



SIEBENQUELL

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# The Theater of the Word: The Hearth Fire

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SOURCE: ERIK RIECHERS

In the old Celtic tradition, when you built a house, you started with the hearth. It is tradition still found in some parts of Ireland today. The home was literally built around the hearth.

The hearth was the center of the home for very good and important reasons. This was the place where you gathered the folks, told the stories and broke the bread. Every other room of the house flowed towards this hearth, this center. And from this center, from the hearth, everything flowed outwards into the other rooms of the house and well beyond it, into the spaces of the world. This was the place where the stranger was welcomed. This was the place where the guest was made to feel at home. It was the ultimate place of belonging. To be driven from hearth and home was a dire curse indeed.

»The hearth is a powerful metaphor for the spiritual quest, for the hearth is the place where the heart is at home. This is the longing in all spirituality: to come in out of the winter of alienation, self-division and exile and into the hearth of warmth and at-one-ness.« (John O'Donohue, *The Four Elements*, p. 112).

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As I am sitting here writing these words, I am leading the Hearthfire Course of Siebenquell in the Black Forest. And there are five hearths at which we gather the folks, tell the stories and break the bread. There is our meeting space, where we tell stories of God, share our own stories and interpret them in a rich cross-pollination. Then there is nature, where we walk, rest, drink in beauty and wander the landscapes that do our hearts a world of good. Thirdly, there is the chapel, where we sing the songs of prayerful storytellers and weave the entrance into and out of every day. Fourthly, there is the dining room where we tell personal stories that nourish the hungry heart as much as we satisfy the hungry stomachs. Finally, there is the small pub-like room, where Rosemarie envelops us in an on-going story that stretches over six nights. These are the places where we live what John O'Donohue so eloquently describes in this manner: »Just as every person has his or her own spirit, every inhabited house also has a unique spirit. The hearth was the place where this spirit was gathered, refined and preserved.«

The question that is bred in my bones during these days is simple. Where are we building our hearths? Where do we center life like this and make it a place of genuine encounter, hearing, gift and rich conversation?

I have a young friend who has lost her home and her hearth. I pray daily that God will open horizons of healing and hope for here. But I am not content to end my petition there. Every day I ask that God will graciously lead her to the hearth and home where she will experience helping hands and heedful hearts a plenty.

Every year Rosemarie and I create a hearth fire for a small group of people for one week. The task of a deep spirituality with the wonderfully wild God of welcome and life, is to create this sacred place everywhere.

**Erik Riechers SAC**

*Haus Feldberg-Falkau, Feldberg, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021*