



views from the hermitage

Living Rhythm

by Naomi Wenger

“The Hermitage Vision is a call, a promise, and a framework for us to live our discipleship. We receive one another as Jesus among us.”

These are words we pray at Monday Morning Prayer as we begin our work of providing a place and a way to pray. The framework we build on each week is a rhythm that holds us to our commitment to pray and create an environment where others are ushered into the presence of God without many words or fanfare, but just by being here.

This rhythm begins each day with Morning Prayer and includes eating a midday meal together in silence and finishes with a simple quiet supper toward the end of the day. Those who come to pray are held in the space between those events as we go about our work. Those here to work use the rhythm of the day to stop working; to pause and remember the purpose of holding this space open for prayer and nurturing the spiritual walk.

How does this simple rhythm help us to be faithful? When we first arrived at The Hermitage, the daily Morning Prayer rhythm was new and exciting. We loved coming together each morning to hear the Word of God and pray for the world around us. We found sustenance in preparing for prayer each day by reading the daily scriptures ahead of time, selecting a hymn and noticing what in the world around us was calling for prayer.

After about four years of conscious preparation for Morning Prayer, I noticed that living the rhythm of The Hermitage prepared me for Morning Prayer. I had begun reading the daily lectionary as a matter of course just as I wake, letting the words wash through my mind without really “studying” them. I take them this way on my morning walk and more often than not, by the time I return home, I am humming a hymn tune. Sometimes, I don’t even know what the words are until I focus on the tune and then a snatch of the words will come to me and I find the hymn. Usually, these hymns fit the scripture or the wider context of our prayer. The *preparation* began to take place in the background and

the *content* of the Prayer was what I lived.

I do go through times when I show up and am not very attentive. These are not times to scold myself or be anxious. Rather, these times help me to know my limits. They help me to recognize my frailty and the need to be open to the gifts of God. I don’t attend Morning Prayer each day alone. I am in the presence of the Holy One.

The other regular part of our rhythm is eating the midday meal in community. When we breathe together and pause to watch the birds (or the greedy raccoons!) eat from the feeder together, we are experiencing what it means to be present to each other. Presence is important. It is how we remind ourselves that God is with us always. The companionable presence of others tells me I am not alone. My own presence tells me that my very existence is important to God. Not what I do, but who I am, is deemed precious. A frequent guest calls the shared meals a “mini-retreat.” At the table, we stop doing everything else and are just there.

This is important when the administrative or maintenance tasks multiply. I am able to stop and attend to one thing. The dishes can wait until after I eat. The grass can be mowed or the sidewalks shoveled in the afternoon. There is absolutely nothing else that I have to do right then. I can receive the food as “God’s love made edible” and not merely nutrition; energy to get me where I’m going.

In fact, rhythmic living frees me to say “yes” and “no” to demands on my time. It defends me from constant motion and the mistaken idea that if I just do enough, I will be o.k. But most important of all, the rhythm slowly moves me in a trajectory toward God. I become increasingly, rhythmically, aware of God as both the center of my desire and the end of my journey. What begins as a faint invitation, becomes the heartbeat of God; a rhythm to which I can move each day.

Retreats in 2014

Lent Quiet Days

The Faith of Nicodemus

Two groups met together at the beginning of Lent to discover Nicodemus as a guide to faith. In John's gospel, Nicodemus is a key figure who appears early in Jesus' ministry (3:1-21), once in the Temple during a failed arrest of Jesus (7:45-8:1) and once after his death, carrying "more than a hundred pounds" of spices for Jesus' burial (19:38-40). From Nicodemus' opening declaration that, "we know that you are...come from God," to his echo of Mary's, "How can these things be?" he is the catalyst for Jesus' most well known speech on the love of God who sent his son into the world so that "the world might be saved." We asked, what does Nicodemus' assurance and curiosity teach us about discipleship? He came to Jesus uninvited, with both faith and doubt together. We affirmed that this is the way we also often come to God—full of faith but wondering. We recognized ourselves in Nicodemus' requirement that the way of salvation be practical. We heard Jesus challenge him to open up his ideas of how God works; to be as free as the wind. And we heard Jesus affirm that all who believe, no matter what they look like to Nicodemus (and to us), are included in the salvation plan. Later, while Nicodemus is still not sure enough to be a "public" follower, giving up everything and going on the road, he makes sure that at least the law is followed in Jesus' case. Finally, we see Nicodemus grieving the loss of one he loved by carrying spices with which to wrap Jesus' body. We see him with Joseph of Arimathea tenderly wrapping Jesus' body in a shroud—layering the heavy spices into the winding sheet to preserve and scent the body. Such devotion from a back-seat disciple when all the other disciples have fled is a model for believers who act in the background and an encouragement for us to bring our faith to Jesus for affirmation that we, too, are included in the "world" that God will save through Jesus. Maybe our faith will be recognized, as was Nicodemus', for years to come.

Hermitage Way Retreats 2014

Earth Stewardship, April 12

Silence and Solitude, September 27

On April 12, we will explore the responsibility we have of caring for the earth, from both Biblical and contextual points of view. We will work on an "action plan" for ourselves as earth stewards. We will also participate in an act of stewardship, giving an hour of service to the land at The Hermitage.

Registration is open for the Earth Stewardship Retreat until April 8. Please let us know if you'd like to be part of this day.

In September, we will explore the importance of silence and solitude in listening for God in our daily life.

If you are interested in keeping The Hermitage Way, please plan on attending these retreats in 2014. The retreats are open to keepers of The Way and those interested in exploring what it means to be a Way Keeper. More information about The Hermitage Way is available by reading the last two newsletters online or contacting us through our web site: www.hermitagecommunity.org.

The Transfiguration of the Poet: Poetry as Spiritual Practice

Friday, June 20, 4 pm -

Sunday, June 22, noon

Come join us for a weekend devoted to the work of writing poems, sharing them with one another, and reflecting on the spiritual practices that enable us to do this good work. Poets point the way but do not map out the journey. Being a poet requires a willingness to be thoroughly changed by the words that are given. Participants should plan on bringing some poems-in-progress with them. Elisabeth Wenger, a working poet, and Naomi Wenger, Co-Director of The Hermitage, are presenting this retreat. Cost for the weekend is \$150. Please register by June 1.

Presence at The Hermitage: The Board at Work

The Board of Directors is working on unfolding our understanding of God's call to The Hermitage in these days. We are sensing a move to develop a residential community at the same time we encourage the dispersed community of The Hermitage Way. (See information on Hermitage Way Retreats on pg. 2.)

We are also working with the reality of several big disruptions on the land (tornado, Enbridge pipeline, the demolition of Nazareth, and power line clearing). What is God's invitation to us as we work at being faithful to the vision to pray and to work in this place? We welcome your input as we discern what a residential community might look like. We welcome your interest if you feel called to live the contemplative life.

The writer of *The Way of the Pilgrim* reminds us that the prayers of the contemplatives "fertilize" the work of the laborers in every other profession. We believe the work of The Hermitage helps make the labor of others more fruitful. Do you sense a call to join us?

Taizé Evensong Second Sundays at 7:00 pm

In December, 2013, we celebrated our 10th anniversary of singing our prayers in the tradition of the Taizé Community. We love the simple chants, the haunting melodies, the gentle instrumental accompaniments and the way our voices take us to God through song. We invite you to join us for one or more of these evenings. Come and bring a friend for about 50 minutes of sung prayer each month on the second Sunday at 7:00 pm.

Stations of the Cross Walk Holy Week, April 13-19

Join us for our annual Stations of the Cross walk on Hermitage Trails. A printed guide is provided for a self-guided meditative hike. Guide

books can be picked up in the upper hallway of the Ken Hanby Center.

NEW Garlic Mustard Day Saturday, June 21, 9 am to 3 pm

Garlic mustard is a beautiful green plant that is good for eating when young (think: spicy salad greens, delectable pesto, garlicky green pasta sauce) and bears pretty white flowers in the woods and meadows in the summer. It has been used in cooking for thousands of years in its native habitat of Europe and Northern Africa. There, the plant has competition from other plants and is used as a food source by dozens of insects and fungi. However, it is an invasive plant in North America. There are no insects or fungi that consume the plant and even North American humans have not yet learned its culinary delights. In addition, garlic mustard releases chemicals into the soil that are poisonous to other plants. Trees also suffer from these chemicals. Deer and rodents do not like the flavor of the leaves and tend to over-browse the other weakened plants nearby, thus further reducing competition. The plant is a biennial, producing hundreds of thousands of seeds in its second year. But these seeds stay viable for up to five years after release.

Enter eager humans at The Hermitage! We invite you and your family to come on June 21 to pull, harvest, collect, eat, preserve, and burn these plants. We have quite a crop of garlic mustard along the trails and in the understory of our threatened woodlands. Will you help us to restore our patch of earth by beginning to eradicate these weeds?

Bring a picnic potluck with you. We will serve garlic mustard salad to accompany your offerings.





Get to Know... The Menno Simons Library

The Menno Simons Memorial Library, located in the upper level of the Ken Hanby Center, houses more than 5,000 volumes. It is a private lending library with a collection focusing on prayer, spiritual disciplines, and Christian formation, with some related biographies and fiction. The library is organized according to the Dewey Decimal Classification System. A book may be found using the card catalog and checked out by signing your name to a circulation card inside each book. We ask that borrowers limit the loan period to 30 days, but there are books that have been checked out since the beginning of the millennium (and before). If you have one of those books, we always extend book return amnesty.

Since the collection is somewhat specialized, shelf browsing is often the most fruitful way to find a book that appeals to you. But, if you are looking for a specific book, the catalog is completely cross-referenced by subject, author and title.

In addition to books, we have some periodical collections for perusal. These are located in the library and on the second floor of the St. Joseph's Barn. Sometimes a magazine article is just the right length for reading while on retreat.

Doris Metzler, a professional librarian, did the initial work of cataloging the collection. She was the first volunteer to help Gene and Mary Herr organize the library. Initially the books were located

on the lower level of St Joseph's Barn where we now eat our meals. Gradually shelves were added up the winding stairwell, in Swartz Hall and eventually all books were moved upstairs to get them out of the humidity on the first floor. Doris worked most intensely in the early 90's and intermittently throughout that decade.

Currently, Kevin Driedger, a member of our Board of Directors, a professional librarian for the State of Michigan and an expert in book preservation, does our intake cataloging.

We are grateful to all of the other volunteers who, "read the shelves" and return dislocated books to their rightful place, re-shelve books and occasionally dust all those books.

Guests often check out books to use during retreat here but just as often, take the book home to enrich their daily life for a time.

We have recently been given the contents of three personal libraries to incorporate into our collection. Some of the donated books are not a fit for what we are collecting. So, these volumes are placed on a shelf in the Hanby Center hallway. Guests may take these books and are encouraged to leave a donation for the library in return.

If you would like to donate a book or books to the library, please check with us first. We have a list of books that would be good additions to the collection. If you have suggestions for books to add, let us know. We cannot possibly read all the books you read and think would be helpful for our guests. Happy reading.

The View from Here...

We thought it might not happen, but spring is here! While we have no delusions that it will not snow again, we are glad that the towering snow piles are almost melted.



What we see now is: thatch, twigs, branches and stones that need to be raked off the grass; flower shoots pushing up through blown-in leaves in the flower beds aching for a raking; empty (or almost) firewood shelters; outdoor chairs that need a coat of paint; a driveway strewn with

cuttings from the electric company opening up the line (15 feet on each side of the power line was cleared in February); walking trails that have been obliterated by the snow weight pushing the vines and vegetation over the trail; garden beds begging for a blanket of compost and a good turn; compost that needs to be turned, too; dips in the meadow trails that can be filled with top soil; a bare area where Nazareth used to sit that needs to be seeded when the frost leaves; the roofs of The Hut and the Tractor Shed that sorely need to be replaced...

Any chance you can help? Let us know: 269-244-8696.

EXHUBERANT THANKS

In the last newsletter we published an urgent need for tree cutters due to a windstorm. The very day we were sending out the newsletter our kind neighbors at GilChrist were busy cutting the downed trees. During the next week, the staff from GilChrist, Henry Braun and Don Stauffer opened 80% of the trails that had been closed by the windstorm. Winter weather halted the clearing but we anticipate a completion of the clearing this spring. We are truly grateful.

Come Live the Hermitage Way

Would you like to come for a week to pray with us? We are looking for folks to work and pray through the days, experiencing our rhythm and listening with us for what God is doing in us and in the world. If you are interested, contact David at 269-244-8696 or contact@hermitagecommunity.org We are also looking for longer-term commitments. Let us know if you would like more information about keeping The Hermitage Way or joining the Resident Community.

Hermitage Calendar

April

- 12 Hermitage Way Retreat – Earth Stewardship, 9-3
- 13 Taizé Evensong, 7pm
- 13-19 Stations of the Cross Walk
- 25-26 Board Meeting

May

- 11 Taizé Evensong, 7pm

June

- 8 Taizé Evensong, 7pm
- 19-22 Transfiguration of the Poet Retreat
- 21 Garlic Mustard Day, 9-3

July

- 13 Taizé Evensong, 7pm

August

- 8 Hermitage JAM, 9-3
- 9 Feast of the Transfiguration Retreat, 9-3
- 22-23 Board Meeting

11321 Dutch Settlement Road
Three Rivers, MI 49093
269-244-8696
www.hermitagecommunity.org

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Creating an environment of attentiveness to God

Retreating at the Hermitage

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 companioning 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.

If you would like to join us for a retreat of any length, contact us by phone: 269-244-8696, email: contact@hermitagecommunity.org or find us on the web: www.hermitagecommunity.org. We provide silence, solitude, Spiritual Direction, guided group retreats, space for groups to meet, community Morning Prayer, simple healthful food, walking trails, and a gentle atmosphere. You provide the willing spirit.

Contact us by Email:
contact@hermitagecommunity.org

Board of Directors:

Ned Arnold
Judith Anne Beattie
David Cowles
Kevin Driedger
Patty Hogan
Jeff Miller
Margie Pfeil
Deanna Risser

Resident Community:

David and Naomi
Wenger, Co-directors

Please hold the Board in your prayers.