



views from the hermitage

Living Contemplatively

by Naomi Wenger

One common question we hear at The Hermitage is, "This has been such a blessed experience, how can I take my retreat home with me? The answer is that you cannot take this place, the freedom of time, the cultivated quiet and the presence of your fellow retreatants home with you. But, there are some elements of retreat that you can take with you into your daily life. It is possible to live your life with intention, attention and a sense of presence; all three of which, you may have practiced on your retreat.

Intention

Intention is cooperation between the imagination and the will. It begins with imagining what kind of life you want to pursue, what kind of connection with God you would like, and what you believe is or hope might be possible in the relationship between you and God. If you can imagine it, you can decide to enter that kind of relationship. Intention is like a New Year's resolution, you determine what your spiritual goal is by what you can imagine as a desirable outcome. Then you act on that imagined outcome through your desire – your will. An intention is possibly not yet realized but held in hope for fulfillment.

We talk about intention in prayer when we hold some person or thing for which we are praying in simplicity before God, not asking for anything or expecting any outcome, just holding them in our hearts in God's presence. Our intentions exist "in" God. So intentions do not necessarily need an "approach" or "permission." There is no need for a formal address such as, "Dear God..." We can simply *will* them or hold our intentions in God.

Attention

Paying attention is to spend your self on one thing. It is looking in one direction at a single object or scene, listening to music or the sound of children playing with your eyes closed, smelling the bread baking in the oven or sensing the halting slide of a single tear down your cheek. To be absorbed and focused on one thing, even something as big as a sunset

or a war, is to be attentive.

Sometimes we choose what we attend to. At other times, events or people around us will insist on our attention. If the stimulus is not new, we can defer our attention or to ignore it. If it is surprising and unexpected, like a book being dropped on the floor in a quiet room, we will find our attention is totally absorbed.

Intention and attention work together to get us where we want to go. When I go sailing, I have to pay attention to the information and tasks of sailing – the direction and speed of the wind, the position of the sails, the set of the rudder, the depth of the water and a few other details. I also intend to sail to a particular destination. However, I work with the particulars of the wind, sails and rudder to arrive at that intended place. Sometimes, it may look as if I'm not going there at all, because the wind is blowing against my intention. But, by persevering toward my intended goal, I can move across the wind steadily gaining on my intended goal, all the while attending to the wind, sails and rudder.

When intention and attention work together, we can decide how we spend our sensory and spiritual energies. For example, you may notice that you appreciate the quiet during your prayer time while on retreat. You can choose to make a quiet place, both aural and visual, for your prayer at home. This may mean you pray at a different time when the house is quiet, or in a spare room or closet that you dedicate for your prayer. Retreat time is when you notice what environment facilitates your prayer and decide how to make changes in your daily routine or setting to "take your retreat home."

Presence

A third element of living contemplatively is presence. This is an easier concept to grasp intuitively rather than mentally. Of course, we say with our minds, "I'm here." But, presence is both more and

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less than physical position. It means that you are more than just sitting in your prayer chair. You are both intending to be there and attending to all that it means to you to be in that space. It means being *only* in your chair, with all your mind, soul, heart, and body. That is, you are not also imagining yourself whizzing up and down the aisles of the grocery store collecting the things you need to throw a birthday party for your friend. Nor are you absorbed in the tangled needs of your teenager. No, you are simply there in your chair. You are quiet. You are centered. You have lit your candle. You are expecting a conversation with God. You are aware whenever your attention begins to wander and you return to the task at hand. It is also less than physical position in that you don't really have to be in your "prayer chair" to be there. You can be present to your prayer anywhere you are if you are intending to pray and attentive to your desire to pray. By being present, all of life can be part of your life of prayer.

When I prepare a meal in The Hermitage kitchen, I intend to be attentive to each task of the preparation, from assembling the raw materials for the meal to chopping, seasoning, and cooking the ingredients. I try to be wholly absorbed in the making of the meal. I think about who might be eating the food. I smell and taste the food to test that it is good. I prepare the serving area and dining area with care, noticing what needs to be done at each step of the process. I feed the birds, because they need to eat but also because we watch the birds while we eat. In season, I wander outside to see what flowers might be cut for the table, so that the space is beautiful. Wandering during meal preparation is like the sailboat tacking into the wind. It looks like I'm doing something else, but my destination is clearly in sight. I want to have the food hot and ready just as guests are arriving in the kitchen for the meal. So, I plan ahead and work steadily. I try not to work frantically as that diverts my attention to fretting about myself. Instead, I am present to my work, to others and to God as I prepare a meal.

With intention, attention and presence, it is possible to live life like you are "on retreat." ✕

Retreats in 2014

Lent Quiet Days

Temptation

February 28 and March 2, 2015

We often pray, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." But what do those words mean? We face temptations daily and often fail to resist them. Jesus faced temptations at the beginning of his ministry. What tempted him? How did he respond? What can we learn from his example? In Hebrews 2:18 we read, "Because [Jesus] was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested." We will spend time learning from Jesus, calling on him for help and encouraging one another.

Join us for a day of quiet reflection on either Saturday, February 20 or Monday, March 2. The retreat lasts from 9 am - 3 pm and includes lunch. Suggested donation: \$50. If you would like to stay overnight before or after the retreat, please make that reservation when you register for the retreat. Please register by February 18. Call 269-244-8696 or email us at contact@hermitagecommunity.org to register.

Hermitage Way Retreats 2015

Holy Leisure, May 9

Simple Living, October 3

These two retreats are open to keepers of The Hermitage 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.

Holy Leisure

"Holy Leisure" is an attitude of the heart which nurtures body and mind. Practicing the discipline of holy leisure is a way to hold the world lightly while our roots grow deeper into God.

This retreat day will include both teaching and practice of holy leisure. This retreat will be held on Saturday, May 9, 2015, 9 am-4 pm, led by Kevin Driedger and June Mears Driedger.

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Kevin Driedger and June Mears Driedger have been affiliated with the Hermitage Community since 1999 when they lived and served here in the fall. Since then they have volunteered, served, and retreated at the Hermitage. Kevin is a librarian at the Library of Michigan and June is editor of *Leader* magazine, published by MennoMedia. They graduated from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in 1996 and currently attend the Lansing Church of the Brethren.

Registration is open for the Holy Leisure Retreat until April 15.

Simple Living

In October, Biff Weidman and Margie Pfeil will lead us in an exploration of Simple Living. More information will be available for this retreat in the Summer. This retreat will be held on Saturday, October 3 from 9 am to 4 pm.

Registration for the Simple Living Retreat is open until September 15.

Lectio Divina, Hearing Divina, Visio Divina

Friday, June 19, 4 pm -

Saturday, June 20, noon

The spiritual practice of “sacred reading” (*Lectio Divina*) enables us to continually turn our minds to God, paying attention to God’s presence in our daily lives.

This retreat will explore, through teaching and practice, how we can turn our hearts and minds to God using our different faculties to “read” the world and our selves. We will practice *Lectio Divina* (Friday evening), *Hearing Divina* (Saturday morning), and *Visio Divina* (Saturday afternoon). June 19-20, 2015, 7 pm–4pm, led by Kevin Driedger and June Mears Driedger.

Introduction to Ignatian Spirituality

Friday, November 6, 5 pm -

Saturday, November 7, 4 pm

Naomi Wenger will lead this retreat for anyone considering a “long retreat” either in the 30-day or 30-week format, and those wishing to deepen their awareness of God at work in the world. More information will be available this summer.

Garlic Mustard Elimination Day

Saturday, May 23, 9 am to 3 pm

Last year a group of hardy volunteers began the process of eliminating the garlic mustard plant from the Hermitage land. 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 late spring. 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. In addition, garlic mustard releases chemicals into the soil that are poisonous to other native plants. Deer and rodents do not like the flavor of the leaves and tend to over-browse the weakened plants nearby, thus further reducing competition. The plant is a biennial, producing hundreds of thousands of seeds in its second year. These seeds stay viable for up to five years after release.

We invite you, your family, and friends to come on May 23 to pull, harvest, collect, eat, preserve, and burn these plants. We have a healthy crop of garlic mustard along the trails and in the understory of our threatened woodlands. Will you help us to tend our patch of earth by beginning to eradicate these weeds? Bring a picnic potluck with you. We will serve a garlic mustard dish to accompany your offerings.

You are invited to join the community for Morning Prayer at 8:00. Let us know by May 15 if you plan to come.



Meet the Hermitage Cabins

In addition to The St. Joseph's Barn and the lower level guest rooms of the Hanby Center, guests of The Hermitage Community can stay in one of three cabins in or on the edge of the woods. People who choose to stay "out" choose solitude but also a more primitive retreat experience.

Caryll House, named for the twentieth century Christian mystic Caryll Houslander, is an octagonal building in a wooded setting with gas heat and lights. Simple food is available in a primitive kitchen. Caryll House is about a 5-minute walk from The Hermitage main buildings.

Thoreau, named for Henry David Thoreau and celebrating his respect for the earth, is on the margin of the woods and the prairie. This is a very small cabin with a propane heater. A single butane burner is provided to heat water. Thoreau is about a 7-minute walk from The Hermitage main buildings.

The Hut is a small building in a woodland setting. A wood stove heats The Hut. Simple food is available in a primitive kitchen. There is also a small fire ring for an outdoor fire. The Hut is about a 10-minute walk from The Hermitage main buildings.



This is **The Hut on Mount LaVerna**, named in honor of St. Francis, who found at LaVerna the response from the Lord that he desired. This has been a place where many have met the loving Savior.

It is dedicated in memory of four young people who died in a plane crash in 1978. Three of those persons were a part of a Discipleship program in Phoenix, Arizona led by Gene and Mary Herr, co-founders of The Hermitage.

This is **Caryll House**. In *The Reed of God*, Caryll Houslander identifies many forms of emptiness that could become containers for Christ. A hollow reed, when shaped and pierced can be used to fill the air with song. The emptiness of a bird's nest, made of bits and pieces of earthy materials, provides a round, warm ring to receive baby birds. The chalice, a hollow cup, is unfilled space made to receive water or wine. We hope this prayer space will provide a place of emptiness for you where God's love and spirit can be generously poured in.



This is **Thoreau**. The setting of this hermitage once overlooked a pleasant pond (like Walden Pond), but due to climate changes and human intervention, the pond has changed to a muddy flat that floods intermittently. A transitional ecosystem has also replaced the pond ecosystem. It also sits on the edge of our newly planted prairie. The expansion of the oil pipeline invited us to change the habitat here. Change sometimes requires new growth and always requires us to adapt. This is a place to nurture your own transition. Look for new growth. Identify where you need to adapt. Pray for God's help.

The View from Here...

It is cold. But beautiful. We are open and serving many individuals and groups as deep winter continues. But, we are thinking of spring. Sometime in March, we will be preparing the gardens for plants, turning the compost pile, doing Spring cleaning in the buildings, clearing the trails, picking up sticks and raking gravel off the grass. We can always use a hand in cooking, cleaning, laundry or working in the library. If you have extra time and would like to spend it volunteering here, let us know: 269-244-8696.

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.

Taizé Evensong Second Sundays at 7:00 pm

We continue the tradition 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 29-May 4

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.

Hermitage Calendar

A complete description of Hermitage Events is on the web site. Here is the calendar in brief.

February

- 8 Taizé Evensong, 7pm
- 28 Lent Quiet Day, 9-3

March

- 2 Lent Quiet Day, 9-3
- 8 Taizé Evensong, 7pm
- 29-31 Stations of the Cross Walk

April

- 1-4 Stations of the Cross Walk
- 12 Taizé Evensong, 7pm

May

- 1-2 Hermitage Board Meeting
- 9 Hermitage Way Retreat – Holy Leisure
- 10 Taizé Evensong, 7pm
- 23 Garlic Mustard Elimination Day

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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

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Please hold the Board in your prayers.