Technically, my father left when I was eight years old, when my parents divorced. Really, though, he was mostly absent anyway, even when he lived with us. I barely have a memory of his presence in my early life. One exception is my memory of him as the big giant, lying asleep in the double bed in the backroom of our trailer home. I had to have been less-than-eight, and yet I noticed his deep breathing as I lay there next to him. I remember that his breath and my own breathing were “off.” His body rose to inhale; mine was sinking to exhale. His was slow and mine was fast. After noticing the difference, I tried to synchronize our breath. I would hold my own lungs tight and wait for his next inhale in order to match my own to his. Then, I would repeat, over and over again. I am not sure how long it lasted, but the exercise certainly held my still-forming attention for a good while.

I wonder, now, if this great absent giant was my first teacher in the long traditions of focused, centering prayer. Tending to my breath, opening myself through disciplined rhythm, responding to a deep Longing, greater than myself . . . each of these movements were part of my experience that day, as well as when I first encountered the contemplative curriculum of centering prayer practice. Surely my not-yet-eight-year-old self already knew, deeply longed for the great, Sacred Presence. Perhaps on that day, when my Dad was actually physically present, my primary experience of his absence broke through and reached toward Presence, toward being seen, toward knowing another, toward encounter, toward union, toward . . . toward . . . always toward . . . Mystery.

In high school, I had an opposite experience; it was one of full Presence, a Presence distinct and strong. Though it was not a “personal” presence per se, it did occur alongside a personal encounter with a priest during confession while we were on retreat. I came to know myself as deeply, deeply loved by God during that holy encounter in confession. Soon after, I palpably perceived a bright white light, as if it came down from above, like a funnel, shot right through my head, and radiated out to all who encountered me during those sweet days. Why my heart opened up like that during confession, who it was that gifted me with that Light was beyond Mystery to me at that time in my life. But the distinction was clear—absence felt empty, and
Absence and Presence . . . continued from Page 1

Presence felt full. The two were complete opposites. It would be more than a decade before I could recognize the movement of Love in both the emptiness and the fullness.

The interplay of absence and presence would come to form me, to shape the empty cavern of my heart and the full spaciousness of my soul. This seeking, this longing, this need to meld my breath into rhythm with others produced imprints of openness and receptivity upon my character, traits which have proven to be helpful in developing my practice of spiritual direction. However, the carving out of empty spaciousness comes at the cost of the pain of the carving-out.

Loving, longing, and not having is a painful anguish, a memory triggered. I remember the open spaciousness inside, carved out during childhood by the pain and longing for my dad’s absent presence. Absence, presence, absence, presence. Over the years, finding and losing love with partners further deepened the imprint of the pattern on my heart and soul. Even into my middle years, as I hold the tension between seeking out and not quite-yet clinching the reality of my life’s dream to manage a hobby farm and retreat center, the pattern remains.

Even the great Mystics of my birth faith tradition speak of this formative tension between absence and presence: Julian’s hazelnut, Teresa of Avila’s dart of the longing of Love, John of the Cross’s dark nights, Paul Tillich’s oscillations between knowing and unknowing. Somehow, through this deep pattern, absence and presence, in and out, like breath, the Holy One manages to transform us through each oscillation, through each breath cycle.

Christine Luna Munger currently serves as the Director of the Episcopal House of Prayer in Collegeville, shepherding it through two years of pandemic restrictions, and now noticing how alive the place feels again as folks begin to regather for a rich variety of upcoming Opportunities.

She is a wife and mother of two young children and enjoys all forms of dance, swimming, and being outdoors. Her long-time dream of having a hobby farm and retreat center—Tierra Luna Farm—began to take concrete form as this was written in March of 2022. Christine may be reached at: directorhouseprayer@csbsju.edu.

Ongoing Opportunities

Covid virulence continues to have its ups and downs. In-person gatherings are becoming more common, but it still seems wise to check with sponsoring organizations for the latest local protocols.

Flying Cloud Zen,
A Contemplative Spiritual Practice Community

Flying Cloud Zen is dedicated to cultivating self-awareness and spiritual growth through the practice and teaching found in Zen, as well as the wisdom and insights found in all of the world’s great faith traditions. Our setting is not bound to any one culture.

Absence, “. . . a garden we can till . . . ”

“Our spirit has an instinct for silence. Every soul innately yearns for stillness, for a space, a garden where we can till, sow, reap, and rest. And by doing so, come to a deeper sense of self and our place in the universe. Silence is not an absence but a presence. Not an emptiness but repletion. A filling up . . . ”

Anne D. LeClaire,
Listening Below the Noise
In both our virtual offerings and at our shared home in Eagan, we offer regular meditation, retreats, Dharma talks, and more. We’re always especially happy to see beginners, and people of all levels of meditation experience come—and all are welcomed.

Our Monthly Mindfulness Practice Group is a drop-in Saturday morning gathering via Zoom. At it we do mindfulness/meditation practices, incorporating contemplative practice teachings, experientials, and discussion to help deepen our awareness of self in a relaxed and friendly community setting.

Since many elements of the contemplative journey are shared by the Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and all major faith traditions, we are able to draw freely from many sources. Monthly Saturday meeting dates vary slightly (please check the Calendar on our website). No registration necessary:

Up-coming Gatherings: June 18, July 9, August 20, 9:00-11:30 a.m.

Flying Cloud Zen
Aslan 4141 Old Sibley Memorial Highway, Eagen
For information about this and other up-coming opportunities—like their summer series, "Your Temple of Practice: The Sanctity of the Home," ten Thursdays, June 5-August 11, via Zoom: www.flyingcloudzen.org or 612.321.8412 or bussho@flyingcloudzen.org.

Walking Meditation
Way Opening Workshops is offering three guided walks at the Wood Lake Nature Center, with reflections, queries, and ritual. Walking itself has a positive effect on mental health, as well as being beneficial for our bodies, minds, and spirits. Walking Meditation adds the benefits of a spiritual practice, in the presence of nature and community. Come alone or with another. All faiths and no faith welcome:

May 22, June 26, and July 2, 6:25-7:30 p.m.

Wood Lake Nature Center in Richfield
Way Opening Workshops
For further details, www.wayopeningworkshops.com
To register, wayopeningworkshops@gmail.com.

Wednesday Bluegrass Evening Prayer
The regular Wednesday Evening Contemplative Prayer gets livelier in June and July . . . moving outdoors and gathering to sing joyously, in-person, and to pray:
- in June, the service will be in Peavey Plaza and features a liturgy written by Minnesota composer, J. David Moore (commissioned last year)
- in July, the service will be in the Lower Plaza, just along Nicollet, and will be modeled on the Holden Village evening prayer known as “Mountain Vespers”
- both months begin with a hymn sing of old favorites
- and there will be an outdoor BBQ on the Upper Plaza following worship each evening:

Wednesdays in June and July, hymn sing at 5:45 p.m.,
worship 6:00-6:30, followed by outdoor BBQ

Westminster Presbyterian Church
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis
For information: www.westminстерmpls.org or 612.322.3421 or jteliczan@wpc-mpls.org.

Visio Divina
All are warmly welcomed to our Visio Divina prayer services, each offers an evening of contemplative prayer through the use of images, music, and sacred writings. No prior experience is needed.

Each is an hour of peace and communal hope:

Every four Thursdays: June 2, June 30, July 28,
August 25, 7:00-8:00 p.m., via Zoom

St. Scholastica Monastery -McCabe Renewal Center
1001 Kenwood Ave, Duluth, MN 55811
For information or registration for this and other up-coming opportunities—like Sunday SoulCollage® Circle (monthly, Second Sundays, via Zoom): 218.723.6699 or www.retreatduluth.org or retreat@duluthosb.org.

On May 21st
John Philip Newell
received The Well Spirituality Center’s annual
Sacred Universe Award
The award, first presented to Thomas Berry in 1993, honors leaders in the field whose work and life foster mutually enhanced Human-Earth relationships.

For additional information for up-coming opportunities at Earth & Soul:
www.earthandsoul.org or info@earthandsoul.org.

“Among all the realities that human beings experience,
God’s presence mysteriously seeks us out
And draws us into a world which is beyond us.”

Lynn Bauman
from a Vade Mecum note, source not recorded
Lynn may be best known for his Ancient Songs Sung Anew, his translation of the Psalms, including Psalm 139, “Encircled by your presence”
Justice, Compassion, Hope: A Writing Process
Motivation to grow as writers comes from gaining confidence in our capacity to help deepen understanding. This short course invites writers to draw on what they have learned in their lives about three critical values: justice, compassion, and hope. Working in pairs, participants will contribute to and learn from what each other is thinking.

After an initial ZOOM session introducing the workshop, participants work anonymously at first with the facilitator responsible for the exchange of their writing. This intensifies the focus on the writer’s ideas, not on the person receiving her or his writing:

July 18, 7:00-8:30 p.m. 
August 8, arranged times, Online

Wood & Water Retreats
For additional information or to register for this or other up-coming opportunities—like Training the Heart (an eight-week, online, individually scheduled opportunity to go deeper and get personal support and encouragement): info@woodandwaterretreats.com or https://wood-water-retreats.square.site.

The Hermitage at Clearwater Forest
Lovely. Peaceful. Welcoming. Has all you will need. In the woods, but also on the lake (with its own private dock and canoe or kayak in warmer months).

Available free of charge to all clergy, religious, and church professionals of any denomination or faith tradition:
Open throughout the year
Clearwater Forest Presbyterian Retreat Center
Deerwood, MN
For information or to make a reservation for The

“Centering . . .”

is a term that comes from John of the Cross in The Living Flame of Love, one of his more mature writings, and it’s not a bad term for what we’re trying to do.

As he says, the center of the soul is God and so as we leave behind the perplexities and the suffering and the turmoil, we turn towards our inmost center. And we move from ordinary psychological awareness to the spiritual level of our being, a level of intuition and our capacity for God. . . .”

Thomas Keating, Contemplative Outreach News, December 2021

Deepening and Widening Your Spiritual Connections:
Charting a Journey of Human/Spiritual Emergence
~ this is only one of the many new Fall Offerings ~
~ check the website for the full array ~
This class explores the journey from a small, bound-up sense of self to a perceptive and expansive spiritual being. We’ll identify six levels of our human/spiritual condition. As we explore each level, you’ll experience a lightening of ego and increased awareness. When we reach the 4th level, The Way of the Alchemist, we begin refining what is known as subtle perception and capacities to communicate more directly with the Spiritual aspects of our world. Six sessions:
First and Third Thursdays in September/October/
November, 7:00-8:15 p.m., On-line only
Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality
Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul
For information or registration for both the new Fall Offerings and for upcoming Summer opportunities—like the weekly Meditation: A Way of Contemplative Prayer (Tuesdays), or Rebekah Taussig’s Sitting Pretty (the Disability Book Club summer read, three Wednesdays):
www.wisdomwayscenter.org or 651.696.2794 or office@wisdomwayscenter.org.

No Two Spiritual Journeys Are Alike
Long experience has shown that this is so, among ourselves and among those who come to us. And, although Covid has made it more difficult, people still do come:
- for a Personal Retreat—we will help you explore your options so that your time with us is rich with healing and renewal
- for Spiritual Direction—exceptional listeners, paying attention to the movement of the Spirit, will help you deepen your spiritual journey
- for Group Conferencing—whether you design your own agenda or draw upon the wide range of resources here, we’re confident your group will be enriched by your time at the Monastery:
The Benedictine Center, St. Paul’s Monastery
2675 Benet Road, St. Paul
For information or to schedule a time to come:
info@benedictinecenter.org or 651.777.7251 or www.benedictinecenter.org.
One-Time Opportunities

An Ecumenical Taizé Evening Prayer for Pentecost
Six Minneapolis faith communities—from Mennonite, Methodist, Catholic, and non-denominational backgrounds—are joining together to offer an Evening Prayer for Pentecost:

**Thursday, May 26, 7:00-8:00 p.m., In-person**
St. Frances Cabrini Catholic Church
1500 Franklin Avenue SE, Minneapolis
For additional information: www.cabrinimn.org or chris@cabrinimn.org.

When Bad Things Happen:

**The Book of Job for Troubled Times**
Where is God in times of struggle?

In many ways, the *Book of Job* is the perfect story for what so many of us are experiencing today: loss, anxiety, and fear. Job’s story of suffering and his bold honest search for answers cuts right through easy and superficial platitudes and cliches. This ancient story speaks to our hearts and guides us on a path toward real hope.

During this retreat, we will courageously ask, “What do I do with my pain?” and “Where is God in suffering?” Through quiet reflection, contemplative prayer practices, engaging talks, and small-group discussion, we will discover for ourselves how the God of life and love is present to each one of us, especially in times of struggle:

**Friday, June 3, at 7:00 p.m.**
**Saturday, June 4, at 4:00 p.m., In-person**
Franciscan Spirituality Center
920 Market Street, La Crosse, WI
For information or registration for this and other upcoming opportunities—like the **Community for Christian Meditation** (1st and 3rd Wednesdays, Christian meditation in the tradition of John Mann, In-person), or **Golden Yoga** (three session summer series, June 14, 21, 28, In-person or via Zoom), or **Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life** (the spiritual practice of Examen, based on Matt Linn’s most popular book, July 12, via Zoom): 608.791.5293 or www.fscenter.org or FSCenter@fspa.org.

A Note: Jean Pagliaro introduced herself as the successor—but not the replacement—for Audrey Lucier, who has been the Director of the Franciscan Spirituality Center for the last ten years. She began by quoting John Bell’s well-known hymn from the Iona Community, lines that may well also speak to each of us as we seek to do as we are called:

“Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown?
Will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be known
in you and you in me?”

And she ended by expressing her gratitude for this chance “to continue an amazing ministry.”

Thank you, Jean. Thank you Audrey.

Journey into Deeper Silence
This is a six-day/five-night intensive silent retreat—held in the restful quiet and sacred beauty of ARC—especially for those who lead community centering prayer and sacred listening/soul friendship sessions.

**Friday, June 3, at 4:00 p.m.—Wednesday, June 8, at 1:00 p.m., In-person (Waiting List)**
Sponsored by **Minnesota Contemplative Outreach**
Held at **ARC Retreat Community, Stansfield, MN**
For information or registration for this—or for their extensive list on **Online Resources**, or for details about the scores of active **Centering Prayer Groups** throughout the region:
www.minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org or info@minnesotacontemplativeoutreach.org.

Each July for many years, Fr. Matt Linn, SJ, has led a weekend healing retreat for men and women. This year:

**“Healing through the Great Parables of Jesus”**
The great parables of the Sower, the talents, the king, the prodigal son, and the Good Samaritan are like a Rorschach inkblot in which we find whatever is deepest in ourselves and meet the depth of Jesus (there is no “. . . direct, immediate Knowing . . .”)

“The mystics of the Perennial Wisdom Tradition assert
that direct, immediate Knowing is possible . . .
that such Knowing is not based on reason or deduction but on communion . . .
that this Knowing is intimate and this intimacy transformational . . .”

Richard Rohr, *Daily Meditation*, 2 August 2018

“...direct, immediate Knowing...”
deeper portrait of Abba than the parable of the prodigal son). Healing occurs at profound levels as the parables bring together both our unconscious self and the deep healing love of Jesus. Whatever you most need in a retreat, you will automatically project into the parable's story and find the next step toward fullness of life:

**Friday, July 15, at 8:00 p.m.**-
**Sunday, July 17, at 1:00 p.m.** —In-person  
**Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN**

For information or registration for this or other upcoming opportunities: www.kingshouse.com or 763.682.1394 or christtheking@kingshouse.com.

**A Note:** This is their 70th year at **Christ the King**, and with the passing and retirement of some of the old guard, some new leadership has come in 2022. During August through December, those who come to their men’s and women’s weekend and midweek retreats will experience some of their “Greatest Hits” from the past, from Our Father to St. Paul’s favorite hymns, from the call to bear fruit to Pinocchio, to name a few—a spiritual potpourri as the new theme for 2023 is prepared.

**Love at the Center**

It is time to put Love at the Center . . . time to reclaim **The Song of Songs** as a central text that can inform, remind, and intrigue us each day. It is time to “live” it, placing Love at the center of our religious/spiritual practice, letting its force radiate through every aspect of our lives.

**Wishing each friend, A Blessed Summer**

Through pauses in the Silence, may you remain aware of the Sacred Journey to wholeness, wherever you are, wherever you travel. May you invite times of quiet relaxation and re-creation into your life.

*As The Zen of Seeing* reminds us, in these times, “to stop rushing around, to sit quietly on the grass, to switch off the world and come back to the earth, to allow the eye to see a willow, a bush, a cloud, a leaf,” will become a step on your Way . . .

“A Summer Blessing,” by Nan Merrill, Founding Editor of *Friends of Silence*, the newsletter of spiritual quotations, author of **Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness**

We’ll spend these special days immersing in **The Song of Songs**, exploring its subtleties, receiving her mysterious gifts, embodying her music, living her questions:

**August 11-14, Collegeville campus, In-person**
**The Episcopal House of Prayer, 14215 Fruit Farm Road, Collegeville, MN**

For information or registration for this and other upcoming opportunities—like **Sacred Music of the Abrahamic Faiths for Resilience and Soothing Uncertainty** (June 2-5), or the weekly **Prayer Tread** (short practical prompts for your prayer life, posted every Friday on their new website), or **Twin Cities Contemplative Prayer Community** (Mondays, 6:30-7:30 p.m., St. John the Evangelist, 60 N Kent St., St Paul): 320.363.3293 or www.ehouseofprayer.org or houseprayer@csbsju.edu.

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And there are many more Opportunities—offered by familiar major main-line retreat centers—available throughout the region:

**Morning Centering Prayer** (every Thursday at 8:00 a.m.)
**Evening Examen** (every Thursday at 8:00 p.m.)
**Spiritual Direction** (online, over the phone, in-person)
**Loyola Spirituality Center** 389 North Oxford Street, St. Paul

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

**Ignatian Retreat: Finding God in All Things**

our next small group online program begins in September, with information sessions in June and August (check the website for details)

**Come and See: Tending the Holy**

our program for preparing people for the ministry of spiritual direction has been here since 1990—it’s not too late to explore joining the new class that begins in September

**Christos Center for Spiritual Formation** 1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes, MN

For information about these two major offerings in the Twin Cities, plus other up-coming opportunities: 651.653.8207 or traci@christoscenter.org or www.christoscenter.org.

**Silent Retreat for Men and Women**

June 23-26, August 11-14
**Franciscan Retreats and Spirituality Center** 16385 St Francis Lane, Prior Lake, MN

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

Listen: Does Not Wisdom Call? June 5
Labyrinth Retreat  June 15
Spirituality Center Directed Retreat  August 7-12
Time to refresh and to deepen . . . time in prayer, silence, walks in nature, and individual visits with a spiritual director. Daily communal lectio with other retreatants, Eucharist with the monastic community, and an opportunity for the sacrament of reconciliation are all available.

Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict’s Monastery  
104 Chapel Lane, St. Joseph, MN
For information or registration for these and other up-coming opportunities: 320-363-7112 or www.sbm.osb.org or mholicky@csbsju.edu or eantony@csbsju.edu.

Reading Opportunities

Faith After Doubt, by Brian McLaren
In some quarters, being a doubter gets you a bad name, being a doubter being synonymous with lacking in faith, and having a lack of faith puts you outside the pale.

At an intellectual level, it seems relatively easy to suggest the limitations of this view. To doubt is to have questions. Being a doubter is to not be satisfied with the answers you now have. As Rainer Rilke urged his friend, in often quoted words, “be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves.” Questions are a way forward. Being satisfied with an answer almost always marks the end of growth. And this seems especially true in the presence of Mystery . . . Deus semper Major, God always Greater.

This is certainly the basic premise of McLaren’s book, but he clearly understands that “doubt” is complex and that the human reality and consequences of it cannot be set aside with an intellectual observation (even if true). As he says in the Introduction, Faith After Doubt, “distills forty-plus years of personal struggle, heart-to-heart conversations, and cross-disciplinary research about doubt: why it is unavoidable; why, in fact, it’s necessary and valuable; and how to live with it.”

And his recounting of his own experience, of his own story, unfolds through the stories of people whom he has met over the years:
- in the first section, stories to help “you understand why your doubts can be so scary and painful”
- in the second, stories about doubt as an opportunity for growth [offered through a “four-stage theory of faith formation” that is developed more fully in the Appendices]
- in the third, stories about “how to live with doubt as a companion rather than enemy on the journey of faith”
- and in the final chapters, he places doubt in the larger context of “old assumptions now being challenged in nearly every area of modern life, not just theology, religion, and spirituality.”

And—in an “Afterword”—McLaren looks back over his own story, his own journey,
“Before doubt, I thought that faith was a matter of correct beliefs. Cradled in the snug nest of my faith community, faith was quietly incubating. The cracking open of my beliefs was not the destruction of faith but its liberation into a new tender stage, a new fledging consciousness, a new freedom to stretch my wings and fly. Looking back, I see that underneath arguments about what I believed to be true factually, something deeper and truer was happening actually.

For example, whether or not the creation story happened factually as described in Genesis, I was committing myself to live in the world as if it actually were a precious, beautiful, meaningful creation, and as if I were too. . . . [more ‘whether or nots’] . . .

What mattered most was not that I believed the stories in a factual sense, but that I believed in the meaning they carried so I could act upon that meaning and embody it in my life, to let that meaning breathe in me, animate me, fill me. . . .”

Amen.

“. . . those who were undergoing doubts . . .”

“You may not know that, when he was young, Brother Roger questioned the reality of God’s love. Because of that, his whole life long he understood from within, those who were undergoing doubts.

An intuition made it possible for him to find a way out of that difficult period. That intuition was this; without being able to understand everything about God, and the Gospel, it is possible to put into practice the little bit we have understood. And for him that meant living the peace of Christ, meant moving towards reconciliation . . .”

Brother Alois, at Evening Prayers, in The Church of Reconciliation, at Taizé on the 5th [now 17th] anniversary of Brother Roger’s tragic death, 16 August 2005
A chance conversation and the use of a familiar word in it, led to first and then second thoughts about one of the basic tenets of our faith. A pastor was telling about an in-home visit she’d made with a couple whom she had not previously met, and she said that almost immediately she had sensed how “comfortable” they seemed to be with each other. At first, “comfortable” surprised as the primary descriptor of what she was seeing there. But maybe not. They had been married for many years, and each knew the other inside and out, knew each other’s special gifts, each other’s sometimes irritating quirks, each other’s real shortcomings. And yet, they were “comfortable” with each other, accepted each other as they were, happy in each other’s presence.

A basic tenet of our faith (and one that, historically, many have found hard to fully accept and believe) is that God’s love is “unconditional,” that it is not something we earn. The tenet is certainly centrally true. Yet, thinking about this couple’s relationship, at first, sparked mild discontent, sparked the thought that “unconditional” love, by itself, is only part of it, is primarily suggestive of a one-way movement, from God to us, does not acknowledge that—if there is to be true relationship—God’s love for us must be conjoined with our love for God.

But mild discontent was quickly followed by second thoughts: God does know me/us inside and out. “You know me completely. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made . . . ” (Psalm 139: 14-15). And God does know how often I/we, like Paul, “Do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate . . . do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want . . . ” (Romans 7:15-19). And what a gift this is.

And it is a gift. For, to know—in my heart—that God is “comfortable” with me, that God accepts me as I am, is deeply releasing . . . and deeply empowering.

And then a further thought came. One of the fruits of contemplative prayer is that through it we are able to be quiet . . . to simply listen . . . to seek to open ourselves to God’s ever-present Presence . . . and—once in a great while—to feel fully “comfortable,” to feel fully at home, in that Presence. . . .