



*Views from*

# *the hermitage*

*Creating an environment of attentiveness to God*

## **Another World**

*This is the final article in a series penned for the Twenty-fifth Anniversary by friends of The Hermitage. Larry Terlouw writes of his experience including months as a "part-time" resident.*

When I first entered the driveway of The Hermitage approximately 18 years ago, I drove slowly to St. Joseph's Barn and felt I was entering a new world. This new world included frequent retreats in the Barn, the Hut or Caryll House, hours of silent meditation and contemplation, walks in the woods, tasty and nourishing meals in the Barn, communion with others in morning prayers.

These experiences freed me, as a person and pastor, to explore, discover and live more fully in my "natural self": one with Spirit and nature and all people in the love of Christ. During some challenging and difficult years as a pastor, husband and father, time at The Hermitage provided safe and quiet respite, renewed sense of being in the Love of Christ, and deep spiritual movement through wrestling which I could experience nowhere else. I began a new journey, which I am continuing to travel: a journey of listening, reflecting, risking, healing, following Spirit's leading within me, discovering life through mountaintops and valleys. I have continued to explore spiritual landscapes far beyond my past imaginations.

Gene and Mary welcomed me warmly and gently held my being when I was physically present and absent from this "new world". Their steady and loving presence invited me back again and again. In the summer of 2001, I passed through a significant turning point personally and professionally. While on Hermitage retreat as part of a three month sabbatical, Gene introduced me to David and Naomi

Wenger who, together with their children, were making this their home and ministry. One year later I began an 18-month experience as a part-time resident member, living in Nazareth. This time was a divine gift: giving and receiving, discovering anew the presence of Spirit within me and others and all creation.

While in residence, I learned to appreciate more fully the "sacred" work of cleaning, raking, mowing, cooking, pruning, shoveling- as well as prayer, meditation, reflection, stillness. I discovered the stillness of my inner spirit in every place or task of my day. The trails in the woods became a special delight: walking and running, pruning and clearing. The Hermitage trails became symbolic of my walk with God, family, fellow humans and nature. Walking with a few other pilgrims in spiritual direction was a special gift. Sharing worship and eucharist in daily prayer with other members of the community fed my whole being. My residency also became a passageway into my present full time service as spiritual caregiver with a hospice group. I feel that I carry the Spirit of Life, the Spirit of The Hermitage, with me wherever I am with persons and families passing through death into the next experience of Life.

The Hermitage and her ministry of Presence for all who live and retreat here will continue on in all our lives and as a sacred place of life and love in Christ. Having had the honor of serving several years as a member of the Board of Directors, I am confident that the life and ministry of The Hermitage under the leadership of David and Naomi and the present Board will grow continuously in the future. This new "other world" I drove into years ago is real, and will go with me and all of us forever. *LT*

## Expanding the Hermitage Welcome

For many years we have lived with the desire for an expanded parking area at The Hermitage. We were keenly aware that the space provided was often not sufficient for the number of cars that come here. We could often feel the tension of those trying to maneuver a vehicle in a tight space.

This summer we were able to realize the dream of expanding the Hermitage welcome to include the parking lot this summer. The new lot includes a circular drive so that cars do not have to be turned around in a narrow space. We also have ample parking for at least 20 cars while keeping the natural landscape intact.

The vision required sacrifice and hard work. One of the biggest sacrifices was cutting down seven pine, two walnut and two box elder trees. Our dear friend and regular Hermitage volunteer, Verena Hoffmann, was here when the trees were cut. She reminded us to give thanks for the life being taken, and led us in expressing gratitude for each tree before it was cut. Further, the earth was gouged by powerful equipment to re-route underground electric service, remove tree stumps and re-shape the land. Anyone visiting during the month of July participated with us in upheaval and chaos.

By early August when the contracted work was complete, scars remained on the land. Disturbed ground surrounded the entire parking area and new circular driveway. But, within two weeks of planting grass seed, all that was brown burst into green. The earth had healed itself with little sign of having been disrupted.

We are grateful for all those who participated in expanding the Hermitage welcome. We want to especially thank Jonathan Corbin of *Out on a Limb* tree service for cutting the largest trees, Rich Yeckly and his young neighbor Tony for the removal of the pines, Anthony Franchina for help with clearing away all the branches, Verena Hoffmann for reminding us to give thanks and Richard Schrock for raking dirt, planting grass seed and watering the seeds.

-David & Naomi Wenger

## Anniversary Reflections:

On the Feast of the Transfiguration, Friday August 6, we awoke to fresh morning air that was comfortable and even cool in comparison to the heat and humidity of the preceding days and weeks. Our pleasure increased with gathering together for Morning Prayer in the Chapel of the Transfiguration with wonderful saints of The Hermitage's 25-year history.

These saints included our friend, Fr. Eric Haarer, from Nada Hermitage, Crestone, CO, who led us in a day of reflection on the themes of the Transfiguration. He asked us to recall and re-live the peak experiences of our life of faith as well as the desert experiences that often accompany coming down from the mountain. In the Hermitage tradition, we ate our midday meal in silence-all 40 or so participants under the Anniversary tent erected next to St. Joseph's Barn. The guided retreat ended with blessing the icon "The Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ" written by iconographer, Donna Rathert to mark the Anniversary celebration. Donna, a long-time friend of the Hermitage, was present to share her experiences while writing the icon. The silence, contemplation and beauty of the day were all fitting ways to prepare us for more celebration to follow.

Friends from the first days of The Hermitage to the present filled all the rooms and cabins at The Hermitage as well as two guest houses at nearby St. Gregory's Abbey. After vespers on Friday evening, we circled around the fire ring to begin telling our stories of The Hermitage.

On Saturday morning, we again gathered in the chapel for Morning Prayer. We used "A Hermitage Affirmation" as our form for prayer, a liturgy written by Gene Herr during the Herr's years as co-directors. It was a glorious day to enjoy being outdoors. With the number of guests arriving for the day swelling to nearly 70, we all settled under the anniversary tent to hear Gene and Mary recount their story of struggle with call; the road to The Hermitage. They told of experiences, people, scripture and writings that informed the founding of The Hermitage.

We then added other activities to the re-

mainder of the morning and afternoon. Some braved the blackberry canes and captured the luscious fruit that Naomi and others transformed into jam; some followed David to the kitchen for bread making. Kevin Driedger created a Hermitage timeline and invited us to fill in the significant events we witnessed or participated in from 1985-2010. Allan Martling organized materials to create plaques using boards from St. Joseph's Barn that were removed during the recent re-siding project. From infant to elderly, we experienced laughter and tears, remembrance and new delights.

As vespers ended on Saturday evening, Gene Herr gave us two words from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm that expressed the experience of the day and the experience of the Hermitage: goodness and mercy. We were all aware of being filled with grace upon grace in sharing life together in this place.

On Sunday morning we gathered in the Chapel of the Transfiguration for the culmination of the weekend events: Taizé prayer and the Lord's Supper. Following the service, Larry Terlouw led us in the annual prayer walk for the blessing of the grounds, buildings, activities and people of The Hermitage.

We are grateful to all who participated in the weekend. Your prayer and generosity has sustained The Hermitage for 25 years. A thunderous-applause-thank-you to the Anniversary Committee: Willard and Alice Roth, Joan Yoder Miller, Kevin Driedger, and Larry Terlouw for your vision, planning and on-site presence and to event volunteers: Richard & Rosella Schrock, Dave & Karen Mast, and Beverly Schmitt. And thank you to the Board of Directors: Allan Martling, Mary Asmonga-Knapp, Natala Mohl, Biff Weidman, Cheryl Nakata, and Darrin Compagner for your continual support and constant encouragement.

-David and Naomi Wenger

### **"Struggle with Call"**

For the 25th Anniversary of the The Hermitage, Gene and Mary Herr prepared a summary of the roots and development of this ministry entitled, "Struggle With Call." The ten-year nurture of call, companionship by a Mission Group in Elkhart,

IN for three years, and faithful discernment by the Board were all works of perseverance, conflict and abounding grace.

A second shorter writing called "Hermitage Essays," prepared for the August anniversary, is also available. "Essays" explores the energizing principles of the founding and development of The Hermitage.

The Hermitage is accepting tax deductible gifts for the unmet costs for these publications. If you wish to donate to this project, please make your check payable to "The Hermitage" with the note "Publications" on your donation. To receive copies of either of these documents, write to The Hermitage and your request will be forwarded to the Herrs. Thank you for supporting the preservation of The Hermitage story.

### **Upcoming Advent Quiet Day— "Emmanuel: Space for Hope"**

Our Advent Quiet Days, a long-standing tradition at The Hermitage, will be held on Saturday, December 4 and Wednesday, December 8 from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. The theme for this year's reflection encourages us to see that Emmanuel-God *with us*-means that we are never without hope. The space for God is in us and that is where hope dwells, too.

If you wish to participate, register by contacting us before November 20. The suggested donation for the day is \$50 and includes lunch. Guests may stay overnight before or after the retreat day. The retreat with an overnight stay is \$75. Reserve your room when you contact us to register.

#### **The Hermitage Calendar**

- Nov 14 Taizé Evensong, 7 pm
- Dec 4 Advent Quiet Day, 9-3  
*Emmanuel: Space for Hope*
- Dec 8 Advent Quiet Day, 9-3  
*Emmanuel: Space for Hope*
- Dec 12 Taizé Evensong, 7 pm
- Jan 9 Taizé Evensong, 7 pm

### The Word Alone

My soul magnifies the Lord,  
And my spirit rejoices in God my savior,  
For he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
For the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;  
He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,  
According to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

-Luke 1:46b-55

### *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

**Board of Directors:** Mary Asmonga-Knapp, Darrin Compagner, Allan Martling (chair), Natala Mohl, Cheryl Nakata, Biff Weidman, David Wenger, Naomi Wenger

## Taizé Services: Second Sundays at Seven

Advent Quiet Day  
*Emmanuel:  
Space for Hope"*

Wednesday, Dec. 4 or  
Saturday, Dec. 8  
From 9 am to 3 pm

NonProfit  
Organization  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Three Rivers,  
MI  
Permit No. 226

**Return Service Requested**

*the hermitage*

11321 Dutch Settlement  
Three Rivers, MI 49093  
269-244-8696 • Fax 269-244-5856  
thehermitage@juno.com  
[www.hermitagecommunity.org](http://www.hermitagecommunity.org)

