



STARCROSS
community

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Sharings

Winter 2011

Life changes after the holidays. Refreshed, schools-business-governments gear up. It is not just a city thing. Standing on the chapel deck I can hear tractors in the vineyards and chainsaws in the woods. But here at Starcross it seems as if each day brings us into a deeper silence and peace. Why? Well, partly because the way our land is laid out the tractor would sink into the saturated ground. Oh blessed sogginess!

We are a still sanctuary in the world's race to make up for lost time. Here, for a bit, time really does seem to stand still. Oh, there is a lot going on; flocks of birds come and go, ravens caw and hawks glide in great circles, the olive trees sway in the wind, their giant redwood neighbors dance in an awesome ballet. The sky is incredibly colorful at dawn and dusk and, unless it is raining, a bright blue during the day.

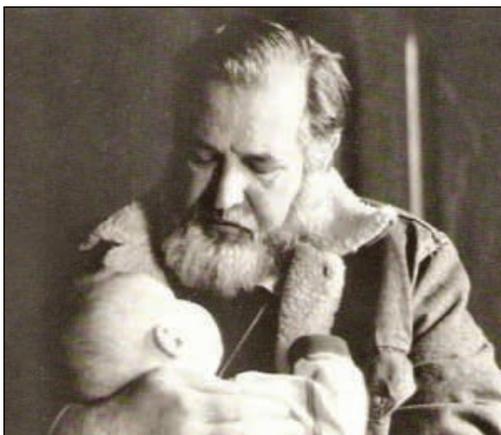


We too must prepare for the days to come but that is mostly inside. Stepping outside we are at this time of year a silent partner in our relationship to the ongoing process of creation. Thomas Merton was fond of remarking that prayer came easier listening to the rain on the tin roof of his little hut than in the Abbey church. Mainly because the rain comes and goes on its own terms and our only task is to align ourselves with it.

On the way to Vespers the bare limbs of the fruit trees stand like monastic companions. The smoke of the wood fire in the house is our incense. The sound of the first owl pitches our chant.

There is much to remember about ourselves, our friends, our world. Much to ponder about the future. But in these rare days it is also good to recall there is always something more than what we can make happen. And, in that, often lies our hope.

Brother Toby



25 YEARS OF RESPONDING TO THE AIDS PANDEMIC

In 1986, a few months after David was born and adopted, we heard about babies with HIV/AIDS being abandoned in hospitals. Then began a journey which has taken us through high adventure and dark places. It began simply, wanting to make a small gesture. Our response to "what can one person do?" has always been to plant a seed, to take the small step we can. We felt that by taking a few children into our family we could help a few, raise awareness of the problem, and put a human face on it. The media response was way more than we ever anticipated, culminating with a PBS program, "Christmas at Starcross."

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After four of our children died, and two proved to be not infected, the hysteria died down. Homes for babies with AIDS were no longer so desperately needed. We turned our attention to educating and helping women who were drug addicts or who had children with AIDS.

Then the news came that in Romania there were over 100,000 institutionalized children, many of whom were infected with HIV/AIDS. Again, presented with an overwhelming problem, we took a small step. Brother Toby went to Romania. One of the Romanian doctors described our program in a book she wrote about the epidemic:

Some months after the Revolution, in 1990, Brother Toby came to Constanta.... He was given a building which he transformed into six small apartments. Each contained a bedroom for five children; near them was a small sleeping room for a 'mama', a living room where the children would eat their meals. Even if the children were still using a bottle they were put at the table to eat. They were not left to eat in their beds as we at the hospital had done. Their beds were cribs, but made of wood, not the old iron beds from the hospital. Every family appeared different.... The apartments had been arranged according to the needs of the individual family and the taste of the mamas. It was like looking at real families. And the children, regardless of how small they were, began to feel that they had come home.

Despite the predictions of everyone, including all the specialists, that the children would die, it was more than a year and a half before the first child from Casa Speranta breathed his last breath. At that time there were no specific HIV/AIDS drugs. All that they did was completely change the way that the children were cared for. The children were not treated like sick orphans, but instead like boys and girls who had a mama, and normal food. They were allowed to live as was normal for their age - like every child in a family, instead of in a hospital. Living near these children made me realize that AIDS is not synonymous with death. These children did not have to live without hope.

Four ABC NEWS programs followed Brother Toby and again “put a human face” on the pandemic. As one journalist wrote to Brother Toby, “You taught me that behind each story stands a life that should be treated with respect. It is not just a news report.”

January 17, 2011, marked the 20th anniversary of the opening of Casa Speranta. After it was well established and began to function independently under the direction of our colleague Marolen Mullinax, we were made aware of the many AIDS orphans in Uganda. A whole generation of parents have been wiped out by AIDS, and the children have overwhelmed the usual extended family structure. Through Starcross Kin Worldwide we began supporting a few children, paying for their food, clothing and school fees. We established a House of Hope for the children when they had no more extended family to care for them. Now, with the help of our Director, Margaret Nanteza, and the generous sponsors of the program here in the United States, we care for 100 children, and have graduated over 30 children into productive lives. All of the children who have come through our program are employed, which is remarkable in their economy. All our “graduates” are now helping the young children at the House of Hope and others in need.



It has been an amazing journey with no end in sight. We will continue not only serving children, but also acting as leaven in the midst of overwhelming problems, taking one more small step whenever we can.

ROLES FOR STARCROSS IN TIMES OF UNCERTAINTY?

This winter there has been substantially increased communication with friends concerning the uncertainties facing so many. Some of the comfortable havens many enjoyed are fading away for numerous reasons; health, finances, relationships. A significant number of our friends seem to find themselves questioning the religious institutions where they once found comfort. Some have found an alternative spiritual community. But many, for themselves or their children, are seeking something hard to define. The question keeps coming up “Can Starcross help out in these times of uncertainty?”



It is early to predict where these discussions will lead, but some practical ideas are emerging. **Finding the Sacred in the Seasons** is a theme dear to our hearts and reflected in talks with friends. We have held off because of the lack of a guest facility. Even a modest one would be at least \$400,000 and we don't have that kind of money or, frankly, any reasonable



hope of raising it. But listening to friends we have decided to go ahead with a program to share this wonderful sanctuary of ours and the experience we have of finding a spiritual anchor in the cycles of nature.

Each season we will have a weekend gathering to increase the awareness of nature and the possible celebrations and challenges presented in each time of year. Participants must have a tolerance for the rustic when it comes to sleeping! We have a few bedrooms, and the rest are sleeping-bag-type accommodations in a couple of tree-houses, pop tents, the barn etc. Everything else - meals, walks, sessions together, chapel etc. will be 4 Star — or so. We simply ask for a voluntary donation to cover our actual costs. The weekends will be-

begin Friday evening and end Sunday afternoon. Times in the chapel will be simple, meditative and ecumenical. The tentative 2011 dates are:

MAY 13-15, JULY 29-31, OCT 14-16

If you are interested in one or more weekends please contact us soon at community@starcross.org.



Another idea shaping up is to make use of the internet for sharing some of the experience and encouragement gleaned from our history. We will use the internet to set up some webinars (“seminar” + “web”!) where there can be dialogue and affirmation on topics of common interest with a small group. The one we are working on now, coming from suggestions of friends, is **“Maintaining a Contemplative Dimension in Our Lives during Challenging Times.”** Brother Toby will facilitate this seminar.

At the request of some spiritually-sensitive parents of young children, who no longer feel comfortable in the institutional Church for various reasons, we are also exploring a web-connected focus group to update Brother Toby's popular book “Guiding God's Children”(Paulist Press, 1983) and craft a practical **Foundation for Spiritual and Ethical Growth in the Home.**

More information will be coming soon. Please make sure you are on our e-list as this is how we must communicate due to financial restraints. Just contact community@starcross.org and ask to be on the e-list. We NEVER give out our list to anyone else!

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WINTER NEWSLETTER 2011

OUR OLIVE OIL IS CERTIFIED ORGANIC!

Growing olive trees has been a magical experience. We started out with sticks in the ground, which grew in four years to young olive-bearing trees, each one different from the others, with leaves that look silver underneath when the breezes blow them. Just walking among them gives a feeling of peace and healing.

Learning how to care for them, and how to harvest and press the fruit has been magical too. Everything is fresh, and it all flows together into a process that feels nourishing and natural. Although “getting it right” with the pressing has been complicated, it has been completely rewarding. The most difficult part has been going through the mountains of paperwork to be certified organic, which we completed this fall. So now, what we knew to be a wholesome process has been certified!

Why was it important? Because we want everything we do to contribute to the sustainability of the earth. Native peoples who were here before us knew that no one really owned the land it had to be used and shared by all. In that spirit, we take our stewardship of this beautiful place very seriously. It is a privilege to live here. We will do what we can to nourish the land as it nourishes us.

The 2010-2011 extra virgin oil is mellowing in the barn. The olives were full of pungent, intense flavor this year. It should be ready for sale in March.

INSIDE: FROM CALIFORNIA TO UGANDA AND AT YOUR COMPUTER — NEW MILESTONES FOR STARCROSS AND OUR FRIENDS.

- NATURE'S SEASON OF PEACE.
- 25 YEARS OF RESPONDING TO AIDS.
- FINDING THE SACRED IN THE SEASONS.
- OUR OLIVE OIL IS CERTIFIED ORGANIC!
- WEBINARS ON CONTEMPLATIVE FACETS OF LIFE.
- SPIRITUAL AND ETHICAL GROWTH IN THE HOME.



Speaking of Sustainability, You Can Help!

More and more we are sending communications only by e-mail, because it saves natural resources and money. We still send the newsletter and other important communications by mail if we do not have your e-mail address — we don't want to lose you! But if you have an e-mail address we would be very happy if you would send it to us. Just send us an e-mail at community@starcross.org. We *never* share our mailing list with anyone.