**Interview with Sr. Kathleen Storms, SSND**

**Our Lady of the Prairie**

April 1, 2022

**Question #1**: Tell us about the Prairie. What are your general impressions?

* I really resonated with the CHM community while I was there.
* The Prairie felt like coming home to me.
* The place sold me right away.
* I also felt a kinship with the CHM community.
* Sr. Marcia helped so much in those days.
* Serious commitment to the earth.
* I have not been there for a while.

**Question #2**: What are the strengths of the Prairie?

* The sheer beauty of the place.
* The whole place feels like sacred space.
* Todd is doing a very fine job with maintaining the place.
* The CHM community understands the connection to the earth.
* The staff has expanded in a healthy way.
* Buildings and grounds are so much better maintained.
* Adding the maintenance shed, etc.
* Sr. Margaret has a great love for the earth.
* Working with local churches.
* Helping people understand their adult faith.
* Chapel.
* Hospitality is key to this place.
* Connection with Fr. Francis Odoom and his parish.

**Question #3:** What are the weaknesses of the Prairie?

* Need more retreatants attending retreats.
* Location is both a strength and a weakness.
* Architecture of the building (lots of steps/ not accessible)
* Lack of space.
* Physical building is not optimal.
* It is a good place of respite but not necessarily for overnight guests.

**Question #4:** How would you improve upon these weaknesses?

* Put even more focus on building relationships with the retreatants.
* Expansion of the physical plant to attract more retreatants.
* More housing (connected to current house) with dedicated prayer space/ chapel would help pay for the growing expenses that the place is going to experience.

**Question #5**: Anything they should stop doing?

* N/A

**Question #6:** What do you see as the opportunities to grow the Prairie?

* It fits the charism of the CHM Sisters.
* More programs with *Laudato Si* and other church teachings about stewardship of the environment and global climate change.
* Being creative about programs on Zoom, etc., using technology.
* Programs using poetry, music, gardening, knitting, hands-on activities.
* Keep the focus on adult formation about care for God’s creation – programs that parishes cannot do by themselves.
* Proximity to Davenport, Dubuque and Cedar Rapids.
* The growing interest in spiritual direction.

**Question #7:** What do you see as the greatest obstacles to growing the Prairie?

* Remoteness of the place (also an opportunity).
* Hiring local people such as the cook when you are so remote and the doors are not open all the time.
* The place will always require a live-in staff for lots of reasons – because of remoteness, safety of the place, hospitality – people can stop in anytime.
* They may have to pay a higher salary for staff in the future.

**Question #8:** What do you suggest as strategies moving forward?

* Having more than one person living there all the time would help a lot.
* Hospitality has to be a major priority moving forward.
* I would encourage the CHM Community to think about their legacy and how the Prairie could be a part of their lasting legacy.
* It may have to become a separate 501-c-3 of its own with support from the CHM Community – like the Humility Shelter – more of a partnership with its own governing board. They have done it so well with the Shelter, I know they can do this. There are many supporters in the local community that could become partners in this.
* Find someone who could do spiritual direction (some of the retreatants are qualified.)
* Maybe find a family that wants to live there.

**Question #9:** What else would you like to share about the Prairie. Anything else?

* The Prairie is an important part of who the CHM Sisters are.
* I’m sorry I had to leave – my heart is still there.
* Sr. Margaret has been very gracious in inviting me back as a presenter.
* Give the Sisters my love.