December 12, 2019

Dear Friends,

It’s been nearly two years since the Thomas Fire and resulting debris flow tore through Montecito and changed the face of our retreat center and the community around us.

But where there is life, there is hope.

And the signs of life are abundant!

Work is continuing to steward the land where our Center has stood for so many years. The orchards continue to provide bright, juicy apples and citrus, which has been harvested by volunteers with over three tons of fruit donated to the Santa Barbara Food Bank.

Working in partnership with the California Wildlife Conservation Board, our water conservation efforts are being redesigned to reflect changes in the property and the new natural landscape. The goal is to create a resilient program which will have as little impact as possible on the San Ysidro Creek and surrounding area.

The Santa Barbara Beekeepers Association came out to check on the small apiary on the Retreat Center property, and to discuss an ongoing partnership to support its growth. With more rain, there is likely to be excess honey in some hives, but this year the honey stores will be left unharvested to allow for the health and expansion of the hives.

But the greatest news of all is the progress made toward rebuilding!

Work has begun on an eco-friendly facility and the new programs it will offer.

Spearheaded by our staff and Board of Trustees, we have requested and received a variety of proposals from world-class architectural firms. This exciting, multi-faceted project will result in a retreat center that remains a welcoming and inclusive space which creates a sense of peace through connection to nature, and will allow us to continue and expand our work of spiritual transformation and renewal with a broader audience.

This has also given us an opportunity to revitalize our programs to continue to encourage spiritual transformation, with a clear focus on the themes of sustainability, environmental design and the empowerment of creativity.

Work also continues in our commitment to our community.

(over, please)
A 250-gallon GeoTea compost tea brewer, formally used on the retreat center property has been donated to the Center for Regenerative Agriculture (CRA). The GeoTea has been placed at the Rincon-Vitova Insectary in Ventura and combined with volunteer support from Patagonia Action Works to serve CRA’s Thomas Fire regeneration program and treat more properties across the region.

Help Our Seedlings Grow!

In partnership with Pacifica College and the Santa Barbara Natives Nursery, our team was able to collect acorns from our property and help to plant hundreds of native oaks throughout the Montecito area affected by the debris flow.

To celebrate the new life that is rising up from devastation, a special acorn sticker has been designed and will be sent to each of our partners who makes a donation before December 31, 2019.

Today, we invite you to receive one of these tokens of new growth and abundance of life by making a special year-end gift to support the renovations, innovations and new life that is growing here in Santa Barbara.

As we move toward the Christmas season, we give thanks for your partnership and support during these difficult times, and look forward to having you walk alongside us as La Casa de Maria rises once more.

With love and blessings,

Linda Alexander
Executive Director
Immaculate Heart Community

Kathleen Buczko
Director of Advancement
Immaculate Heart Community

Cindy Faith Swain
Operations Manager
La Casa de Maria and Center for Spiritual Renewal

PS. You can follow our progress – and make your tax-deductible year-end gift – online at www.lacasademaria.org/donate. Thank you again for your prayers and support!