

Refreshment at The Well

A day of solitude soothes the soul

I like to greet a new year with a positive outlook and some personal goals jotted down in my journal. Until recently, I didn't have either. Last year was riddled with challenges, and I was feeling a bit disconnected from "me."

An escape to Well of Mercy — a place of retreat just an hour north of Lake Norman — was the antidote I needed. More than a year ago, I heard about it from Cammie Howard, a wise woman and friend at Lake Forest Church in Huntersville. During a Lenten workshop, she had shared the many benefits of setting

apart time for solitude. The idea intrigued and terrified me at the same time.

As posted on its Web site, Well of Mercy offers "quiet sanctuary for adults in need of a temporary respite from daily demands, expectations and stresses, or those who may simply wish to move apart for a time of prayer, rest and renewal." I immediately called to reserve a day visit and blocked it out on my calendar. Resisting the urge to pressure a friend into accompanying me, I stayed true to my objective and prepared for a day with just me, myself and I ... unplugged from being a

wife, a mother, and an employee and writer with deadlines to meet.

A few weeks later, as I pulled out of my driveway just after 9 a.m., I smiled to myself, knowing that I was going it alone. The passenger seat was filled with devotional books and journals, my camera, and my iPod. *Would I be bored after the first hour, or wishing I could stay a week at the end of the day?*

I drove north on I-77 unhurried. The sky was a brilliant blue, and the air was crisp. Exit 65 (toward Harmony) and a few winding roads led me to Well of Mercy, a ministry of the Sisters of Mercy. A main lodge, two guesthouses, two small cottages and a chapel are situated on some 100 picturesque acres.

I arrived just after 10 a.m. and was greeted warmly by Julia Vogler and the dogs, who are part of The Well family: Patches, Rascal, Max and Hunter. I was given a tour and then met the founders, Sister Brigid McCarthy and Sister Donna Marie Vaillancourt, as well as the other staff.

After dropping my stuff in a cozy sitting room, I set out to explore with my camera. A



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last-minute decision to bring along a devotional book and my journal was a good one. Many spaces at Well of Mercy beckoned me and allowed me to exhale: front porch rocking chairs and hammocks, quaint garden benches, beautiful nature trails along the creek, a peace-filled chapel in the woods and a hilltop labyrinth.

As I walked, I truly felt the presence of the Lord on this holy ground. Back at the main



house, I shared a delicious lunch with the Sisters and a few other guests around a long table in the very spacious kitchen/dining/living room area. I stayed a while to chat and laugh with Sister Brigid, whose sunny and sweet demeanor almost made me want to abandon the plans I'd made for the afternoon.

But just after 1 p.m., I set out again, choosing to spend silent time reading down by the creek and in the chapel, as well as walking the labyrinth.

As I strolled along the creek and listened to the soothing sounds of the water gently rushing over the rocks, I allowed self-doubt to be cleansed from my mind. And as I meandered through the labyrinth, I prayed for patience and steadfastness on my journey — mindful of the many paths,

twists and turns my life has taken.

My six-hour soul retreat at Well of Mercy left me wanting more of God's peace. The Sisters' ministry of hospitality and healing was both a cupful of refreshment and a loving hug of encouragement.

And so, this is my resolution for 2011 — the year I will say goodbye to my 40s (hopefully with grace) and embrace a new decade of opportunity: to be intentional about gifting myself with time set apart for "me" and to return to Well of Mercy for reconnection and renewal. LNC

THE SCOOP

Well of Mercy

181 Mercy Lane, Hamptonville
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www.wellofmercy.org

Opened in September 1997, Well of Mercy is open to individuals, and accepts donations only. Office hours are Wednesday through Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. to make reservations. Daytime and overnight guests are welcome anytime between Wednesday morning and Sunday morning. Hospitality includes accommodations and meals. Private, fee-based sessions for spiritual healing, massage, Healing Touch and Reconnective Healing also are available. Well of Mercy is not a clinic, conference center or meeting place, and it is not available for groups.



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