

Chrysalis Interfaith Retreat Center Sermon

June 11, 2017

**by John Caldwell, Genevieve Starbuck, Kay Hicks, and
Dolly Cardwell**

John Caldwell:

This morning Chrysalis Interfaith Mission Group would like to share news of our mission with you. Since 2006, Chrysalis Interfaith Retreat Center has been a small overnight retreat center located on forty acres of quiet, secluded forest in the city of Lynchburg, VA. Our goal is simple: to provide a quiet place where people of all faith traditions can come for a day or several days to find refuge- for quiet prayer, meditation, and contemplation, individually or in small groups.

The Chrysalis Mission Group is called to develop, maintain, and support the Chrysalis Interfaith Retreat Center as a ministry of the Church of the Covenant. We are under the umbrella of the Church of the Covenant which means that we are not a separate 501(c)3 nonprofit, as is The Haven, and as was The Festival Center, and as are all the missions which have sprung from our little church and grown into vital independent entities which serve the Lynchburg community. Every second and fourth Thursday afternoon at 4:30 pm, you will find our mission group in the Lodge sharing our inward journeys and planning and coordinating the work of our outward journey. In order to carry out our mission, we commit ourselves individually and together to:

- Share ultimate responsibility for the mission

- Daily prayer, meditation, and study
- Be channels of love, forgiveness, and compassion in the world
- Contribute our time and financial support
- Prompt and regular attendance at mission group meetings
- Discern our own and others' gifts to be used in the mission
- Share with the group on a regular basis a report on our spiritual journey
- Maintain confidentiality
- Attend an annual silent retreat
- Renew commitment to the group and its mission annually
- Grow in understanding and appreciation of religious traditions other than our own

We welcome Intern or Exploring Members. Those feeling called to move toward a commitment to the mission group, its structure, and work are encouraged to attend mission group meetings for a period of at least three months prior to making a commitment. This is to enable fuller understanding of the mission itself, the nature of membership in the mission group, and provides a period of preparation for readiness to make this commitment. At the time of commitment, the new member will share her/his autobiography with the group.

Let me help you envision the spaces which make up our retreat center. We have overnight accommodations for up to twelve people.

The facilities are scattered in three areas of our 'campus'. First there are three bedrooms, a bath, a kitchenette, and a sunroom/sitting room on the second floor of this church house. Then there is our most requested

space, Kitty's Cottage, quaint and cozy with a sitting room, two bedrooms, a bath, and a kitchen where guests have everything they need for their stay. Appropriately named for Kitty Hash, a member of our church community in the 1970's and 80's, the cottage, which had been rented to individuals including Kitty prior to 2006, echoes that same spirit of welcome and hospitality which Kitty so generously shared with the church and the camp. Last but not least, in 2008 the church purchased Pantops from the Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship, to be used as our parsonage. The former home of the Cosby family, where Camp Kum-Ba-Yah, the Lynchburg Covenant Fellowship, and the Church of the Covenant all began, was renovated, largely by members of our own community, and an upstairs apartment was set aside by the church to be a part of the retreat center, increasing our capacity to twelve people. The apartment, with outside steps to its own entrance on the second floor, is composed of a combined sitting room and bedroom, a small kitchen and a bath. The rest of Pantops which includes four bedrooms is being rented on Air B&B. Sandy is managing this successful venture, with help from Randy and his team. This will likely continue until perhaps our new pastor has need of Pantops as a home.

Genevieve Starbuck makes her statement. (off-mic and not included in the audio recording)

Kay Hicks makes her statement. (can be heard on the recording)

Dolly Cardwell:

I can make a case for the retreat center. The pace of our world, technology included, and personal crises alone, demand that we take time for reflection. The commitment of our own community to silence, reflection, inclusiveness, and hospitality makes us a natural, for welcoming guests to

this place; the retreat center gives significant voice to our mission as a church to encourage others to pay attention to the inward journey and to one's spiritual life. Chrysalis Interfaith Retreat Center offers a place of refuge in these spaces on these grounds. Actually when I used to barrel through these woods as a passenger in Jack Cosby's old jeep, the ride always included crossing the creek, climbing the hill and bumping along the ridge parallel to Mimosa Drive, where Bev and Jack dreamed of planting a retreat center. Most of us know and appreciate the sacred space by which we are surrounded- a landscape of play, rest, and renewal. We treasure the quiet of our setting away from traffic and street lights, with peaceful sitting spots around the grounds, moderately challenging trails all amid homes of permanent forest residents, including Long Lake which hosts Canadian geese almost every spring and summer. Each guest is provided a trail map, a key to the Lodge for phone access and possible space for meals and group meetings; a password for internet access; there is no TV. The retreat center mission group has developed, maintained, updated, and supported all these spaces for the church for over a decade now. I figure our on-going tender loving-care has been given to roughly a third of the space in our entire Church of the Covenant facilities. A donation of \$30 per guest per night is requested for a stay and of that donation; \$5 per diem per guest is given to the church for use of utilities and wear.

Currently our mission group is in transition, thus our Retreat Center is in transition. Sandy Fisher, who has been part-time Director of the Center since about 2010, following the tenure of our first Director Phil Boyce, has resigned and is leaving our mission group, due to current family concerns and needs. We are very grateful for her leadership and for all the work Sandy has done on our behalf as Director and as a part of our mission group; we, as well as our regular

guests, will sorely miss her. Sandy continues as our part-time administrative-assistant here at the Church of the Covenant, which includes management of the Pantops B&B. But in our mission group four mission group members remain- John Caldwell, Genevieve Starbuck, Kay Hicks, and myself. We are here to hold up our mission, to invite interest and support, to sound a call, to inform the community as we consider what it is that God might have us do with this mission, which means so much to us as well as to a number of guests who visit regularly.

We believe in call and gifts in our Church of the Covenant community. If no one is called to a mission or if not enough people are called to carry on the work of an active mission, then the continuation of the mission is in jeopardy. We have let missions go before, when the need no longer existed or when the mission group ceased to be able to support the mission. For a time, our mission group is feeling that it wants to see how it goes before we make a firm decision about whether to stay open or to close down. Exploring just how essential our mission is, the parameters of the work at hand minus a director and active member, and whether the mission group has the call and the stamina to sustain it, this is the task at hand. It is important to take time to carefully discern our next step. Perhaps a new part-time director, a new mission group member or members will join and strengthen us. Maybe there will be a volunteer or two who might be called on for occasional help when we are pressed, short-handed and in a bind to be ready for guests about to arrive. Or there is always the chance that it will not go well, that it is more than we can handle and that we will need to close it down. At this point we especially need several healthy active volunteers who are up to occasional making of beds, cleaning kitchens and bathrooms, and vacuuming; these activities demand energy and are challenging our current

capacity. We are fortunate indeed to have Randy Layne, whose team does our regular church and Lodge cleaning, available to help at times. We also benefit from the expertise and the work of Mike Mayer who identifies and helps to implement needed repairs on our grounds.

Practically speaking, our retreat center is largely a place where folks come to stay when visiting family members here in town or attending workshops or classes at local institutions. Only occasionally, do we host a friend or friends actually here for a retreat. Some of us through the years have taken time in retreat here. Guests come irregularly. In spring, summer, and fall, there are more guests. At Thanksgiving and Christmas, we usually have guests although, generally speaking, in winter there are fewer guests. We have a few folks who return each year or several times a year. Parents stay here when they come to visit their students in local colleges. Some of our own families stay when they come to visit. Guests visiting our church often stay here.

Ours is a troubled world. Quiet places where we can simply be are hard to find. Chrysalis Interfaith Retreat Center is at a crossroads. We hope that those who stay with us will continue to enjoy their stay, as we so often hear from them, that they do. During this interim, we pray for the grace to remain open and flexible and tuned to God's leading. We pray for the patience and the stamina to do our work and to embrace the new rhythm our lives will employ. We pray for the courage, the willingness and the wisdom that we need to recognize what it is that we should do - when to continue and when to let go of this mission. We hope for clarity of vision and the resolve to do the right thing. For now, Chrysalis remains steady on the course; we are stepping up to embrace more responsibility and more work through this time of transition; we are all hopeful that we can continue to

offer this place of refuge. As expected, reservations are on the rise for the summer. We welcome new members to our mission group; we welcome assistance from anyone who might be prompted to join us through the interim; we welcome your prayers; we welcome guests. Life is full for us all, these days; we have no expectations of anyone. We celebrate Chrysalis Interfaith Retreat Center and will enjoy the journey in the days to come. We thank you for listening and for caring about this mission and for all the missions of our community. May God bless each of us as we find our way.