

# CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS

A place for solitude, prayer and reflection

Hermitage Retreat Center    Sponsored by the Congregation of St. Joseph    Spring, June 2017

## Finding Healing in the Darkness

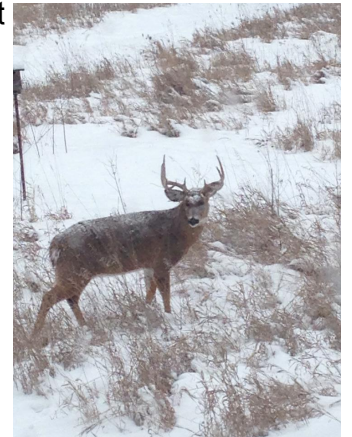
It never fails. The day before I leave for a retreat at Christ in the Wilderness, my mind starts racing with anxiety and fear. "I shouldn't be going," I say to myself. "I have to do X, Y, and Z. What if someone needs me while I'm gone? I shouldn't be spending this money. I don't want to be alone for three days..." My mind races on. But each time I manage to remind myself that this is exactly why I need to go, and a few days later, I drive away from the retreat center wondering why I ever doubted the decision to go.

I've been taking retreats at Christ in the Wilderness for two and a half years now. My first trip was on Jan. 1, 2015. Two years prior, the dream that I had harbored since I was a child collapsed in front of me. My whole life, I have wanted to be in the Army. After two previous attempts, I was finally granted a chance to try out for the Special Forces at the age of 28. But just two weeks before I entered basic training, I injured both of my legs. My injuries worsened in training, and after three months, I was medically discharged and sent home. I was crushed. I came back home to Illinois – where I hadn't lived in 10 years – and took the first job that came along so that I could get health insurance. My lifelong dream was dead, I was far from the friends I had made in other cities, and I was constantly in pain.

In December 2014, I was at a breaking point. I had had three surgeries, but my injuries had not improved. My job was extremely stressful, and I felt the burning desire to get away from everything, be by myself, cry, and wrestle with God. I searched online for a cabin I could rent, but I came across Christ in the Wilderness and was intrigued. My faith had all but disappeared during my ordeal, so I wasn't sure I wanted to go to a place with such a name, but deep inside me I felt like I was being called to go there.

When the day for my retreat arrived, I felt myself calming and my head clearing as I made the two-hour drive west. And when I finally pulled off of the pavement and on to the rocky road that leads to CITW, I knew I was in the right place. That first retreat was hard, I won't deny it. I loved walking the snow-covered hills, watching the birds gather

at the feeder, seeing the deer running through the barren woods, and reading quietly in my room as I listened to a CD from the CITW library, but when I would take time to pray, meditate, and reflect, my mind and heart went to some dark places. Anger, hurt, fear, and resentment came boiling to the surface. I was overwhelmed, and the dark nights seemed to mirror my heart. I cried a lot that first retreat. But I would force myself to take long walks at night, and it was at the top of a hill under thousands of stars that I began to feel the first hints of healing.



I have had six surgeries and four visits to the retreat center over the past few years, and each time I go, I don't want to leave. No matter what my intentions are when I arrive, I end up having some life-changing revelations (most often on my night hikes, while staring up at the stars). I've begun to come to terms not only with the pain of my failed Army dreams, but also with difficult experiences from my past and long-term, unhealthy patterns that I am now working to change. I still have a ways to go in my faith journey, but at CITW, God has begun to soften my hardened heart. I have even learned to be grateful for my injuries, for they have forced me into deep soul searching that has brought me much inner healing.

I heard once that not all people find God in church. Some people find Him in service. Some in solitary prayer. And some in the wilderness. When I am walking around the CITW property with my walking stick, I feel like I am once again part of creation. Small, insignificant, and at the same time, loved and free. The isolation, solitude, and opportunity to disconnect refresh my soul. And when I get back to "reality," I want nothing more than to sit on a wooden swing and watch the sun set over the hills. I will forever be grateful to Sr. Julia, the Congregation of St. Joseph, and everyone else who makes this retreat center possible. Without the silence, solitude, and time for reflection at Christ in the Wilderness, I know not how I would have made it through this most difficult period of my life. Thank you.

## Save the Date

On Sunday December 10, 2017, we will have our annual Christmas Concert and Benefit to support Christ in the Wilderness. Invite family and friends to join you at the Nazareth Academy at 2 pm. Nazareth Academy is next door to the CSJ Lagrange Center. Luke and Sarah Windham, who gave us a marvelous concert the past couple of years, will be performing again. We will have the silent auction, fifty-fifty, mystery gifts, and wonderful refreshments. Mark your calendars. For more information call 815-947-2476 or email: [citw@citwretreat.com](mailto:citw@citwretreat.com).

If you would like to help in preparation for this fundraiser, here are ways that you can help us out. We are accepting auction items, mystery gifts, etc., or maybe you would like to make a contribution to help offset expenses. If you are unsure of whether we can use an item, give me a call. We can arrange pick up if necessary. All assistance is appreciated.

## You Tube Video

Last Fall the Stockton Chamber of Commerce Board came out to visit Christ in the Wilderness and did a filmed interview before their meeting. Village of Stockton AmeriCorps Member was able to edit the information into a nice video segment. Here is the link to the video <https://youtu.be/Hp5KM8dbo2k> Feel free to share it with others who may be wondering what CITW is like.

## Hotel Tax

Senator Tim Bivins engaged other senators to help sponsor Bill SB587 that would exempt Tax-Exempt Retreat Centers from charging and paying the Hotel Owner's Occupancy Tax (HOOT). The bill has passed both Senate and House and is awaiting the signature of Governor Bruce Rauner. Once signed, the bill takes effect on July 1, 2017. Thank you Senator Bivins and fellow Congress Members for supporting this bill.

## *In the Wilderness....*

Once the weather started warming up, Chuck Loehr was busy with many staining

projects. The decks and hand rails have been stained. The wooden trim around all the porch windows in each hermitage has been stained and looks great. The gazebo was a big project and took several coats of stain. Chuck repaired a few chairs and started staining chairs, benches and swings. Frank Schwirtz organized a volunteer project with Bryton, Avery, Ben, Cheryl and Norma this past weekend. They finished staining the benches around the property. We have lots of tables and benches that the retreatants enjoy sitting at along the paths.

Thanks for everyone for the donations to support the gravel and mulch purchases to improve the lane and the Sabbath's path. Over the years the wear of vehicles and erosion from the weather made them rather uneven and bumpy. We still have a few more areas to tackle, but the lane, parking lot and Sabbath paths are in great shape.

With the warm weather Chuck and John are keeping very busy trying to keep ahead of the growing grass, shrubs and vines. We have lots of birds around and enjoy hearing them sing. We will be having an Open House at Christ in the Wilderness, Stockton, IL, on Sept. 10, 2017 from 4 to 7 pm. Put it on your calendar and bring family and friends to see our beautiful place.

Don't forget to schedule your retreat for the rest of the year. Some months are already filling up quickly. Have a safe and peaceful Summer. God bless you. Peace, Sr. Julia



## Openings:

You can check out our website: [www.citwretreat.com](http://www.citwretreat.com) for updates when openings are available, especially on short notice.

If you are on Facebook, check out our Christ in the Wilderness page: <https://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Christ-in-the-Wilderness/257739718945>. I will post openings there regularly. You can also share those pages with others who may be interested in coming. Contact Sr. Julia for reservations.