**Interview with Sr Margaret**

**Our Lady of the Prairie**

4-1-22

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

* Very positive.
* Lots of exciting things going on.

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

* Great platform for taking registrations – Retreat manager.
* Improvement in the environment – because of Todd
* Building updates.
* Prairie burns have helped improve the environment.
* Forest management plan is next – getting invasives out and clear underbrush
* Took down the old barn and put up new maintenance shed which helps work on machinery over the winter and add Todd’s office out there.
* Keeping place as peaceful, quiet, prayerful place.
* Flower beds and grounds help keep it that way.
* Grounds have a real sacredness to them.
* Lori as program coordinator is bringing in whole new dimension of retreats.
* We are now also collaborating with other retreat centers for online retreats.
* 120 people online for Matthew Fox retreat.
* More interfaith outreach to faith groups in the Quad Cities.
* We are always open to new ideas.
* Knitting dish cloths for new people (Sr. Dolores Schuh).

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

* Losing the neighbors who used to cut grass for us.
* Have someone live here is very important but it is so remote.
* With number of programs we have, it is important to keep someone living here.
* Also important for the safety of the place and keeping relationships with neighbors.
* We can house 12 people overnight when someone is living here, but would only hold ten if we have director who does not live here, because of space needed for person to live there.
* Sometimes we have two different retreats at same time, and that puts extra strain on the cooks and staff because it takes so much more energy.
* Limited space for meals, sleeping quarters, etc.
* Person living at the Prairie needs to be amenable to people popping in and out of what they might see as their private space.
* Sometimes it gets to be a very long day when retreats are taking place.
* Lack of marketing over the years (we are getting better).
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**Question #4:** How would you improve upon these weaknesses?

* We have someone new to cut the grass.
* Find a new director who wants to live at the Prairie.
* Program coordinator might need to come out to the Prairie more than once or twice per week – to experience how the retreats happen.
* During the transition period, with no one else living here, it will take a team effort to keep the place up and running.
* New person/ director needs to be outgoing and welcoming, available to people who pop in, and be creative person who can work well with people and build a team.
* Hopefully, they can find someone who loves the outdoors and is willing to work the garden and think creatively about the grounds.
* The new “director” needs to work with people instead of always directing.
* Good computer skills would be a good plus for the new person.
* Holding “friend-raisers” to spread the word about the Prairie.
* The Prairie Fest (Sept 24) will help promote this place.
* Advisory Committee is coming up with good ideas, e.g. marketing.
* Christmas at the Prairie also helps bring new people out here, e.g. young families.
* Bringing high school classes out here.

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

* N/A

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

* Online opportunities for retreats.
* Collaborating with other retreat centers to get “big named person” for less money.
* Followed up with discussion facilitated with someone else.
* Networking with people who are concerned about sustainability of the earth.
* Sponsoring events on caring for the earth and the environment.

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

* Remoteness of the place.
* Pandemic put a wrench in a lot of our plans.

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

* Hospitality has to continue to be a core value and priority.
* Signs of stewardship of the grounds must remain a top priority.
* Contact LCWR to see if there is a sister who would look for a rural place like this to live here.
* Involvement with the neighbors, and knowing them, is crucial for this place.
* Involvement with Fr. Francis’ cluster of parishes is important.

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

* The idea of hermitages has been mentioned but they would have to be close to the house.
* The County wants to create a solar farm out here.