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Thin Places, an ecumenical sampler of events and resources for spiritual growth, with a particular interest in the contemplative spiritual journey, is published by the Spiritual Life Community of Westminster Presbyterian Church.

Look for *Thin Places* at:
thinplaces.us or
westminstermpls.org/publications



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Taizé: Cold-shower Spirituality . . .

by Rev. Dr. Dirk G. Lange

Many years ago, I finished college and took off for France. I wanted to study French and had signed up for courses at the Alliance Française in Paris. In the months before leaving, a couple of pastors had talked to me about the Community of Taizé. This was long before Taizé became well-known in North America and around the world.

I was intrigued and contacted the Community. The brothers wrote back (yes, this was long before computers!) with information and, in the envelope, a publication called “The Letter from Taizé” – a letter Brother Roger wrote every year from a slum where he was living with his brothers and young people. I was immediately struck by this balance and contrast: prayer and action.

When I arrived in Paris, I immediately got on a train for southern Burgundy and then onto a bus that would take me to Taizé. It was a beautiful September afternoon. The sun was warm and the Burgundy vineyards were yellow with ripened grapes and turning leaves. The hills were calm, rounded, gentle, soothing. The villages, the old medieval villages, seemed half asleep, the occasional bell tolling.

The bus stopped at the bottom of one of the hills, dropped me and two others off, and continued its route. I looked around in amazement. There was nothing here! It was just a bus stop in a field. The two other young people motioned to me: you have to climb up the hill . . . Taizé is on the top of the hill! So, with my luggage and after more than 24 hours traveling, I started trudging up the hill, towards a sleepy medieval village.

Now let me add another piece of information. When I received the information from Taizé about visiting the Community, their description spoke about the 12th century Romanesque church in the village. For some reason – perhaps the naivety of youth or my own idealism – I had pictured an ecumenical community, centered around that 12th century church, like the monastery in *The Name of the Rose*. As I climbed I could barely wait to find my room, to experience the silence, to participate in the monastic prayer.

Something, however, didn’t quite fit. I had an uneasy feeling that things weren’t quite how I’d imagined they would be. Already, you know, there were these two other young people walking with me up this rather steep hillside – one was German and the other was Dutch, I believe. In their attire, these two didn’t strike me as persons who would be going to a 12th century monastery (but that judgment revealed more about me than about them!).

My worst feelings were confirmed as we got to the top of the hill and entered an area called “The Welcome.” This entrance area was teeming with young people. There was an old white-washed house with stone and wood benches. There were

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plastic bowls with some powered tea and a curious type of spiced cake. But mostly, there were many more people than I had ever imagined. I was ushered into a little welcome house where I filled out a registration form and was told – to my even greater surprise – in which barrack I would be living!

There was no 12th century monastery. There wasn't even a spiritual retreat center (let alone private rooms!). There was just this field, on the top of a hill, with tents and barracks all over it, full of young people, circulating in every which way. My first cold-shower – all my expectations of a monastic experience went down the drain. (The next cold shower experience was a literal one because Taizé, at the time, had no warm water for the young guests!)

No sooner had I settled in when the bells began to toll. I walked to the big church that looked more like Noah's Ark poured out of concrete than a church. I entered with the other thousand odd people and was struck blind. It was so dark that I couldn't see a thing, and certainly no chair or pew to sit in. As my eyes adjusted, I saw that everyone was sitting, kneeling, or squatting on the floor. I knelt down, too, and waited.

The bells gave way to a profound silence, and then a brother's clear tenor voice began in French, "Seigneur, ouvre mes levres . . . (Lord, open my lips)." I did not understand a word (remember I'd come to France to learn French), but the tears began to flow. They did not stop flowing for the whole prayer. The cold-shower had turned into a warm, quite literal, flooding.

Despite this cold-shower experience, I remained in Taizé a second week . . . then a third week . . . and finally almost twenty years.

I never did go back to Paris for those French courses (though I did end up learning French). That first cold-shower experience had more to do with me than with the warmth and beauty and generosity of Taizé. In fact, for the next twenty years and now for all the many years since I left Taizé, that cold-shower experience has marked my spiritual journey. Martin Luther writes that "prayer is almost like a baptism." Yes! On this journey, God has taken me and continually washed me down, so to speak. Prayer has been a continual stripping away of those things I want to cling to, all those identity markers I want to construct around myself. Prayer is not about me.

The other discovery I made at Taizé has had equal impact: prayer and action, contemplation and struggle, always go together, as Brother Roger had shared so many years ago. The fervent prayer of the heart, being

immersed in God's Word, shaped by God's Word, flows forth in solidarity with the neighbor, with all those who suffer in this world, in the streets around me. The cold-shower of prayer opens us, frees us . . . for this unique solidarity . . . for reconciliation.

Dirk Lange was the Chief Liturgist for many of his years at Taizé and was asked to be the Lead Planner and Liturgist for the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation Prayer Service celebrated jointly by Pope Francis and leaders of the Lutheran World Federation in Lund, Sweden, in October 2016.

Dirk is Academic Dean and Professor of Worship at Luther Seminary in St. Paul. He and his wife, Ilona, have four children. Dirk may be reached at: dlange001@luthersem.edu.

Ongoing Opportunities

**"Now is the Spring of our discontent
made glorious summer by the sun of June,"**

or however Shakespeare had it, for this year's Spring that couldn't get started has suddenly become the glorious season of green growing things . . . of time off or of time away . . . of opening ourselves to God's world, . . . to nature fully alive.

And this might also be a time to think about our own growing . . . about the retreat, workshop and new worship opportunities available to us in these days of Ordinary Time . . . and perhaps, especially, a time to think about some of the longer-term spiritual growth opportunities, whose registration deadlines are likely to come in August or early September.

"Anything can become a spiritual practice . . .

. . . once you are willing to approach it that way—
once you let it bring you to your knees
and show you what is real
including who you are
who other people are
and how near God can be . . ."

Barbara Brown Taylor,
An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith

Opportunities like the “Extended Ignatian Exercises”

offered by **Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality**

The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius have been offered in monastic intensive retreat settings continuously since this famous collection of “exercises in prayer and discernment” was created over four hundred years ago. Now, they are often also offered as a “retreat in daily life”: daily prayer and practices at home, with once-a-week meetings to share the week’s experiences in prayer and daily life with a director, extended over at least eight months.

Now—as they have since their beginning, and however offered—the Exercises provide people of all backgrounds and experiences a proven process:

- for integrating life and prayer
- for coming to greater freedom of spirit
- for deepening a personal relationship with God
- for finding God more deeply in all parts of life

Seeking to grow in these aspects of our lives does require extended weekly perseverance. But that being accepted, you may wish to consider joining the cloud of witnesses who have gone before:

Program starting dates are arranged individually

Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality

Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph, St. Paul

For more information or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities: www.sacredgroundspirit.org or 651.696.2798 or info@sacredgroundspirit.org.

Two Opportunities

at Christos Center for Spiritual Formation

—with summer deadline dates—

Sacred Connections: Spirituality Meets Real Life

This eight-month program (Oct-May) explores the connections individuals have with the Divine, with others, and with themselves. The program dignifies questions and doubts . . . inviting deep and wide exploration through an authentic spiritual community and contemplative practices that deepen the inner life.

It is open to people of all backgrounds and experience, to anyone who desires a deepened relationship with God, seeks authentic spiritual community and support, welcomes the development and deepening of spiritual practices, is open to learn within an ecumenical Christian environment, and longs to be a transforming presence in the world:

1st and 3rd Tuesdays, Oct.-May, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Applications and information are available at <http://www.christoscenter.org/sfp/sacred-connections> contact us at info@christoscenter.org or 651-653-8207 Early registration deadline is August 15.

Standard registration deadline is September 15.

also:

Tending the Holy:

Preparation for the Ministry of Spiritual Direction

This two-year program of training to be a spiritual director rests on the core premise that we receive the gift to be present and listen to another’s story in a healthy way through our own prayerful practices and contemplative experiences of God.

Each of the units is designed to encourage those experiences. The program’s peer groups foster honest and deep sharing of the insights and affects of the formation process. Program requirements include readings, written reflections, practicums in receiving and giving spiritual direction, and peer supervision:

Two Thursdays per month, Sept.-May, 7:00-9:30 p.m., over two years: Registration deadline is August 1

For more information or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities—like our **Quiet Garden Retreat Days** (July 13, 14, Aug. 10, 11, Sept. 14, 15): www.christoscenter.org/tth or 651.653.8207 or info@christoscenter.org.

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation

1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes, MN

Chicago Center

Tau Center, 26W171 Roosevelt Rd., Wheaton, IL

And **Three Opportunities**, long in place, at the **Shalem Institute**

Transforming Community:

Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups and Retreats

. . . provides resources and support for leadership of short- and long-term contemplative spiritual formation groups and retreats

“ . . . opening up and letting go . . . ”

“Faith points to an *initial opening* of the heart or mind, from our side. Foundationally, this is all it is.

And such an opening or re-opening is necessary to help you make fresh starts or break through to new levels. You normally have to let go of the old and go through a stage of unknowing or confusion before you can move to another level of awareness or new capacity.

This *opening up and letting go* is largely what we call faith. . . . Our faith is not a belief that dogmas or moral opinions are true, but a faith that Ultimate Reality/God/Jesus *is accessible* to us . . . ”

Richard Rohr, *Daily Meditation*, 18 July 2017

Nurturing the Call: Spiritual Guidance

. . . designed to provide resources and support for the ministry of one-to-one spiritual guidance and to assist in clarifying a calling to the ministry

Going Deeper: Clergy Spiritual Life and Leadership

. . . provides a dedicated time for congregational clergy to nurture their own souls and to deepen their contemplative orientation as spiritual leaders

Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation

3025 Fourth Street NE, Suite 22, Washington, D.C.

For more information or registration details and application deadlines: www.shalem.org or 301.897.7334 or margaret@shalem.org.

Three New Centering Prayer Groups:

Sisters of St. Francis

1001 14th Street Northwest, Rochester, MN
Mondays, 6:00-7:00 p.m., we meet in the Sun Room,
3rd floor of the Mother House
For information: Sr. Claren Sellner
claren.selner@rochesterfranciscan.org.

Edgcumbe Presbyterian Church

2149 Edgcumbe Road, St. Paul
Tuesdays, 3:00-4:00 p.m.
12-Step Friendly Centering Prayer group
Enter office door on north side, meet in the Sanctuary
For information: Julie Gebben Green
pastorjulie@epchurch.org.

University Lutheran Church of Hope

601 13th Avenue SE, Minneapolis
Fridays, 1:00-2:00 p.m.
Free parking in lot on north side of building
For information: Nicholas Tangren <nickt@ulch.org>
612.331.5988, ext. 14.

Contact **Minnesota Contemplative Outreach** for information about Centering Prayer, Centering Prayer groups statewide, and other up-coming opportunities: info@minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org or www.minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org.

“Prayer is . . .

. . . a serene force at work within human beings, stirring them up, changing their hearts, never allowing them to close their eyes in the face of evil, of wars, or all that threatens the innocent of this world. From it we draw the energy to wage other struggles, to transform the human condition and to make the earth a place fit to live in . . . ”

Brother Roger of Taizé, *Prayer for Each Day*

An Update on Fr. Thomas, from Mid-May

With better 24-hour care at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts, Fr. Thomas is in less pain, is eating well and gaining strength. He is still not able to engage in regular activities or return correspondence. Your continued prayers are appreciated.

One-Time Opportunities

“The spiritual life according to Henri Nouwen”

This will be the first specifically spirituality-focused public event to be offered in The Clearing, in the new Open Doors, Open Futures Building at Westminster:

Wednesday, May 30, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

The evening will feature Wil Hernandez discussing his new book [he is the founder of The Nouwen Legacy www.nouwenlegacy.org], followed by questions and answers, with mingling/refreshments afterwards.

This gathering is an opportunity to learn more about the real and practical possibilities of a spiritual life as Henri Nouwen came to see them and a chance to see Westminster's new spaces. All are invited.

There will be no admission fee, just a free-will offering and no pre-registration. Please just come.

Offered by Venite Ministries [109 East 26th St., #3, Mpls.]—co-sponsored by **Restoration Ministries** [info@restorationmnm.org] and **Thin Places**
Held at Westminster Presbyterian Church
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

Free on-site parking [300 stalls beneath the new Building], enter off Alice Rainville Place, between Marquette and Nicollet Mall.

For information about this or other up-coming Venite opportunities: www.veniteministries.org or 763.333.8976 or nancy@veniteministries.org.

The Spiritual Journey to the True Self:

Where East Meets West

In Western culture, yoga is known by many as a program of body movements to help with balance, strength and flexibility. But, as many may also know, yoga as a much broader spiritual system of ancient India.

The yogic journey, as a spiritual path to the true self, mirrors the Christian contemplative tradition as

initially taught by Jesus, St. Paul and the Desert Mystics; and more recently by Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, Richard Rohr and many others. This common path also provides the central story line in two transformational epics: the life of St. Francis in the West and the story of Arjuna as told by the Bhagavad Gita in the East.

We will explore these parallel stories of disillusioned warriors turned mystics – tales that hold the key to unlocking hidden inner treasures. Jeff Dols will weave these epic tales with his own story of traveling along both the Western and Eastern paths. Along the way, participants will be guided on their own journeys, provided with roadmaps and techniques from both East and West that point to a common destination . . . self-realization and divine union:

**Friday, June 8, at 3:00 p.m.-Sunday, June 10, at noon
Franciscan Spirituality Center**

920 Market Street, La Crosse WI

For information or registration for this and other upcoming opportunities—like **Exploring Celtic Spirituality** (August 17-19): www.fscenter.org or 608.791.5295 or fscenter@fspa.org.

Condensed School of Lectio Divina

You will immerse yourself in a Scriptural text that speaks to your heart—one that can help you walk through the world in a sacred way.

This popular retreat has been shortened and is less expensive, with its core teachings remaining intact. It is an excellent introduction to the practice of Lectio Divina for new participants, and a good review for past participants. A special opportunity:

**Friday, July 20 at 7:00 p.m.-Sun., July 22, at 1:00 p.m.
The Benedictine Center, St. Paul's Monastery**

2675 Benet Road, St. Paul

For information or registration for this and other upcoming opportunities like **Taizé Reflection: Silence and the Mystery of Wholeness** (Aug. 17: 651.777.7251 or www.stpaulsmonastery.org or benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org .

Healing the Deepest Hurts with Contemplation: A retreat for men & women (that returns every year)

This retreat will use Ignatian contemplation of the life of Jesus to heal the fear, anger, guilt and shame of our own life. As we walk with Jesus, sharing the Scriptures on our road to Emmaus, our hearts too will have the opportunity to burn within us and return with new life, so we can wisely and compassionately accompany those overwhelmed by trauma:

**Friday, July 20, at 8:00 p.m.-Sun., July 22, at 12:45 p.m.
Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN**

For information or registration about this or other upcoming opportunities—like **Spirituality and the Seasons of Our Lives** (July 6-7), and many more: 763.682.1394 or jhanson@kingshouse.com or www.kingshouse.com.

Oasis of Wisdom and the Episcopal House of Prayer

David Keller, the Founding Warden of the House of Prayer, and Emily Wilmer are returning to Collegeville and will be in residence there for a month: July 16 – August 16.

While there, Emily will lead a retreat:

**Mary, Mother of Jesus: A Woman for Our Time
an intergenerational retreat for women**

During this weekend together, we will bring Mary out of the bright lights of Advent into the ordinariness of daily life, as we slow down, share silence and song, poetry and prayer, and time for personal reflection.

Participants are encouraged to bring a woman from another generation—or come on your own:

**Friday, July 27, with dinner at 6:00 p.m.-
Sunday, July 29, after lunch**

David will also lead a retreat:

**More than Words: Encountering Jesus' Life
of Prayer and Ministry**

At a time in the church's life when "spiritual formation" has become a priority what can we learn from Jesus' Jewish spiritual formation and its influence on his life and ours? This retreat experience will explore Jesus' life of prayer as a devout first-century Jew and the consequences of his prayer in his personal life and in his active engagement with society. It will integrate substantive academic presentations with contemplative prayer and discussion. It is designed for clergy and laity:

"The present moment is . . .

. . . where life can be found.

And if you don't arrive there, you miss your appointment with life.

You don't have to run anymore. Breathing in, you can say, 'I have arrived.' Breathing out, you can say, 'I am home.'

This is a very strong practice, a very deep practice . . . "

Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Present Moment*

Friday, August 10, with dinner at 6:00 p.m.-
Sunday, August 12, after lunch

The Episcopal House of Prayer, Collegeville, MN

To learn more about David and Emily and their current ministries, go to: www.oasisofwisdom.net.

For information or registration for these two retreats and many other up-coming opportunities—like **Kenosis**, led by Ward Bauman, David successor at HOP (July 8-15) and **Wisdom School** (June 25-30): 320.363.3293 or houseprayer@csbsju.edu or www.ehouseofprayer.org.

Studium: A Scholar's Program

Studium places special emphasis on the love of learning and honoring scholarship as a sacred ministry. Whether your project (book, essay, poem, composition, whatever) is ready to begin, underway and you're stuck, or almost done—Studium has been for many and may be for you just what you need:

**Programs—from a week to four months—
arranged individually**

**Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict's Monastery
104 Chapel Lane, St. Joseph, MN**

For information or registration for **Studium** or for other offerings like **Spiritual Direction** or our **Hermitages** or the **School of Benedictine Spirituality** beginning in the fall: 320.363.8987 or mholicky@csbsju.edu or www.sbm.osb.org/minstries/spirituality-center.

Liberating the Heart: A Journey of Transformation

A Day Retreat with Joyce Rupp and Sara Thomsen

Spiritual liberation involves affirmation and acceptance of the enduring quality of one's core goodness. It also requires recognition of personal obstacles and a choice to become free from interior barriers that limit spiritual growth. This retreat day focuses on an in-depth approach to becoming a more whole human being, one

"If we stop . . ."

. . . and let life in our particular community of faith give us new eyes to see, we might catch a glimpse of the Beyond moving close by.

Our very people—with whom we worship and work, argue and disagree, pray and hope, love and live—can become a thin place, where God is known first hand.

And in our thin place families called congregations, the veil of mystery surrounding the divine can, indeed, become exceedingly sheer. God is near . . ."

Tim Hart-Andersen, in *Thin Places* # 67

whose vision and way of life becomes ever more transparent and animated. This inner freedom leads to an expansion of compassion and to dwelling in fuller harmony with both self and the larger world.

Sr. Joyce Rupp is widely known for her work as a writer (of over twenty books, e.g., *Fly While You Still have Wings*), spiritual midwife, and retreat leader [www.authorjoycerupp.com]. **Sara Thomsen** is a weaver of song and community singing and founder and artistic director of the *Echoes of Peace Choir* community choir in Duluth, Minnesota [www.sarathomsen.com].

This will be a very special day. Come and restore your joy, peace and passion for life:

Saturday, September 22, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Offered by **Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality**

Held at: **Rauenhorst Ballroom, Coeur de Catherine, St. Catherine University, 2004 Randolph Ave., St. Paul**

For information about this and other up-coming opportunities: www.wisdomwayscenter.org or 651.696.2788 or rdobias@wisdomwoayscenter.org.

Reading Opportunities:

A New Song to Sing

The Rev. Linda Loving is known across the nation for her powerful one-person dramatic presentation of **Julian of Norwich** and is remembered by many in Minnesota for her years as the Senior Pastor at House of Hope Presbyterian Church in St. Paul.

When she first learned that she had breast cancer, she felt calm and rational. As a parish pastor, she'd tended to so many women with breast cancer over the years that she simply thought, "Well, one in eight women gets this diagnosis in her lifetime."

But things quickly became more personal and fragile as she had to make complex treatment decisions, lost her hair, spent nine days in the hospital critically ill from a reaction to a study drug, and lost her identity as a healthy career woman. . . .

A New Song to Sing: Breast Cancer as Journey of Spirit

is an account of Linda Loving's years-long journey towards recovery, and writing it was an important element in the healing. It is also a workbook for breast cancer survivors, providing a springboard for discussion and healing, offering a safe place for women to tell their stories without feeling the need to edit or censor.

More information can be found at:

www.spirited-voices.com.

“ . . . the vision that Jesus starts . . . ”

Mere Spirituality: The spiritual life

according to Henri Nouwen, by Wil Hernandez

As the author says up front, this is not an interpretation of Nouwen’s understanding of the spiritual life but an attempt to “let Nouwen speak for himself,” by choosing Nouwen’s central insights about the nature of the spiritual life—understandings which he often revisited, with added nuances, in the more than forty books he published during his lifetime.

Since *Thin Places* had become a co-sponsor of Wil Hernandez’s [May 30, at Westminster] Twin Cities’ presentation of his new book before it had been read, eyes opened wide when it was seen that the book is organized around a passage about the spiritual life that is also the center of “***The Vision that Jesus Starts: A Follower’s Quiet Worship***,” a contemplative prayer service Westminster offers on the third Saturday of February each year. In Nouwen’s words,

“A biblical text that has been very, very important to me is the story in **Luke 6:12-19** where Jesus spent the night in prayer on the top of the mountain. In the morning, he came down and created a community of apostles around him. Then in the afternoon, with his apostles, he ministered—he went out and healed and proclaimed the good news.

I’ve been fascinated by that because it basically says, prayer at night, community in the morning, ministry in the afternoon. Now night, morning, and afternoon are symbols for *the vision that Jesus starts*.

The three areas

we have to consciously focus on are,

**one, communion with God, prayer,
or being in solitude with God;**

secondly, creating community;

and thirdly, doing ministry.”

Hernandez doesn’t include the Nouwen passage as such but references it when noting that his book’s three major sections: “Communion,” “Community,” and “Commission,” adding that it and they “sum up for us what an authentic spiritual life looks like: ***a life apart*** in solitude with self and communion with God; ***a life shared*** in community with other kindred hearts; and ***a life given*** for others in ministry.”

Readers might well wish to begin *Mere Spirituality* with the “Forward,” the “Preface,” the “Introduction,” and the compact but helpful “Overview of Henry Nouwen’s Life.” But since on many if not most pages throughout Hernandez inserts (in un-outlined boxes) single Nouwen

sentences, one might then wish to skim along, reading these sentences until one seems lifted up, and then stop to read and ruminate. In their boxes throughout, there are meditative stopping points like:

“*Attentiveness* helps us look fully at God, to invite God in more completely—it leads us into the depths of God’s healing mercies.” *from Turn My Mourning into Dancing*

“*Healing* means . . . the creation of an empty but friendly space where those who suffer can tell their story to someone who can listen with real attention.” *Reaching Out*

“*Community* is like a large mosaic . . . of little people who together make God visible in the world.” *Can You Drink the Cup?*

“*Community* cultivates that mutual vulnerability in which we forgive each other and celebrate each other’s gifts.”

A Spirituality of Living

“*Compassion* grows with the inner recognition that your neighbor shares your humanity with you.” *With Open Hands*

Or—an equally good way—just open to a chapter, perhaps “Chapter Three: Presence,” which begins,

“The more our spiritual sensitivities come to the surface of our daily lives, the more we will discover—uncover—a new presence in our lives.” *A Letter of Consolation*

But—however ***Mere Spirituality*** is read—many may well be struck by Nouwen’s down-to-earthness, his view of the daily doable-ness of a spiritual life, . . . by the inherent hopefulness of his belief that a spiritual life is a daily way of living that is available to every one of us, . . . when we seek to open ourselves to God through prayer, . . . when we join together in community, as children of God, . . . and when we then go forth to do ministry, as each of us is called.

Contact Us

Do you know of anyone—it’s free to all who ask—who would like to receive this ecumenical newsletter?

Do you know of an up-coming *Opportunity* that might be of interest to others?

If “Yes,” please contact Kristin Kieft at:
news@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

If you have other questions or comments, please contact us at: **thinplaces_us@msn.com**

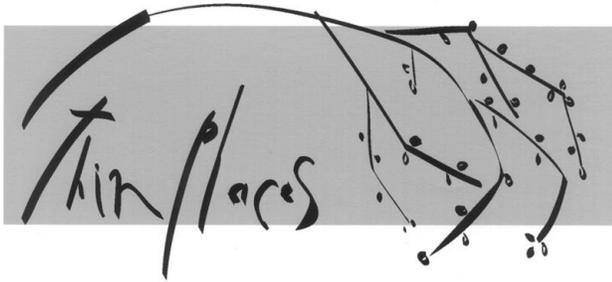


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“Taizé: A Cold-shower Spirituality . . .”
May 30: “The Spiritual Life according
to Henri Nouwen . . .”
“Glimpses, . . .”



Afterwords: Glimpses, just glimpses, of “. . . a nonreactive heart . . .”

Glimpses can come, . . . but they come as gifts, always, never as the result of something we might have done. Glimpses, hints of a way of being, short times of feeling enveloped by a sense of serenity and peace. Glimpses . . . that can seem to take on a somewhat sharper shape through the words of another, through words that seem to name, or to hint at the reality of a shared experience.

Words by Richard Rohr did that. In his book, *The Enneagram*, Rohr writes about something that can come: **“the gift or virtue of serenity, meaning a nonreactive heart—serenity holds the world with compassion and patience.”**

When come upon, these words brought a stop, seemed to be lifted up, . . . but why? Serenity, even only at times, would surely be a gift. But Rohr calling “a nonreactive heart” a gift? Hadn’t we read to all four of our children Maurice Sendak’s, *Pierre: A Cautionary Tale*—about a boy whose response to every new situation or experience was, **“I don’t care”**?

What might Rohr be thinking here? . . . Maybe it was that most of our time is spent *reacting* to external events and experiences. This can often be good, reacting to a need, doing justice. But is there something in addition to or beyond reacting to outside needs and experiences? . . . In *Centering Prayer*, we seek to gently let thoughts and external sensory input go by, to be nonreactive to them, to have a sense of being centered, of having externals and accidentals temporarily set aside, perhaps even sometimes to having a sense of resting in God’s presence. . . . And yet, could there be something in addition to or beyond even these great gifts? Maybe.

Maybe, for many of us, it was a Grandmother who was a nonreactive heart incarnate. A grandmother who, when grandchildren came, welcomed them with their favorite home-made cookies and milk. A grandmother who was not re-acting to their coming, but was acting out of her deep and unconditional love for them . . . something very different.

Maybe what was being lifted up in Rohr’s words was not so much the idea of “a nonreactive heart,” or its naming, but the gift offered to us—at least sometimes, and for a while—of serenity coming when we are able to simply, nonreactively

“hold the world with compassion and patience.”

Glimpses, just glimpses, can come, . . . of compassion as a steady state rather than as a reaction to a situation or experience, . . .
glimpses of serenity as a deep, continuing awareness of God’s unconditional love for us, . . .
and, perhaps, glimpses of the steady state experience of praying unceasingly. . . .