



views from the hermitage

Creating an environment of attentiveness to God

Retreat—Standing with Mary Magdalene: Re-discovering Devotion to Christ

When: 5 p.m., June 7 through 4 p.m., June 8

Leader: Naomi Wenger

Suggested Donation: \$100; we gladly receive what you are able to give for any of our programs (Includes overnight lodging and three meals).

Who: Women and men

This past week, I was asked, “what do you mean by ‘devotion?’” I responded, “Devotion includes loyalty, dedication, a bit of wonder and awe, and the total giving of one’s self to another. It is self-surrender and adoration.”

The anonymous author of the fourteenth-century mystical classic *The Cloud of Unknowing* describes devotion to God as the journey of our love takes into (God’s) Love that happens without “any stressing or straining of the imagination.” That is, it is calm, complete, and inevitable, drawn out of us by the presence of Love as we make ourselves aware of that Presence. Our response cannot be less than total when Love is the aim of our life.

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(Photo by Kevin Driedger)

Silent Retreats for Recovery

By June Mears Driedger

When the 12-person van trundles down the Hermitage drive and men of various ages exit, they have been silent since leaving Grand Rapids, MI, approximately 1.5 hours away. The men arrive for a 48-hour silent retreat as part of their addiction recovery program with Guiding Light Missions/Guiding Light Recovery (<https://guidinglightworks.org>).

This recovery program is distinct from other programs as it provides a contemplative angle: the men meet weekly with a spiritual director, they practice *lectio divina*, centering prayer, and participate in a silent retreat at the Hermitage. Additionally, the men are required to attend a house of worship although Guiding Light doesn’t assign a specific house of worship.

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Spring 2019

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Mary Magdalene is a model of this kind of devotion. We know very little of her life story from the Biblical texts, but what we do know has been recently amplified by other early manuscripts (found in the 20th century) that add interesting glimpses into her life that are not in the Gospel record. Her reputation has been both besmirched and stretched beyond belief by tradition about her and the imaginations of contemporary novelists and filmmakers.

In this retreat, we will begin to pull back the curtain on her life as a model, not only of a forgiven person, but as one who was completely captivated by Christ, who gave all to Christ and understood more than many of the others who followed Jesus of the Christ's mission and message. As a model of devotion, Mary leads us through forgiveness to love, she shows us how to love through fear and, finally, she models a pure desire—to simply be in the presence of God.

Register for this retreat before May 31:
269-244-8696 OR
contact@hermitagecommunity.org.



This summer at the Hermitage:

- June 7-8: Standing with Mary Magdalene retreat (see page 1 for more details)
- June 15: Invasive Species Eradication Day; 9:00 am—4:00 pm
- June 30-July 6: Hermitage closed
- August 3: Feast of the Transfiguration retreat led by Carmen Horst

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This contemplative emphasis happened after volunteer spiritual directors began meeting with men and the director suggested contemplative ways of prayers and the experience of a silent retreat. Guiding Lights sends two rotating groups of men, approximately ten men plus a staff member and a spiritual director, three times a year as part of the recovery program. The staff choose which men can stay in the cabins while the rest stay in the Barn.

Many of the men participate in the Hermitage morning prayers: often attendance is required for the first morning of the retreat, yet many choose to attend on their second morning.

According to Steve Pratt, a Guiding Light staff member, the silent retreat is “a way to bring up what’s going on inside of the men,” Pratt said. “The silence of a retreat allows them to respond with their truer self rather than just being reactive.”

Pratt himself experienced the contemplative nature of the Guiding Light program, including the silent retreat at the Hermitage. He described his experience of sitting in the chair overlooking the meadow when the silence allowed him to clear away the noise and to see himself.

“I had a vision of what can be for me, to become a recovery counselor, a life coach with others,” he said. “That vision became a pull for me to get stronger.”

At the conclusion of the retreat and the men leave to return to Grand Rapids—still in silence—Hermitage staff discover notes from some of the men to future guests in their rooms, such as, “May you be blessed by your time as I was.” Other notes are thank-you notes to Hermitage staff or a painting. After a recent retreat, one young man purchased a gift certificate for his father to experience a retreat at the Hermitage because his experience had so moved him.

Listening for God

By Kevin Driedger

This spring, when June and I arrived at the Hermitage in the morning, as we walked from our car to the chapel, we often found ourselves stopping along the way to stop and listen. The chorus of morning sounds—of bird calls and critter noises—grew in variety and volume as the days grew warmer. We loved taking a moment to bathe in these beautiful sounds before heading into the chapel for morning prayer.

Once inside, as we sat quietly, morning prayer began with the leader ringing the singing bowl to begin the service. The prayer leader then ends the great silence of the night and uttered the first words spoken each morning: “O God, come to my assistance.” We continued the service with words spoken, sung, and chanted. After the reading of the gospel, we sat in silence with the instructions to “Listen for God’s word to us today.”

We may hear God as we deeply engage with a scripture text and hear Jesus ask us: “What do you need from me?”

Listening is one of the most important activities at the Hermitage. The deep silence that characterizes the Hermitage is there to help us all be attentive and listen. We listen for God’s voice which can come in a myriad of ways, but we don’t notice it, if don’t listen for it. We may hear God in the call of the crow. We may hear God in the words spoken affirming us as “the bearer of God’s infinite life.” We may hear God in the affirmations and questions of our spiritual director. We may hear God in the stirring of our hearts, or aching of our souls. We may hear God as we deeply engage with a scripture text and hear Jesus ask us: “What do you need from me?”

The Rule of St. Benedict begins with the work “Listen” and the admonition to “incline the ear of your heart” to the teacher. Inclining the ear of one’s heart to God is the first, and final task for the person on retreat, as it is for everyone.

(It is one of my favorite quirks of the English language that *Silent* and *Listen* are anagrams—the same letters rearranged).

(This essay was published on the Hermitage Community blog. To read weekly blog posts from the Hermitage residential community go to www.hermitagecommunity.org and click on “Blog”).



What I See: A Prose Poem

By Naomi R. Wenger

Rain sprinkles the spring-green grass, just a little now, but earlier today, it came so fast, small streamlets made mini-rivers in the driveway. The gray sky gives way to patches of whiter light. Against the variegated sky, redbuds flash a welcome to the still green petals of the dogwood blossoms. Tulips drop their petals one-by-one on the myrtle. Browning daffodils still nod in the gentle breeze, their green seedpods swelling where the flower cups recede. Grass flowers turn sections of the hillsides yellow or deep purple except where the first mowing has removed the deep green and left a golden hue behind. Birds claim territory at the feeder for the few moments they are there—redwing black birds, cow birds, finches, sparrows, nuthatches, tufted tits, cardinals, chickadees and the occasional red squirrel. Bees probe everything for pollen, including the dusty seeds in the feeder. What lies beneath the surface of the hay-mulched garden swells in my imagination to rows and rows of goodness for sharing and eating—potatoes, peas, fava beans, beets, onions, carrots, spinach, garlic, cucumbers, eggplant, and peppers. Frogs sing in the meadows, in the woods, and along the edges of the ponds. Peepers make the night music now that will give way to cricket songs in summer. Early mushrooms tower over the grass or hide under leaf cover. Asparagus stalks spear the air under the wrinkled leaves of young trees. May apple leaves unfurl under glistening black oak trunks. Garlic mustard blooms display brightly against the brown of the forest floor. Green leafy rosettes show where meadow flower spikes will shoot up on the prairie. The competition for sunlight has begun. Everywhere I look, the earth is swelling with life.

UPDATES

By David Wenger

Cultivating Community Campaign: A \$15,000 Marching Gift Challenge

In the first quarter of this year we passed the \$200,000 mark in gifts and pledges received for the building of a new home on the Hermitage land. Many thanks to all who have contributed to the campaign. Your giving puts us in the home stretch of meeting the campaign goal of \$270,000.

To that end we are pleased to announce a **\$15,000 Matching Gift Challenge** to go toward the Cultivating Community campaign. Currently all donations given toward the campaign will contribute to the matching gift challenge. Can you help us meet the goal of raising \$15,000 by the end of June?

We are deeply grateful to the donors who have provided this opportunity for us. And we are deeply grateful to all of you who give generously to the well-being of The Hermitage Community. **Thank you.**



Clay-Straw House

Currently we are awaiting a building permit from the local township. As soon as this is granted we will be ready to break ground. We are eager to start this next phase of the project. We've likened our experience to that of preparing to paint a room or house. The preparation seems to be endless when what we really want to do is to start painting. At this point, we are ready to start building this house: we've studied and practiced the building method, the plans for the house are drawn, the fundraising benchmark for breaking ground has been met, the building team is in place. It is time to begin. We have been beginning on this building project for the past several years—we are *ready to begin again. with what is now the next thing to do.*

Deepest Thanks

The Hermitage thrives due to the generous help of our volunteers. If you sense God's nudging to volunteer, please contact Kevin, volunteer coordinator, to offer your time and skills:

Kevin@hermitagecommunity.org
or 269.244.8696

We are grateful to:

- Nancy Boyd and granddaughter Hannah**, for providing baked good twice a month;
- Jay Budde**, for his continued work on the new house;
- Barbara Budde**, for eradicating garlic mustard on May 4;
- Bierma family** for cooking, yardwork, and gardening, April 3-6;
- Sylvie Gudin and Suzanne Lind**, for cooking, February 8;
- Janae Hall**, for preparing and serving meals, April 16;
- Ursula Hess**, for providing hospitality, March 15-16 and April 26-27, which included preparing and serving meals;
- Mary Asmonga Knapp**, for preparing and serving meals, May 7;
- Gloria Showalter and Maeve Smucker**, for providing weekend hospitality, January 25-27, which included preparing and serving meals;
- Dylan Siebert**, for plethora outdoor work, March 25-31;
- Larry and Judy Somers**, for making granola, providing water, and preparing and serving meals April 12-13;
- Simone and Benjamin Tennant**, for preparing and serving meals, March 7-9;
- Biff Weideman**, for preparing and serving meals, February 9;
- Roger zum Felde**, for weekly library work, including digitizing the library card catalogue; And on the Garden Work Day, April 6, **Patty Hogan, Margie Pfiel, Mary Asmonga Knapp, Verena Troyer, Barbara Budde**, with **Tim Pisacich** and members of his community **Caroline and Raquel**.

Lastly, and continuously, we are grateful for **all the board members** who carry many tasks for the Hermitage year-round.



Up Close with Volunteers

1. What is your name and where do you live?

Roger zum Felde, Goshen, Ind.

2. How did you learn about the Hermitage?

My pastor asked for help for a workday and I came and split firewood at the Hermitage. Then I came for a personal retreat and enjoyed the great outdoor space.



3. What do you do as a volunteer? I help in the library by inputting books into a new software program. I've also been culling books and finding duplicates and lowering some of the shelves so the books are more easily accessed.

4. What drew you to the library?

I love all the wisdom that is encompassed in all the books that are in the library. There are so many saints and other religious figures over the centuries who've left behind significant words and thoughts that can be helpful for us today.

5. What is one thing that you want the Hermitage community to know about the library?

That there are many rare and unusual books in the Hermitage library which have much within them to treasure and to lead us in our lives as we seek to grow and learn and become more spiritual and better at relating to one another and the troubles of our time.

By the Book

Our practice during the Lent season is to read aloud during the midday meals to focus our thoughts and prayers. This year we read from The Inward Journey: Meditations on the Spiritual Quest by Howard Thurman, a 20th century mystic, teacher, preacher, and spiritual advisor to Martin Luther King, Jr. Below is a quote from the book:

"It is good to experience the quiet ministry of the living spirit of the living God. Again and again there are little healings of silent breeches which sustain us in our contacts with the world and with one another. We are stunned by the little word, the unexpected silence, the smile off key; without quite knowing why, the balance is recovered and the rhythm of the heart is stopped in its place. . . . It is good to experience the quiet ministry of the living spirit of the living God."



the hermitage

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Retreating at The Hermitage

As Jesus was revitalized for begin 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 the 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 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.

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Please hold the board and community in your prayers