

Views from

the hermitage

Creating an environment of attentiveness to God

Disturbed Ground

Labyrinth Envy While walking the trails here, I often pass our labyrinth. It is roughly mown into the clearing made by a gas company for a cross-country pipeline. Six years ago, the same area was a muddy pit. Now, it is covered with rough weeds and wildflowers. In wet weather the outer ring at the back of the labyrinth can be quite soggy, reminiscent of the mud hole. Blackberry canes have crawled onto the pathway where it labors along the hillside and are likely to trip an unwary pilgrim. During late summer, the wildflower heads become heavy with seeds and tend to fall over the path, sometimes obscuring the way.

I have walked or heard of many other labyrinths over the years. Some are large mowed grassy areas, some are brick pathways laid into manicured bushes and landscaped flowerbeds. Others have been painted on canvas and temporarily laid in a church hall or camp dining hall. The original of our eleven-circuit labyrinth was laid by stone masons into the floor of the cathedral at Chartres, France sometime in the early thirteenth century.

None of these other labyrinths appear to be messy or have obstacles like puddles or thorny canes. I often wish for more level ground, more fertile soil or more planned plantings. I call this labyrinth envy.

Labyrinths are representations of the pilgrimage of our life. Walking a labyrinth is undertaken as a sign of the journey each of us makes toward God. We maintain a labyrinth at the Hermitage to help us all remember our own journey, its goal and the perseverance needed to reach the goal. Unlike a maze, there are no dead ends or confusing passages. If one sticks to the only path, the center will be reached. There is no guarantee, however, that the path will be easy.

Each one who enters the labyrinth does so

with their own calling before them. Why are they entering this circuitous walk now? What do they carry with them? What will they do with it? What is their prayer as they walk? How significant is the journey back out? Will they “jump the hedge” or persevere on the path out? None of the questions necessarily depend on the quality of the path. But all of them give shape to the journey of the labyrinth and ultimately to each person’s spiritual journey.

But I still walk past the labyrinth cringing at the blackened seed pods of the Queen Anne’s Lace wishing for Black-eyed Susans that someone has had time to deadhead and for butterfly bush instead of a butterfly weed that turns black after pollination or for climbing roses instead of clinging raspberry canes.

I am aware of a persistent desire in me for things to be better, based on some inner qualitative criteria. I am learning to embrace this desire as a longing for all that is possible on God’s very good earth. I am learning to live with people and things as they are; always a little less than they could be. I am also learning to embrace what is, recognizing value in shortcomings.

Waste Places So, what is good about a weedy, wild place for a labyrinth? For starters, it is weedy and wild. Pilgrims have long sought desert places as places of renewal. For penitence, for stripping away what is unnecessary, for heeding the call to leave all and follow, you can’t beat a place that is untamed and untrimmed. Too much planned beauty can be distracting from the inner work to be undertaken, which has never been, at least in my case, pretty. Coming face to face with my sinful self on the way to the cross might just be helped by that pesky vine.

A second benefit is to practice finding beauty where it is rather than where it has been prepared. In

our labyrinth, the wetter parts of the path have begun to grow mossy carpets. The wild asters and burdock are beautiful in bloom. Butterflies and bumble bees love the weedy flowers. Unique and colorful stones continue to work their way to the surface with each winter frost cycle.

In reading a guide to edible wild plants I am struck by how many of these useful plants grow on “disturbed ground” and in “waste places.” It is just this kind of ground that forms the substrate of our labyrinth. The plants that grow there can feed both my body and my spirit, if I can learn the lesson of disturbed ground and waste places. Queen Anne’s Lace, chicory, sheep sorrel, burdock and blackberries are not only beautiful in blossom or when fruiting, but nourishing. As we can learn how to use what grows in disturbed ground we can also learn to appreciate the waste places as those which call us out of our desire to control or manage. They can take us to the place where surrender is all that is left to us.

The hope of the disturbed ground and the waste places that I find within my own soul is that at these very places I am being changed into a “new creation.” What seems rough is nourishing the new life.

May you live in the grace of the waste places as you seek your own disturbed ground. If you visit us, you may want to enter our labyrinth, only remember, the journey is not always easy, beauty is all around, and stumbling might bring you closer to it.

-Naomi R. Wenger

Feast of the Transfiguration

The annual Hermitage Homecoming held on the Feast of the Transfiguration (August 6) fell on Sunday this year. We had a wonderful day of reflection, beginning with morning worship, followed by teaching on unity and group *lectio divina* on part of Jesus’ high-priestly prayer in John 17.

After a delicious pot-luck lunch, we feasted again in the Phoenix Gallery as artist Suzanne Siegel led us on a review of her journey of finding the Holy wherever you look. We then participated in a prayer walk, holding each site before God for blessing. These are significant days for us to be transformed more and more into Christ’s likeness.

Phoenix Gallery

In keeping with our focus during the month of September on praying for world peace (Day of Prayer for World Peace, 9/21), our current exhibit invites viewers to experience peace as reverie, relief, tiredness, rest, the calm before the storm or just being.

Working with pastels, acrylics and oils, Suzi Lattner Zwissler presents a collection of paintings which will be on view through October 30. Her use of vibrant colors draws the viewer to re-examine the truth of vision and beckons us to look for more than we may have seen before.

Our next exhibit will be sculpture by Karen French-Hall from November 4–December 29.

The gallery is open from 9-5 daily, closed on Sundays. Call to let us know you will be coming, 269-244-8696.

Thank You

We are grateful for all those who contribute their time and gifts to The Hermitage Community. Thank you for loving this place and its people with your service.

Canning/Freezing: Mary Asmonga-Knapp, Mary Recher, Sharon Rumsey

Carpentry/Repair: Les Keener, Harold Yoder

Cleaning: Nancy Boyd

Food Service: Mary Asmonga-Knapp, Kevin Driedger, Allan & Nancy Martling, Natala Mohl, Willard Roth, Rosella Schrock, Judy Somers, Heidi Torres.

Mowing: Biff Weidman, Emily Wenger, Margaret Wenger.

Painting: Richard Schrock

Taize Worship Leaders: Nathan Cole, Larry Farris, Pat Farris, Willard Fenton-Miller, Karla Kauffman, Jeffrey Keefer, Bob Reetz, Verna Troyer, Elisabeth Wenger, Margaret Wenger

Trails/Tree Cutting: Luther Eberly, Steve Thomas.

We would be happy to add *your* name to any of these lists or to use your gifts in ways that are not listed. To inquire about service opportunities at The Hermitage please call David Wenger, 269-244-8696.

Spring, Again?!

While cutting rhubarb for lunch today, I noticed new shoots unfurling at the base of the plant. The *Gallardia* right next to the rhubarb is putting out new buds and the indefatigable *dianthus* is cranking out flowers just as fast as the sun can rise. The grass is long, long and longing for a cut. As I walked back inside, though, I noticed the yellow leaves in the red pines, the storm-worn leaves of the wild grapes and the new nut clusters on the hazel bushes. No, it is not spring again, but some of the hardy plants just keep going until the frost comes.

Now, in the early morning, the cricket's song can be counted in clicks and the birds sing less robustly. Mature preying mantises are brown instead of bright green. Fall mushrooms in yellow, purple, red and creamy brown are burgeoning under the pines and in the open fields. The year's cycle is surely coming around to the resting phase. We feel it in our own rhythm; the need to slow down and get cozy inside.

Part of our winter work is interior, not just in buildings, but in our souls. The darker days urge us to examine what lies in our dark corners, taking what is broken to be mended, and clearing out piles of collected refuse. There is no escaping the inner view when the outer world is less inviting. We welcome this season of introspection just as much as the excitement of spring.

Plan an inner excursion for yourself this season. Ask what needs to be tended and give yourself permission to let other tasks go to do this good work. Be sure to notice the beauty that is within you as you do. God is delighted in you as you delight in God.
-Naomi R. Wenger

Spiritual Classics Reading Group

You are welcome to join a small group that has been meeting on the last Monday evening of each month to discuss books that we read together. Our current schedule of readings is:

- October 30: Merton, *Contemplative Prayer*
- November 27: Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*

We will not be meeting in December. If you are interested in joining us, call 269-244-8696 or e-mail from www.hermitagecommunity.org.

Wish List

- Volunteer Jack- or Jill-of-All-Trades for regular repair/maintenance tasks
- Single or double mattresses in good condition
- Single or double winter blankets in good condition
- Dehumidifier
- Replacement windshield for Hermitage truck (\$200)
- Upgraded valves for geothermal unit (\$700)
- Grade & gravel parking lot & driveway (\$2000)
- Gas-log heater for Schwartz Hall (\$1000)

Advent Meditation Days Scheduled

We have scheduled three guided retreat days for the Advent season, Saturday, 12/9, Monday, 12/11 and Friday, 12/15. We will meet from 8 am–2 pm. Cost, \$45. To register, contact us: thehermitage@juno.com or 269-244-8696.

The Hermitage Calendar

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| Sep 18 | Paintings by Suzi Lattner, Phoenix Gallery, thru 10/30 |
| Oct 8 | Taizé Evensong, 7:00 |
| Oct 30 | Spiritual Classics:
Book Discussion, 7:00
<i>Contemplative Prayer</i> , Merton |
| Nov 12 | Taizé Evensong, 7:00 |
| Nov 27 | Book Discussion, 7:00
<i>The Spirit of the Disciplines</i> , Willard |
| Dec 9 | Advent Meditation Day, 8-2 |
| Dec 10 | Taizé Evensong, 7:00 |
| Dec 11 | Advent Meditation Day, 8-2 |
| Dec 15 | Advent Meditation Day, 8-2 |

E-news Available

If you would like to receive notice of an electronic posting of the newsletter rather than receiving it in the mail, send us an e-mail with the word "subscription" in the subject line. We will remove you from our mailing list for the newsletter and add you to an electronic list.



the hermitage

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Taizé Services: Second Sundays at Seven, Chapel of the Transfiguration

The Word Alone

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

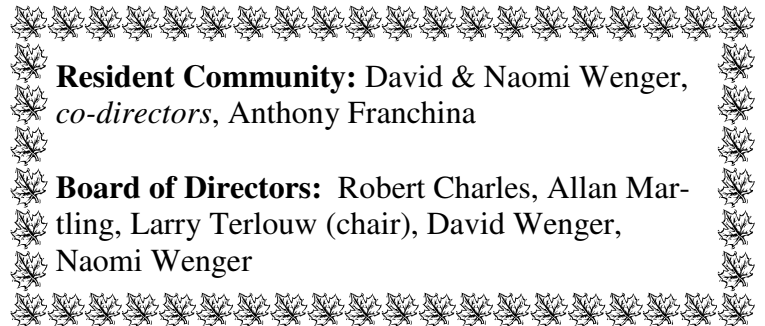
II Corinthians 5:17-19

the hermitage Mission

As Jesus was revitalized for being about his Father's business by periodic withdrawal to retreat and prayer, so The Hermitage seeks in its mission:

- *To be a prayer community, available as a place of spiritual formation where scripture, silence, nature, group experiences, and personal companionship are cultivated elements of retreat.*
- *To provide a guesthouse away from daily tasks where pastors and other pilgrims can deepen their call and relationship with God, be refreshed in their whole person and be revitalized by the presence and promise of Christ.*

(from The Hermitage Rule)


Resident Community: David & Naomi Wenger, co-directors, Anthony Franchina
Board of Directors: Robert Charles, Allan Martling, Larry Terlouw (chair), David Wenger, Naomi Wenger