

April 2009 Issue Number 7



COMMON LIFE

NEWSLETTER

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**"Come away to a deserted place
all by yourselves
and rest awhile"
(Mark 6:30)**



Common Words

We've just come through the season of Lent – a time in which traditionally folk went on retreat in recognition of the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness. Retreat is one of our Common Life practices or disciplines. What might its purpose be for our movement? How might retreat help us “discern and do God's healing work in the church and world?”

On TV, we see “organizers” go into homes to help the residents declutter their living space. The practice of retreat could serve this function of decluttering – helping us take the time to sort through the chaos in our minds and spirits so we can see what matters most in our lives. The “organizer” might be a spiritual guide or the Spirit itself. But the end result, rather than a tidy, stylish achievement of society's standards, could be a discovery of who we really are and what we are meant to do. Retreat could open our eyes again to the goodness that is deep within us, to the God within. Retreat could create a space of time and place where change can take place – a change of heart, a change of lifestyle, a change of life work.

Workers at a construction site in my neighbourhood have had to dig deep in order to build a firm foundation for a new structure. First they had to clear away the remains of shoddily built commercial buildings and then go further down to remove the brick and stone foundations of much older houses. From this deep and sturdy foundation will rise a wonderful multidisciplinary health care centre. Retreat could be about digging deeper - getting below the surface of our lives to establish again our connection with the foundation of our lives and to build our ministry. Deeper than our fragility, brokenness and destructive urges, we find the life-giving presence of God.

Matthew Fox suggests that a desert experience goes beyond decluttering or going deep into what is. It involves an emptying out and letting go of everything, including our understandings of ourselves and God. Experiencing the silence at the heart of letting go can be frightening. We fear its formlessness, its lack of boundaries, its emptiness. We don't know if we can trust what will happen if we let go. We wonder if there will be anything left of us. Yet, unless we enter the nothingness, in his view, we can't receive. Empty vessels, not full ones, become St. Francis of Assisi's channels of peace. Seeds lying in darkness, letting go of their identity as seeds become grain and flowers. Jesus on his “retreat” let go of images of what a messiah ought to be or what a king ought to be. Out of experiences of nothing, we could create anew in church or world and participate in God's creating here and now on earth.

George MacLeod of Iona firmly asserted that retreat was never about escaping from the world or looking away from it but about going deeper into it. He believed God is to be found in the noise and busyness of our lives. He would agree however with David Stevens of Corrymela. Stevens who has lived through the decades of conflict in Northern Ireland claims that any attempt to transform a social system without addressing its spirituality is doomed to failure. Time must be taken, in a “thin” place if possible, to let the Spirit begin its quiet work of healing our selves, our relationships, our social and political structures and our spiritualities.

Decluttering? Digging deeper? Emptying out? What have been your experiences of retreat? Have you felt a vague puzzling call as did Marilyn Bacon? Or, a sense of renewed commitment as did Mardi Tindal after her sabbatical? Have you reframed it as has Tim Scorer? Have you felt the fear that the Shekhinah Seekers are exploring? Or nothing? What role does the practice of retreat play in your CLC group and how might it enable you to fulfill the purpose of Common Life? May we live into the questions.

It felt lonely putting together the newsletter this time. I'm grateful for the news we have received from CLC groups but many are missing this time. I can't help but wonder what this says. Please let me know. Blessings to all groups across this country.

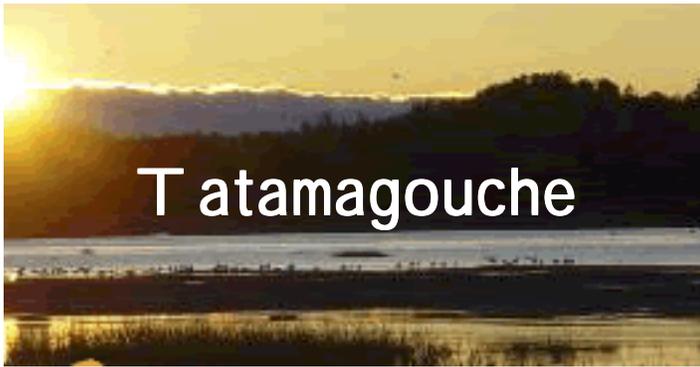


This newsletter was formatted by **Debra Brown**, who is nourished and renewed by laying upon the earth. She works as Communications Coordinator at Calling Lakes Centre.

Solitude in nature is essential to my being. While I am very fortunate to work and live in the Qu'Appelle Valley where I am held by hills, trees and sky, it is still essential that I “retreat” to spend intentional time to connect with nature and myself on a regular basis. And, I have dear friends who remind me of the necessity of this!

Pictures of Iona on pages 1 and 6 were taken during Calling Lakes' Celtic Pilgrimage in 2006 by Jim Von Riesen. Thank you Jim!

Word from the Common Life Groups



Tatamagouche

Fredericton Group

Group members: Charlotte Campbell, Mac Campbell, Heather Donnelly, Cathy Holtmann, Gail Wiley, Norm Whitney

We in the Fredericton Common Life Group are approaching our second anniversary as a group together. You can tell from the photo we are enjoying our table fellowship. Having spent our first year learning about the five practices, this year we bounded in bravely and each agreed to take on a presentation. The topic could be anything. It just needed to be one that held deep personal interest and passion. By the time this newsletter goes to print, we all will have wrestled with our nerves to present that something. Needless to say, this has been an intense year of trust building for us.



Charlotte Campbell, Cathy Holtmann, Mac Campbell, Gail Wiley, Heather Donnelly. Absent: Norm Whitney.

Our areas of interest have been varied. We began the fall by exploring the model of a Quaker discernment committee as a vehicle for discernment and then assisted a member who was wondering where to go with some theological writing. Another time we learned more about social justice issues in Canadian

mining. In December we shared ways to stay focused on the real Christmas while living in the midst of a consumer-branded Christmas. And in three very different but moving experiential sessions, we celebrated and reflected on our radical interdependence with all life forms with whom we share a common 14 billion year history.

Some of us are looking forward to meeting with Common Life members from the rest of Atlantic Canada at our annual meeting in May. It will be a time of sharing friendship and learnings, reflecting on our individual and collective journeys, and recommitting to the five practices that are our common life.

We send you all our love and look forward to reading about the life of your groups.



Five Oaks

Free Spirits

Group members: Yvonne Stewart, Mary Joan Bradley, Michele Braniff, Lilojean Frid, Nancy Hardy, Marion Kirkwood, BJ Klassen, John Klassen, Des McCalmont, Joan McCalmont

Advent meeting: In advance, we read an Advent sermon from one of our congregations that offered an invitation “to look at our lives and the chaos, injustice and misery in our world with Advent eyes” and “to open ourselves to the Spirit and intentionally ask for the Spirit’s gifts, in this case the gift of hope.”

When we raised the whole notion of “waiting time,” our political junkies could not resist introducing the word “prorogue” as we talked about the reality of our times.

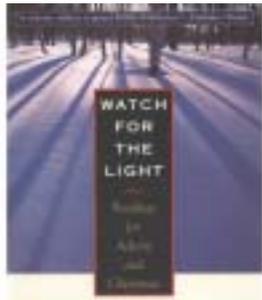
*Emperor in whatever era,
Is always about money and power,
About power and force,
About force and control,
And eventually violence.*

As we thought of our context, we asked, “How can we behave differently?” Or, how can we hopefully participate in God’s

Word from the Common Life Groups

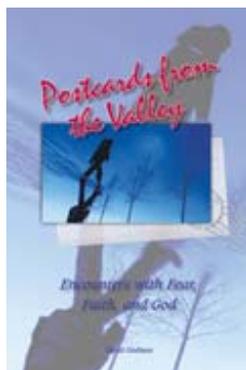
transforming action. We shared our different approaches to gift-giving for example.

Another reading from Jan Richardson's book *Watch for the Light* raised the imagery of the womb which was very helpful as we tried to understand what it was about Christmas that still evokes warm, caring hopeful response.



We enjoyed a pot luck lunch at the home of Nancy Hardy and joined in a discussion of Sunday morning worship and its purpose.

January Meeting: Before this overnight meeting at Five Oaks, John Klassen invited us to reflect on the events of a day in our lives responding to the questions: Where did you see God, incarnate, absent, present? How would you talk about that? How does this affect your understanding of church? community? world? Our reflections were in the mode of David Guiliano's book, *Postcards from the Valley: Encounters with Fear, Faith, and God*, where he finds God in the ordinary. Later, we shared dreams we have had and what they reveal to us about God and community. We used biblical analogies and Jungian concepts.



Our reflections noted that church and community and connection to the world can be created through the telling of stories. Storytelling can bring us to new depths (the divine?) in ourselves and connect us to others. This process can inspire us to care for others and act accordingly. Attending fully to the ordinary things in life such as enjoying a cup of water can



also connect us with the sacred or the divine, giving us such an appreciation for it that we can take action to care for it.

Shekhinah Seekers

Group members: Pam Byers, Barbara Bitzer, Jane Entiknap, Lloyd Smith

The four Shekhinah Seekers met at Five Oaks in January using the Friendship House for our 4 p.m. to 4 p.m. gathering. We find our check-in needs a good chunk of time and so we allotted the evening for it, beginning with a 'light' round before supper and then going deeper after supper.

Our theme for the gathering was fear and how we saw it affecting ourselves and our various communities. We noted how scripture is full of God's call to "be not afraid" and shared other written material that had spoken to each of us about fear. We observed that: fear and love are opposites: fear blocks true community among individuals and nations: fear can never be eradicated as the potential for fear is a fact of life, however, faith and trust can prevail over fear: fear seems to be having a stronger than usual effect on our church and our world at this time: when reluctant to do something, it's hard to know whether we are being fearful or realistic: and finally, fear can affect how we stretch and grow, or not, through the five common-life practices.

We decided to leave this last observation for personal reflection so we could look at it in more depth when we meet again in June. At that time we will also be sharing our experience of the book *Soul Fire: Accessing Your Creativity*, by Thomas Ryan. Not having ever really 'accessed my creativity', I already know that I fear 'wasting' time trying to be creative. Or maybe I'm just being realistic!

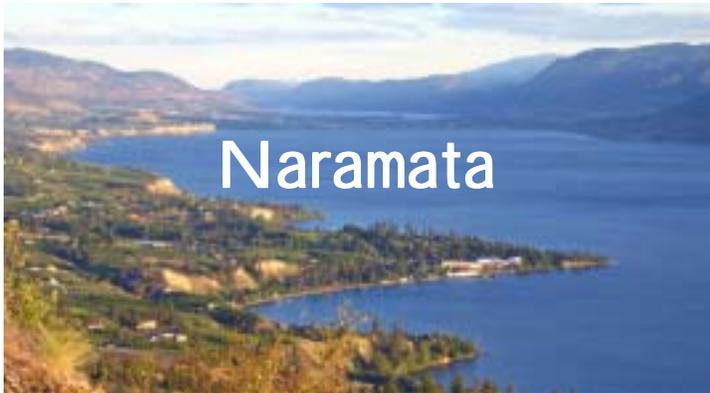


Free Spirits in Discussion

Top left: Yvonne Stewart, Mary Joan Bradley.
Bottom left: Marion Kirkwood, Lilojean Frid, John Klassen.
Bottom right: Mary Joan Bradley, Marion Kirkwood, Lilojean Frid.
Cover photo: Nancy Hardy, Michele Braniff.



Word from the Common Life Groups



Retreat Reframed

~ Tim Scorer, Common Life Facilitator

It's great that it takes effort to get to Naramata Centre. It's not just a couple of hours down the highway, unless you happen to live up the valley in Kelowna and Vernon or south toward Osoyoos. People arrive talking about what it took to get there: how the airport in Penticton was socked in by low cloud and they had to land in Kelowna and be bussed down; how they were stuck between Peachland and Summerland because of blasting to widen the highway and missed the first part of the session; how they prefer the long climbing straight-aways and the romantic Shakespearean names of the Coquihalla rather than the curves and tight corners of the Hope-Princeton highway; how they left Prince George at 4am and stopped at a winery just north of Vernon but had coffee not wine to keep them going. Even after 30 years of hearing stories of Herculean efforts to get to the Centre, I'm still up for more. I understand now that listening to the stories of the journey is more than entertainment; it's all about affirming that the experience begins the moment that they leave the place called home.

That's right: the moment that the members of the Common Life community leave home sometime during the day on Friday or, in some cases, on Thursday evening with a leisurely stopover with a friend along the way, the weekend retreat has begun, and it's not over until late on Sunday or even Monday when the return is complete. I've never thought of the word 'retreat' in this way before, but taking this perspective warms me to a word that, in the context of the spiritual life, I've sometimes found problematic. I've tended to allow the word to be coloured by its militaristic associations more than its spiritual ones. If someone were to throw the word 'retreat' at me in one of those spontaneous 'say the first thing that comes to your mind' parlour games, I'm as likely to say Napoleon as Thomas Merton. So what is it about this word that can allow it to hold two such disparate endeavours?



In its French origin it's all about withdrawal, particularly from something that is dangerous or disagreeable. In its military use the emphasis does tend to be more on removing oneself from a threat, even from impending defeat, rather than on movement toward a desirable sanctuary, although that might indeed be a feature of the overall strategy. In its use in the spiritual and religious life, the word retreat has tended to be more about the place and condition to which one is going, as in 'retreat house', or in the expression 'to make a retreat'. However, to return for a moment to my initial reflection on the challenges of travel to a retreat centre like Naramata, the energy put into the withdrawal from something as yet undefined is significant and matters a great deal. Let's turn our attention for a moment to the disagreeable or dangerous thing from which we are, in the very offering of such a thing as Common Life, encouraging courageous and energetic retreat.

Think for a moment about the space between the 'familia' of home and the 'unfamiliar' of the place of refuge. There's a delicious sense of relief for me in being assigned to a retreat room and schedule which is totally lacking in all the familiar distractions and dependencies of my home and office and garden and kitchen and TV and responsibilities and all the rest of it. Those are all good and lovely things which feed all parts of me, but I do appreciate them so much more after I've fled from them for a while. Their danger is real. They are dangerous to me when they keep me from an acute

awareness of my own values. They are dangerous when, in their substance, they keep me from embracing the deeper truths of my living. They are dangerous when they sabotage my intention to pursue a clear path I have named as desirable. They are dangerous when they subvert my willingness to surrender to a power beyond my own will.

I've really appreciated the capacity of the members of the current Common Life

community at Naramata to articulate what it is that they gain from their strategic retreat to Naramata. Here are twelve of the responses they offered when I asked them about this:

1. A time to get away from what I usually do – a dedicated time with no interruptions
2. The discipline of signing on for the trip – it changes something in me – a commitment – a witnessing to the way I live – a focus – leads to feeling more awake
3. Intentional accompaniment with gracious and forgiving fellow pilgrims

Continued on page 7

Article

To Re (treat) or...not to "be"

By Marilyn Bacon



I am currently a Voluntary Associate at Five Oaks with responsibility to assist in the coordination of what we have termed the Listening Ministries or Spiritual Accompaniment at Five Oaks. (You can read our new flyer in full on the Five Oaks web-site). As a team of 14 volunteer spiritual guides, we resource monthly Days Away – days for spiritual nourishment and reflection with the Spirit's guiding; and weekend or 5-day Guided Silent Retreats. This quiet time away is described by Jane Vennard in her book *Be Still* as a way to "open time and space so that we may hear God's still small voice...[it] is about listening and waiting, receiving and being, not about getting anything done."

The title of this article is not meant to say that the only way to "be" is by attending a Guided Silent Retreat or Day Away. Rather, it is to raise the question of how we are to find ways to tap into that place of "being" that God calls us to in that still small voice which persists even in the tumultuous din of our times. I want to introduce this theme by first recounting a little of my personal story.

My journey into this ministry began more than a decade ago in Nova Scotia when I was facing yet another reorganization in the health care facility where I was a member of the senior administration. I had a deep sense that I was being asked to "do" something else. I remember saying to Sister Yvonne, one of the chaplains, "I need to go on retreat and I need to go somewhere where I can't escape." The next thing I knew, I had taken early retirement and was on my way for a two week personal, silent retreat to the island of Iona off the coast of Scotland. There I found myself reconnecting to God after having hung up my "receiver" – or nowadays we might say "turned off my Blackberry!" On the tenth day of my retreat, while I was on a contemplative walk

around the island, I sat still long enough to just listen and wait. After awhile I "heard" a voice say so clearly "the work I want you do will be gentle"...that's all, no elaboration. What kind of "job" was I supposed to look for now? What was "gentle" work? How was I ever going to figure this one out? It has taken many years for me to know the wisdom of that voice and its message to me.

I left Iona feeling peaceful but also confused as to what this gentle work would be. Over the next three years I found myself "guided" into new paths and ministries. I started to see a Spiritual Director regularly. I went on several silent retreats at one of my favourite places in the world, the Seton Spirituality Centre in Terrance Bay, NS. I completed the Atlantic Jubilee Program in Spiritual Guidance and went on to discern a call to be a Spiritual Director. I also had the distinct privilege of being part of the Program Resource Group at the Tatagamouche Centre. It was there that I started to bloom into what God was calling me to "be." It was there that I began to understand what it might mean to live a more contemplative life. When it came time to move back to Ontario, I felt bereft, wondering where I might find a spiritual community that would nurture and challenge me.

Well, I found it in many ways here at Five Oaks with people who were on the same journey. I learned about the Lowville Prayer Centre and its ministry of deepening spiritual practices, its leadership in days of silence, weeks of guided prayer and spiritual companioning. Before long, as Lowville prepared to pass on its rich legacy, I became part of the re-imagining of its work in various places like Hamilton Conference's Week of Guided Prayer Network and the Days Away and Guided Silent Retreats at Five Oaks. So here I am today writing some words for the Common Life Newsletter to describe what silent retreats are all about!

Article

Let's look at Jesus, who in Mark 1:35, is described going on his retreat. "In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went to a deserted place, and there he prayed...and, in Luke 5:16, "he would withdraw to deserted places and pray." Another time when the disciples were full of the stories of their work and ministry and wanted to talk, Jesus invites them to, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest awhile" (Mark 6:30). This last reference describes best for me what a silent retreat is about. In some way we experience a need to get away, to connect with God in a deeper way. We sense a call to come apart from our usual routines. We feel we need to go somewhere peaceful, often surrounded by nature with water to sit by and woods to walk in. As Jane Vennard says "A contemplative retreat can be as short as a breath or as long as a month...a walk on the labyrinth, an hour on a park bench, a day of quiet at home, a weekend in a retreat house...the one constant in a contemplative retreat is silence." We in the Listening Ministries at Five Oaks would like to suggest, it is the "interior silence" that we cultivate in our retreats since we sometimes need to offer them in the midst of other not so quiet programs. Our evaluations tell us that retreatants do indeed find the quiet they need to carry on the deep, internal conversation with God, as they walk the trails, sit by the river, rest in the Friendship House, relax on its lovely porch, and meet daily with the spiritual guide who is leading the retreat.

To conclude, I return to the voice that spoke to me in the silence on the island of Iona in 1998 saying, "the work I want you to do will be gentle." While I find retreats and silence and spiritual companionship to contain seeds of gentleness, I now know that the direction I was given that day was about my own inner life. My journey has taken me through many years of learning that the gentle work was about learning to see myself as beloved by God and taking that love into my very being so I could indeed follow the command of Jesus to love my neighbour as myself. I have come to believe that this is indeed what is happening with all the violence in the world: many of us do love others like we love ourselves, with judgment and violence against the sacred beings we have been created to be. I have come to know that if we take up "retreat" as a spiritual practice, we will find that God waits for

us there in the stillness. In the atmosphere of a silent retreat, we notice the reality of God's presence and learn to trust our own sense of that presence. We deepen our response to the guiding Spirit and find ourselves moving back into our daily lives more aware of what action God is calling us to as we bring our own "gentled" love to a hurting world.



Common Life Groups: Retreat Reframed

(continued from page 5)

4. I know that I can trust the conversations I have here and that I won't have any other place
5. A community of seekers who encourage one another to stay awake on this journey of life. I'm living more awake, more consciously. I'm more open to opportunities related to this experience.
6. A time to reconcile some inherent contradictions between my faith and my employment
7. I feel free and confident to test ideas that are beyond orthodox.
8. What if being involved in everyday life is actually a spiritual practice? I recognize now the part that spiritual practice plays in moving me from self-absorption to self-awareness to service beyond myself. Mindfulness.
9. In spite of the infinite possibilities that make us all very different, when we gather around the table here, there is something profoundly connective. We are not alone!
10. This is my 'coming out' to faith. I find myself using words and phrases of faith that I would formerly have found embarrassing. I feel like I'm learning a secret about mature faith – a wisdom that my elders knew and that I am now getting to know. Now I'm finally getting that prayer is a powerful thing and that it requires ritual and practice.
11. A sense of being accountable – a combination of intention and focus – the gift of having others to report back to – people who understand and accept me for who I am
12. The unexpected pleasure provided by the opportunity to share things from this experience with friends and family who are curious about it and some of who, I discover, have a yearning for the same thing

It's a good word, this word 'retreat' - perhaps more multi-layered than I had previously allowed. In another parlour game – the one where word associations are used to come up with the one word – there was an amazing wealth of words dancing around 'retreat': retirement, departure, withdrawal, seclusion, solitude, privacy, asylum, shelter, refuge, safety, silence, and devotion. In the end, I admit, they do collectively belong more to the retreat of Merton than to the retreat of Napoleon. I think I've moved.



Tim Scorer, Bowen Island,
BC timscorer@gmail.com

Sabbatical Reflections

Mardi Tindal



*To the abandoned fields
the trees returned and grew.
They stand and grow. Time comes
to them, time goes, the trees
stand; the only place
they go is where they are.
These wholly patient ones
who only stand and wait
for time to come to them,
who do not go to time,
stand in eternity.
They stand where they belong.*

~ from Wendell Berry,
Sabbaths 2000 (poems)

One of the features of my sabbatical was a 12-week course taught by Mary Jo Leddy at the Toronto School of Theology, on the *Theological Significance of the Works of Wendell Berry*. These classes and readings spread like a net into which other sabbatical experiences and reflections were caught and gently held, making it possible for me to hold the insights of these months and what they may mean for me and for Five Oaks. The netting is made of strong threads:

- The importance of choosing, loving and nurturing a place
- The importance of choosing, loving and nurturing a community so that it situates itself in what it is *for* in order that it does not become who or what it is *against*
- The spiritual and physical value of place in a world where people are increasingly dislocated
- Focal practices by which to live faithfully in a fragmented world and a dislocated culture
- Seeing Christ embodied everywhere because Christ was and is located in particular places and communities within a reality of interdependence

Our Five Oaks “north star image” has come to hold even more meaning for me: a mature tree, well planted by the waters, lovingly holding the community of those who come and go (both human and non-human), formed and transformed in this place. Sabbatical allowed me to contemplate the ways in which I best stand and grow in the places where I belong; how I embrace a life that is both solitary and communal, contemplative and active, formed and transformed; and how best to go on pilgrimage and return home.



Spiritual Travels

I have contemplated the deep and interwoven life-roots which foretell above-ground growth; have enjoyed times away and times of return; times of deep assurance and of unsettling challenge. I return with a clearer sense of my belonging in

Article

the sacred place of Five Oaks and in the sacred place of relationships with family, friends and church.

While contemplating my roots I have become reacquainted with the place of my soul, sprung from early days on the land and formed largely in church community since. Earliest memories include marveling at worms as I followed my father's plow; watching my grandfather hoe his large garden on early summer mornings; helping my mother and grandmother pick berries and shell peas and prepare food for the sake of family and community, and for the sake of the church's work of community formation in Canada and abroad. One of the most poignant days of my sabbatical was spent with my mother and aunt at my aunt's home, next to the farm house in which I was raised. At the end of the afternoon my aunt offered leeks from her garden along with her favourite leek soup recipe. My mom and I trekked out to pull them up from the rich topsoil. Mom, who now lives nearby in a suburban townhouse where she has worked hard



to transform lawn into garden, said "The topsoil here is so good." That topsoil has been lovingly cared for by generations, and it shows. My family continues to be nourished by it.



Metaphorically speaking, Five Oaks' God-given topsoil has also been lovingly cared for, generation by

generation and today. It is a place ready to support ongoing growth with the kind of compost and care by which it will continue to support growth – within its natural limits – for future generations. And with the humility to listen carefully to Wendell Berry's reminder that only God can *make* topsoil.

It's been worth considering what sustains my own life. The writers of *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (one of many good sabbatical reads) offer:

Biologists tell us that when confronted with a changing environment, the first response of most organisms is to do what they have always done only faster.

Too often, in response to the increasing challenges of centre and church life, my instinct has been to try to do more good work, and faster. I don't think I'm alone. I return, having committed to healthier, transformative practices, including:

- Respecting Sabbath
- Balancing contemplation and action
- Nurturing community and creativity

I have recommitted to Common Life practices including morning contemplation, an understanding of my work that allows for reflective time, and regular physical exercise in addition to well established habits of congregational worship and monthly spiritual direction. I am trying to do better with ongoing assessment of what work is central and possible within my human limits. Accepting natural limits as a creature of God is true to the incarnational spirituality in which I feel grounded, and which I hope will prevent distraction. As Wendell Berry writes in *Standing by Words*:

Distraction is inimical to correct discipline, and enough time is beyond reach of anyone who has too much to do. But we must go farther and see that propriety of scale is invariably associated with propriety of another kind: an understanding and acceptance of the human place in the order of Creation — a proper humility.... It is the properly humbled mind in its proper place that sees truly...

As this quote and the opening poetry suggest, Berry looks to what he calls the Great Economy, or The Kingdom/Kindom of God, for clues as to how to live in sustainable ways, reminding us that if we do not abide by natural limits, the very life of the earth is imperiled:

We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. We have been wrong. We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us... We must recover the sense of majesty of the creation and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.

Berry talks about experiencing life on the ground, of paying attention to the natural order, of consciously and attentively living in God's world to discover it and to love it and to live *into* our place in it; to find the harmony that comes, not when we impose our plans from above but when we pursue harmonious relationships from within. Thanks to sabbatical, I know more deeply that what is good for the world is good for Five Oaks and for me. Yet the implications are staggering.

Continued on next page



Article

Having spent time at other centres over the three months: Iona, Woodbrooke and Glenfall House in Britain; and returning to Kirkridge (hiking afterwards on the Appalachian Trail with Doug in the brilliant colours of October) and to the Seasons Centre for further Courage to Lead retreats and Facilitator Training with Parker Palmer and his colleagues, I've come to better understand the paradoxes that lie at the heart of my own life and the life of Five Oaks.



And what now? Living with Paradox

Sabbatical was a formative time, and what is true for personal formation is true for the formation of centres such as ours. Identity is formed in the holding of paradox. Sabbatical time helped me consider how we – and I – hold paradox day by day and in this sacred place. As I think about sabbatical gifts, I think about three such particular tensions which live in me and in the life of the centre:

Solitude and community: We need, and our United Church centres provide us with spiritual accompaniment for 'inner work,' for the sake of inspiring 'outer work' in the world – and vice versa. Having visited so many other centres now, I say with greater clarity that our United Church centres provide for time alone and time together in distinctive ways.

Formation and information:

Formation is much more than education, though both thrive in an information rich-environment. It seems clearer to me now that I and we are primarily focused on the spiritual formation of leaders and communities of leaders – in the Common Life Community and in other communities that are formed by people with a similar calling including Neos, Spiritual Practices Certificate series participants; our Listening Ministries network and the now-forming Designated Lay Ministry program community.

Location and dislocation: A number of sacred spaces have been dislocated in recent years as populations have shifted and once-thriving churches have been closed and sold. Our centres offer grounding, unique places in the midst of such dislocation. We are called to care for these sacred places and make them available to *all*.



A sabbatical spirit lives on in renewed work and in holding the tensions of paradox in my own life and in the life of this centre in much clearer ways. I have tried to express the depth of my gratitude to the Five Oaks board, to staff colleagues and to Don Parsons who served in the director's role in my absence. I hope they know how truly grateful I am for this gift of learning and retreat.

I encourage you to consider sabbatical practice that might enable you to live more faithfully and consciously within a fragmented world and dislocated culture; that might help you see Christ embodied in the particular places and interdependent communities that shape your life. These, for me, have been the truest gift of this particular practice of retreat.

General News from the Centres

Five Oaks News from Mardi



2009 Annual CLC Retreat

We are all looking forward to our upcoming common retreat, with active group members across our five current groups; individuals who have been active in former groups and want to stay in touch with the Common Life Community; and those who are discerning whether or not Common Life is for them. (We're very close to having enough individuals to start a new group!) We would also welcome those from Common Life groups connected to Naramata, Calling Lakes and Tatamagouche at these retreats, so please let us know if you're interested in joining us this year or next. This year's retreat will take place on **May 3rd and 4th with Peter and Susan Short** leading, **supported by Nancy Hardy's** musical leadership. Please come prepared for gardening and other outdoor activities, according to your choice and the weather. And register ASAP with Jenny Rypma



General News from the Centres

2010 Annual CLC Retreat

We're already planning for our 2010 retreat, **May 9th and 10th**, when Christian economist **Ched Myers** will be with us, sharing, no doubt, from his life and work on Sabbath economics, an economic model so refreshing in the midst of popular views on the 'economic crisis.'



New On-Site Host

Please know that we continue to pray for you (including those of you in discernment) and your group or centre every week at Five Oaks. And thank you for praying for Five Oaks. Several of you have contributed to the process of finding a new on-site host to follow in the footsteps of Don Robinson. By the grace of God, **Janke Wielenga** has emerged as the right person. Given that Janke will be living on-site by the end of April, I imagine that those of you coming to the retreat will get to know her at the retreat. Janke comes to us from Orillia where she worships at St. Paul's United Church and at St. James' Anglican Church. Her background is multifaceted with many points of interest including a Master of Arts degree in Religion and Culture (emphasis on story & poetry) from Wilfrid Laurier University, teaching and research work with professors in the English Department at Lakehead University, homemaking, and other hands-on work, growing in large measure from her passion for gardening. Janke looks forward to caring for our vegetable and flower gardens, with help from volunteers like you. I believe that you will be blessed by Janke's friendliness, kindness and joy in encouraging dignity and respect for all while attending to the details that reflect her attitude.

Invitation

**Common Life folk from Naramata,
Calling Lakes and Tatamagouche
are welcome to join
the Annual Common Life Retreat
at Five Oaks!**

Something on the Slant



Hail to the god who joins us; for through him
arise the symbols where we truly live.
And, with tiny footsteps, the clocks move
separately from our authentic time.

Though we are unaware of our true status,
our actions stem from pure relationship.
Far away, antennas hear antennas
and the empty distances transmit...

Pure readiness. Oh unheard starry music!
Isn't your sound protected from all static
by the ordinary business of our days?

In spite of all the farmer's work and worry,
he can't reach down to where the seed is slowly
transmuted into summer. The earth *bestows*.

Rainer Maria Rilke from The Sonnets to Orpheus