



Who knew healing could be so simple?

By Bob Hill

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Here's something to think about – “voluntary simplicity.”

Its implication – and truth – is that it's become way too hard to keep things simple. We have to work at it; simple can't happen without effort.

It's a thought from Joseph Mitchell, director of the Passionist Earth & Spirit Center located on 20 wooded acres in the Louisville Highlands that most of you never knew existed.

He is seated on the screened-in porch behind the red-brick barn that serves as the spiritual life center. He is soft-spoken, incredibly relaxed and apologizes if his words sound a little too “woo woo.”

“The language fails us,” he explains.

OK, but the message is everywhere.

It is outside the screened in-porch, where healthy mounds of heirloom tomato plants rise up from the earth.

It's just down the hillside, where a huge vegetable garden stuffed with beans, kale, chard, peas and squash thrives in compost-enriched land.

The vegetables are loosely penned within an artful fence made of old sticks and pruned honeysuckle branches, giving the garden a rustic, pioneer look. It has been weeded and watered by about 300 volunteers, from kindergarten students to Bellarmine University students.

More recently, the sexually, emotionally and physically abused girls from Maryhurst have also tended the garden – and taken home its bounty.

“Our focus,” says Holly Clark, the center's garden educator, “is to provide healing for the earth, the growers and the community the garden supports.”

All of which Mitchell had in mind when he began tilling the fields around the center. His biography lists him as “a priest in the Roman Catholic tradition.” Mitchell earned a graduate degree in philosophy, cosmology and consciousness at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco.

His current work, his biography says, “engages the rela-

tionship between the emerging scientific cosmology and Christian theology, the cultural implications for human institutions, and the role of humanity in the story of the Earth.”

Yeah, it does get a little too “woo woo,” doesn't it?

But the inner message is simple: We were not put on the earth; we came from the earth. If you see the earth as a living system, a living organism, then God was a part of the process of evolution.

There is some argument on how long it took – with the time period ranging from 6,000 years to about 13 billion years – but either way, some creator was part of the deal.

“There's something about us,” Mitchell says, “that's beyond our mind and our body.”

The bad news is we haven't been taking very good care of either one. Which has led Mitchell and the Passionist Earth & Spirit Center to offer a series of classes on human and world healing through discussion, meditation and, well ... weeding tomatoes?

The classes cover global warming, discovering a sense of place, globalization, and yes, voluntary simplicity. Information is available at www.earthandspiritcenter.org – or call (502) 452-2749.

Mitchell's leading guru on all this is writer-philosopher-“geologist” Thomas Berry. He avoided all “woo woo” with this summation: “The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.”

It really isn't that difficult to understand. Look around you at what we've done to ourselves, our planet. It's summed up in a cartoon on Mitchell's wall. A globe is sitting in an old orange chair – somehow looking anxious. The caption reads, “Your mother would like a word with you.”

Are you ready to talk?

Bob Hill's column appears on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Reach him at (502) 582-4646 or bhill@courier-journal.com. Comment on this column, and read his blog and previous columns, at www.courier-journal.com/bobhill.