

Views from

# the hermitage

*Creating an environment of attentiveness to God*

## The Year of Release

During our most recent board meeting, the discussion of our mortgage repayment began with silent meditation on Leviticus 25:1-34. We were amazed to hear what God had to say to us through this scripture. While “Year of Release” had been introduced as a way to look at the retirement of the mortgage, we sought clarity as a group about what this phrase means to us and to The Hermitage. By focusing on the source and listening to the Holy Spirit, we discerned the following principles which will continue to guide us through this phase of operations.

The first three principles; God is hospitable, all land ownership is temporary, and the land is God’s, come from Leviticus 25:23 (NJB). “Land will not be sold absolutely, for the land belongs to me, and you are only strangers and guests of mine,” There is no mistaking that God is in charge of parceling out the land.

To say that God “owns” the land does not do justice to the nature of God’s possession because it attributes our limited understanding of ownership to God. We generally understand ownership in terms of how we decide to dispose of or use something. God’s ownership is absolute so that the only disposition possible for God is gift and God’s nature is such that the only possible use is abundance or blessing.

Perhaps a more helpful way of thinking about God’s ownership is belonging. When something belongs to you, it is rightly and naturally yours. We say our children “belong” to us not because we “own” them but because we have either a blood claim or a love claim on them. We draw them to our breasts because they fit naturally in our hearts. We understand belonging also in the idea of fittingness. We fit with a certain group or club or association because of something we have in common with all of the other members. If we are a member of a choir, we belong because we sing together. If we are a member of a labor union, we belong because we work with others at related tasks.

So, to think of the land as “belonging” to God, we are saying that the land is rightly and naturally God’s as its first cause and that care for the land is fitting to the na-

ture of a Creator. Our care of the land is a gifted extension of God’s care for the land. Ownership implies responsibilities and opportunities rather than rights.

A fourth principle is that the real value of land lies in its gift as provision for life and livelihood rather than on the money paid for it. (Leviticus 25:14-17) Food and meaningful work derive from land. We can expect harvest from the land. We are to treasure the land and give it regular rest. “For six years you will sow your field, ... prune your vineyard and gather its produce. But in the seventh year the land will have a sabbatical rest. (Lev 25:3-4a). The land is fruitful and given for work but must also be rested and lightly held.

An additional principle is that we are to work and care for the land whether we own it or not. Since all land is God’s, our good use of it is expected without possession. We must be patient and in harmony with God’s rhythms.

Finally, release from debt and restoration of the land is assured. Either in due time or suddenly, the land will return to a debt-free status and be unencumbered by worry (See, Leviticus 25:28c, 31c). We will either pay the mortgage gradually or suddenly, as God provides. There is to be no worry about the land. The community that gathers here will be nurtured and nourished on the land by God and not by our effort; though our effort is required as the work of living. The promise of a Year of Release frees us from experiencing a mortgage as in any way preventing or limiting our work. What we do will be continually dependent on God’s grace, mortgage or not.

We found this brief study of Leviticus 25 to be rich with meaning for us as we look at our budget and see the chunk of money devoted to mortgage repayment. While we would love to see the money go to program or staff development, we can see God at work even in holding and faithfully paying a mortgage. We are constrained to work within the limits of the land and they are good limits. We are continually learning that just because we *can* do something it does not follow that we *should* do it. Limits reinforce our learning of that lesson. Pray with us that we will be faithful to “work the land” that we have been given.

-Naomi R. Wenger

## Lenten Retreat Days

Our practice of providing quiet days of reflection and preparation during Lent continues this year on Saturday, **March 3**, Tuesday, **March 13** and Friday, **March 23**. The retreat day begins with Morning Prayer at 8:00 am and concludes by 3:00 pm. Guests are welcome to come for an overnight before or after the retreat, or stay longer on the day of retreat. Cost for the day is \$45 including lunch. Cost for the retreat with an overnight is \$75.

The theme for this year's retreat is Belonging: Remembering Our Longing for God. Together we will experience different ways of responding to God's presence within us and among us, using the gospel story of the Prodigal Father/Son as our framework.

Contact Naomi or David at [thehermitage@juno.com](mailto:thehermitage@juno.com) or 269-244-8696 to register for any of these days.

## Phoenix Gallery: Lenten Exhibit

Shirley Souder of Elkhart, Indiana, has collected her mother's crocheted doily handwork for several years. Recently, she has come to see these handcrafts as works of art and has begun using photographic images of them for her own meditation. As the images have grown in Shirley, so has the desire to dig out the spiritual connections between the knotted threads of the doilies. She has prepared *Doily Images and the Sacred Thread*, an exhibit of these images, along with distillations of her meditations to be shown in the Gallery throughout the Lenten season from Wednesday, February 21 through Saturday, March 31.

The Gallery is open from 9:00 am - 5:00 pm, Monday through Saturday.

## Stations of the Cross Walk—Holy Week

During Holy Week, April 1-7, the Hermitage trails are transformed into a meditation walk focusing on Jesus' journey from the courtroom to the place of his crucifixion. This journey is traditionally broken into fourteen meditative Stations of the Cross. Individual guests or groups may come at anytime for this self-guided, mile-long walk. The chapel is open for meditation for those who do not want to walk the trails.

## Exploring *The Divine Comedy* for Personal Transformation Retreat

This Eastertide, from April 20-22, we are offering a contemplative retreat on *The Divine Comedy*. In this poetic masterpiece, Dante Alighieri reflects on experiences traveling through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. As one of the most renowned and magnificent artistic works of all time, its influence on culture has been profound—ranging from traditional forms such as literature, music, painting, sculpture, and the performing arts to contemporary forms such as the digital arts and computer games. In its essence, *The Divine Comedy* invites those who read and contemplate the work to become fellow pilgrims with Dante.

The under girding purpose of *The Divine Comedy* retreat is opening up the literary and spiritual work for each participant to explore their own journey of transformation. Dante's hope was to lead readers to a greater understanding of their place in the universe and prepare them for the next life, which begins after death. This retreat experience is intended to be accessible to people from all backgrounds; no previous knowledge of *The Divine Comedy* is necessary. Quiet time for personal reflection and application will be interspersed with group sessions. The retreat guide is Anthony Franchina who has an M.A. in Italian language and literature, and the disposition to conduct the mini-pilgrimage under Dante as the retreat master.

*The Divine Comedy* retreat, April 20-22, will begin with supper on Friday and conclude with lunch on Sunday. The cost is \$175 (including a \$25 non-refundable deposit), which covers lodging, meals, and materials. For registration or further information, please email [thehermitage@juno.com](mailto:thehermitage@juno.com) or phone 269-244-8696. Consider making this part of your springtime itinerary!

## Storytelling in Fabric III: Quilting Retreat

*Storytelling in Fabric III: Quiltmaking as Sacred Art* is a weekend retreat for women who want a safe, nurturing, playful environment to explore our stories through fiber art. The focus of the retreat will be to create fabric journals.

The Hermitage will host this retreat from May 4 to 6. Beth Ann Williams and June Mears Driedger are the co-leaders. For further information, contact June at [jmdriedger@mindspring.com](mailto:jmdriedger@mindspring.com).

## Spiritual Classics Reading Group

You are welcome to join a small group that has been meeting on the last Monday evening of each month at 7 pm to discuss books that we read together. Our schedule of readings for 2007 is:

- February 26, Thérèse of Lisieux, *The Story of A Soul*
- April 30, Teresa of Avila, *Interior Castle*, part 2 (a continuation of the discussion from our January meeting, but all are welcome to join in)
- May 21, Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*
- September 24, Hieromonk Damascene, *Jesus the Eternal Tao*
- October 29, book TBA

If you are interested in joining us, call 269-244-8696 or e-mail from [www.hermitagecommunity.org](http://www.hermitagecommunity.org).



## Help Wanted

We are constantly and gratefully amazed by the way our needs are met by those of you who assist in so many ways. We have had volunteers cook, host guests, attend to our bookkeeping, clear trails, cut wood, shelve books, wash windows, mow grass, weed flower beds, rake leaves, pick up walnuts, trim tree limbs, and so much more.

Many of these are activities we need to have done regularly and some are tasks that guests do when they ask if there is anything they can do while on retreat to balance their inner work with active outer work.

We are never without a list of ideas if someone should ask to help. Do you want to have a regular helping presence at the Hermitage? See if the following list fits any of your interests. Needed:

- An individual to do bookkeeping tasks, 10 hours/mo.
- An individual to maintain trails, 10 hours/mo.
- An individual to tend flower beds and do light landscaping, 10-20 hours/mo.
- Lawn mowers for summer (it's never too early to dream!), about 8 hours/wk.

## The Hermitage Calendar

Feb 11 Taizé Evensong, 7:00  
Feb 21 Ash Wednesday, Begin  
Lenten Observance  
Feb 26 Spiritual Classics Book  
Discussion, Thérèse of  
Lisieux. *The Story of A Soul*

Mar 3 Lenten Retreat Day, 8-3  
Mar 11 Taizé Evensong, 7:00  
Mar 13 Lenten Retreat Day, 8-3  
Mar 23 Lenten Retreat Day, 8-3

Apr 1-7 Stations of the Cross Walk  
Apr 8 Easter, Taizé Evensong, 7:00  
Apr 21-23 *Divine Comedy* Retreat

May 13 Taizé Evensong, 7:00  
May 4-6 Quilting Retreat  
May 21 Spiritual Classics Book Dis  
cussion, Cynthia Bourgeault,  
*Centering Prayer and Inner  
Awakening*

Jun Taizé Evensong, 7:00

Jul Taizé Evensong, 7:00

Aug 4 Feast of the Transfiguration  
Retreat

Aug 12 Taizé Evensong, 7:00

## 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**

11321 Dutch Settlement  
Three Rivers, MI 49093  
269-244-8696 ° Fax 269-244-5856  
thehermitage@juno.com  
www.hermitagecommunity.org

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

**The Word Alone**

(God, speaking to Moses about trust, rest, and homeland security, says:)

*Hence, you will put my laws and customs into practice; you will keep them and put them into practice, and you will live securely in the country. The land will give its fruit, and you will eat your fill and live in security.... Land will not be sold absolutely, for the land belongs to me, and you are only strangers and guests of mine.*

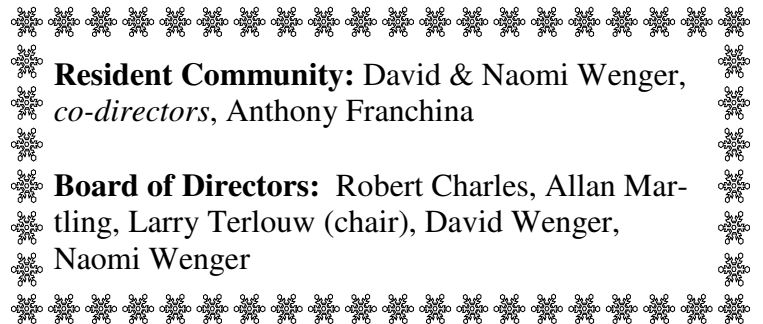
Leviticus 25:18-19, 23 (NJB)

**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