



Grace in the very midst of anguish . . .

by the Right Rev. John Klassen, OSB

Dear Friends of Thin Places,

Nineteen years ago, I began my service as abbot of Saint John's Abbey. In the first week I found myself beginning the ministry of listening and responding to survivors of sexual abuse. These were individuals who were asking for space and time in conversation, for someone to listen to their stories, their confusion, disappointment and hurt, and their desire for healing and restoration. Nothing in my life as a chemist or as an ordained minister had prepared me for the intensity of these conversations. I would be untruthful if I claimed to be the soul of calm—initially, I was scared. Gradually, over time, came the realization that my only role was to be a compassionate presence. Survivors taught me about triggers, about the severity of the damage done. And I could never know if this listening time would be a “thin place,” where God's healing Spirit would be palpably present, if only for a short time.

One such instance occurred over a period of years. One of my confreres abused two young boys in a family in the 1970s. When they came forward in the 1990s with the allegations, they received funding for therapy and a settlement, but there remained a substantial anger, not so much against the Abbey but against the individual who had harmed them. In 2005, their father was killed in a car accident. Because he had so many friends at Saint John's, the family requested burial in the parish cemetery. The Dad had been a woodworker and a painter, and the family asked if they could use a monastery-made coffin. His wake, funeral and burial became the occasion for a deep measure of reconciliation. Relationships that had long been strained and tentative were re-vivified. It was a graced time, a thin place.

Later one of the sons emailed me and told me how much he wanted to be able to pray again. But it seemed to be a dead end, a cold “nothing” there. Not being quite sure how to respond, I sent him a book with a good translation of the Psalms and suggested that he look at some of the psalms of lament and of redemption: 13, 18, 88 and others. The psalmists—sharing their deeply human experiences from long ago—began to give him words to loosen the emotions buried so deep, for so long.

That experience and others led me to believe that one of the major problems with clergy sexual abuse is the corruption and distortion of the language that we use for God, and for sin, redemption, forgiveness, conversion, and holiness. Reconciliation will always happen in its own way, and at one or more levels, sometimes with the Church, between individuals, and with God. And one of the ways we can help survivors towards healing is in the recovery of meaningful God language.

A complementary experience of a thin place occurred more recently when I met with a woman in her late 70s who had been sexually abused by a priest when she was in her teens, over a number of years. Our conversation lasted over ninety minutes, and I realized that I was “standing on holy ground.” This woman had been a wife and a mother, had worked professionally, still loved the Church, and had managed to jettison the anger toward the offender. How, I wondered, had she fought through this horrible offense to her as a young girl and not let it overwhelm her life? Somehow, she had

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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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managed to separate God's love for her from the priest's crime against her—not an easy differentiation at any time in our lives. I am still in awe at the grace in this woman and can only be thankful for the gift of being in her presence.

A third example of being invited into a thin place happened this past fall. I was part of a panel discussion on clergy sexual abuse and had described how hard it has been to post the names and files of sexual offenders—of confreres—on our website. Hard, but utterly essential for such postings are a fundamental expression of repentance and of ownership.

A Lutheran clergywoman on the panel, during her initial presentation, offered an image of clergy standing before a congregation, with hands raised, asking for forgiveness, both from God and from the Body of Christ. And that image shot through me like a bolt of lightning because for me it frames this whole crisis perfectly. It is the way we as leaders, as abbots, clergy, and bishops need to move forward with reconciliation and healing: by asking for forgiveness, by an honest acknowledgement of the harm done, and a genuine commitment to sustained change.

For me the hardest part of these past nineteen years has been the intensity of these conversations, of these attempts at deep listening and reconciliation, of the laying bare of the severity of the damage done. Some conversations have ended, at best, in a neutral acceptance, without reconciliation or forgiveness but with a desire to move on. And sadly, many others have ended with the wound open and unhealed.

But others, especially those in which we were able to stay in relationship long enough for a thin place to emerge, have led to the surprising discovery of grace in the very midst of anguish . . . have been powerful witnesses to the depth of God's love.

I earnestly ask that those in the larger contemplative community pray for openness and for ongoing healing.

Abbot John Klassen, OSB
Saint John's Abbey

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.

Abbot John Klassen is the 10th Abbot of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville and has been a long-time friend and encourager of Thin Places. Many will remember his role in this newsletter's Twentieth Anniversary Worship Service last October, which brought together and celebrated the region's larger contemplative community.

He is particularly interested in the theological conversation between science and theology, especially in our understanding of evolution in relationship to biblical theology. Reading, biking in the summer and working out the rest of the year, and giving retreats are ways to renew. Abbot John may be reached at: jklassen@csbsju.edu.

Ongoing Opportunities

The beginning of any new "year" seems to invite a looking back and a looking forward.

The last time John Philip Newell was in town, he commented, "The depth of your contemplative network is unparalleled in the country." If this is so, its depth is due to the many churches, spirituality centers and other groups in the region and to the richness of the contemplative "Opportunities" that they offer. Worship services, retreats and workshops by more than two hundred such organizations have been noted, and there must be many more not yet known. [If you are a member or know of such a contemplative Opportunity, please share it with us at thinplaces_us@msn.com.]

The depth of this contemplative network has certainly also come through the faithfulness of those groups who have-been-there-doing-that every week or every month for many years, offering contemplative experiences of many kinds to us all. [Please also let us know if your long-term group is not here]:

Centering Prayer Groups

Except for those few years when Christmas Day fell on a Saturday, the St. Olaf Centering Prayer Group—they are thought to be the area's oldest—has come together to pray every week since February 1993, having been started by Sr. Joan Tuberty, and now carried on by faithful members (a few of whom have been there since the beginning). Their gathering on September 7 may well be **their 1,378th**.

Consider coming.

If you do, you will be warmly welcomed:
Every Saturday morning, 9:15-11:15 a.m.
St. Olaf Catholic Church
215 South 8th Street, Minneapolis

For additional information: 612.332.7471 or carolquest@q.com.

Beginning its twentieth year, the Centering Prayer group at **Incarnation Lutheran Church** meets **Every Tuesday, at 7:30 a.m., in the Chapel**
For information: l.linderscholer@gmail.com.

For more than seventeen years, Colonial continues to offer a place of silence to listen to God thru Prayer and Scripture:

Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina
First & Third Thursdays, 7:00-8:30 p.m., Oct.-May
Colonial Church of Edina, in the Hearth Room,
6200 Colonial Way, Edina,
For information: 952.926.2711 or www.colonialchurch.org or cjoanne1@comcast.net.

Taizé Evening Prayers

Now beginning its twenty-second year, the First Friday Taizé Prayer group—the area’s oldest—offers to each one who comes . . . a time for contemplative prayer and silence, with traditional Taizé songs and chants:
First Fridays, 7:00-7:45 p.m., beginning September 6
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church
4557 Colfax Avenue South, Minneapolis
For information: first.friday.taize@gmail.com or www.facebook.com/firstfridaaytaize or larryreynolds52@gmail.com.

For the sixteenth year,
Minnehaha United Methodist Church,
3701 East 50th Street, Minneapolis,
a church that—like most Methodist churches—takes its singing seriously, continues to offer, October to May:
Second Friday Taizé Worship, 7:00-8:00 p.m.
with sung prayers, scripture and silence
For information: www.minnehaha.org or 612.721.6231 or becky@minnehaha.org.

“Thin Places are places of transformation . . . ”

Abbot John Klassen

“Transformation: the stable conviction of the abiding presence of God, rather than a particular experience or set of experiences . . . a restructuring of consciousness in which the divine reality is perceived to be present in oneself and in all that is.”

Fr. Thomas Keating,
Open Mind Open Heart

These six Minneapolis faith communities, St. Frances Cabrini Catholic Church, Prospect Park United Methodist Church, Faith Mennonite Church, Compassion of Christ Catholic Community, Church of Gichitwaa Kateri, and Dignity/Twin Cities, begin again, in October, their truly ecumenical—as it is at the Community in France—monthly Taizé Evening Prayers. All are invited to this season’s first gathering:
Thursday, October 17, simple supper at 6:00 p.m.,
Taizé Evening Prayer at 7:00 p.m.

St. Frances Cabrini Catholic Church
1500 Franklin Avenue SE, Minneapolis
and

Thursday, December 5, simple supper at 6:00 p.m.,
Taizé Evening Prayer at 7:00 p.m.

Prospect Park United Methodist Church
22 SE Orlin Avenue, Minneapolis
For information about these and for the dates/places of these Taizé Evening Prayers in the new year:
612.339.3023, ext. 115 or chris@cabrini.org or www.cabrinimn.org.

Choral Contemplative Prayer:

Compline for a New Millennium

After twenty-six years, **The Minnesota Compline Choir** will no longer operate its own active choral program, but it may still be heard in archived recordings on their

The Book of Joy, Chapter Five,
“Forgiveness: Freeing Ourselves from the Past,”
by His Holiness the Dalai Lama
and Archbishop Desmond Tutu

“I have seen remarkable instances of forgiveness,” Archbishop Tutu declared, “carried out by people we would not have thought could possibly do it. In one instance during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we had mothers of some young people who had been lured by those working with the apartheid system into a booby trap where they were killed. . . . Then one who betrayed these young people came and appeared in front of these mothers and asked for forgiveness. . . . Because of the tenseness, we had to adjourn for a little while, but then, during the break, came a totally fantastic moment: one of the women got up and went across the room and embraced him. . . . Yes, it’s difficult, but it happened.

No one is incapable of forgiveness
and no one is unforgivable.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

website [www.minnesotacompline.org] or on archived Saturday evening radio broadcast. A number of the Compline Choir's members, however, are continuing to sing with our new Contemplative Prayer Choir for tenors and basses [potential members are invited to audition]:

Third Sundays, at 6:50 p.m., September-December

Choral Contemplative Prayer now joins Pilgrim's two long-standing contemplative Evening Prayers: A Celtic Journey into the Mysteries:

Celtic Contemplative Communion

Second Sundays, at 6:51 p.m., September-April

and

Nordic Contemplative Evening Prayer: A Celebration of the Rich & Haunting Music

of the Scandinavian Peoples

Fourth Sundays, at 6:51 p.m., September-March

Pilgrim Lutheran Church

1935 St. Clair Avenue, St. Paul

For information on these and other up-coming opportunities: www.pilgrimstpaul.org or 651.699.6886 or pilgrimlccomm@gmail.com.

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### **Spiritual Listening Training**

City House was founded in the later 1990's by Jim Dodge, a Methodist Pastor who had the vision of bringing spiritual direction to those on the margins of society. And to this day, its ministry remains focused on "spiritual listening with people in our community who are generally unseen and unheard."

**"God's forgiveness** is unconditional.

. . . it comes from a heart that does not demand anything for itself, a heart that is completely empty of self-seeking. It is this divine forgiveness that I [Henri Nouwen] have to practice in my own daily life.

It tells me to keep stepping over all my arguments that say forgiveness is unwise, unhealthy, and impractical. It challenges me to step over all my needs for gratitude and compliments. It demands of me that I step over that wounded part of my heart that feels hurt and wronged and that wants to stay in control and put a few conditions between me and the one I am asked to forgive.

This 'stepping over'  
is the authentic discipline of forgiveness."

Henri J. M. Nouwen,  
*Return of the Prodigal Son*

Because of this focus, they have been particularly interested in developing listening skills and now offer a quarterly workshop open to anyone who would like to participate. (City House doesn't mention it, but observation suggests that many of us are better at talking than at listening, and that listening may often be the more important skill.)

All are invited. Take a day to hone your deep listening skills, and see what might then happen:

**Friday, September 13, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.**

Offered by City House—to be held at:

**St Mark's Episcopal Cathedral**

**519 Oak Grove St, Minneapolis**

For information or registration for this or other up-coming City House opportunities: 763.443.0047 or [joyce@city-house.org](mailto:joyce@city-house.org) or [www.city-house.org](http://www.city-house.org).

For information about other up-coming opportunities at **St. Mark's Cathedral**—like their **Contemplative Prayer** (Thursdays, 8:00 a.m., in the Chapel) and their **Choral Evensong** (Sundays, 5:00 p.m., in the Nave): 612.870.7800 or [www.ourcathedral.org](http://www.ourcathedral.org).

**Admissions are now open (but only until Sept. 15) for the Living School for Action and Contemplation**

*"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."* — Howard Thurman

Are you ready to come alive in service of the world? **The Living School** is an immersive experience, going deep to the roots of faith to nurture a generative and compassionate life.

Our faculty—Cynthia "Bourgeault, James Finley, Barbara Holmes, and Richard Rohr—guide students through a formation experience rooted in a Christian lineage of contemplative practice, rigorous study, and meaningful engagement. The two-year program includes online course work and four gatherings in New Mexico.

Apply to join the 2020-2022 cohort. Begin your discernment process at: [www.cac.org/livingschool](http://www.cac.org/livingschool).

### **Groundings – Telling Our Stories**

Groundings is Sacred Ground's monthly lifelong learning presentations on current themes of spiritual inquiry and discovery. This year the programs will explore how we can deepen our connection with faith and Spirit through the writing and sharing of our stories:

**Third Thursdays, 9:30-11:30 a.m.**

- **September 17th** 31 Narrative Voices:

- The Narrative Voice of Home
- **October 15th** Learning How to Tell Our Most Life-Giving Stories
  - **November 19th** The Healing Doll Way
  - **January 21st** The 5 Movements of Prayer

**Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality**

**Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph, St. Paul**

For information or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities: [www.sacredgroundspirit.org](http://www.sacredgroundspirit.org) or 651.696.2798 or [joan@sacredgroundspirit.org](mailto:joan@sacredgroundspirit.org).

**Ice Break, by Sam Rahberg**

Sam is known by many as the Director of the Benedictine Center in St. Paul. **Ice Break**, his latest collection of poems, explores “the humble and familiar slow process of change” that many of us experience on our journey. “Like frozen top waters just beginning to crack and thaw, we depend on moments of sunshine and warmth or of pressure and collision” to help this process of change and growth, along the way.

It is available at [www.amazon.com/books](http://www.amazon.com/books).

**One-Time Opportunities**

**Contemplation and Community: A Gathering of Fresh Voices for a Living Tradition**

A resurgence of Christian contemplative living by emerging young practitioners is creating a new framework for spirituality, inside and outside of formal religion. This weekend will introduce these diverse voices, who reflect—from truly global perspectives—the gifts, challenges, differences and commonalities of Christian contemplation today for communities and people of faith.

**The Friday night event** begins with a public conversation and book launch for Contemplation and Community. You will have the opportunity to talk with the co-editors and enjoy readings and reflections from contributing writers:

Friday, September 20, 6:30-8:20 p.m.

**The Saturday All Day Retreat** offers reflection, practice, and workshops that explore more deeply the next era of Christian contemplative movement.

The day will be spent moving through three lenses of understanding contemporary Christian contemplation: Grounding in Practice, Transformation

in Community, and Embodiment, Compassion and Healing:

**Saturday, September 21, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.**

**Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality**

**Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul**

For information about these and other up-coming opportunities—**The Quest for a Moral Life** (a Men’s Spirituality offering, Sept. 26 ) **Witnessing Hospitality Film Series** (Dec. 6) and **Becoming One with the One** (Oct. 16): [www.wisdomwayscenter.org](http://www.wisdomwayscenter.org) or 651.696.2788 or [rdobias@wisdomwoayscenter.org](mailto:rdobias@wisdomwoayscenter.org).

**Iconography Workshop, St. Joseph or St. Nektarios:**

**Choose One to Paint**

Both a meaningful prayer practice and a technical art form, iconography traces its history to the beginning of Christianity. Icons are often referred to as “windows into heaven” and continue to be venerated within the Byzantine rite and are increasingly popular in America.

Noted American iconographer Phil Zimmerman will guide you step-by-step through the process of “writing” or painting an icon in the Byzantine style, following ancient guidelines and techniques while using modern artist’s materials. Each day of the workshop will also include prayer, reflection and historical information specific to the icon.

Please note this is not a silent retreat. It is a “work” shop (all materials and supplies are included). It is specially recommended for those who have done some painting (of any kind) but are open to learning this unique style of painting. When it ends, you will have in your hands an icon that you created:

**Sunday, September 22, at 7:00 p.m. –**

**Saturday, September 28, at 10:00 a.m.**

**Franciscan Spirituality Center**

**920 Market Street, La Crosse WI**

**“Healing**

**. . . is not forcing the sun to shine, but letting go of that which blocks the light.”**

Stephen and Ondrea Levine,  
*Embracing the Beloved*

**“What brings healing and joy?**

**Any act of giving brings healing and joy.”**

Tom Bender,  
*Silence, Song and Shadows*  
**[with thanks to Friends of Silence]**

For information or registration for this and other up-coming opportunities—like **Art as Prayer** (Sept. 16 and Oct. 21) and **Daring Greatly: A Weekend Experience** (three weekends): [www.fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org) or 608.791.5295 or [fscenter@fspa.org](mailto:fscenter@fspa.org).

### **Tending the Flame: An Exploration of Celtic Spirituality**

Discover the people of the Celtic lands, both indigenous and immigrants. You will learn about pre-Christian faith traditions and how they integrated with Christianity and the challenges they faced.

There will be time to reconnect to your deeper, contemplative self with times in nature and time to create meaningful rituals—drawn from the ancient Celtic practices—to restore your soul:

**Saturday, September 28, 9:00 a.m.-noon**  
**Christos Center for Spiritual Formation**  
**1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes, MN**

Remembered from a college  
British Lit survey class:

In the early nineteenth century, the English poet John Keats asserted that *“Negative Capability,”* the capacity for being comfortable with *“Not Knowing,”*

- the capacity

*“which Shakespeare possessed so enormously,”*

- the capacity for accepting

*“uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason,”*

was a great gift, an unshackling and enriching gift.

In the early twenty-first century, we may be more likely to call this challenging but liberating capacity *“Non-dual Thinking.”*

Richard Rohr, as many will remember, has repeatedly noted that non-dual thinking is a new way of seeing,

- that [paraphrasing]

*shifting to non-dual thinking involves experiencing the world with a new freedom, letting the walls fall away,*

- that—nourished by intentional contemplative practice—it lessens our seemingly built-in penchant

*for labeling things, or categorizing them too quickly, so we can come to see them in themselves—apart from the words or concepts that become their substitutes—in all their richness and complexity and ambiguity;*

it is a new way of knowing that brings into our daily life a clearly felt measure of richness and of peace.

For information about these and other up-coming opportunities in the Twin Cities—like **Contemplative Pause Weekly** (every Wednesday, 9:45 a.m.-noon) or **Moving Beyond Self Preservation to Resiliency** (Nov. 5): 651.653.8207 or [kathryn@christoscenter.org](mailto:kathryn@christoscenter.org) or [christoscenter.org](http://christoscenter.org).

### **Dakota Sacred Sites Tour**

These tours offer an opportunity to learn about Minnesota history from a Native perspective through storytelling and experiencing the sites in silence / meditation / reflection.

We visit sites located around the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, what the Dakota refer to as *Bdote*, or “meeting place of rivers,” including: Fort Snelling State Park, Dakota Internment Camp following the Dakota-U.S. War, and Pilot Knob Hill, a traditional burial ground.

These tours are very popular, are free, and frequently fill early:

**Sunday, September 29, 1:00-5:00 p.m.**

Sponsored by the **Minnesota Council of Churches**  
Meet at **Church of St. Peter**

**1405 Sibley Memorial Highway, St. Paul**

For more information and/or registration, contact The Rev. Jim Bear Jacobs at [jimbear@mchurches.org](mailto:jimbear@mchurches.org).

### **Christ and Evolution**

How do we understand and experience Christ in evolving creation? What does it mean for our daily lives? After both the morning and afternoon presentation, there will be personal reflection time followed with shared insights:

**Tuesday, October 22, 9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.**

also:

**Ancient Prayers for a New Millennium:**

**Finding God, Christ and Creation in the Psalms**

“The Psalms are the songs of [women and] men who knew who God was” (Thomas Merton). Who is the God of the Psalms? How can we pray the Psalms, enter the Psalms and experience the Psalms? This two-evening workshop explores these questions and others through presentations, practice and time for participant interaction.

**Two Thursdays, November 7 & 14, 6:30-8:30 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 **The Celtic Way: Writing Toward Wholeness** (Saturdays in October): 320-363-7112 or [www.sbm.osb.org](http://www.sbm.osb.org) or [mholicky@csbsju.edu](mailto:mholicky@csbsju.edu) or [eamtony@csbsju.edu](mailto:eamtony@csbsju.edu).

## Forgive Us and We Forgive Those

You will be invited to reflect on those things making it difficult to forgive others and also to accept God's forgiveness for your own failings.

In this session, you will reflect on questions that make it difficult to forgive, such as *"How do I deal with anger and hurt?"* *"What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?"* and *"How does the acceptance of God's forgiveness of me relate to my willingness to forgive others?"*

**Tuesday, October 22, 7:00-9:00 p.m.**

also:

## Spiritual Direction and Your Journey with God

If you'd like to know more about spiritual direction and how it can sustain your spiritual journey, or if you've experienced spiritual direction and want to go deeper, join members the spiritual direction staff for this event. There are times when having a companion who listens and helps you listen to yourself will sharpen your ability

### A Few, on "Mysticism"

"In the days ahead, you will either be a mystic (one who has experienced God for real) or nothing at all. . . ."

Karl Rahner, "Christian Living  
Formerly and Today"

"Mysticism is defined more truly as the intrinsic capacity of each self to touch and be touched by the Source—to know the Source through certitude too deep for words or images. . . ."

Beverly Lanzetta, *The Monk Within*

"Everything stems from mysticism, or primary religious experience. . . . We do need religion, yet we need direct contact with the divine, or ultimate mystery, even more. . . . [and perhaps, also, we need the Church to nourish direct experience, ed.]"

Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*

"Mystical perception is not a goal to be reached at the endpoint of the religious life but the **starting** point, the power that un-forms and then reforms knowledge, love, and perception. . . ."

Richard Rohr, *Daily Meditation*, 7 August 2019

to hear the voice of God:

**Tuesday, September 24, 7:00-9:00 p.m.**  
**The Benedictine Center, St. Paul's Monastery**  
**2675 Benet Road, St. Paul**

For information or registration for this & other upcoming opportunities—like **Together in Contemplation: A Practice-Based Spiritual Formation Group** (Second Tuesdays, Sept-Dec.):  
info@benedictinecenter.org or 651.777.7251 or  
www.benedictinecenter.org.

## A Retreat for Women whose Mothers have Died

"We mourn the death of our mother all the days of our life." Whether our mother died this year or many years ago, we grieve.

Some of us grieve what we had and some of us grieve what never was in our relationship with our mother. This retreat offers women an opportunity to explore the significance of mother loss:

**Friday, Nov. 1 at 6:30 p.m.-Sat. Nov. 2 at 4:00 p.m.**  
or

**Friday, Jan. 17, at 6:30 p.m.-Sat., Jan. 18, at 4:00 p.m.**  
**Loyola Spirituality Center**

**389 North Oxford Street, St. Paul**

For information or registration for this or other upcoming opportunities: 651.641.0008  
or loyolassr@comcast.net or  
www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org.

## A Weekend of Wisdom with Parker Palmer

Two opportunities:

**"What We Need is Here: Hope, Hard Times and The Human Possibility,"** a song and spoken word presentation with Carrie Newcomer

**Friday, November 15, at 7:00 p.m.**

and

**"We the People: A Time to Act,"** a special **Westminster Town Hall Forum** presentation, in conversation with Sondra Samuels, President of the Northside Achievement Zone in North Minneapolis  
**Saturday, November 16, at 11:00 a.m.**

**Westminster Presbyterian Church**

**1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis**

For information: 612.322.3421 or  
www.westminstermpls.org.

Also at Westminster this Autumn:

### Centering Prayer

Every Wednesday, at noon, in the Bates Room

### Contemplative Evening Prayer

Candlelit quiet prayer and silence, with music in the Celtic, Taizé and other traditions  
**Wednesdays, 6:00-6:30 p.m.**, in The Clearing

### Quiet Worship

Taizé sung prayers, Lectionary Scripture, Prayers of the People, and silence

**Third Saturdays, 9:00-9:45 a.m.**

around the fireplace in the Bushnell Room

### The New Performing Arts Series

In the first two years of the new building, the unexpectedly large number of performing arts groups that have chosen The Clearing for their public events has led to the creation of a new Performing Arts Series:

**Friday, October 11, at 7:30 p.m., Nachito Herrera**, pianist, one of the leading Cuban musicians of our time, with Cuban food

**Friday, November 1, Gospel Ensemble**, offering a joyous concert of South African music, as part of its "Forgive Tour"

**Friday-Saturday, December 13-14, James Sewell Ballet**, presents the classic and well-loved "Amahl and the Night Visitor"

**At the Town Hall Forum**, in addition to Parker Palmer: **André Thomas**,

*"The Impact of African-American Spirituals,"*

**Tuesday, November 12, at noon,**

**Westminster Presbyterian Church**

**1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis**

For information: 612.322.3421 or

[www.westminstermpls.org](http://www.westminstermpls.org) or [jteliczan@wpc-mpls.org](mailto:jteliczan@wpc-mpls.org).

#### An intricate relatedness

"A human being is a part of the whole, called by us *Universe*, a part limited in time and space. One experiences oneself . . . as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of one's consciousness. . . ."

Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. . . ."

Albert Einstein, Condolence letter to Norman Salit, reprinted in *The New York Times*, 29 March 1972

### Sacred Song: Short Retreat

#### Celebrating Chant & Sacred Words

All are invited to join us for this Advent celebratory retreat experience. We will be led by Sara Thomsen, the founder of the Echoes of Peace Choir and companion non-profit in Duluth, a weaver of song, increasing wonder and awareness, deepening spiritual connection, and widening social engagement through people coming together to sing together.

We will gather informally to share sacred words and chant, as well as shared contemplative prayer:

**Friday, Dec. 13 at 5:00 p.m.-Sat., Dec 14 at noon**

**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 upcoming opportunities—like **Discernment and**

**Contemplative Dialogue: Noticing and Responding to**

**Wisdom in Daily Life** (Oct. 10-13) and the House of

Prayer in the City Short-session Teaching Series

(offered September-December): 320.363.3293 or

[houseprayer@csbsju.edu](mailto:houseprayer@csbsju.edu) or [www.ehouseofprayer.org](http://www.ehouseofprayer.org)

or [www.ehouseofprayer.org/hopc](http://www.ehouseofprayer.org/hopc).

### Living a Trinitarian Lifestyle

This retreat explores the Trinity as a dynamic and relational mystery, inviting human transformation. As we journey with mystics and others who embraced the Triune God, these themes will emerge: love, hospitality, poverty, beauty, desire, service, and hope.

By exploring the Trinity, we are already gifted by it:

**Friday, Dec. 13 at 7:00 p.m.-Sunday, Dec. 15 after lunch**

**Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN**

For information or registration about this or other upcoming opportunities—like **Serenity (Twelve Step)**

**Retreat** (Sept. 27-29) and **Stories Told By Jesus:**

**Learning from the Parables** (Nov. 1-3): 763.682.1394

or [jpolman@kingshouse.com](mailto:jpolman@kingshouse.com) or

[www.kingshouse.com](http://www.kingshouse.com).

## Reading Opportunities

### ***Open Mind Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*, by Thomas Keating**

For this 100th issue, it seemed appropriate to turn back to the book that may have started many of us on our contemplative journeys, the book that began to turn what may have been a vague yearning or a hunger into something more concrete and do-able, that introduced us to the practice of Centering Prayer.

Remembering a book that was important to us at one point—perhaps especially a point well in the past—may be guided more by fondness than by accuracy, but that seems not to be so here. Looking back now, it was *Open Mind, Open Heart's* step-by-step guidance in the method and practice of Centering Prayer that probably first caught our attention. With chapters on “First Steps in Centering Prayer,” “Sacred Word as Symbol,” “Ordinary Kinds of Thoughts,” “More Subtle Kinds of Thoughts,” and “Summary of the Centering Prayer Method,” it resonated with a felt (or unfelt) need, . . . offered a traditional and authenticated way of bringing a reasonable measure of organization and discipline into our daily prayer . . . and, in so doing, started us on a path toward a foundational, deeply-missed-if-skipped spiritual practice. What a gift.

But looking back through it now, the passages that have been returned to most often are not those offering step-by-step guidance but passages that point to something deeper, yet more vague. Passages like,

“Centering Prayer is not so much an exercise of ‘attention’ as ‘intention.’ It may take a while to fully grasp this distinction. You do not attend to any particular thought content. Rather, you intend to go to your inmost being, where you believe God dwells. You are opening to God by pure faith, not by means of concepts or feelings. . . . What you are saying by means of the sacred word is, ‘Here I am, waiting.’ . . . Have no expectations in this prayer. It’s an exercise of effortlessness, of letting go. . . .”

Passages like these make it clear that Centering Prayer is only its starting point, that *Open Mind, Open Heart* is really about surrender, . . . about opening ourselves to God’s love, . . . about *absorbing* the fact that we are made in God’s image and that God is within each of us (as in all of creation), . . . about the reality, and the accessibility, and the consequences, of “God’s radiating and inflowing presence.”

Thirty-three years ago, for many, Thomas Keating opened (and still opens today) the door to a pathway that can lead to Christian contemplative prayer. And then, . . . on toward a contemplative way of living. What a gift.

“At the bottom of all reality is always  
a deep goodness,  
or what Thomas Merton called  
‘a hidden wholeness.’”

Richard Rohr,  
Daily Meditation, 27 March 2019

### ***Mystic Prayer: The Poetic Example of Emily Dickinson,* by Charles Murphy**

The richness and complexity of Emily Dickinson as one of America’s foremost poets continues to unfold. College American Lit surveys from years ago may well not have recognized her as “a mystic of profound depth and ambition,” as Charles Murphy does here. He places her in the Christian mystical tradition of Teresa of Avila and identifies her poems as a record of “her wrestling with God,” . . . as expressions of what he terms theologically as “believing unbelief,” . . . as outgrowths of her reservations about organized religion (the received Puritan religious tradition, which she found cold and remote) and the discovery of God in the beauty and mystery of nature.

The book is compact and dense but clear and readable, matching elements in Dickinson’s poetry with quotations from many classical and more modern mystical writers. To take a single example, having noted Teresa of Avila’s “interior castle,” Murphy observes,

“Emily lived her life entirely in the yellow brick mansion built by her father on Main Street in Amherst, but she discovered within herself and expressed in her poetry an interior mansion, much more opulent, such as Teresa of Avila discovered. The ‘prose’ of that earlier existence, with its routine of life and social interaction, was eclipsed by her discovery of Paradise, Being itself, her new domain. . . .

She records the experience in this mystical poem.

“I dwell in Possibility –  
A fairer House than Prose –  
More numerous of Windows –  
Superior – for doors –  
  
Of Chambers as the Cedars –  
Impregnable of eye –  
And for an everlasting Roof  
The Gambrels of the Sky –  
  
Of Visitors – the fairest –  
For Occupation – This –  
The spreading wide my narrow Hands  
To gather Paradise – “

In that American Lit class years ago, Emily Dickinson was set forth as a great American lyrical poet. She surely is that. And more. . . .

**Afterwords:** continued from back page.

It may be. But maybe a still better way forward would be to put aside seeking to capture and spell it out . . . returning to the experience of the sung prayer, sinking into the deepening calm of,

“Holy, Holy, Holy One” . . . “Holy, Holy, Holy One” . . .



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*Grace in the very midst of anguish . . .*  
*“A Weekend of Wisdom with Parker Palmer. . .”*  
*“Oneness . . .”*

**Afterwords: “Oneness . . .”**

A favorite sung prayer is a simple Trisagion chant composed by David Keller, the first Warden of The Episcopal House of Prayer in Colledgeville, **“Holy, Holy, Holy One.”** Over the last few years, this sung prayer has often been used to begin morning prayers, often prompting the thought that—if there is one thing that binds together all religions and all that is—that one thing may well be Oneness.

Over that time, every attempt at writing about the thought, at exploring even some of the implications of Uniqueness and Oneness, headed off in multiple directions and had to be abandoned. But the thought kept coming back, and it was deeply comforting. Somehow, in all the chaos and separateness, there is a Wholeness, or a Plan.

Perhaps part of the comfort comes from the circumstance that science and religion—two hugely affective parts of our lives—now seem less often to be seen as alternatives (or even as antagonistic) and more often to be seen as having—underlying all the Unique-nesses of the universe—the same basic premise, that there is a Oneness underlying all, that in all major faith traditions there is an “Ultimate Reality,” and that in science there is a “Grand Unified Theory” and a “Theory of Everything.” Perhaps it was somewhat out of this context that Albert Einstein, in one of his most intimate letters, wrote,

**“A human being is a part of the whole, called by us Universe . . . One experiences oneself as something separated from the rest . . . Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. . . .”**

Remembering Einstein’s words and especially his choice of “beauty” as his descriptor for “the whole of nature,” sparks another memory. For many years, the words in large letters on the outside of the Walker Art Museum in downtown Minneapolis read,

**“ . . . Bits and Pieces . . . Put Together . . . to Present a Semblance . . . of a Whole . . . ”**

Bits and pieces, each one unique, each one its “own self,” yet each being fitted together, pointing toward a Wholeness.

“Grand Unified Theory,” “a Semblance of a Whole.” Big ideas, bits and pieces of big ideas. But maybe there is something here that contemplative experience helps to make accessible, and helpful. Perhaps this is the ultimate non-dual way of thinking and being . . . I am totally Unique / I am fully One . . . with others (those I know and those I don’t know), with all peoples (including their deep suffering and their broad joy), with all that is, all of Creation. . . . Perhaps getting stuck in my uniqueness, in a necessary false-selfness, is a major barrier to my going forward on the journey. . . . Perhaps, put differently, the spiritual journey is the journey from understanding and appreciating our uniqueness, toward (never getting there but toward) awakening to/being absorbed into the Oneness.