

*This Gift of Land*  
*By Christine Loughlin, OP*

In 1949 the Dominican Sisters received Crystal Spring Farm. The eighty-five acres were a gift to Sister Bernardine from the Toner family in thanks for the loving care she had given to their very special daughter Patricia. In the letter that Sister Bernardine wrote to the leadership of the congregation she said, "I feel so honored to have been the recipient of such a gift for the community.

In that same year naturalist Aldo Leopold wrote, "We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to see it with love and respect." (A Sand County Almanac)

When Sister Bernardine looked out over the land, she saw possibilities. Dominican Academy was founded and a novitiate established. Now the academy has closed and the novitiate is no longer needed.

But the ethic presented in 1949 by Aldo Leopold has begun to quicken in our consciousness. Deep in the American psyche is the practice of looking out over the land and seeing what is before us as resource to be turned into commodity. We do not see the vast richness of the whole community of Life before us.

This practice of looking but not seeing has brought great devastation to the North American continent. The waters are poisoned, the air polluted, diversity diminished, the soils eroded. No family is left untouched by the tragic consequences of an unhealthy environment, by increasing violence, by the unfair distribution of resources, or by the alienation that comes from loss of community.

Today we "see with new eyes" this gift of land for the community. To face into the challenges of our time will take great courage, wisdom and a sense of the sacredness of Place. In 1995 Susan Witt of the Schumacher Society wrote, "It is time for action of a broad and populist nature informed by common cause and common consent, action which is bold and affirmative, action which reflects a new understanding of our responsibilities to the earth and to one another. Future generations deserve nothing less. We must and can meet Aldo Leopold's challenge."

On March 7 Crystal Spring welcomes Susan Witt to lead a workshop on practical approaches to solving economic problems in a manner that is socially and ecologically responsible. At the heart of her reflection is the core of E. F. Schumacher's philosophy, "What is the role of the human on Earth? How do we shape our economic lives to responsibly reflect that role? How do we create a new system of land allocation and use that is fair to all and ecologically sound?"

Such rethinking will require a strict novitiate training. Our common work now is no less than reshaping the American dream. To do this we must all come home to Place and see with new eyes the "gift of land for Community." ■ CL

"Leading people back to their connections with the earth and Creation happens with one healthy carrot at a time." dear friend and Crystal Spring supporter, Adele Rustino.