

CHRIST IN THE WILDERNESS

A place for solitude, prayer and reflection

Hermitage Retreat Center

Sponsored by the Congregation of St. Joseph

Winter January 2015

Finding God's Love and Peace

I began going to Christ in the Wilderness on retreat about nine years ago. I was a young mom with five children, and at that particular time, I felt exhausted and completely empty. I felt like I had nothing more in me to give. I remember praying and asking God for a retreat, but not one with people talking to me. I needed a peaceful and quiet place to be with Him. He answered my prayer by bringing another woman into my life who had been to CITW and shared the treasure with me. I went for three days and came back renewed.



Since then, I have returned to CITW almost every summer, and every year I stay longer as my capacity for silence and solitude expands. Every time I have gone there, God has

taken some area of my life and healed me. One year He taught me about the need for a regular Sabbath time in my life. Another year He worked on healing some aspects of my marriage. Another year, He lead me to read a book about Seasonal Affective Disorder and I cried through the whole thing as I realized that this was what I was experiencing and it had a name and I was not "crazy".

There was a year that I brought "Consoling the Heart of Jesus" by Fr. Michael Gaitley with me and had a huge burden lifted off of me when I realized that I am a little soul. After trying to be a big soul for so many years this was very healing to me and gave me a new path of spirituality to follow that fits who God created me to be. A couple years ago I had been quite ill for many months and on top of that was spiritually dry. I couldn't pray or feel God's presence at any time. I thought it would be a waste of time to go that year but a holy priest I sought counsel from encouraged me to go. I did go and God not only took away the dryness

during the retreat, but also healed me of the anger and bitterness I had been struggling with during my illness. He let me know that, in order to bring me closer to Him, He had to do "surgery" on me with my sickness to remove the cancer of some childhood baggage that I couldn't get rid of by my own efforts. He let me know that He cried with me and held me and never let me go for even a second. From the bitterness and anguish I had arrived on retreat with, I found myself praising and thanking God for His mercy in loving me enough to change me, and for the suffering he had given me. That was a miracle He worked in my heart.



When I share my experiences with others, most of them express fear- fear of being alone and of being so vulnerable with God. This makes me feel sad. Why are we afraid of the God who created us and knows every little thing about us and loves us more than we can imagine? What could be safer than being in God's protective hands and what could possibly be better than having God Himself as the Retreat Master and Spiritual Director who is directing the retreat just for you?

When I arrive at CITW, I go into my hermitage and tell God, "I am yours. Lead me and guide me. You are my director." He does. I open my heart and follow the quiet nudgings in my heart whether it is reading a spiritual book I brought or from the library, praying in the chapel, walking in the beautiful nature surrounding me, or going to Holy Mass or Confession in Stockton. The last time I went I slept for a full day and night to begin my retreat!

Every time I have gone on retreat, without exception, to Christ in the Wilderness, God has washed me in His love and I come back renewed, restored, healed and at peace, knowing I am God's precious daughter and my

heart desiring to know, love, and serve Him better. I want that for everyone.

By Carissa Beck, Oct. 2014

Christmas Concert

Thank you to all who came for our Christmas Concert Fundraiser. We had a wonderful group of visitors who enjoyed the Christmas music and then gathered for refreshments afterwards in the Welcome Hall. We had over 50 silent auction items for guests to bid on. The



baked goods, jams and jellies were popular items as well. Thanks to all who secured auction items, assisted with set up, helped during the program and the clean up. We appreciate your support for our delightful

and successful fundraiser. Hope to see you next year.

In the Wilderness...

Although it has been a very cold winter so far, we have had minimal amounts of snow. The lack of snow has made it a bit more manageable to traverse the grounds of CITW. We have many openings for hermitages over the next 3 months. If you are in need of some solitude in our busy world, come and quiet yourself in one of our cozy hermitages. In Carissa's article, which first appeared in Christ our Hope Magazine from the Joliet Diocese in Illinois, she extends an invitation to come aside and find your true inner self and be renewed. It is hard to do that in our jam-packed daily life.

Over the 34 years of CITW's existence, we all have enjoyed the unique features of the diverse landscape of Christ in the Wilderness. We have woodlands, meadows, over 3 miles of walking paths, and wonderful quiet areas to sit and reflect. We have been attempting to control invasive non-native plants that have been trying to take over our meadows. We are making some progress, but it is an ongoing and challenging task to keep the meadows maintained as beautifully as they have been in the past. We have been planting native prairie plants and some them have really established themselves and will, over the course of years, spread

their beautiful flowers across the meadows.

This year with the help of Natural Resources Conservation Services and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, we have developed a long range plan for regenerating our woodland areas. The autumn olive, sumac, and other invasive trees and shrubs have filled the woodlands to the point of inhibiting future growth of native trees. The native trees provide food and shelter for the wildlife on our property. We have been able to secure funds in the past couple of years to plant some new oaks, maples, birch around the land. These trees will add to the beauty and stability of our tree population. Over the next five plus years, we will be cleaning out the woodlands and planting more trees, whenever funds are secured for that purpose.

The Congregation of St. Joseph, who own CITW, has as one of its Generous Promises:

We, the Congregation of St. Joseph, promise to recognize the reality that Earth is dying, to claim our oneness with Earth and to take steps now to strengthen, heal and renew the face of Earth.

CITW is committed to being a good steward of our land, so that it will be available to all who come for quiet, solitude, prayer and reflection far into the future. Contact me if you know of any groups that would like to partner with us in these efforts.



Have you thought of remembering us?

- When you are making your will and are thinking about charitable bequests, have you ever thought about including Christ in the Wilderness? This would help us immensely in the future as we might continue our retreat ministry.
- Our legal title and address are Christ in the Wilderness, 7500 S. Randecker Road Stockton, IL 61085 -8922 We are a not-for-profit 501(c)(3).

Spaghetti Dinner Fundraiser

On Saturday, Feb. 28, 2015, we will have our annual spaghetti and meatball dinner in Stockton at Holy Cross Parish, 223 E. Front Ave., Stockton, IL. Dinner will be served from 4-7 pm. Dine in or Carry Out. If you are in close proximity to Stockton, join us. Invite family and friends for this delicious meal.