



Natural Connections at Mercy Center

January 2007

One of my favorite phrases is '*not all who wander are lost*'. I think I like it because it reminds me that we don't always know where the path may lead, but this doesn't mean we don't know where we are going. Or perhaps, we don't need to know where we are going, as long as we are still moving, breathing, living.

Walking and hiking are activities I do for recreation. I love to hike with friends and family giving us a chance for long conversations. It also gives me opportunities to connect with the outdoors which renews me.

These days I walk around Mercy Center a lot. When I'm running late you may see me quickly walking across the campus. Other times I slow my pace and wander the property to learn more about This Place.

My mother, who was a naturalist on Cape Cod, encouraged residents and visitors to slow their pace walking the woods and in the natural areas of the Cape. By doing so, she believed we would learn more about the landscape and connect with nature. We are more receptive to listening, smelling and feeling the world around us when we slow our pace.

At Mercy Center we've just begun examining our grounds and are working towards creating a plan for how we want the grounds developed in the future. I don't mean developed in the sense of a housing development, rather how we want to use the grounds (walking trails, denser woodlands, type of woodlands, gardens) so we can proactively move in that direction. As a result I'm bringing others on walks to the outer edges of the property; encouraging staff and board members to join me in learning more about This Place. Learning and connecting by walking it at a slow pace.

If you haven't seen the new Soundings, which lists upcoming programs, I encourage you to contact Guest Services for a copy. One of our spring programs is presented by Dr. Lauren Artress. She's sharing with us the mystery of labyrinths. Like slowing the pace in the woods to learn and connect with nature; walking the labyrinth slows your mind and helps you learn and connect with yourself. With our outdoor labyrinth, you can do both at the same time!

Walking slowly,

Upcoming Events & Activities at Mercy Center

- **A Reflection**
- **Tu B'Shvat: Celebration of Trees**
- **Cultivating Community Farms Across Connecticut**
- **Earth, Air, Fire, Water: Pathways to the Spirit**
- **Mercy Center's Labyrinth**
- **Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Divine Within**

Sherill

Sherill Baldwin, Ecology Director at Mercy Center

A Reflection

ANY TREE WILL LISTEN

- Shelby Allen

If you can't speak of it,
stand in the embrace of a Norway spruce,
branching to the ground.
All of Norway will shelter you
in a cloak of boughs filled with fjords of light.

The church of the trees has a place
for what you are carrying.

In a forest, the brambled chaos
of growing and dying can guide you:
an old beech stump is becoming
a new kingdom for ferns and voles.

A magnolia's full-throated flowers
open for arias in spring,
but trees in winter show you
their true shape. You belong to something
magnificent that begins in darkness
below the ground. It branches out
but keeps the center aligned,
stands through the seasons and trusts
its small seeds to the wind. By the time
a seed becomes a tree, it can teach you
to free your own dry leaves to dance.

If you can't find a tree
when you need one, all you need
is one green shoot making its way
through a crack in concrete.
Hardness doesn't have to win,
you too can rise.

Cultivating

Tu B'Shvat: Celebration of Trees

With Aaron
Askanase

Mercy Center
167 Neck Road
Madison, CT
Saturday, February 3,
5 - 7pm
No Charge



Come celebrate the new year of the Trees! The Jewish Holiday Tu B'Shvat is a time for renewal and harvest, celebrating the abundance of the earth and wish the trees a happy New Year!

Join us in celebrating in the traditional manner of Tu B'Shvat seder, or festive meal, and learn about Jewish approaches to the environment, a taste of Jewish customs...and food!

Light refreshments will be served as part of the celebration.

Please let us know if you plan to join us.

Aaron Askanase, MAC, Lic Ac, is an acupuncturist and healer who lives and practices in Boston. He is currently studying Jewish healing and mysticism, and focuses on how one can understand traditional mystical view for practical applications in healing. He is a lifelong environmentalist.

[Register for this program now](#)

Earth, Air, Fire, Water: Pathways to

Community Farms Across Connecticut

Co-sponsored by Mercy
Center's Ecology
Program

Mercy Center
167 Neck Road, Madison, CT
Saturday, February 10
8:30am - 3pm
\$30 (NOFA members); \$40
(non-members)
Registration fee includes
lunch



Across Connecticut, towns and land trusts are getting the message about preserving open space, including farmland. They don't want every acre of land covered in buildings and asphalt. As farmers get older, and need to sell off their land for retirement, the towns snap it up, rather than see it developed. But once the towns own farmland, what do they do with it?

At the same time, people in the same towns across the state are realizing that they want a deeper connection with a local farm. They want to be able to eat locally grown food and know their farmer. They want their kids to see where the food comes from, pick their own, maybe even get their hands dirty planting and weeding. Where are the farms producing local food for local people and open to educating the local kids? And then there are the people who want to farm. They've been getting ready, learning the methods, gardening, taking an apprenticeship on a farm, or farming a bit on a small scale. But land in Connecticut is so expensive! Where can they go?

The Community Farming Conference aims to connect these three groups of people: the towns and land trusts with land, the community groups that want a local farm, and the farmers who need land and local markets.

Lynda Simkins of the Natick Community Organic Farm in Massachusetts, and Elizabeth Henderson of Peacework Organic Farm in Newark, New York are both keynote speakers.

Lynda Simkins has run the town-owned farm in Natick for 27 years, and has always provided hands-on education for people of all ages by involving them in doing real work on a productive organic farm. Lynda will speak about combining educational programs and farming.

Elizabeth Henderson has been farming for about 25 years, and, although she farms on private land, she has always been deeply committed to farming with and for a community. She was one of the early pioneers of Community Supported

the Spirit

Annual Winter
Weekend Retreat for
Women in Seascape
With Patricia Stere
Sears

Mercy Center
167 Neck Road
Madison, CT
Friday, February 9, 7pm
to
Sunday, February 11,
2pm
\$275



Grounding ourselves in life's rhythms as we explore the essences of earth, air, fire and water can enrich our journeys as women. Earth-centered religions recognize the four elements as essential to human survival and foundational to life in the Spirit. We will experience how these elements, and the images they communicate, deepen and enliven our spiritual quest. Our sessions will include discussion, guided meditation, journaling, creative expression, music and ritual. Come - strengthen your roots, breathe clearly, be ablaze with love, be cleansed and refreshed!

Patricia Stere Sears, MA, is a life long seeker and a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). A graduate of Union Theological Seminary, she is an educator with more than 30 years experience designing and leading retreats, workshops and training events. Patricia's work draws on her interests in spiritual development, women's health and psychology, earth-centered spirituality, healing, meditation and creative expression.

Register for this program now

Agriculture, and she is the author, with the late Robyn van En, of the book *Sharing the Harvest*, which profiles CSAs across the country, and tells how they work. Elizabeth will speak about how to start a CSA farm. In addition to the keynote speakers, the conference will feature a forum for community farms (established and developing) to share their successes, challenges, resources, and needs, and short talks and discussions on special topics, including: working with your town government, and planning your community farm as a business.

For more information about this event contact Kim Stoner at 203.974.8480.

For more information, visit CT NOFA's website

Mercy Center's Labyrinth

Outdoor pathway by the Sea



In anticipation of Dr. Lauren Artress' visit to Mercy Center next month, I've been reading about labyrinths. What is most interesting is that so many places and so many cultures have a historical connection to this circular designed pathway. They have been around for a very, very long time. As early as c4000 BCE.

Mercy Center has a 7-circuit labyrinth. It is referred to as a Cretan or Minoan Labyrinth and is a 7 ring design. According to one source, the 7 rings symbolize the seven sacred planets, the seven days of the week, the seven Chakras of the body and the 7 Principals of the Cosmos.

Today you can find labyrinths around the world made of different materials including turf mounds, earthwork henges, hedges, wooden fences, pebble- stone paths, painted floors and mowed in tall prairie grass. Portable labyrinths are also available in both cotton and vinyl.

Mercy Center's labyrinth is made of brick and boxwood shrubs with a path of Stony Creek granite. It is located by the beach, allowing for a quiet yet stimulating setting near the water and surrounded by gardens.

Our labyrinth is open to retreatants, guests and friends. If you would like to visit Mercy Center and walk our labyrinth, please contact Guest Services to coordinate your visit so as not to compete with the on-going programs.

Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Divine Within

With Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress

Mercy Center
167 Neck Road
Madison, CT
Friday, March 2, 7pm to
Sunday, March 4, 1pm
\$275 (Commuter Rate \$175)



The transcendent nature of the Divine gets a lot of press these days. This part of God is 'out there,' outside ourselves. Some people picture 'him' as in the clouds and children draw a white beard to soften 'his' stern face. But there is another aspect to the Divine. It is the immanent nature of God found within our beings. It is the source of inner wisdom - the "small voice within" - that, if we learn to listen to, can guide our lives.

This retreat weekend will allow us to quiet our minds and become attentive to what is going on inside us. It will teach us to listen deeply, receive guidance and discern wisely from that which we receive. Walking the Chartres-style Eleven-circuit labyrinth, journaling and discussion will help us find our sacred path so we may deepen our compassion and be of service to the world.

Mercy Center is home to a 7-circuit labyrinth, in a spectacular setting overlooking Long Island Sound. For this workshop, an indoor, full-scale replica of the 11-circuit labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France, will also be onsite.

The Reverend Dr. Lauren Artress is president and founder of Veriditas, the Voice of The Labyrinth Movement, and former Canon for Special Ministries at Grace Cathedral. She creates large group spiritual programming through the use of the Medieval Eleven Circuit Labyrinth both in the United States

and Europe. She is author of *Walking a Sacred Path* and *Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Tool*. She is a member of Spritual Directors International and is a licensed MFT psychotherapist in the state of California. Lauren is an Episcopal priest and a priest associate at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

[Register for this program now](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS - VOLUNTEER NEEDS

The Ecology Program needs volunteers for upcoming community events. These events are free of charge and are open to the public.

SPRING EQUINOX CELEBRATION

This event is scheduled for Saturday, March 24th from 11am to 3pm and will include entertainment for the family as well as sales of used books, plants and refreshments. Volunteers are needed to help with the book sale, pansy plant sale and refreshments.

JOURNEY THROUGH THE HEAVENS

Two stargazing programs with Dr. Donald Lukaszek have been scheduled for this spring. They will start indoors with a short presentation and then proceed to the field next to Seascape.

Volunteers are needed to help with registration, providing directions for participants and assisting the presenter.

Stargazing programs are scheduled for Saturday, March 10 at 8pm and Saturday, April 14 at 8:30pm.

IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING, please contact Sherill at 203.245.0401 or sherill@mercybythesea.org.

[Click here to learn more about these events](#)

ON-GOING VOLUNTEER NEEDS

RECYCLING & REUSE

Looking for help to sort through materials to ensure items are reused or recycled - saving items from the landfill or incinerator and money for Mercy Center

RESEARCH

Looking for someone to help research projects. For example ecologically sound icemelt that is also cost effective, alternative cleaning products to try at an institutional level.

MARKETING & PROMOTION

Looking for someone to help create flyers and help promote ecology projects and programs.

[If you're interested in volunteering, please contact Sherill at 203.245.0401 or \[sherill@mercybythesea.org\]\(mailto:sherill@mercybythesea.org\)](#)

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Mercy Center is a conference and retreat center for human development. The Ecology Program is supported with funds from the Mercy Northeast Community, Mercy Action and ministry funds from Mercy RI and Mercy VT.