

Sharings

Starcross Monastic Community Newsletter | Spring 2020

A BREEZE OF COMFORT

In these especially troublesome times let us give thanks for the gentle winds of spring! Across the planet poets are writing about these special winds, which seem to caress the blossoms as well as our souls.

This is when followers of Jesus of Nazareth celebrate the feast of Pentecost. After the crucifixion and death, his friends were frightened, and they hid away in a room. Then they heard the sound of “a wind from heaven.” It brought them comfort and strength. There are similar stories in many other spiritual traditions at this time of year.

I've always been fascinated by the important Chinese spiritual concept of *ch'i*, or *qi* as it is now more often spelled in English. The character itself consists of lines representing breath combined with a symbol for universal nourishment. The concept is often translated as “*life force*” or “*spiritual energy*.” In the Western world we more often use terms like “*breath of life*.” Most people on the planet have probably sensed something like this, even though they might have trouble defining it.

I am fond of the story in the Hebrew Bible where Elijah is trying to encounter God. First came a mighty wind — no God. Then came an earthquake — no God. Then came a fire — no God. “Then came the sound of a gentle breeze” and Elijah found God. I discovered that Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest have an understanding similar to Elijah.

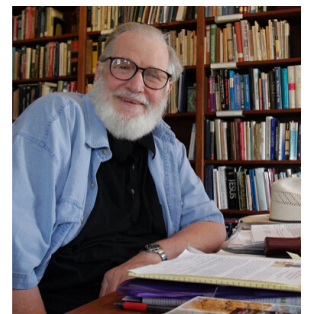


There is a gentle breeze that is warm enough to begin to melt the snow pack in the mountains. It is known as the “*Chinook Wind*.” I first experienced it on the banks of the Columbia River where the Chinook culture once thrived. A light, warm wind came up the river from the Pacific coast. With it came the smell of the sea and the earth and growing things. I somehow knew that where I was standing was where some Chinook woman or man once stood centuries ago. The cares that preoccupied me began to retreat like the snowpack before this sweet breeze.

So let us join the followers of Jesus, Elijah, our Native American mentors, and others. Step outdoors or open the window when you see the trees and shrubs gently moving. Feel this life force, this breath of life, this comforter of nature — and literally of heaven — begin to melt your fear, your anxiety.

We are in a hard time. We need comfort and we need strength. A little help from a gentle breeze may be near at hand.

- Brother Toby





The Haiku Bench

STARCROSS MONASTIC COMMUNITY

Is a small, independent, multi-faith community, living peaceful lives in the contemplative tradition, and offering encouragement to folks on all spiritual paths. Our emphasis is on spiritual growth, preserving the land, helping others and the world. Our organic farm is in the coastal hills of Sonoma County, CA and our 91-acre property is perpetually protected by a Conservation Easement with the *Sonoma Land Trust*. We've cared for children with unique gifts and needs, many of whom were born HIV positive. We've established *Houses of Hope* for AIDS orphans in Romania and Uganda.



Magnolia blossoms arrived at the end of February, this year!

RESPONDING TO COVID-19

We are appreciative of folks both near and far who have taken a moment to check in on us. Like many, we have been Sheltering-In-Place for almost 3 months. In light of the Coronavirus we have also had to take steps to adjust our way of life here.

In this issue of *Sharings*, you'll be able to read about how it's affected our programs and outreach, but also given us a unique opportunity to think of new and creative ways to engage with the wider Starcross community.

- Updates to our Volunteer Programs (p.3)
- Serving our Neighbors in a Time of Need (p.4)
- Weekly "Walk" Around Starcross (p.5)



VOLUNTEER PROGRAMMING UPDATES

Folks young and old from all over the US, and around the world, have sought out Starcross as a place to merge their spiritual and ecological paths. We provide training in organic farming and a safe, wholesome environment. They in turn enrich our lives in so many ways.

Following shelter-in-place directives and quarantine measures, we made the tough, but safest decision not to accept any ecological or spiritual interns from WWOOF (*Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms*) or Workaway, this Spring. That makes for some extra work, but the folks here, along with friends, have risen to the occasion! We look forward to welcoming volunteers as soon as the COVID-19 situation permits.



Lance shows Collin tips on transplanting cucumber seedlings in the greenhouse

GARDEN

The hoop house and greenhouse are overflowing with vegetable seedlings ready to be transplanted to the garden. Soon there will be beautiful veggies to offer at our *Food Pantry* and in the *Honor Produce Stand*.

This year we are growing strawberries, snap peas, cucumbers, squashes, corn, tomatoes, carrots, radishes, beans and more! Blackberries and plums arrive in summer, and the orchards will begin to produce apples & pears in early fall!



Image descriptions L to R: Cucumbers in the Garden; Lettuce in the Hoop House; Corn in the Garden; Snap peas in the Hoop House

FOOD PANTRY



Boxes of food prepared and ready-to-go for easy and safe pick-up!

During the pandemic, the Starcross Food Pantry has been very busy. People who never expected to be in this situation find themselves jobless and unable to feed their families. As a partner agency of a large food bank in Santa Rosa, we can access government surplus food as well as buy basics at a very reasonable rate. We have set up a drive through system so that everyone stays safe. Since COVID-19 we have served approximately 550 individuals.

Prior to the pandemic, students and faculty at **San Francisco Conservatory of Music** put on a **“Music for Food”** benefit performance for our pantry. Music for Food is a musician-led initiative for local hunger relief. Their concerts raise resources and awareness in the fight against hunger, empowering any musicians who wish to use their artistry to further social justice. We are grateful to be recipients, as those funds have helped us meet the increasing need in our underserved rural area.



UGANDA UPDATE

Schools and businesses are closed in Uganda. Children are sheltering-in-place at the *House of Hope*. Thankfully, everyone is well. Our nurse-midwives must still deliver babies, but they are taking precautions to stay healthy. A recent success story shared by one of the midwives is that, thanks to specific prenatal care and efforts, a mother who is HIV positive has given birth to three children, all of whom are negative for the virus.

SECURING THE FUTURE OF STARCROSS

You can remember Starcross through a provision in your will or trust, or as a beneficiary of your life insurance policy or IRA charitable contribution. Starcross Monastic Community is a non-profit 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization. Contributions are tax deductible. Our Tax ID is 94-1687876. *For More Information Call Us at 1-800-960-1500.*



STAYING IN TOUCH!

We are glad to continue to engage with our community each week through **Monday Haiku**, **Wednesday's Weekly "Walk" around Starcross**, and **Brother Toby's Friday Reflections**.

Our newest weekly inspiration to your inbox, *A Weekly "Walk,"* came from a desire to respond to our community when the Shelter-in-Place orders first began. We are aware that it may be extremely hard, and often unsafe, for individuals to get outside. We hope that bringing you along on a *virtual walk* through our gardens, grounds, and forest can provide joy and wonder to our extended Starcross family, as it does for those of us here.

If you're not subscribed already, we invite you to [join our e-list](#), and engage with us on a weekly basis. We never share our list. You can also follow along with us on social media via [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#).



REMEMBERING LOVED ONES

If she's not out collecting images for our Weekly Walks, you can find Chloe working on the Friday Reflection and other writing projects with Brother Toby. Among other behind-the-scenes tasks, she's responsible for our increased digital presence on social media, our updated website in Fall 2019, and the new look for this issue of *Sharings!*



At our evening meditation/Vespers service, we read aloud the names, dates of birth and death, and a few sentences, about people who were special to our friends. If you would like to have someone commemorated in this way, please make an entry using this [form](#) or call 1-800-960-1500. *There is no charge.* It is our honor and privilege to do this.

We have received a number of memorials and prayer requests during this time of COVID-19. Please continue to contact us. We are grateful to support our friends at this time.



CARING FOR THE EARTH AND ITS PEOPLE

Starcross is a sanctuary of beauty and peace.

Yes, it's an active organic farm. Equally important though, is the work we do to maintain the land as sacred space for people who come here in search of solace.

We try to make the world a better, kinder place. People often tell us they are glad we are here, doing what we do... *So are we!*

Sister Julie, Starcross Administrator, takes care of the important day-to-day details of our Community. She also enjoys taking walks through our Forever Wild forest and her beloved Olive Groves. She still keeps up with her School Board duties by way of Zoom, and stays in close contact with our wider community - whether it's friends, former volunteers or checking in on people in need.



ANNUAL FUND DRIVE

While our rhythm of life has been altered, *our mission and values have not changed.*

As a non-profit, we depend on support from folks like you to help us continue our work to be a sanctuary for people and nature. Now more than ever, many are expressing their desire to connect with others, the earth, and work for the common good.

We strive to meet that need, and that's why we're asking for your help. Amidst the changes, we are still looking toward the future of Starcross.

We recognize that your ability to give as you have in the past may be different this year. Please know that any gift small or large is appreciated, and makes a difference. *Thank you.*

OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUPPORT

- ✓ **Agricultural & Ecological Programs**
- ✓ **Retreats & Spiritual Life**
- ✓ **Food Pantry & Local Service to Neighbors in Need**
- ✓ **Starcross General Fund**

WAYS TO GIVE

- ✓ **Make a Donation Online**
- ✓ **Deferred Giving (Will or Trust)**
- ✓ **Call Us: 1-800-960-1500**

CONTINUING THE STARCROSS STORY . . .

We are often asked about our children, especially **David, Holly & Andrew**, whom we adopted, and who remain active in the life and future of Starcross Community.



David (violin) and **Angela** (cello) are safe in Berlin! For the most part, their musical performances have been put on hold. Meanwhile, they have been exploring the city on their bikes (masked!), and are enjoying watching their tomato plants grow! Their wedding, hosted here at Starcross in October 2019, was a beautiful event!

Holly is busy these days helping her son **Damien** with distance learning, as he finishes up 1st grade. Holly's culinary background make for fun educational experiences in the kitchen, as well! Damien also enjoys helping his dad, Lance, around the farm.



Andrew lives nearby and is staying safe, while having to continue to go into work, amid COVID-19.



OLIVES!

Our 2019 harvest was one of the largest and tastiest we've ever had! Thanks to a fantastic crew of live-in helpers, we brought in over 10 tons of fruit. *Sister Julie's Organic Extra Virgin Olive Oil* is available online at shop.starcross.org as well as locally at our Honor Produce Stand. This robust oil is delicious for dipping, drizzling, and more!



Filling lugs of olives during Harvest, **Nov. 2019**



Part of our excellent Harvest crew, **Nov. 2019**