



Thin Places

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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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Surrendering our frenzied pace . . .

by the Rev. Kara Root

Sabbath-keeping, from the Hebrew word, **sabat, to rest**, (*Gen. 2:2, Ex.20:8-11*) involves stepping away from the regular patterns of life, trusting that when we do, God meets us in a particular way. Our congregation, Lake Nokomis Presbyterian Church, has been deeply changed through the practice since we began, nearly ten years ago, taking two weekends a month (2nd and 4th) to worship on Saturday evening and setting aside those Sundays as Sabbath Days.

Sabbatical-taking is a more extended form of Sabbath-keeping. Last Fall, I was given a three-month sabbatical away from my congregation, during which both the congregation and I intentionally and separately contemplated, “*What would make my/our heart(s) sing?*” Those months were incredibly rich for me and filled with multi-layered experiences. I know that as I continue to process them, I will be discovering treasures for years to come, but for now, two stand out for their stepping out of regular life for a time, into an alternative way of being.

The first was my family’s visit to the Taizé community in France, as part of the extended time the four of us spent in Europe. The worship there resonated deeply for me. And while we’ve been drawing from their music and materials at Lake Nokomis for some time, to be surrounded by all the languages and cultures, with pilgrims from all over converging here, seeking silence, connection with God, a sense of unity across human cultures—it was heart achingly beautiful. I was particularly moved by the resurrection service on Saturday night, when very small children sat among and sang with the Brothers, who were otherwise set apart from the rest of us. Then they carried lit tapers out to the rest of us, lighting ours, and we lit each other’s, until the whole room was filled with light. Then one of them (who could have been no more than six years of age) led us as cantor in a sweet, high voice, and the whole assembly responded.

My two kids (11 and 14) so loved freely exploring the village and surrounding countryside, and showing me their discoveries—especially a Little Free Library on an otherwise empty farm road that conjured images of people coming to visit it from their field work, or stopping the car to get a book on the way home from school. Traveling with them for two months on end was challenging at times, and also deeply rewarding. It feels like we poured concrete into the foundation of our family. Being so together for so long meant we drove each other crazy—but then we were still with each other *through* the crazy to the other side—where we found deep love and new levels of understanding and gratitude.

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The second experience that pulled me into a different way of living and seeing was my visit with three other pastors to the Abbey of Gethsemani in Trappist, Kentucky, for a retreat at a monastery in the middle of nowhere, nestled among forested hills and rolling prairies. The five days of intentional silence was one of the most profound experiences I have ever had. Sticking with the silence long enough to feel the mind actually clear! Just after my arrival, I read something Thomas Keating wrote in his wonderful, *Intimacy with God*, “The psyche needs expulsion just like the body does.” I felt my crazy, monkey mind bouncing around with song lyrics and 90’s pop tunes, and so much noise non-stop for the first day and a half. And then . . . quiet.

The gift of a quiet, still mind remained with me for the rest of the time, and never ceased to fill me with wonder and gratitude. My friends and I—who have shared so much with one another through words—ate silent meals together, saw each other now and again at Compline, or Sext, *didn’t* speak, and felt ourselves drawn closer together. One day, a serendipitous connection had us strolling with Brother Paul, one of two remaining monks who knew Thomas Merton well, out to Merton’s hermitage (this was our one talking time). We heard stories and read snippets of his journals together. It was a holy afternoon we spent soaking up the peace of that place and Brother Paul’s deep presence.

Before flying home from Louisville, we had a whole day together to process what we’d experienced and how it might impact our lives, rhythms, and work with our congregations. For me the best part of this time had been two different hikes I’d taken for over three hours each. The first was through green forest with the deep silence of nature—which is, of course, a cacophonous silence—with birds and brooks and turkeys and squirrels and wind in the trees. A deep communing with nature, with no goal other than to be. Part of God’s great symphony.

“I only went out for a walk,
and finally concluded
to stay out until sundown—
For going out, I found,
was really . . . going in.”

John Muir, *John of the Mountains:
The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*

A frost overnight meant my second hike, two days later, was among brilliantly red-dipped trees and golden tunnels of lime and yellow above and below, watching the world shift into its Autumn garb so deliberately. It kind of took my breath away to have witnessed such simple and stunning change while it was quietly taking place. The whole week was a palpable integration of head, heart and body, and I left craving more opportunities to experience extended silence, and to offer that experience to others.

I could say so much more, and I also sense there is so much more here that doesn't yet have words. These stories will come. These lessons will unfold in time. And reuniting with my people, beginning to hear their own heart-singing stories of sabbatical time, reveals again that the gifts of Sabbath don't end when the set-aside time of rest ends. Instead, surrendering our frenzied pace to God's gentle timelessness means that even after we resume the ordinary, we continue to be met and fed by God in surprising and unexpected ways.

“So, God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it...” Gen. 2:2

“Remember the sabbath . . . and keep it holy” Ex.20:8-11

Kara Root is a pastor, spiritual director, writer, and workshop and retreat leader. A recovering world-class multi-tasker, Sabbath is a particularly rich vehicle for the Spirit’s work of transformation in her life. She loves to read fiction, walk and bake, and she takes every opportunity she can to travel and explore the world with her kids and husband. She may be reached at: kara@lakenekomispc.org.

Ongoing Opportunities

Retreat Opportunities in Prior Lake

Our Retreat House is situated on sixty wooded acres—with large trees, walking trails, and a small lake—near Prior Lake, twenty miles southwest of Minneapolis/St. Paul. It provides a spiritual oasis for people of all faiths seeking a deeper relationship with the Almighty. Our enlightening talks, lovely Chapel, attractive meeting spaces, and inviting private rooms—along with the care and concern of the friars and staff—provide a peaceful setting for prayer, reflection, and personal growth.

We offer a variety of retreats. In some, the retreat team gives a series of conferences around a particular theme, with ample opportunities for common prayer, liturgy, spiritual direction and with large blocks of time

for personal prayer, rest, and reflection.

For the second year in a row, we have expanded our opportunities for weekend Silent Retreats for Men and Women. The next one is the **Men's Silent Retreat, October 18-20**, Thursday evening through all day Friday.

For those who would like an extended period of silence, we offer three **Extended Silent Retreats: June 20-23, August 8-11, and September 19-22**. These retreats offer one retreat conference per day, which is optional, and more time for individual spiritual direction and personal reflection.

And we also offer opportunities for individual or private retreats, from Tuesday through Friday.

Perhaps you, or someone you know, could benefit from some time in quiet here at the Retreat House? Please pass the word along, and, please listen to where God may be calling you in the months ahead:

Franciscan Retreats and Spirituality Center
16385 St Francis Lane, Prior Lake, MN

For information or registration for these or other up-coming opportunities: 952-447-2182 or www.franciscanretreats.net or director@franciscanretreats.net.

Bluegrass Vespers

Please join us for Bluegrass Vespers at Westminster Presbyterian Church on Wednesdays in June.

The uplifting music for these services comes from "Mountain Vespers," a bluegrass-style evening prayer liturgy written at Holden Village, deep in the Glacier Peak Wilderness area in Washington.

We will begin with a hymn sing-along at 5:30, . . . followed by worship at 6:00 p.m., . . . and then a cookout and a time for fellowship at 6:30. The service—and the entire gathering—will be joyful, participatory, and family-friendly!

All activities will be outdoors, on the Nicollet Mall side of the church (in Westminster Hall if it rains). There is ample free parking, beneath the new Open Doors building, off Alice Rainville Place (13th Street). All are welcome ! :

Wednesdays, June 5, 12, 19 and 26—

Sing-Along at 5:30 p.m., Bluegrass Vespers at 6:00, Cookout and fellowship time at 6:30

Westminster Presbyterian Church

1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

For information about this or other up-coming opportunities—like **Gathered at Five** (Westminster's way of doing non-traditional worship that is casual and eclectic, every Sunday, 5:00-6:00 p.m.) : 612.322.3421 or www.westminstermpls.org or aweber@wpc-mpls.org or jteliczan@wpc-mpls.org.

Save the Date
Parker Palmer and Carrie Newcomer
at Westminster
Friday, November 15
details next time

New (or relatively new) Centering Prayer Groups

➤ **Episcopal Homes**

490 Lynnhurst Ave. East, St. Paul 55104

Thursdays, 6:30-7:30 p.m.

We meet in the Drew Room, on the 5th floor of the Terrace Building. Parking lot entrance on University Avenue.

Nelson Coffey, 651-238-8574

➤ **First Congregational Church of Minnesota**

500 SE 8th Ave., Minneapolis 55414

1st Friday of each month, 10-11:15 a.m.

20 minute sit; check-in; Keating video

Mary Lapham, 612-747-0709

➤ **University Lutheran Church of Good Hope**

601 13th Ave. SE, Minneapolis 55414

Fridays, 1:40-2:15 p.m.

Welcoming Prayer, starts after 1:00 CP mtg.

Mary Lapham, 612-747-0709

➤ **Lumen Christi Catholic Community**

2055 Bohland Ave., Saint Paul 55116

Every other Saturday, 9:30-11:30 a.m.

(alternates Saturdays with Salem Lutheran)

We meet in Room 237

Jim Babin, 651-699-2514

For a wide range of additional information, contact

Minnesota Contemplative Outreach at:

info@minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org or

www.minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org.

Tending the Holy:

Preparation for the Ministry of Spiritual Direction

This two-year program of training to be a spiritual director rests on the premise that we receive the gift to

"Here I stand, and I say a prayer:

'Come Lord, come down, come in, come among us.
Enter into our darkness with your light.
Come fill our emptiness with your presence . . .
Come, Lord, come down, come in, come among us.'"

Celtic Prayer, from the Holy Island of Lindesfarne

be present and listen to another's story in a healthy way through our own prayerful practices and contemplative experiences of God. Program requirements include readings, written reflections, practicums in receiving and giving spiritual direction, and peer supervision.

If you might be sensing a call to this ministry of helping, we will be glad to explore it with you:

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

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation

1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes, MN

Chicago Center

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

For information about this and other up-coming

opportunities in the Twin Cities—like the special

Quiet Garden Days (July 19 and/or 20, Aug. 16 and/or 17, Sept. 20 and/or 21): 651.653.8207 or

info@christoscenter.org or www.christoscenter.org.

For Opportunities in the Chicago area: 630.868.9425 or

donnascott@christoscenter.org

or www.christoscenter.org.

Enrolling for this Fall:

Join fellow pilgrims and explorers at Sacred Ground for **The Transformative Journey**, an eight-month spiritual deepening program starting this September.

Based on Sacred Ground's nationally recognized formation program, it focuses on self-exploration, the challenges of the spiritual journey, and the beginnings of learning to listen deeply to self, to others, and to the movements of the spirit. Components include faith, human and spiritual development; faith traditions, spiritual practices, Enneagram basics, insights of the mystics, and deep listening practice.

The Transformative Journey is a spiritual deepening program designed and open to all. But as an added bonus, if—at the end of the eight months—you feel called to continue, you can then enroll in the three-year training to be a spiritual director, with full credit for this first year:

Contact us or Register by/before August 15

Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality

“The light which shines in the eye
is really the light of the heart.
The light which fills the heart
is the light of God.”

Rumi, *It is What It Is*

Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph, St. Paul

For information or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities—like the **Sacred Ground Summer Institute** (three Saturdays, June 15, July 20, August 17): www.sacredgroundspirit.org or 651.696.2798 or info@sacredgroundspirit.org.

One-Time Opportunities

Exploring the Five Wisdoms: A Maitri Retreat

The Five Wisdom Teaching describes five personality and constitutional types, each arising from a unique elemental energy. This retreat will allow you to explore these energies through a special meditation practice and learn how to relate to each one with greater wisdom and clarity to enhance your personal growth and health:

Thursday, May 30, with supper at 6:00 p.m.—

Tuesday, June 4, after lunch

MICAH, Minnesota Institute of Contemplation and Healing, Crookston, MN

For information about this and other up-coming opportunities—like **The Cloud of Witnesses, Honoring Ancient Traditions: A Prayer Practice Retreat** (Sept. 13-15): www.micahprays.org or 218.280.4917 or trey.crxpres@midconetwork.com.

A Taste of Forest Bathing

We invite you to explore forest bathing. Inspired by the Japanese practice called Shinrin-yoku, forest bathing is an intentional practice of connecting with nature by going into the woods, sitting with trees, and surrounding oneself with the energy of the forest. Benefits may include elevated moods, joy, stress relief, increased focus, mindfulness and spiritual well-being.

Our morning will start with a brief introduction to forest bathing, followed by a guided immersion experience in the La Crosse Community Forest. We'll conclude with sharing tea and stories about what we noticed about our surroundings and ourselves:

Saturday, June 1, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Franciscan Spirituality Center

920 Market Street, La Crosse, WI

For information or registration for this and other up-coming opportunities—like **The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius in Daily Life** (a nine-month program beginning in September: for more information or registration, contact Stacey Kalas, skalas@fspa.org or 608.791.5296), and **When Retirement Comes: Renegotiating Our Purpose** (June 15), or

A Retreat With the Mystics (June 28-30): www.fscenter.org or 608.791.5295 or fscenter@fspa.org.

Men's Spirituality—Sacred Site Tour

As part of Healing Minnesota Stories' effort to create dialogue, understanding and healing between Native and non-Native peoples, we gather as a group of men to experience a Sacred Site Tour of the Twin Cities area.

Led by Jim Bear Jacobs (Mohican) and Bob Klanderud (Dakota), we'll immerse ourselves in Minnesota history from a Native perspective as we experience Dakota history, culture, and sacred sites through storytelling and are present to one another through silence/meditation/reflection.

We will meet at St. Peter's Church, 1405 Highway 13 in Mendota:

Wednesday, June 5, 5:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality

Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For information about this and other up-coming opportunities—including the **Tuesday Evening**

Meditation (weekly) and **Walking in Harmony: A**

Labyrinth Journey (June 14, July 12):

www.wisdomways.org or 651.696.2788 or rdobias@wisdomwayscenter.org.

Update on ARC Retreat Community Transition Plan

We are in a time of transition and have begun a four-month sabbatical during which the Board together with friends of ARC will seek to discern what is the future of an ARC 2.0 and if there is sufficient support for sustainable staffing, resident community, and funding for a relaunch as ARC 2.0.

As part of this process, we are hosting a gathering at ARC to further this conversation. It will offer tours of the grounds and building improvements, with time to remember the past and imagine the future. Please come and share your thoughts and hopes with us, both on-site at ARC . . . and on-line.

During the four-month down time, the Hermitage and the Cottage will still be available for use:

Sunday, June 23, 2:00-5:00 p.m.

ARC Retreat Community, Stanchfield, MN

For information about this gathering or to add your comments and suggestions to this conversation: transition@arctreat.org or 763.689.3540 or www.ARCretreat.org.

Men's Rites of Passage, Minnesota Region 2019

These five-days are not a retreat but are five days of

formal male initiation, of teachings on the "mysteries" and rituals of male passage to a more mature spirituality. They are based on the foundational work of Fr. Richard Rohr on masculine spirituality and are for men of any background who are committed to a spiritual journey. They are an invitation to listen to the "quiet voice of God" and a chance to return to life with a renewed commitment to your gifts:

Wednesday, June 19, at 2:00 p.m.-Sun., June 23 at noon

Sponsored by: **MN Males: Men as Learners and Elders**
Held at: Audubon Center of the North Woods

54165 Audubon Road Sandstone, MN

For information or registration: 763.482.1353 or www.malespiritualitymn.org or malespiritualitymn@gmail.com.

Healing Retreat for Men and Women:

"Healing Our Tired Heart,"

Caregivers, mothers, those in the helping professions, and anyone who is overworked often get edgy, sick, and even die prematurely because of "compassion fatigue." When tired, we become long on negativity and short on compassion because we are giving more than we are receiving. Come if you are feeling tired, a bit negative, burdened, or wishing you could change something in your life to get new life.

Presented by Fr. Matt Linn, SJ:

Friday, July 12, at 7:00 p.m.-Sunday, July 14 after lunch
also:

Looking ahead: Joyce Rupp, "Anchors for the Soul: Finding Peace amid a Hurried Life"

It is easy, as we rush from one thing to the next, to feel

Friends of Silence

"Friends of Silence"—offering selected quotations monthly. from a wide range of sources, for all who have been befriended by silence. It was started many years ago by the late Nan Merrill, who wrote the widely used *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness*, the Lead Meditation for our Issue #55, "Angels, voices, and spiritual awakening . . ." and more. This valuable resource is now carried on diligently (and selflessly) by a small ecumenical faith community located at Still Point Mountain Retreat near Harper's Ferry, WV.

Their newsletter is sent free to all who ask and is also archived on-line, with a very helpful "Search" feature. For more information or to subscribe: www.friendsofsilence.net or 304.724.1069.

off-balance, overwhelmed, or lacking in purpose. *Anchors for the Soul* offers a day of reorientation, rootedness, and restored inspiration in order to live peacefully within the endless tasks and anxieties that come our way.

Come and join in these brief hours that can bring us back to our center and remind us of the depth of stillness within ourselves:

Friday, September 13, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN

For information or registration about these or other up-coming opportunities: 763.682.1394 or jpolman@kingshouse.com or www.kingshouse.com.

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. These “Schools” frequently fill early:

Friday, July 19, at 5:30 p.m., with dinner—

Sunday, July 21, at noon

**The Benedictine Center, St. Paul's Monastery
2675 Benet Road, St. Paul**

For information or registration for this and other up-coming opportunities—like the ongoing **Taizé Prayer** (third Fridays each month, 7:00-8:00 p.m.) or the **Dementia Caregiver Support Group** (second Tuesdays of each month, 7:00-9:00 p.m.): 851.777.7251 or info@benedictinecenter.org or www.benedictinecenter.org.

An Initial opening . . . from our side

“An initial opening of the heart or mind, from our side—foundationally—this is all that Faith 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 on to another level of awareness or new capacity. . . .

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

The Holy Rule: Rekindling the Fire

This retreat—a conference retreat with the monastic community—is a special opportunity to step back and discover the *Rule of St. Benedict* as it encourages and challenges you.

Conference titles include *The Gaze of God*, *Balancing Work and Prayer*, *Hospitality*, and *Good Zeal*. Our time together will engage both heart and mind in deep listening to what God is saying to you on your spiritual journey at this juncture in your life:

Sunday, July 21, at 7:00 p.m.-Friday, July 26, 6:00 p.m.
Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict's Monastery

104 Chapel Lane, St. Joseph, MN

For information or registration for these and other up-coming opportunities—like our **Sophia Program for Women in Ministry** (call 320.363.7028 or contact mholicky@csbsju.edu for details) or the **Introduction to Centering Prayer** (August 17): www.sbm.osb.org or 320-363-7112 or mholicky@csbsju.edu or eantony@csbsju.edu.

Wisdom School, Summer 2019, “Places We Never Expected to Go: Being with Vicissitudes”

Our annual Wisdom Schools seek to make use of wisdom teachings for all faith traditions, but each one begins with the recognition that each of us already has seeds of Wisdom within, hard-earned insights and common sense forms of knowing that have emerged from our ongoing encounters with the Sacred, found right in the muck and mess and beauty of daily life.

This year, we will nourish these seeds by drawing upon wisdom teachings from Judeo-Christian and Buddhist traditions, exploring practices for “being-with” rather than bypassing the vicissitudes in our lives, and by learning small-group practices for “being with one another” during difficult times.

Each day will include retreat-leader teachings, periods of sitting and walking meditation, contemplative creative art activities, and contemplative conversations in small groups. We will carry light and joyful hearts as we engage our deep work:

Monday, July 22, before 5:00 p.m.—

Saturday, July 27, after lunch

**The Episcopal House of Prayer, Collegeville, MN
and**

**The House of Prayer in the City,
St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Minneapolis**

For information or registration for this and other up-coming opportunities—like our **Pilgrimage to Iona: A Journey to Silence** (October 6-17) or HOP in the City's **Contemplative Practice** (Mondays, 6:30-7:30 p.m.):

320.363.3293 or houseprayer@csbsju.edu or
www.ehouseofprayer.org or
www.ehouseofprayer.org/hopc.

Reading Opportunities:

Oneing, An Alternative Orthodoxy: Transformation,
Vol. 5, No. 1, The Center for Action and Contemplation

This series is by far the most scholarly of the many CAC offerings, but—like all the others—is fully readable and is full of spiritual-journey lessons learned, and shared.

When Cynthia Bourgeault acknowledges “a huge turning point in my own spiritual journey,” one’s attention is certainly gained:

“As a good student of Centering Prayer,” she writes, “I had been patiently working to dismantle my false self, assuming that my ‘true self’ would be what was left when the illusory pretender was exposed. . . .

[But] I gradually came to see that the much-maligned ‘false self’ is really our protector-self—and, what’s more, in a strange but real way, the reciprocal measure of our capacity for transformation. When you think about it, it’s extraordinary to what lengths a vulnerable and wounded human being will go, what intricate psychic armor he or she will construct, in order to remain in the game of life.

In that sense, this *nafs* (as the Sufis call it), this ‘lower, passionate self’ really carries the force of our hope, our stubborn courage to hang in, even when the odds seem hopelessly stacked against us.

The goal then, is not to dismantle the false self, but to transfigure it, reclaiming the qualities of essence it has so valiantly defended. That recognition was a huge turning point in my own spiritual journey, a whole new way of looking at myself and others. . . .”

Perhaps other “good students” reading this will say, “Amen,” . . . will feel that we, too, have or had journeyed

Contact Us

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

If you do, please contact Kristin Kieft at news@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

If you know of an up-coming *Opportunity* that would be of interest to other readers, or

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

too long with a sense that our egos and false selves were a big part of the problem and that nourishing our true selves was what we were called to do.

Good students of silent meditation have probably also sensed that there is a place beyond words and ideas or, perhaps, a place before words and ideas . . . and a subtle sense that words and ideas do not just show up in our minds. In another of the fifteen articles in ***Oneing: Transformation***, David Banner ironically—yet helpfully—puts words and ideas around this very sense:

“Thoughts are not awareness. They arise from awareness. Awareness is ***presence to what is***. Thoughts are what the mind creates to express ***what seems to be***. They are our judgments about the things that arise in awareness. This is why thoughts create duality. Awareness is non-dual, like the deep ocean. Thoughts are like the ocean’s waves — ripples on the surface of the whole. . . .

Banner then goes on to introduce a familiar metaphor, and then underlines it:

“Thoughts [and words] are mental constructs that point toward reality, . . . ***fingers pointing to the moon***. [Many] confuse the moon with the fingers and never get around to directly experiencing the reality behind the words.

This is why meditation offers tremendously important help in cultivating ways of softening our attachment to thoughts, something that is essential if we are to experience authentic transformation. . . .”

Tremendously useful as intellect and language are, contemplative experience surely shows, as Banner suggests, that we do need to be cautious about too insistently seeking to craft—and constrict—awareness into words and ideas.

The *very real gifts of the false self and the great gift of experiential awareness*, . . . two passages to linger over in this issue of ***Oneing***, a book full of experiences remembered . . . and spiritual-journey lessons shared.

Afterwords: continued from back page.

Is it any wonder that Music plays such an important part in our deeper experiences of worship? . . . or that Benoit Standaert includes Music in his alphabet of spiritual practices, or openings to spiritual life?

“When we sing, we pray twice.”

Brother Roger, on the sung prayers of Taizé

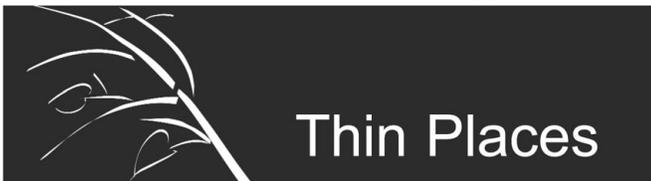


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“Surrendering our frenzied pace . . .”
 “Bluegrass Vespers . . .”
 “Music, a spiritual practice . . .”



Afterwords: Music, as a spiritual practice . . .

A book which continues to be fruitful . . . experiencing silence . . . a choir experience . . . “Music, as a spiritual practice . . .”

As noted before, Benoit Standaert’s *Spirituality, An Art of Living: A Monk’s Alphabet of Spiritual Practices* greatly broadens the definition of spiritual practices and deepens the understanding of what they do: seeing them—not as parts of a daily spiritual workout—but as “entrances to the spiritual life,” as intentional choices we make which open us “to being transformed, . . . to living differently.”

Some of the ninety-nine spiritual practices that Standaert describes are familiar (*Lectio Divina*, Meditation, the Jesus Prayer) but others—like Emptiness, Smiling, Vulnerability, and Music—may surprise as “entrances to the spiritual life.” But maybe not.

In her Lead Meditation above, Kara Root shares her experience worshipping with the Taizé Community in France, “with pilgrims from all over converging there, seeking silence, connection with God, a sense of unity across human cultures—it was heart achingly beautiful.” And she describes an especially poignant experience near the end of the Saturday night Resurrection Service, when one of the small children who had been sitting among and singing with the Brothers “(who could have been no more than six years of age) led us as cantor . . . in a sweet, high voice . . . and the whole assembly responded.”

Not every experience of music becomes, like this, a spiritual experience. But, Standaert asserts, music does have a built-in capacity to do so when we open ourselves to it, . . . has the potential of bringing us to a place of total presence, . . . to a place beyond words and ideas, where “nothing is expressed with complete precision,” . . . to a place where we are opened “to something beyond ourselves. . . . Music is the art of *otherness*. . . . Music opens the world to *more*. . . .”

Reading this description of music as a spiritual practice brought back the memory of an early reader who always said, ironic as it might seem, that the experience of music, of the sound of music, and of silence, of the absence of sound, can be more alike than opposite. In the deep experience of both, our normal sense of self and of time going by are muted or gone, replaced by a sense of being totally present, . . . of—in Standaert’s words—being open to something beyond ourselves, . . . open to otherness, . . . open to more. . . .

It also brought back the memory of an event held by the Alzheimer Chorus (which is sponsored by the MacPhail Center for Music in Minneapolis and is a caring help to people experiencing memory loss and to their caregivers). Forty people were on the stage at MacPhail, sitting side by side, care-givers and care-receivers, some looking around, others with their heads down, eyes closed. But when the music began, all sat up, becoming fully alive, joining in singing the old familiar songs. One could say, with Kara Root, “it was heart achingly beautiful.”

We learned later that the singing works because music operates through different parts of the brain than those used for language and thoughts. It seems, then, that Music—like Silence—uses other pathways than those used by words and ideas . . . other pathways . . .