



views from the hermitage

Creating an environment of attentiveness to God

Feast of the Transfiguration

August 5, 2017

Each year we celebrate the Feast of the Transfiguration because this feast commemorates both the mystery of spiritual Presence and the revelation of Jesus as honored Son of God. When we sit in quiet contemplation at The Hermitage, we receive both of these modes: mystery and revelation. We celebrate these aspects of God's Presence, realizing that the fullness is not always given to our mind and senses, but it is always with us.

On this feast day, we also renew covenant with the Keepers of The Hermitage Way.

Join us for a day of reflection and covenant renewal. Details on page 3.



Wild God

Though The Hermitage sits on 62 acres of largely uninhabited land and it borders another 500 acres of mostly uninhabited land held by two other retreat centers, it is not wild. Wild places are untouched by human will and effort. Rather, it bears the marks of long farming in the straight line of over-mature sassafras cutting through the woods, evidence of an old fence row. The title history of the land indicates that it was once forested. The dominant black oak, hickory, beech and scattering of soft maples indicate that this may once have been an "oak barren," with oaks alternating with tall-grass prairie. Now, a few giant white oaks in fencing corners show how farmers cleared regular tracts of land, following the surveyor's compass grid, erected fences, and kept the fields clear of the encroaching scrub of sumac, sassafras, spicebush, dogwood, hawthorn, and elderberry - harbingers of the oak and hickory forest.

Further evidences of human interaction with this environment show in the proliferation of garlic mustard, multi-flora rose, autumn olive, and oriental honeysuckle. All of these plants are non-native, now invasive, species brought by the human propensity to wander to other areas of the globe and bring back "exotic wonders."



Upcoming Events

August 4 Hermitage Jam
Making Workday, 9-4

August 5 Feast of the
Transfiguration Retreat and
Covenant Renewal for Way
Keepers, 9-4

August 26 Hermitage Board
Meeting

September 10 Taizé Evensong,
7 pm

October 7 Hermitage Way
Retreat - Topic: The Body of
Christ, 9-4

October 8 Taizé Evensong, 7

Looking Ahead

December 2 & 4 Advent Quiet
Day Retreats, 9-3.

We make paths, here, that do not go to the water. Though the deer trails flow from water source to hidden bowers, the human paths are kept wide enough for shoulders and the easy swing of arms. They loop or connect to the places humans inhabit—the guest house, the cabins, the house.

There are also other creatures who make this place home. Raccoons, who try to inhabit our structures whenever they can outwit our clever interventions to their presence (which is quite often), woodchucks, skunks, opossums, rabbits, red squirrels, fox squirrels, ground squirrels, gophers, chipmunks, moles, voles, field mice, and the occasional rat make their homes here. Frogs in the ponds and in the trees, toads, snakes (eastern garter, hog, black), and turtles (painted and snapping) abound. Birds rustle and sing, swoop and nest: red winged blackbirds, cow birds, blue birds, robins, blue jays, titmice, nuthatches, finches—gold and purple, wrens, sparrows, warblers, cardinals, orioles, grosbeaks, woodpeckers in astonishing variety, owls, water fowl, grouse, turkeys, and so many others. Then there are the deer who leap across the fields, jumping fences and laying down the deep tracks that beckon us to follow. To follow a deer trail, you have to be lithe, bending under low hanging branches and leaping brush piles. We are not accustomed to bend in the way of wildness.

So, while wild things live here, and were here before humans, they now live with humans and have adapted to this uneasy connection. Woodchuck pups happily gambol in the grass and when threatened, seek shelter in the den under the shed floor. Skunks, opossums, and mice find scraps that we throw into the compost pile. Deer drink from the bird baths. The birds and small mammals find sustenance at the bird feeders and hung suet cakes that lure them into our viewing range.

God is the only truly wild “thing” here, not tamed by our fences, buildings or trails, not interested in the detritus of our life, nor adapted to the landscape we have altered. If a wild system is essentially untouched by human will, then God is wild. And yet, God chooses to touch us and always does so in the wild way of the Divine. When Jesus spoke with Nicodemus about this touch of God, the Spirit who blows whence and whither, he intimated that wildness (John 3:1-21).

Oh, to be attuned to the wild ways of God—the wind, the still, silent voice, the invisible life-force in every seed, and the strength of every cataclysmic storm. Our work is to “take upon us the mystery of things, /As if we were God’s spies” (Shakespeare, *King Lear*, V, iii). And in being such spies, we are not so much spying on God’s behalf as spying God. Look around. In whom do you see God at work, today? In which situation is God likely to be found? It is the very wildness of God that makes it possible for us to spy God at work everywhere,

any time. God is not limited by our imagination or our ability to perceive. So, our “sense” of God always falls short of God’s real presence. The nature of God confounds us: we are both aware of our desire for God and aware of our deficient sensitivity to apprehend God. The good news is that we have already been found by God. What a wild God we come to know; one who finds us and

loves us, which is the very thing we have been longing for all along. I’m sure the wild things in the woods and meadows at The Hermitage are aware of my approach long before, or if, I ever sense their presence. Just like our Wild God.

—NRW

*“In one sense we are always traveling,
and traveling as if we did not know where we were going.
In another sense we have already arrived.
But oh! How far have I to go
to find You in Whom I have already arrived!”
-Thomas Merton*

Hermitage Jam Work Day and Feast of the Transfiguration Retreat

August 4 & 5, 2017

Hermitage Jam, Friday, August 4

The annual jam-making workday will be held Friday, August 4 from 9 am - 4 pm. Join us for a day of berrying, jam-preparation and fellowship. Wrestling the berries from the canes is a heroic task that leaves most pickers exhilarated, if a little scratched. It is so satisfying to pick a handful of berries all at once and then see them turned into a glorious black-purple jam. There are tasks in the field or the woods, and in the kitchen for all. If you have ever wanted to learn to make jam, this event is for you. If you love eating jam, just being outside, or hearing the “ker-plink, ker-plank, ker-plunk” of berries in your bucket, this event is for you. Participants can come for the day or for Friday and Saturday. The midday meal will be a salad and dessert potluck. Bring your favorite salad or whip up a batch of brownies to share. Those staying over will be treated to a cookout for

supper. The work day will begin at 9 am with Morning Prayer in the Grove.

Transfiguration Retreat, Saturday, August 5

The Feast of the Transfiguration retreat on Saturday, August 5, from 9 am to 4 pm, will be led by David and Naomi Wenger on the theme, “Until the day dawns,” exploring the possibility of spying God in the everyday. We will have time for prayer, walking, quiet, and communion around the Lord’s Table. There will also be a covenanting ritual for those choosing to be part of The Hermitage Way, for the coming year.

Join us for this retreat, counting our extraordinary, daily blessings. A midday meal will be provided for retreat guests on Saturday.

There is no cost to participants of the workday or the retreat. Donations are accepted for overnight stays before or after either day. Let us know you are coming or reserve a room: call (269-244-8696) or email (contact@hermitagecommunity.org) to let us know your intention.

EDC Work Days

The Ecosystems Discernment Committee held work days on May 13 and June 10. If you wander away from The Barn to the far end of the parking lot, you will see a beautiful garden, tended by Elisabeth Wenger and the Hermitage staff, volunteers, and guests. As the weeks progress, we will be eating more of our own produce: peas, eggplant, garlic, onions, shallots, broccoli, beans, kale, parsnips, squash, dry beans and cornmeal. We'll even have some honey to share from our bees. The EDC workday crew assisted in weed-proofing the fence line, clearing the persistent crabgrass, spreading manure, and getting the soil



ready for the seeds that are now growing with abandon.

Likewise, if you walk in the small woodland that separates the west meadow from the prairie, you will notice a new spaciousness in the undergrowth. An energetic team cleared the understory of the Asian bittersweet and autumn olive that were overshadowing the emerging hickory and oak trees and the burgeoning sassafras saplings. While the invasive bushes will certainly re-grow, we hope to give the other plants a chance to become strong in the increased light and nutrients not previously available to them.

Watch the website (www.hermitagecommunity.org) for more opportunities to work on the land. If that kind of

work delights you, you can also make work hours part of your retreat or come for a day of work. The Ecosystems Discernment Committee always welcomes helping hands.

Hermitage Way Retreats

The Hermitage Way Retreat, held on June 3 on the practice of Spiritual Direction was led by David Wenger and Mary Asmonga-Knapp. The day included time for solitude, group spiritual direction and the practice of holy listening. It was a grace-filled day of holding one another and being held in the loving presence of God.

The second retreat focusing on supporting the Body of Christ, will be held October, 7 from 9-4. This retreat will explore the value of participation in a local expression of the Body of Christ, the importance of community and communal worship, and will include sharing the various ways we are involved in the local worshipping community.

These retreats are designed for Keepers of the Hermitage Way and for people wanting to find out more about the Way. Each year, we present two of the ten practices of a Way Keeper in a day-long retreat format so we can share our stories and support one another in a particular commitment of the Way. We also delve more deeply into each practice, learning its history and the reason it is part of the Way. We try to broaden both our understanding and deepen our practice of each commitment of the Hermitage Way. Please join us for this retreat. Information about registration is on the web site (www.hermitagecommunity.org).

Spiritual Exercises: 9-Month Retreat September 30, 2017 - June 2, 2018

Every person in the world is so put together that by praising, revering, and living according to the will of

God our Lord, he or she can safely reach the Reign of God. This is the original purpose of each human life.

This statement frames the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. Ignatius' life-long project, to introduce people to a method of following Jesus that engaged them in looking for God in all things, resulted in what we know as the Spiritual Exercises. While his original design was for a person to complete the exercises in 30 days, he recognized that many people would not be able to leave their work and families for that extended time. So, he also encouraged an adaptation of the exercises that spans approximately 30 weeks rather than 30 days.

We are forming a small cohort of folks (limit 6) who wish to embark on the Exercises together using this expanded format. Participation will involve monthly meetings (2.5 hours) with the group and a monthly one-on-one meeting (1 hour) with Naomi Wenger, the Director of the retreat. Persons who want to participate should be able to commit to an hour of prayer and meditation each day for the duration of the retreat and to attend the group and private meetings. Cost for the retreat is \$600. A deposit of \$120 is due (by July 31) to reserve your place in the group.

The initial meeting will be September 30 beginning at 9 am. Subsequent meetings will be scheduled at that time. If you are interested in being part of this group, please contact Naomi Wenger (Naomi@hermitagecommunity.org or 269-244-8696) by July 30.

Thank You

The gratitude list keeps growing as we receive what God brings to us in each season. Over the last months, we are grateful to:

- David Janzen and Carmen Horst for leading our community retreats
- Mary Knapp for ably guiding a Hermitage Way retreat
- Dan Kuiper for a gift of hostas for the walled garden
- Verna Troyer for gardening help

- Dee Swartz for cooking days
- Judy & Larry Somers for water, granola, laundry soap, and mowing
- GilChrist Retreat Center for gifts of furniture, tree clearing around the cabins, and tree cutting along the trails
- Tom and Yvonne DeVries for their presence and stellar service during a 6-week work-retreat

Volunteer Opportunities

We rely on many volunteers to help with the ongoing work of The Hermitage. If you would like to help, here are some projects, you might consider helping with:

- cutting and splitting the wood that was taken down around the cabins and along the trails
- gardening, both in the vegetable garden and in the flower beds around the buildings
- regular invasive species management - consider giving one day a month to keep after some of our pesky plants
- hospitality volunteers - several persons are needed to give one to two days a month to assist with food prep, cleaning, laundry and greeting guests

New Landscapes at GilChrist

When you come to The Hermitage these days, you will notice a new contour to the land of our neighboring retreat center, GilChrist. They are digging new ponds in the meadows to attract wildlife, and provide still water for reflection. It will take a few years for the ponds to naturalize, but your usual walks in GilChrist meadows will follow a slightly different path for awhile. The Labyrinth, horse/goat barn and Garden of Many Faiths are still accessible, as is the Stone Chapel used by so many for quiet prayer.



the hermitage

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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.

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*Please hold the board and
community in your prayers.*