“Everything we do is music.”

John Cage

Because I am a musician, people like to ask what kind of music I prefer listening to on a long drive, or a Saturday morning. They are shocked by my response: I don’t usually listen to music at all. In fact, I have driven cross-country trips alone, completely in silence, perfectly content. I grew up in a household filled with music, my dad at the piano composing, my mom listening to recordings of organ repertoire, my sister blaring pop songs on the radio, and my brother wailing away on the drumset in the garage - all at the same time. I distinctly remember having mini panic-attacks, running out of our house and into the acres of open field just beyond the trees at the end of our property. I was in search of silence.

According to avant-garde composer John Cage, “There is no such thing as silence.” It’s true; escaping my cacophonous house, I fell into another sound world—one with birds and crickets, wind in my ears, and crunching leaves beneath my feet. The search for silence led John Cage to experiment with different acoustical environments, visiting an anechoic chamber in an effort to block out all noise. Yet even there, in the most advanced soundproof room in the world, Cage heard a high and a low hum. Perplexed, he asked the sound engineer what he could possibly be hearing. The answer? Cage’s nervous system, and the pumping of his blood. No matter how still we are, we live in a world full of motion. No matter how quiet, we are surrounded by sound.

I never found the silence I was in search of as a young girl, and now—many years later—I realize I was looking for the wrong thing. Silence is not about absence—it’s about being fully present. We see this in music, where rests can speak as loudly as notes. Composer Libby Larsen said, “Every rest we put on our pages needs to be really considered.” What is its function? Is it a moment of drama? Fear? Peace? Perhaps it moves the music forward, reflects backward, or causes time to stand still. Silence provides a framework for sound and is as tangible a tool as the notes a composer pens onto staff paper.

In studying conducting over the past ten years, I have taken a deep dive into a world of silence. My work is often lonely; practice looks like waving my arms and imagining sound that has not yet been birthed. Even within a rehearsal or concert, I am the single musician on stage that stands completely in silence, ears wide open. It is a most unusual experience. Of course, a conductor is not always silent. It is our job to give feedback and shape the sound, both through our words and our gestures. This is a struggle for conductors-in-training, who are often so preoccupied with their own thoughts and self-consciousness that they forget to listen altogether.

The Song of Silence . . . continues on Page 2
It has been a journey for me, using music to seek silence and, ultimately, to practice listening, awareness, and being present with others. This journey has taken me places I never would have imagined, most recently, into the Minnesota Correctional Facility in Shakopee, where I conduct the Voices of Hope women’s prison choir. Every Sunday afternoon, at 3 o’clock on the dot, “Movement!” is called over the loudspeaker, and a group of fifty incarcerated women make their way to choir rehearsal. I can see them across the courtyard, hurrying in their gray sweats, eager to come together once again.

The door to our rehearsal room swings open and the women come bustling in, their energy palpable. It is not all positive energy. I scan the room to see looks of anger, depression, and annoyance. Some singers stare at me with blank expressions—their bodies present, but their minds elsewhere. The noisiness of isolation—of loneliness, pain, and doubt—has been the week’s soundscape. My job is clear: to draw each woman back into the beauty of her body and the strength and stillness of her mind. And so, we breathe. It only takes a few group exhales for the clouds to begin lifting. Before you know it, the room fills with laughter, companionship, and encouragement. We have rediscovered ourselves.

So many of these women have been silenced by someone else. In reclaiming our voices, we also reclaim silence. Not silence as weakness, but silence as empowered presence. We rehearse each week to practice standing tall, accessing our breath as the source of life and power, and singing a new song—supported in community. I didn’t know how much I was equally in need of these things until I found myself at a loss to lead them.

In being silent—fully present—with others, my life has been transformed. Like John Cage, I have been made aware of the blood coursing through my veins and my beating heart that swells and breaks at the same time. What beautiful sounds our lives make, and how extraordinary the chorus when we come together in unity!

Amanda Weber is the Minister of Music and the Arts at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Minneapolis, and the Founder and Director of Voices of Hope, a choral organization that offers singing opportunities in Minnesota Correctional Facilities. In both settings, Amanda strives toward an expanded vision of the arts as a tool for healing and justice.

Outside of conducting and leading music, Amanda enjoys painting, pottery, photography, swing dancing, and travel. During these pandemic days, Amanda and her partner, Zeb, are joyfully awaiting their first child, due November 7.

Amanda can be reached at aweber@wpc-mpls.org.

Ongoing Opportunities

The coming of September and the start of the new church and school year have always been an exciting time of new beginnings and promise. So, too, this year. But also, profoundly different. With churches and religious organizations—like schools—having to decide on the path that will work best for them, some staying virtual, some beginning to gather again, and some hybrid.

At Westminster Presbyterian, Minneapolis, Thin Places’ home church, this will be a “Year of Listening,” a theme that will surface throughout the online worship and education opportunities.

Sunday Morning Worship and the Sunday evening worship, “Gathered at Five,” will continue online at 10:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. The (frequently contemplative) Wednesday evening worship returns on September 2 via livestream at 6:00-6:30 p.m., beginning with a special Bluegrass Evening Prayer. In addition, Westminster now livestreams the Social Justice Forum and the Adult Education classes simultaneously each Sunday morning, from 9:15-10:15 a.m.

To take part in any of the worship services and adult learning options, both live and archived, visit www.westministermpls.org and click the “Livestream” button at the top right of the page.

Please consider joining us as we listen and learn our way through this spiritually potent, transformational time.

As shown in the following “Ongoing” and “One-Time Opportunities,” other churches and organizations have made other choices. But put together, it seems clear that—though the times are a-changing—the Church...
and the larger Contemplative Community are alive and well, broadly active and engaged.

As has been done in this Autumn issue in recent years, “Ongoing Opportunities” begins by noticing prayer groups whose members have been coming together, weekly or monthly, for many years. The intent is not so much to single them out—“wherever two or three are gathered . . .”—but to suggest the continuity and faithfulness of the contemplative community in this region.

Since published health gathering guidelines can change, contacting the offering organization through their web-site or email seems particularly prudent.

**Centering Prayer**

In February, 2020, the St. Olaf Saturday Morning Centering Prayer group began its 30th year of gathering for Centering Prayer at 9:00 a.m.. On March 21, 2020, we moved from gathering at St. Olaf Catholic Church in downtown Minneapolis to gathering on Zoom. Every Saturday we begin with twenty minutes of Centering Prayer, followed by a reflection time that ends around 10:30 a.m..

All are welcome. A few have been in the group since it began—others are just beginning their experience of Centering Prayer.

Here’s the link to join the Zoom Meeting: [https://us04web.zoom.us/j/305995857](https://us04web.zoom.us/j/305995857)
And the Meeting ID: 305 995 857
For additional information: carolquest@q.com.

Now beginning its twenty-first year, the Centering Prayer group at Incarnation Lutheran Church [4880 Hodgson Road, Shoreview] continues to meet:

**Every Tuesday, at 7:30 a.m..**

But we are meeting outside, in the church’s parking lot, six feet apart, around a painted circle.

If it rains: Turtle Lake Picnic Area [4979 Hodgson Road, Shoreview], with roof.

also:

The Westminster Presbyterian Centering Prayer group (begun much more recently, but under the same leadership), after taking August off, returns to weekly Zoom meetings on September 9:

**Every Wednesday, at noon.**

Join the Zoom gathering at: [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87203866390?pwd=TzVqQl05dREYUpTFVFVUQkJ5YZ5zZ09.](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87203866390?pwd=TzVqQl05dREYUpTFVFVUQkJ5YZ5zZ09.)
Meeting ID is: 872 0386 6390  Passcode is: 287683
For information for both: I.linderscholer@gmail.com.

For more than eighteen years, Colonial Church of Edina has offered a place of silence to listen to God through Prayer and Scripture.

During the 2020-2021 calendar year, Centering Prayer will be offered **either on Zoom or “live”** depending on Colonial’s decision to open up:

**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 the latest information: 952.926.2711 or [www.colonialchurch.org](http://www.colonialchurch.org) or cjoanne1@comcast.net.

**Taizé Evening Prayer**

The 23rd season of First Friday Taizé Prayer will begin Friday, September 4, at 8:00 p.m..

Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, services will take place via Facebook Live, accessible on the First Friday Facebook page: [facebook.com/firstfridaytaize](http://facebook.com/firstfridaytaize).

For further information, contact Larry Reynolds at music@st-lukes.net [Note, for when we begin again to meet face-to-face: St. Luke’s Episcopal, First Friday’s home in recent years, has united with St. James on the Parkway—the two parishes are now known at Sts. Luke and James Episcopal and will consolidate in the St. Luke’s facilities.

“**This silence is alive. . .**”

“Coming to a red brick church, we slip inside, slide into pews, remove our hats, gloves, coats. The Sanctuary is empty. Silence.

Unlike the silence of a library with its absence of noise, of outward distractions, its rules and kindly librarians who shhhhl! at you, in the empty church the silence is different. It’s all about presence. Presence you can’t name for what it truly is, can’t see. But you can feel it all around you, if you bring your heart across the threshold of the outside world.

This church could as easily have been a synagogue, mosque, or temple. There you meet yourself, and that inexpressible mystery that lies beyond you. This presence requires reverence, not obedience. We kneel at the shrine with no donation to make but our prayers—for things beyond words, prayers of the open heart. This silence is alive . . . making possible a change . . ."

Phyllis Cole Dei and James Murray, *The Emptiness of our Hands*
at 4557 Colfax Avenue South, Minneapolis."

For our seventeenth year, Minnehaha United Methodist Church is taking its Taizé services to the web.

From our website [go to www.minnehaha.org, scroll down and click on “TAIZE WORSHIP ONLINE NOW”], you can access any of our previously recorded Taizé Worship services. We will be adding more each month as this new year begins.

Once we can gather safely indoors, we will resume in-person services at 3701 East 50th Street, Minneapolis, on the Second Friday of each month, 7:00-8:00 p.m. with sung prayers, Scripture, and silence. For more information: 612.721.6231 or becky@minnehaha.org.

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—would like to continue offering their truly ecumenical Taizé Evening Prayers again this year. But integrating six church schedules and mastering the technology for doing it virtually have been challenging.

Chris Kosowski, the Liturgy Coordinator at St. THINPLACES.US Frances Cabrini, is the best source for possible upcoming opportunities—she can be reached at: 612.339.3023, ext. 115 or chris@cabrinimn.org.

In Memoriam
August 16th was the fifteenth anniversary of the stabbing death of Brother Roger at Evening Prayers at Taizé.

“Are we not called to communicate a mystery of hope to those around us by the lives we lead?”

Brother Roger of Taizé

Contemplative Evening Worship

Entering its nineteenth year, Sunday Night Contemplative Worship at Pilgrim Lutheran continues this Fall, but—as with so many other things in our communities in these days—it will look a little different. These contemplative worship gatherings will happen via Zoom, except for one special evening outdoor gathering in September.

Each service will feature the same kind of contemplative word weavings that Pilgrim’s Sunday night worship services have been known for since our first Celtic Contemplative Communion in 2002 and our first Nordic Contemplative Evening Prayer in 2004. This year we will include familiar elements from the past, along with creative new dimensions:

- **2nd Sundays, at 6:51 p.m.,** **Holden Contemplative Evening Prayer,** beginning with “Thy Hand Hath Provided” on September 13, followed by coffee conversation
- **4th Sundays, at 6:51 p.m.,** **Woven Together in Spirit: Contemplative Worship,** beginning with “What can I say, what can I say” on September 27, followed by poetry reflections and conversation also:
- **One special outdoor contemplative worship service, Sunday, Sept. 20, 6:51 p.m.,** on the street beside Pilgrim: Night Light: An Outdoor Sunday Evening Contemplative Communion

Pilgrim Lutheran Church, 1935 St. Clair Ave., St. Paul

For information on these and other upcoming opportunities: www.pilgrimstpaul.org.

The Enneagram: Support for the Journey

The Enneagram is a map for navigating challenges and embracing opportunities for growth wherever we find

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**Silence, The Great Teacher**

“Silence has a life of its own. It is not just that which is around words and underneath images and events. It is a being in itself to which we can relate and become intimately familiar.

Silence is not just an absence, but a primal presence. Silence surrounds every ‘I know’ with a humble and patient ‘I don’t know’.

We must find a way to return to this place, live in this place, abide in this place of inner silence. Outer silence means very little if there is not a deeper inner silence.

Without it, we do not really experience our experiences. We are here, but not in the depth of here. We have many experiences, but they do not have the power to change us, to awaken us, or give us the joy and peace that the world cannot give (John 14:27).”

Richard Rohr, Daily Meditation, 7 January 2020
ourselves. Integrating the gifts of the Enneagram helps us to identify supportive resources and discern a path toward greater interior freedom.

In our time together, we will engage in self-awareness practices, explore ways to deepen spiritual awareness, and learn to access supportive resources to integrate the gifts of the Enneagram into everyday life.

Each session will include a presentation and opportunities to share stories and interact with other participants. Practices will be offered to engage with the Enneagram between sessions. Online via Zoom: Tuesdays, Sept. 15, 22, 29—10:00 a.m.-Noon

Loyola Spirituality Center
389 North Oxford Street, St. Paul
For information or registration or other up-coming opportunities—like Morning Centering Prayer (Thursdays at 8:00 a.m.), Evening Examen Prayer (Thursdays at 8:00 p.m.), and opportunities for spiritual direction over the phone or outside: 651.641.0008 or loyolassr@comcast.net or www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org.

Fall Formation Class Open For Registration
This fall we'll be continuing the 20-year tradition of welcoming a new class of eager seekers to the first year of the Spiritual Director Formation training program, beginning Saturday, September 18.

In keeping with all Covid-19 recommended practices, we provide a combination of online resources and in-person, socially distanced gatherings. The goal is to provide access to the rich learning resources while at the same time providing safe opportunities to build the connections so important in this work.

If you or someone you know would be interested in exploring training as a spiritual companion, email sarah@sacredgroundspirit.org.

Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality
Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph, St. Paul
For information for this or other up-coming opportunities—like Head, Heart & Body Paths to the Still Point: Contemplations on Silence, Solitude and Stillness (Sept. 13), and Poetry as Spiritual Practice (the first of Sacred Ground's stand-alone online offerings): www.sacredgroundspirit.org or 651.696.2798 or info@sacredgroundspirit.org.

Westminster Town Hall Forum
As the Town Hall Forum begins its 41st year, it will continue to offer nationally known speakers, exploring the key issues of our day from an ethical perspective. Until we are again able to gather in-person, they will be virtual: Live-Streamed on our web-site [www.westminsterforum.org] and broadcast on Minnesota Public Radio.

The four Fall 2020 Forums are now in place:
Victoria Sweet, Slow Medicine: The Way to Healing Tuesday, September 22, at Noon
Maria Teresa Kumar, Election 2020: Securing the Vote Tuesday, October 6, at Noon
Bill McKibben, Building a Movement to Stop Climate Change, Tuesday, October 27, at Noon
Eddie Glaude, Jr., James Baldwin’s Lessons on Race in America, Tuesday, November 10, at Noon
also:
Town Talks [“Engaging the next generation in conversation and reflection on the key issues of our day”] a new project of the Town Hall Forum of virtual online discussions, open to all.

The next Town Talks will be on September 17

Westminster Town Hall Forum
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis
For more information about the Town Hall Forum or about Town Talks: www.westminsterforum.org or 612.322.3421 or mmccall@westminsterforum.org [Susan McKenna, the Forum’s long-time Director, retired after the Fall schedule was in place. We wish her “Fair winds, and following seas,” as her voyage continues.]

A Course in Spiritual Growth & Guidance:
Spiritual Beings in Human Form, The Depths and Heights of Personhood
This four-session course explores the challenges and the potentialities related to our personal spiritual journeys. As a small and supportive learning community, we will explore the continuum of awareness, . . . the Enneagram as a map to unitive spirituality, . . . the power of letting go, . . . and the human flourishing that lives in us as spiritual potential.

The course includes centering, personal check-ins, presentations, movement, meditation, and small and large group discussions. No previous experience is needed. All are welcome:
Four Saturdays: October 3, November 7, December 5, January 9, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

“Music needs the hollowness of the flute,
Letters, the blankness of the page,
Light, the void of the window,
Holiness, the absence of self.”

Anthony de Mello, Taking Flight; A Book of Story Meditations
A New Normal
The “old” normal seems to be passing and a “new” and better normal may well be beginning to emerge. This thought was re-awakened by a note in the August House of Prayer newsletter:

“Throughout August you will notice a number of announcements regarding opportunities for small groups and short events sponsored by EHoP. In part, these new options are a response to the reality of the pandemic. Yet beyond the scope of these months, these new options offer an additional layer of programming that we expect will build and sustain our communal life well into the future.

More detailed descriptions about each of these offerings will come in the next few weeks.

Visit our website for more information on small group spiritual direction, small group lectio divina, small group book discussions, and on our Mystic-a-Month series, Day-Long Prayer series, and video series.”

The Episcopal House of Prayer,
14215 Fruit Farm Road, Collegeville, MN

and The House of Prayer in the City,
St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, Minneapolis

For information on these possible new normal opportunities and other up-coming opportunities—see the Prayer Teaching Library page on the web-site, Mindful Paddles (Sept. 2-6), and Contemplation with Art, Poetry and Music (Oct. 9, 14, 19, 24): www.ehouseofprayer.org or 320.363.3293 or houseprayer@csbsju.edu.

To Lie Fallow

“To lie fallow is a gift. But we don’t really know how to do it. Rather we are done by it—or undone by it. The moments we are allowed to be in that condition are times of gratitude. And it is from these that our freedom comes. It is where authentic being exists.

Any fruitfulness arises from that surrendered openness. For it is there that God makes each of us a fertile ground, a bearing soil.”

—Gunilla Norris, A Mystic Garden

City House
Pandemic gathering restrictions, as they are for many caring organizations, are impacting City House in its core mission of providing deep listening. They are experimenting with using a secure audio/visual site for having conversations and are exploring the possibility of offering its listening services to seniors living in residential facilities—more on both next time.

City House is also searching for a new Executive Director. The position will be posted on the Minnesota Council of NonProfits’ job board, on Pollen, and on the City House website [www.city-house.org].

Please spread the word among people you know who might have an interest in the opportunity. Email board member Nancy Twidwell [nancyt@city-house.org] with any ideas.

Kidnapped?

The larger Lutheran Church has tempted away two leaders in the local contemplative community.

The Rev. Dr. Dirk Lange, from Luther Seminary, has been elected Deputy General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations at the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva.

And the Rev. Barbara Lund, after twelve expandedly fruitful years at Wisdom Ways, has been called as Senior Director of Innovation and Operations in the ELCA’s Global Unit.

Thanks and Blessings
to both, as their journeys continue.

One-Time Opportunities

Hybrid Retreat—in Person or Online:

Fear Not for I am with You Always
Step aside from the challenges and uncertainties of this time for a blissful 24 hours of unique spiritual renewal. Retreatants can choose to spend one night/day in person at the retreat center or participate via remote digital tools:

Friday, Sept. 11 at 6:30 p.m.-Sat., Sept. 12 at 5:30 p.m.

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

For information or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities—like Retreat for Those in Grief (Sept. 18-20), or videos on Pathways to Prayer (on www.franciscanretreats.net/pathways-to-prayer), or additional Resources for the Covid 19 Virus Era (www.franciscanretreats.net/resources-for-the-convid-19-virus-era): 952-447-2182 or

Sponsored by The Sojourners Institute, the course will be offered through Zoom Conferencing—details on the connection process will be sent once you register.

To register for this course, or for more information about it and other up-coming opportunities:
www.sojournersinstitute.com/csgg or Scott@SojournersInstitute.com.
Men’s Silent Retreat: A Listening Heart
All is Grace. All is Gift. Each human being must embrace the reality of life. But the spiritual pilgrim knows that the meaning of this reality is shaped by the gift of a listening heart.
Each of us is called by God to see all of life as gift and blessing. Are we able to look beyond the obvious to see the sacred?:
Friday, September 25-Saturday, September 26
Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN
For information or registration about this or other upcoming opportunities—like God Grant Me the Serenity, A 12-Step Retreat, (October 2-3), and Eucharist and the Healing of the Earth, A Men & Women’s Silent Retreat (Nov. 13-15): jpolman@kingshouse.com or 763.682.1394 or www.kingshouse.com.

Brother Sun: A Collage-Making Experience
Celebrating St. Francis
The natural world is a consistent source of generosity in our lives. St. Francis, patron saint of ecology, expressed his love for God and nature through The Canticle of the Sun in which he sang praise and thanksgiving for Brother Sun, Sister Moon and the stars of heaven.
Please join us as we honor St. Francis by creating a colorful Brother Sun collage. Using an assortment of hand-painted paper, music sheets and poetry/words, we will embark on a creative, spontaneous pilgrimage. No experience is necessary, as you’ll be guided through the steps:
Saturday, Oct 10, 9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m., via Zoom
Franciscan Spirituality Center
920 Market Street, La Crosse WI
For information or registration for this and other up-
coming opportunities—like **The Sound of Resilience** (Sept. 26, 9:00 a.m.-Noon), and **SMART for Educators** (Oct. 11 and 18, 6:30-8:00 p.m.): www.fscenter.org or 608.791.5295 or fscenter@fspa.org.

**Aging with Grace: Letting Go and Embracing New Life**
During this stay-at-home retreat, we will reflect on how the Paschal mystery of loss, grief and new life can help us embrace the invitation to a deeper and richer life in our later years. We will explore how a growing sense of inner freedom can help us find new meanings and embrace new ways of being. Our five mornings will be interactive, inspired by a *A Spirituality of the Paschal Mystery* by Ronald Rolheiser and *From Age-ing to Sage-ing* by Zalman Schachter-Shalomi.

Participants need to be comfortable using Zoom for video conferencing. Afternoons and evenings will allow some time for reading and continued reflection:

**Monday-Friday, Oct. 12-16, 9:00 a.m.-noon each day**
Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict’s Monastery
104 Chapel Lane, St. Joseph, MN

For information or registration for this and other upcoming opportunities—like **Prayer in Troubled Times** (4 Sundays, Sept. 13-Oct. 4, 7:00-7:20 p.m.) and **Ordinary Miracles: Writing Our “Book of Delights”**: 320-363-7112 or www.sbm.osb.org or mholicky@csbsju.edu or eantony@csbsju.edu.

**With Grateful Hearts:**
Personal Reflections on the Spiritual Journey
Minnesota Contemplative Outreach’s Annual Retreat—**virtual, this year**—will explore Thomas Merton’s stages of spiritual development.

“To be grateful is to recognize the Love of God in everything He has given us—and He has given us everything. Every breath we draw is a gift of His love, every moment of existence is a grace, for it brings with it immense graces from Him.”—Thomas Merton

Rooted in the practice of Centering Prayer, this retreat will deepen your awareness of the Divine Indwelling, and offer life and voice to key moments in your personal spiritual journey:

> “Be like the bird, who halting in flight upon a limb too slight, feels it give way yet sings knowing it has wings.”
> 
> Victor Hugo, *Be Like the Bird*

**Friday, October 16, at 5:00 p.m.-Sunday, October 18 at 10:00 a.m.**
**Minnesota Contemplative Outreach**
For information or registration for this and other upcoming opportunities: info@minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org or www.minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org.

**School of Discernment**
You might want to plan ahead since this is one of the Center’s most treasured retreats.

During the weekend, you will have the opportunity to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit in your life under the guidance of skilled teachers and listeners. The program includes sessions on the practice of discernment, quiet time to reflect, and one-on-one meetings with spiritual directors who will help you with discernment issues or questions as they arise:

**Friday, December 4, at 10:00 a.m.-Sunday, December 6, at 1:00 p.m.—on Zoom**
The Benedictine Center, St. Paul’s Monastery
2675 Benet Road, St. Paul

For information or registration for this and other upcoming opportunities—like
- **Together in Contemplation** (four Tuesdays, Sept. 22, Oct. 13, Nov. 17, Dec. 15—7:00-9:00 p.m., on Zoom),
- **Attentive Companions** (Tuesday, September 29, 7:00-9:00 p.m., on Zoom), or
- **Bouncing Back: a SoulCollage Retreat on Resilience** (October 23-25, on Zoom)—info@benedictinecenter.org or 651.777.7251 or www.benedictinecenter.org.

**Creation’s Wisdom:**
*Spiritual Practice and Climate Change*
Daniel Wolpert’s Meditation in last Spring’s *Thin Places* was drawn from a manuscript that has now been published as a book. In the words of one reviewer, *Creation’s Wisdom* explores “the central crisis of our time: climate change, . . . showing how the contemplative spiritual traditions can help us heal the alienation between humanity and the rest of creation. . . . ”


**Reading Opportunities**

**Gratefulness: The Heart of Prayer, An Approach to Life in Fullness, by Brother David Steindl-Rast**
When this recommended book arrived and was
opened, it was a surprise to notice that the “Foreword” had been written by Henri Nouwen and to realize that the book itself had been written in 1984. Digging into it, the surprise was underlined by the sense that it did not seem at all dated. Take away the “Foreword,” and most readers would probably think it had been written in these challenging times (see first quotation below).

The one who had recommended the book also recommended visiting Brother David’s current web-site: https://gratefulness.org/reflections/. Doing so—actually seeing and listening to the now 94-year-old and still very active and engaged Brother David—somehow changed the experience of then reading the book, changing it from words and ideas on the page to experiences and observations being shared by an older, trusted friend. And Nouwen’s “Foreword” clearly shows that his knowing Brother David personally affected him in the same way.

A second impression is that these individual chapters—e.g., “Aliveness and Wakefulness,” . . . “Prayer and Prayerfulness,” . . . “Faith and Beliefs,” . . . “Hope: Openness to Surprise,” . . . “Fullness and Emptiness”—are not neat summaries but diverse, nuanced, unreconciled experiences and observations, are the product of what Richard Rohr identifies as non-dual thinking. This impression cannot be captured in the short sample quotations included below, but it is strongly present.

Four excerpts. First, one from the opening video on his current web-site, restating in 2020 his thesis from 1984:

“Of course, there are many terrible things in our world today, but it is a joy to be alive. . . . You cannot be grateful for everything, but you can be grateful at every moment. . . .”

From the chapter, “Prayers and Prayerfulness,”

“No sooner or later we discover that prayers are not always prayers. That is a pity. But the other half of that insight is that prayer—moments when we communicate with God—often happen without any prayers. And that should cheer us up. . . . Some native American tribes would say, ‘A well-educated child ought to be able to sit and look when nothing is to be seen, to sit and listen when nothing is to be heard.’ When this attitude prevails, children have a better chance to learn the art of tapping the Source of meaning, the art of prayer.”

From “Faith and Beliefs,”

“When religious traditions speak of the divine life within us, they refer, implicitly at least, to our high points of wakeful awareness, to our mystical experiences. Yes, let us not shy away from that thought. We are all mystics. . . . High peaks of aliveness are also always marked by intense gratefulness. Even people whose world view does not include a divine Giver to whom their thanks can be directed often experience deep gratitude in those moments. They experience it no less strongly than others, even though their own gratefulness gets mailed without an address, so to say.”

And from “Hope: Openness for Surprise,”

“We have made an important distinction here between hope and hopes. It parallels our earlier distinction between faith and beliefs. We saw that faith leads to beliefs, just as hope leads to hopes. Yet, faith does not depend on beliefs, nor does hope depend on hopes. . . . A person of hope will have a whole array of lively hope. But those hopes do not tell us much. The showdown comes when all the hopes get shattered. Then, a person of hopes will get shattered with them. A person of hope, however, will be growing a new crop of hopes as soon as the storm is over.”

Friends recommending books is a good thing. . . .

Afterwords: continued from back page.

acknowledge the goodness, too. And we direct that acknowledgment at its source. Gratitude is one of the shortcuts out of the Way of Fear and back into the Way of God. . . .”

And, as Maisy had discovered and declared, “It really works!”

Kara’s shared experience was reinforced a few days later by a discernment shared by a friend, whose wife had died shortly before Covid-19 was known to be here (and whose grieving had been affected by repeated postponements of her memorial service). There was a clear sense of rest in his note when he said that after months of thinking about it, and remembering their long life together, he had finally settled on the engraving that will be on their joint marker. Beneath their names and dates will be a single word, “Gratitude.”
Afterwords: “Gratitude . . .”

The Rev. Kara Root (Nokomis Presbyterian Church, Minneapolis) shared an experience, pointed toward the book noticed in the “Reading Opportunities” section above, and triggered a heart-felt “Amen” to a spiritual practice and mind-set that act against the deep feelings—of unsettledness or uncontrolableness, of ongoing anxiousness or fear or grief—that a time of pandemic uncertainty and economic distress and social unrest has brought to many of us.

Kara’s daughter had called her into her room. Maisy had had a rough day, feeling down and despondent for most of it. But Kara quickly saw that something had shifted. Her eyes sparkled when she said, "Hey Mom, I was just talking to my friend Greta, and I asked her how she is such a contented and happy person so much of the time. She told me it’s gratitude. She tries every day to notice all the things she’s thankful for. I just did it, and Mom, it really works!"

Then, “in typical Maisy-style, never letting me be a bystander but pulling me into life, she said, ‘You try it now. Just look around and name what you’re thankful for in your head,’ watching me expectantly.”

So, Kara did, and she experienced again what she and many have discovered before. Suddenly being told to name what she was thankful for, and obeying for just sixty seconds, pulled her into a different headspace and heartspace. It changed how she laid her tired self down to bed that night, just a little bit more aware, a tad bit more in touch with the mystery it is to be alive at all.

Kara concludes, “It’s nice to be given a liturgy by a couple of 13-year olds. (That’s Church!) Also, we have this practice deeply embedded in our Christian faith, in familiar hymns, like “Count your Blessings . . .” and in countless theologians and mystics who’ve turned to gratitude as a way to stay grounded in God’s bigger picture.”

“True gratitude doesn't deny what's in front of us, but looks for the Kingdom of God more deeply, into what's here, and into ourselves. It assumes we can already taste the Kingdom, can catch glimpses of it. It assumes God made the world good and goodness is all around us.

“To rejoice in the good does not deny the evil or the brokenness. It acknowledges all that is here. But this means that we