



The Prairie Experience

by Lisa Martin, CHM Communications Director

Drive far enough along US 30 and you'll come across Wheatland, a small town on the west side of Clinton County in east central Iowa. Nestled into the surrounding hills is Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat (OLPR), a spiritual retreat center overlooking the Wapsipinicon River.

For over 20 years, the Congregation of the Humility of Mary (CHM), has run the center, offering people of all faiths a place to come reflect, meditate and appreciate the surrounding beauty. Through the years many people have come to find the experience of OLPR to be a source of inspiration and joy. Following are some reflections from sisters and friends that give a sense of this sacred place.

The first director of the Prairie Retreat, Sr. Joann Kuebrich, CHM, feels that

the purchase of the Dierickx farm, in 1993, was the first significant milestone in The Prairie Retreat's history. She reflected, "This was preceded by five years of discerning and searching with specific criteria for the 'right' property with support from the New Horizons of Faith Board and people from the Davenport Diocese. At that time one of the greatest unmet needs of the people was prayer and spirituality."

Sr. Jude Fitzpatrick who was CHM president at the time recalls, "The 'negotiations' surrounding that purchase were interesting. We entered the conversation thinking that the Trappists might give the CHMs the house and 40 acres to continue Father Vincent Fabula's ministry; purchasing the entire 200 acres had not been something we had considered. However, it became clear that some members of the Trappist

community thought a better option would be for us to purchase the entire property. I remember my father being amazed at the 'deal' we had made in purchasing 200 acres, the house filled with antiques, a small tractor and two used vehicles. While it may have been a good 'deal,' it was, more importantly, a good investment of CHM resources with a good 'return' over the last 20 years and a response to the spiritual hunger which continues to be addressed in the ministry there."

Sr. Lillian Stevens, CHM, remembers a story Father Vincent told her about his first experience with a prairie burn. "He wasn't ready for the outcome of lighting a fire in the grass and he almost burned the neighborhood down! He also explained how the glaciers and rivers carved out our beautiful landscape."

Photo: A retreatant enjoys the silent beauty of The Prairie from a favorite spot on the front porch of the Victorian House.

-The Prairie Continued on page 3

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The Flame is published three times a year for the Congregation of the Humility of Mary and friends.

Our Mission: We, the members of the Congregation of the Humility of Mary, call one another to live the Gospel with simplicity and joy following the example of Mary.

Like our founders, we strive to be attentive to the call of the Spirit in the signs of our times, especially the needs of the poor and the powerless.

We commit ourselves as individuals and as a congregation to work for justice within the human family and to care for the earth itself.

“As stewards of God’s creation, we are called to make Earth a beautiful garden for the human family. When we destroy our forests, ravage our soil and pollute our seas, we betray that noble calling.”

-Pope Francis

Congregation of the Humility of Mary

820 W. Central Park Avenue
Davenport, IA 52804-1900
563/323-9466
sisters@chmiowa.org
www.chmiowa.org

Executive Editor: Lisa Martin
Asst. Editor: Joyce Bieber

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At left: Sr. Mary Ann Vogel, Sr. Johanna Rickl and Erin Van Waus, conservation easement director from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

Above: A view from the OLPR conservation easement looking toward Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat atop the hill. Learn more about the easement on page 4.

Dear Friends and Donors,

Several years ago the Congregation of the Humility of Mary developed a Vision Statement. “As a community of strong, dedicated women rooted in prayer and spirituality, we are called to face our contemporary realities and step deliberately into the future with courage and grace.” These words certainly would have described the action taken by the small group of sisters who left their homeland in France and sailed to the United States in 1864 to establish the first motherhouse of the Sisters of the Humility of Mary.

That statement describes our mode of operation throughout our history. It only takes a few to help us step “into the future with courage and grace.” In this issue of “*The Flame*”, you learn how a small group of sisters stepped forward to make Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat a reality. As you read through this issue, my wish is that you could take a small break in a day to be refreshed by all this beautiful oasis, in the middle of Iowa corn fields, has to offer. Be sure to read the poem, “*The Prairie Waits*”, on the back of this issue to see all that awaits you on that visit.

To you, our friends and donors, thank you for your support of this very special ministry.

*Sr. Mary Ann Vogel
CHM President*



A woman walks the Prairie Labyrinth with Joseph the Journeyer not far behind.

Sr. Rosie Restelli, CHM, recalls turning off the gravel road and coming up the lane and seeing The Prairie for the first time. “It was simply beautiful. The absolute silence when I got out of my car was profound. It is and will continue to be an oasis in the desert.”

CHM Sr. Joan Sheil’s pet project was creating the labyrinth. A great moment for her was its completion after having to redo it twice due to damage by heavy rain. Sr. Jude said, “A number of us CHMs placed every stone which outline the paths for the labyrinth. What satisfaction we experienced when people could take advantage of the special space and a journey to the center.” Sr. Harriett Ping, CHM, recalls working with little inner city kids to get the rocks for the labyrinth. “It was important! And we had to find a way to haul that rock. However, my favorite thing is St. Joseph the Journeyer. I do think a lot of The Prairie and its wonders and beauty.”

In the middle of the night Sr. Marcia Eckerman, CHM, who was living in the Victorian House at the time, awakened to the sounds of an a cappella chorus of coyotes. “At first I was not sure what I was hearing; was this a recording? Leaning out my bedroom window, I was able to hear the sounds of a pack of coyotes on the hillside near the statue of Joseph the Journeyer. This choral arrangement was short lived

but certainly the sound of God’s love through nature.”

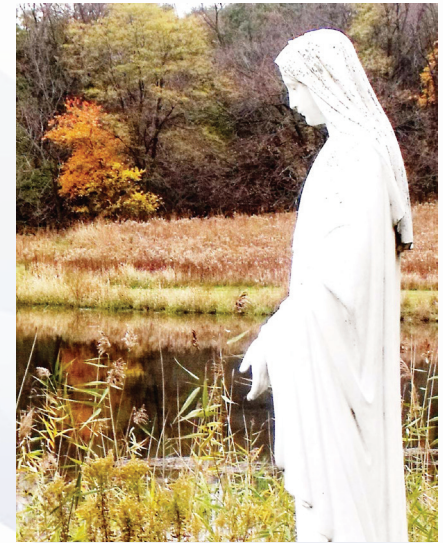
Among Sr. Joann’s favorite features of The Prairie are the many porches, especially the Victorian House porch. “It fosters the spectacular views of the landscape no matter the time of day or the season. The early morning sunrises were so magnificent that the Dierickx farm was identified on the early plat map as the “Sunrise View Farm”.

“I am an early riser,” said Sr. Dolores Schuh, CHM. “I would get up, get dressed and sit on the porch of the old house to watch the sunrise—a peak experience in my life. I would hear train whistles in the background, watch the tree branches sway in the breeze, and frequently watch a deer or two grazing in the yard. It just could not have been more perfect. I’ve never before or since experienced such an inspiring, moving and beautiful work of God’s creation.”

After attending an annual women’s retreat, Claudia Scharf said that this was a time where she felt like she finally had a voice. “All my life I have struggled with having a voice, even now. I felt comfortable at this retreat to share freely with the women. The weekend never failed me. The riches of the prairie grounds, labyrinth, and openness of The Prairie engulfed my heart and soul.”

So now you know—The Prairie experience is like no other. If you would like to share your OLPR memory send to lmartin@chmiowa.org. And, if you haven’t yet, please plan to visit OLPR to create your own prairie memory! OLPR Director Sr. Margaret Kruse, OSF, , has put together a wonderful variety of retreats, both in-person and online for 2021, that you can find on page 5 of this issue. Or if you have your own personal or group retreat to plan, consider having it at OLPR. You’ll never forget it!

Meanwhile, we invite you to explore our website at theprairieretreat.org.



“I am always grateful that we were given the opportunity to use the Stations of the Cross from the Marycrest Chapel as well as the statue of Mary from the Crest campus. For me, that tie with our ministry at the college and with The Prairie ministry is priceless.”

—Sr. Jude Fitzpatrick

A Prairie Retreat Prayer

by Sherry Nauman

“Good and Gracious God, we thank you for your most generous love. Encourage us to be like you, worthy of proclaiming the Gospel, in this sacred space of Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat. Help us to always reverence this space where our donors, our participants and our mission meets. Give us joyful spirits and an eagerness to engage others as we spread the word of tranquility that resides on the land of The Prairie. Give us hopeful imagination and creative vision, to design bountiful fundraisers. Give us trusting hearts, knowing that the fruits of our labor will be realized long after we are gone. Remind us always that what we do for the least of our sisters and brothers, we do for you. Bless the future of all of our events and retreats with picturesque weather, exceptional attendance, cheerful volunteers, delicious food, happy hearts and bounteous love.

We ask this in Jesus’ name and in unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen!”

Cultivating Communion with Creation

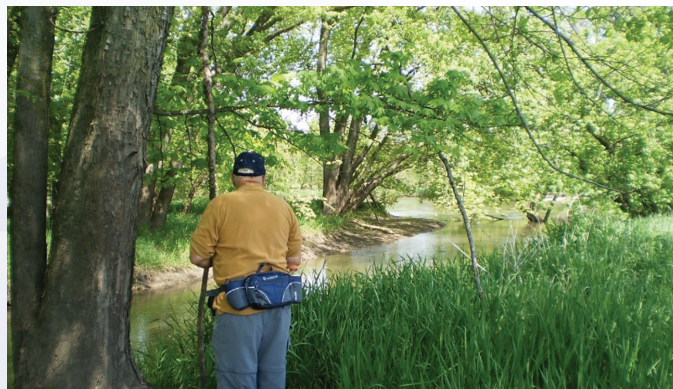
by Sr. Johanna Rickl, CHM Vice President

In 2017, CHMs formalized a Land Ethic to guide decisions made by the entire congregation and by those in congregational leadership regarding the land for which they are responsible. The Land Ethic supports the CHM mission of working for justice within the human family and caring for Earth itself. It affirms, as a matter of justice, the prophetic call to ecological sustainability and nonviolence in relationships.

Our Lady of the Prairie property near Wheatland, Iowa has been and is an important one for the Sisters to protect. The restoration of the prairie, forestry management and attention to conservation practices are primary ways to care for the land. To continue preserving the land and its web of life for future generations, the CHMs decided to set aside 80+ acres of the prairie property as a conservation easement.

Such an easement is a legal document that determines the uses of a particular piece of land in perpetuity. The agreement defines uses that mutually respond to needs and desires of the owner as well as the requirements of the nonprofit entity charged with overseeing implementation into the future. On November 20, 2018, the congregation signed a conservation easement with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

Some goals of Our Lady of the Prairie Conservation Easement are to improve the health of the Wapsipinicon



A hiker pauses by the Wapsi River during a walk through the OLPR conservation easement area.

River bordering the property and to create better habitat for many different plants and animals. In addition, the amount of carbon captured helps decrease the rate of global warming. The prairie grasses and flowers offer opportunities for bees, butterflies, and other insects to do their important work in human food production. The land preservation retains a quiet setting for more effective retreats and contemplative experiences for people seeking to nourish their relationship to self, God and others.

All are invited to enter into communion with creation. The conservation easement reminds all who come to Our Lady of the Prairie that they are part of the web of life and have a responsibility to protect our common home.

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way God will bring with Jesus all who have fallen asleep believing in Jesus.”

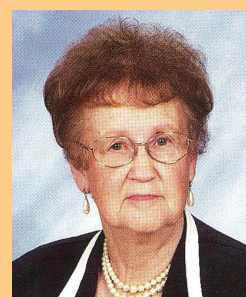
-1 Thessalonians 4: 14



Sister Marie Vittetoe
May 19, 1927 -
July 31, 2020



Sister Lucille Feehan
February 7, 1937 -
August 4, 2020



Associate Gertrude Vogel
June 15, 1920 -
August 11, 2020

Loving tributes to our departed sisters can be found in “Sister Stories” at www.chmiowa.org

Care of Earth at OLPR

by Tony Schiltz, OLPR Advisory Committee Chair

Seven unique signs were recently created for Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat to highlight the efforts there to protect our environment. These include the restored prairie, the pond and wetlands, the vegetable gardens, pollinator strips, rain-barrels, composting and solar panels.

Each sign includes a logo and the slogan: OLPR – Caring for Creation. The logo was created to symbolize the cycle of life and the delicate balance of nature. A seed sends out roots to anchor itself and draw water and nutrients from Earth, while stretching upward to catch the sunlight and convert its energy into food and provide for regeneration.

The signs are posted at locations where visitors can observe these features on a tour of the grounds. They include simple points illustrating ways each feature benefits the environment. The hope is to illustrate simple actions individuals might take at home to protect the environment. The example below illustrates the benefits of the solar panels. Look for all of the signs the next time you visit.

I remember a wild, windy and wonderful walk around the prairie trail in the dead of winter with the crunch of snow under my feet. It was during a break in a retreat on Care of Earth. Tracks and scat of wildlife wanderings were in evidence everywhere in the pristine snow: pheasant and fox, rabbit and squirrel, field mouse and deer. They told a story of the great circle of life and the blessing of life. My meditation resulted in the little prayer that follows:

“All creation breathes the same air, drinks from the same stream, depends on the same soil for its nourishment, warms itself of the same sun and thrives only on the goodness of God in whom all things live and move and have their being.”

OLPR ~ Caring for Creation

Solar Panels (est. 2016)

- Produce electricity from sunshine
- Provide sustainable, renewable energy
- Decrease global warming from fossil fuels
- Decrease pollution, improve public health
- Contribute to local jobs, local economy

GIVING TUESDAY

GivingTuesday is a global day of generosity that will take place on **December 1, 2020**.

This year, CHM is participating in GivingTuesday to raise money for one of our important ministries—

Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat. Specifically, we are seeking donations for additional solar panels for our Sunrise Shop, the new maintenance building.



The OLPR Sunrise Shop and Gazebo

CHM sisters are dedicated to the care of Earth and view nature as a gift from God. We want to sustain and improve the environment. We continue to invest in improvements to OLPR that will allow us to fulfill that mission while providing a safe and welcoming space for our guests to continue their spiritual growth. All donations designated to OLPR or Greatest Need from this issue of “The Flame” will be used for the purchase of solar panels.

Please visit our website at theprairieretreat.org, to learn more about our GivingTuesday efforts and how you can get involved. You may also follow Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat on Facebook.

Upcoming Retreats!

Call 563-336-8414 or visit theprairieretreat.org for more information and to register.

Nov 10	Zoom: Blessings of the North
Nov 17	Zoom: Circle of Life: Autumn
Dec 1&8	Zoom: Integrating Mary's Magnificat
Dec 4	Zoom: Resting in God
Dec 8	Zoom: Celebrate Divine Incarnation
Jan 14,21,28	Zoom: Letting go of Stress
Jan 19	Zoom: Ecumenical Prayer Service
Feb 9	Zoom: Circle of Life: Winter
Feb 10	Zoom: Come to the Quiet
Feb 18	Let God be God
Feb 24	Zoom: Lenten Nights with Barb
Feb 26-28	Grief Retreat: Healing from Loss
Mar 3, 10,17	Zoom: Lenten Nights with Barb
Mar 5-6	Men Encounter Christ in Prayer
Mar 13	Spring Equinox: Act of Power
Mar 19-20	Pause and Refresh
Mar 24	The Heart of Forgiveness
Mar 30	No Fear, No Fail Yeast Bread Making

Honor and Remember

The Congregation of the Humility of Mary is grateful for the donations received in memory or honor of loved ones between June 1 and Sept. 30, 2020. CHMs remember these individuals in daily prayers and Masses. If you have prayer requests call 563-336-8401 or visit our website at chmiowa.org

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2020 Jubilarians

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*The original CHM prairie crew. L-R:
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 Cathleen Real, Sr. Joann Kuebrich and
 Sr. Dolores Schuh.*

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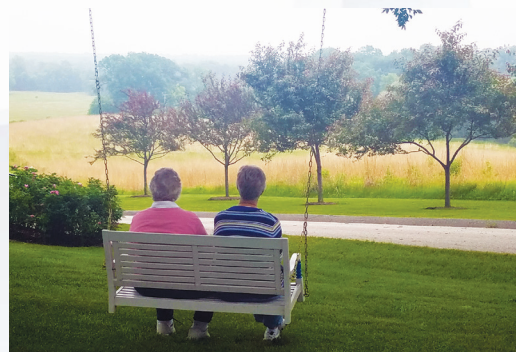
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Mary Louise Wright

Mary Louise Wright Estate



"The view from the swing at OLPR was spectacular...such joy I received swinging there by myself and when shared with a friend."

-Claudia Scharf

“During a retreat my first summer as director of The Prairie, I offered a retreatant a golf cart ride so she could experience more than sitting on the porch. She wanted to soak in all that God was inviting her to reflect on during her time of retreat. It was a delightful ride of noticing all the unique beauty of The Prairie. As we were coming around the last bend in the trail behind the pond, a beautiful, graceful buck leapt out of the prairie grasses and paused for a moment in front of the golf cart. We both gasped with delight.

A few days later she gifted me with a poem that she wrote during her time of retreat. When I want to remember what The Prairie means to me, I re-read this poem.”

*Sr. Kathleen Storms, SSND
Former OLPR Director*

The Prairie Waits

by Sr. Margaret Murphy, OSB

Gentle rolling hills, carpeted green,
Terraced, rocks caressing fertile Earth.
Meadows of wild cornflowers
Holding the yellow sun.
Butterfly bushes keep company
With the sturdy milkweeds;
A harvest of delight for Monarchs
And bright winged butterflies
Who stop in flight and sip.
I also stop for nourishment.
Nourishment for my spirit,
So plentiful here even in the air,
Breeze on my face, in my hair
Palms of hands feel its movement,
Stirs my soul, brings the fragrance
Of wild prairie grass, warmed by sun
Meadow knolls filled with
Black-eyed Susan mingling with
Lavender-blue Prairie Stars.
Woodlands surround, lush and green,
Bordered with ripening blackberries.

My spirit also knows the desert
The labyrinth way leads to the center,
My center empties and longs to be filled.
Flowers border the buildings,
Landscaped into a whole of beauty,
A community of graceful harmony,
Day lilies bloom in brilliant array
Yellow and orange blossoms mixing
With the brilliance of other flowers.
Birds come to home in the trees
To be fed with caring hands,
The vivid Goldfinch, Oriole,
Woodpeckers, Grosbeak and all.
Garden flourishing with vegetables,
Cooked in special ways.
Pond and river, a walk away,
Speak of the deep Living Water within,
Springing up, flowing outward to all.
All things in concert make this
Prairie-home a home of harmony,
A home of reflection and prayer.
Yes, the prairie waits to give peace and joy.