



views from the hermitage

Creating an environment of attentiveness to God

Advent

QUIET DAY RETREATS

December 2 & 4, 9am-3pm

“What are you waiting for?” will be the focus of the retreat this year. Are we waiting for the Second Coming of Christ, the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, the end of suffering, or something else entirely? What if we focused on recognizing that God is waiting for us—waiting for us to notice where and when Divine work is being done? What does God desire us to see? What does God hold as the possibility for humanity? Why do we not see what God sees? What gets in our “eyes” and hinders our vision?

Join us for a day of reflection and pondering. What are you waiting for? Call or email to register.



Winterdeath

The garden is once again shrinking into the ground. The frosts we have had over the last weeks followed by heavy rains, have rendered the tender vines of zucchini, melon, and cucumber into mush. The sturdier stalks of tomatoes, eggplant, okra, and broccoli still stand, but shorn of leaves and fruit and leaning into the soil. The basil is blackened and moldy. Corn stalks have dried and are breaking apart in the wind. There is no sheen of brilliant green over the garden, but darkness, decay and death.

Living in one of the temperate bands that circle the globe means that we participate in this phenomenon as an annual cycle. Every year, I marvel at the beauty of death and dying in the plant world. Multi-colored and -shaped fungi are springing up everywhere. They are crowding on top of each other in shingled profusion. Once monochromatic green leaves are spotted with brown and striped with yellow. The smooth surfaces have begun to ripple and curl. All of this is in service of a death that does not diminish but rather preserves life.

Last week, as I pulled the irrigation tapes out of the ground



Upcoming Events

Nov 10-11 Hermitage Board Meeting

Nov 12 Taizé Evensong, 7 pm

Dec 2 & 4 Advent Quiet Day Retreats, 9am-3pm

Dec 10 FINAL Taizé Evensong, 7 pm (see p. 3)

Dec 21 - Jan 3 Hermitage Sabbath - We will be taking no guests these weeks

where they had become buried during potato digging, I unearthed dozens of earthworms, barely able to move out of the light because of the cool temperature of the soil. These are the giant harbingers of the life that still resides in the soil. Mold, fungus and tiny animals are now the new life on the plants and in the soil. What we assume is the ending of productivity for the plants is only the beginning for a whole host of decomposers, who come into their own in this season of diminished fruitfulness. Their work is to free trapped carbon, nitrogen, etc. from a life form and make it available to lives not yet begun.

In just this way, our spiritual practices sometimes look like death, that is, they seem to sap our energy or take us through experiences that diminish, rather than expand our lives. And yet, this Winterdeath remains one of the more fruitful, rejuvenating seasons for our spirits as well as for the plants. We like to quote the gospel, “unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). But do we take into account what has to die for the fruit to be borne? That would be us, our very selves, down to the husks; we have to be “sponged out, erased, made nothing.” When we are laid bare, the decomposition of our former selves becomes the soil for new life to emerge.

All over the garden this year, Spanish black radish plants popped up. They were planted in one short row last year. But, this year scattered through the rutabagas, the beets, the lettuce, the potatoes, and the broccoli, there were radish plants. These sturdy specimens are stars of the garden. Health-giving tubers grow from tiny seeds to the size of small pumpkins. But first, the plant has to die and the stored food of the previous year’s tuber enriches the soil in which the new seeds thrive. So, these black beauties show us that what feels like death is actually the doorway to new, abundant life that is no longer confined to one place but shoots up everywhere.

I’m looking forward to seeing where these radishes will show up next year, after Winterdeath does its work of stripping and enriching. And I’m looking forward to see what comes as our lives are stripped, diminished and turned into soil that will host the next season of abundant life.

-NRW



Taizé Evensong - **TAKING A BREAK**

We have had the practice of praying in song for fourteen years. “Second Sundays at Seven” saw us in the chapel with a variety of musicians or just with our voices to chant in the style of the Taizé community.

When David and I traveled to France 17 years ago, just before coming to The Hermitage, we twice made a pilgrimage to Taizé where prayers are sung thrice daily. We were struck then by the simplicity and depth of these simple songs, chanted until they imprint on the heart. Since then, we have hosted 154 evenings of prayer fashioned after the experiences we had in Taizé.

With a bit of sadness, we will be taking a break from this practice in 2018. We will miss the rhythm of praying in song, the folks who have been faithful attendees for years, the beauty of the music created by the guest musicians and the soulful way these chants find their way into our work around the Barn. We will continue to use our recordings of the Taizé community prayers during meals. And we will continue to chant these prayers as we go about our work.

Zac and Kristi Bowman Cook ably served at The Hermitage as resident staff from June 2016 through August 2017. They have now moved on to other work. The following two articles are reflections about their service.

God’s love given hands and feet through Kristi and Zac

By Lynda Hollinger-Janzen

As a Hermitage board member, I thank God for the gift of Kristi and Zac Bowman Cooke and all they brought to the community in the 15 months they lived in residence. Along with fresh ways of expressing their deep commitment to God, they brought concrete skills. They helped develop new systems for dealing with finances and scheduling. They used their mechanical skills to keep the ancient truck running, install a new heater in Carryll House, and oversaw improvements to the septic system, among many other much-appreciated contributions.

Kristi and Zac brought a passion for planting seeds and watching God bring fruit from their efforts. This was most visible in the flowers and vegetables still growing in the garden for the enjoyment of The Hermitage guests – even after Kristi and Zac have moved on to the next steps of their pilgrimage with God. But they also engaged in spiritual seed-planting in conversations with guests and through acts of service.

Kristi said, “It brought me a great deal of joy to prepare meals for guests and to minister to them through massage. One guest told me, ‘If food is God’s love made edible, massage is God’s love made tangible.’”

Kristi and Zac also brought the gift of cats to The Hermitage. Kristi said, "It's amazing what you learn about God through cats. They mirror your emotions; and they come and pray with you." Kristi remembers one man who was part of a retreat for people recovering from addictions. He sat outside for hours, stroking a cat on his lap. When he later learned that the cat's name was Thomas, his eyes filled with tears. He was mourning for his father who had died. His father's name was Thomas.

Kristi and Zac treasure their relationships with guests and, especially with the volunteers, whom they call "the life-blood of The Hermitage." They hope to continue to nurture some of these relationships as they follow God's leading into new places.

As a member of The Hermitage board, I feel the loss of Kristi and Zac's presence, but know that they will continue to share their gifts with the world in ways that make God's love tangible. The Hermitage sends them forth with gratitude for their service and blessings for their future ministry.

Gratitude to The Hermitage

By Kristi and Zac Bowman Cooke

We are grateful for the many good things that we have experienced in our sojourn at The Hermitage. It was a great gift to spend time on this beautiful piece of land, to become well acquainted with the call of the sandhill cranes echoing over the marshes. It was a privilege to walk the snow-covered trails in winter and work in the garden in summer. We ate such wonderful food at the long wooden table in St. Joseph's Barn and in the Wenger home. We were welcomed by wonderful neighbors at GilChrist, *cino, Bair Lane Farm, and Sustainable Greens.

We learned to delight in the warmth of Centering Prayer like a divine embrace. We were shepherded by excellent spiritual directors and board liaisons that helped us to see how God might be moving in our experience here. We were so encouraged by the words of affirmation and deep listening on the part of all board members and the wealth of wisdom and experience converging to guide this organization. The facilitated staff retreats also provided an essential venue for open and honest communication and spiritual guidance.

Looking for a "New" Truck

At the Board Meeting in August, we reported that our trusty Hermitage truck (1990 Toyota) is nearing the end of its usefulness. The truck is only marginally road-worthy at this point, though we continue to use it to haul wood and service the cabins. Do you know of a used truck that is looking for a new home? We would be glad to receive your donation or suggestions.

Thank You

We continue to be blessed by the people who come to The Hermitage desiring to serve. Over the last months, we are grateful to:

- ♦ Roger zum Felde and Brent Koehn for great progress in both processing additions to the library and entering data for the existing collection into a database.
- ♦ Sylvie Gudin, Lynda Hollinger-Janzen, and Gloria Showalter for many hours spent cooking, cleaning and hosting
- ♦ Kelly Bryan, Mark and Christine Guy and Ursula Hess for helping to harvest and process corn, dry beans, and green beans from the garden

- ♦ Alf Driedger for rebuilding the porch railing on the Hanby Center, braiding the onions, fixing electrical outlets, replacing a rotten step, and digging lots of potatoes
- ♦ Mark Guy for sorting out the old wood from the wood pile and putting the good wood in the wood shed so our campfires are burning brighter
- ♦ Ruth Stoltzfus and Kate Falk for making pickles, cooking and cleaning, picking the last of the blackberries and oodles of mouse melons
- ♦ Larry and Judy Somers for canning 100 quarts of tomatoes for the Hermitage pantry in addition to supplying the granola, laundry soap, and water and mowing the ever-growing grass
- ♦ Elisabeth Wenger for planning, planting, weeding and maintaining such a beautiful and bountiful garden
- ♦ Verna Troyer for helping to maintain the beautiful flower beds around the buildings
- ♦ Nick Simons for trimming the “squirrel highway” branches away from the Barn

Volunteer Bookkeeper Needed

Over the years, several people have given consistent time to the task of bookkeeping at The Hermitage. Once again we need someone who enjoys bookkeeping, can give 2-3 hours every other week to the task (on site), and who is comfortable working with spreadsheets. The job involves recording income and expenses and making regular deposits. If you, or someone you know, fits this description,

contact David Wenger and he will be glad to answer any questions you may have about this opportunity for service.

For Pondering...

“The person who fears to be alone will never be anything but lonely, no matter how much he or she is surrounded with people. But the one who learns in solitude and recollection to be at peace with his or her own loneliness, and to prefer its reality to the illusion of merely natural companionship, comes to know the invisible companionship of God.”

—Thomas Merton

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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.

Board of Directors

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Resident Community:

David Wenger
Naomi Wenger

Please hold the board and community in your prayers.