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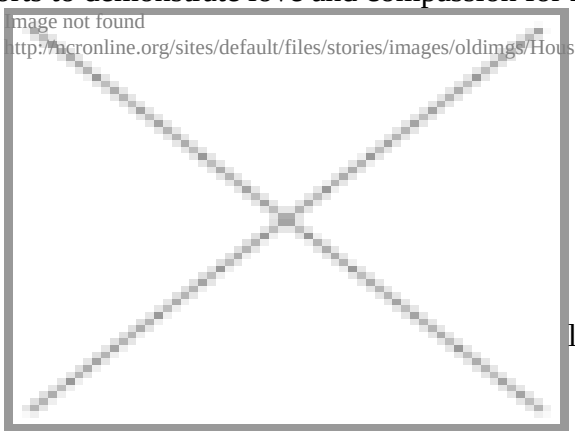
Clare's Well offers healing, education and intimacy with nature

Rich Heffern | Dec. 13, 2010 Eco Catholic

Clare's Well, a 40-acre farm and retreat center in Annandale, Minn., operated by the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, is another project sponsored, developed and sustained by a U.S. womens' religious community. Clare's Well director Sr. Jan Kilian introduces us to Clare's Well.

"Clare?s Well is one of our Franciscan efforts to demonstrate love and compassion for Earth and all she sustains. We say in our literature, ?Let the 

life-giving energy of Mother Earth restore your balance at Clare?s Well Spirituality Farm in Annandale, Minnesota. The scriptures remind us of what happens at a well.

Founded by Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minn.(FSLF) in 1988, Clare?s Well is a 40-acre farm with a farmhouse, three hermitages, meditation chapel with opportunity for shared morning prayer, a wellness Center with massage and sauna, gardens, Sabbath pond, a sacred path in a woods, a labyrinth in restored prairie, and a large barn with three cats, two goats, two pea hens, lots of chickens and guinea fowl.

Retreat guests are usually greeted first by Lacy, Clare?s Well?s Collie. The human staff consists of four Franciscan Sisters (Jan Kilian, Carol Schmit, Paula Pohlmann and Janice Wiechman), a lay massage therapist, Roxanne Wagner, and Richard Wagner who helps occasionally with the heavy work. We provide Trager, Integrative Energy Therapy and Massage. We are blessed with numerous volunteers helping us serve women and men who come from all walks of life for a day?s retreat, a few days, a week or more for spiritual and physical restoration.

Our name, Clare?s Well, was chosen to honor the 13th century Franciscan saint, Clare of Assisi. The image of a well invites guests to plumb their own inner depths: ?Wisdom is simple and deep within; drink from your own well.? We offer space, meals and hospitality without programs or direction.

People of all creeds and cultures find acceptance at ?the Well?. This Well is deep enough to reach beyond the elements that separate to what is essential and unifying. When we experience the mix of persons gathered for meals around the farmhouse table, we often note the meaningful synchronicity in timing of

individuals? scheduling. We say, ?How right it is for these who were strangers just yesterday, to be together in this moment.? Our guests might be from any walk of life, mostly from Minnesota but also from out of state, more rarely from outside the U.S. They are parents, counselors, writers, teachers, clergy, students, overworked or unemployed, all recognizing our common need for ?time out.?

Nature, direct contact with Earth and her elements is undeniably one of humanity?s most healing resources. We encourage those whose lives we touch to return the favor and do what they able to maintain Earth?s resources.

From the moment Sisters Aggie Soenneker and Carol Schmit first envisioned Clare?s Well, they committed themselves in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi to responsible care of our natural resources. Gardening with canning/freezing of produce for use in healthy meals was begun immediately.

More recently, we investigated the possibility of a wind turbine to generate energy, but after a year of measuring wind velocity in the low place in which we are located, we had to abandon that dream. We built our hermitages with as green as possible materials and design, including in-floor heat in two. When we needed a new furnace in the farmhouse, we choose a geothermal system with 4 wells dug just outside our dining room window. Digging wells for the geothermal mechanisms happily destroyed that lawn, leading us to plant an herb garden instead.

A certain amount of education continues on site as guests observe our practices, ask questions and share their own experiences. In addition, staff members participate in educational programs, speak and write on sustainable practices, and work with committees sponsored by the Franciscan Community of Little Falls. We have a booth at the FSLF annual Green Fair. Staff member, Sr. Carol Schmit, led an Earth Healers group, which consisted of Franciscan associates and sisters who led the entire FSLF community in an in depth study of the Earth Charter. This study culminated in 2009 with the entire community taking a formal corporate stance resolving to promote the principles of the Earth Charter.

In 2010 this group developed the Franciscan Green Citizen Award, with one of the first recipients being our newest staff member, Sr. Janice Wiechman. Janice received the award for work she did to bring previously disparate church groups together in San Raphael, Mexico to clean up their streets and recycle materials ordinarily trashed in their neighborhoods.

More information about Clare?s Well can be found on our website at www.clareswell.org "

-- Sr. Jan Kilian

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