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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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The Lord will keep you . . .

by *The Rev. Dr. David Tsai Shinn*

The southbound drive on Interstate 5 from Portland, Oregon, is serene. Just before Salem, I saw the small brown scenic sign for “Mount Angel,” an unassuming small town set on a flat plain, surrounded by endless farms. It is known for its Oktoberfest festivities, a local German brewery, and its restaurants. But it is even better known for the deep spiritual heritage and formation in the Mount Angel Benedictine Abbey and Seminary, set atop a little wooded mountain that juts oddly up out of the surrounding flat farmland.

As I directed my car up the hill to the Abbey, on a road lined with Stations of the Cross, the opening lines of the familiar ascending psalm, Psalm 121, entered my consciousness,

*“I lift up my eyes to the mountains—
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.”*

And it was indeed help I sought when I took that drive to Mount Angel Benedictine Abbey for the first time. Life had taken a turn in an unexpected way. Everything that I had dreamed, worked, and hoped for was turned upside down, tossed about, and thrown a thousand yards out the window. I was in the midst of a contentious divorce and custody battle, and I felt betrayed and in pain both physically and emotionally.

Mount Angel Abbey was founded in 1882 from the Abbey of Engelberg in Switzerland. Now as then, the monks dedicate themselves, under the Benedictine Rule and an Abbot, to a life of prayer, work, supporting one another in community, service to God, the Church, and the larger society. They do this as they celebrate the Holy Eucharist together, pray the Liturgy of the Hours five times daily in choir, and devote themselves to reading and silence. Many of the Mount Angel monks have taken the vow of silence. The only time they use their vocal cords is to sing in praise of God in Gregorian style chants. The daily Monday to Saturday mass begins at 5:25 a.m. with a vigil, then 6:35 a.m. Lauds, then 8:00 a.m. Mass, 12:00 p.m. Midday Prayer, 5:20 p.m. Vespers, and finally the 7:30 p.m. Compline.

Recognizing that I needed help while attempting to “hold it together” for the church I

The Lord will keep you . . . *continues on Page 2*

was called to serve in Seattle and to love my two young sons (five and three at that time), my Spiritual Director recommended that I visit the Abbey to seek clarity and to renew my spirit. At first, I scoffed at the notion of taking time for myself. Yet, having lost nearly thirty pounds in the preceding weeks, I heeded his advice and sped southbound on Interstate 5 to this sleepy town and its Abbey.

In 1 Kings 19, Elijah was fleeing from the wrath of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. Desperate and depressed, leaning against a solitary broom tree, he asked that he might die: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life." But God nourished him with an angel's company and with "cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water." Twice the angel of the Lord came to nourish him so he could go into the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, tracing the steps of Moses to Mount Horeb, with the intention to meet God.

Perhaps not with such grand sense of self and expectations, but certainly with a similar hope for renewal, I arrived at Mount Angel Abbey and began my three-day silent retreat. The only time I could speak was at my daily meeting with a designated spiritual director and to sing softly during any of the five services. Upon arrival, I was broken and vulnerable, a weather battered boat drifting rudderless in a sea of despair. My spirit was shattered from the broken dream of marriage and family. My mind kept replaying one bad scenario to the next.

Father Michael directed me to attend the services, journaling after each, to pray, pray, and pray some more, and to just rest and nourish my body. The emotions of betrayal, abandonment, and shame came

at me relentlessly. I felt helpless and uncertain. While it was not my first time experiencing those feelings and insecurities, it was severe and crushing.

The three-day silent retreat was both my wilderness and my oasis. As the hours and days progressed, I slowly began to feel the visits of the angels. The solitary walks through the Stations of the Cross gently offered me hope. The soft and warm bed and delicious meals nourished my body. And, crucially, Father Michael and the monks were not trying to fix me, but were opening the monastery to me, were sharing with me their way of opening themselves to God. It was in these thin places when God came and assured me of God's love and strength for me.

God did not promise a quick and easy path to wholeness. God did not show up as a dove descending from the clouds. God did not appear in a dazzling white robe. Instead, as I began to reopen in the quiet and routine of the Monastery, God showed up in between lines of the hymnody. God showed up between words of my journal. God showed up between my tearful prayers. God showed up between one Station of the Cross and the next. God showed up. . . .

Driving down from Mount Angel Abbey was a blur, that first time. I knew that I was still in pain and confusion, but I also knew that I was not alone. God will not abandon me and will support me to care for my congregation, love my children, and restore my sense of self. Reflecting on that time of my life, and the journey since, God's sure presence has never wavered.

In the heart felt words of hymn writer Isaac Watts:

*"Our God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
still be our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home!"*

The Rev. Dr. David Tsai Shinn is the Associate Pastor for Congregational Care at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, husband to Julie, father to young adults, Enoch and Ethan, and a marathoner. He seeks to joyfully serve the church and the community. He may be reached at: dshinn@wpc-mpls.org.

Contact Us

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

If you do, please contact Mahin Hamilton at mhamilton@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

Ongoing Opportunities

Individual Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction offers a non-judgmental environment for honest sharing about spiritual matters and an improved sense of how God is working in everyday lives. Our Spiritual Directors are available to meet with you via phone or via Zoom or Skype. And they can work with you to set up a virtual directed retreat, meeting daily for a series of days.

To learn more about spiritual direction, go to www.benedictinecenter.org, click on “Services” and scroll down to “Spiritual Direction”

And for a free initial consultation to see what it is actually like: email us at info@benedictinecenter.org

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

For information about other offerings—like **Individual On-site Retreats**, or hosting for **Your Group's Retreat**, or the **Benedictine Wellness Care Program**, or the **Monastic Art Gallery**: info@benedictinecenter.org or 651.777.7251 or www.benedictinecenter.org.

Graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction

This program leading to a Certificate in Spiritual Direction is both flexible and comprehensive in its academic content—being able to draw upon the rich resources of Saint John's School of Theology—and fairly flexible in its scheduling timeline. It offers twelve credits in core theology and ten credits in the art and skills of spiritual direction, including an eight-month practicum.

All of the program's courses—like **“Dynamics of Spiritual Direction”** and **“Integrating Spiritual Direction”** — can be taken in-person on campus or online. If you have wondered if you were being called to this caring ministry, please contact us:

Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary,
Collegeville

For additional information or if you have questions: 320.363.3559 or srahberg001@csbsju.edu or www.csbsju.edu/sot - Academics - Non-Degree Study - Spiritual Direction.

Beginning in the Fall, two upcoming Opportunities . . . that have been for many, and might be for you, deeply life enriching experiences:

The Ignatian Retreat: *Where is God acting in your life?*

This is an exploration of St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, offered by the **Christos Center** as an eight-month small group experience. The 2023 Retreat will run October, 2023, through May of 2024. Registration is now open.

If you would like to learn more, please plan to attend one or all of the upcoming information Zoom sessions:

June 22, 6:00-7:00 p.m. and July 13, noon-1:00 p.m. and August 17, Noon-1:00 p.m.

and:

Tending the Holy “Come and See”

Since 1990 Christos has hosted **Tending the Holy**, our two-year Cohort for those hearing a call to walk alongside others on their spiritual journey. The 2023 Cohorts begins in both the Twin Cities and Chicago in September, with applications due by August 15th.

If you may be, sensing this call or would like more information, there are two upcoming opportunities. You can attend an In-person gathering, **June 6, 7:00-8:30 p.m.**, at St. Thomas Moore Catholic Church, 1079 Summit Avenue, St. Paul. Attend our **Tending the Holy “Come and See”** webinar on **June 12** to meet our Coordinators, to learn more about the program and its meeting options, and to have your questions answered. Or you can take part in both!

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

from the Meditation, a small bonus

It certainly must have been noticed before, but not taken in, that fifteen of the *Psalms* are Ascending Psalms, many sub-titled “A Song of Ascents.”

Scholars suggest that the Ascending Psalms were sung by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem (which was at 2,700 feet) and, once they were there, as they climbed the Temple Mount. Thus, *Psalms* 122 begins:

**“I was glad when they said to me,
‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’
Our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.”**

It is thought that as they marched the pilgrims would call out in a responsive liturgy, encouraging each other to keep climbing. One would call out,

**“The Lord will keep you from all evil;
God will keep your life . . .”**

And the rest of the worshippers would respond,
**“The Lord will keep your going out
and your coming in
from this time on
and forever more . . .”** (Psalm 121:7-8)

A small bonus, a modest increased understanding when one reads an Ascending Psalm.

Tau Center, 26W171 Roosevelt Rd., Wheaton, IL
For information about these and other upcoming opportunities in the Twin Cities: 651.653.8207 or info@christoscenter.org or www.christoscenter.org.
For opportunities in the Chicago area: 630.868.9425 or info@christoscenter.org or www.christoscenter.org.

Training the Heart

This eight-week on-line course explores the big ideas Benedict and Ignatian shared, the practices that made them unique, and the kinds of suggestions that make it all practical today. Want to go deeper? Get personal support and encouragement with one-hour, one-on-one conversations. Let Sam Rahberg or Peter Watkins personally guide you through the retreat experience, on a schedule that meets your needs:

Wood & Water Retreats

For additional information or to establish a retreat timeline that would work for you:
info@woodandwaterretreats.com or
<https://wood-water-retreats.square.site>.

One-Time Opportunities

Tending Our Spiritual Storehouse

St. Benedict, quoting Matthew's Gospel, calls on monastics to be able to "bring out new things and old" from their spiritual storehouses." This retreat invites you to open the door and explore your spiritual storehouse, delighting in unexpected and much-needed treasures while noticing those whose expiration date may have passed.

The retreat closes with consideration of the ways that our life together can enhance or hinder the stewardship of our storehouse. It will be led by a visiting Sister, Sr. Edith Bogue, OSB, from Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, Alabama:

... even in the midst of disaster ...

"The contemplative vision perceives God as fully present in our lives even in the midst of disaster, turmoil, or personal failure.

It never loses hope because its hope is not based on human events but on the divine goodness, which is infinitely powerful and infinitely merciful . . ."

Thomas Keating,
Consenting to God as God Is

Sunday, June 11, at 7:00 p.m.-

Friday, June 16, at 5:00 p.m.

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

For information or registration for this and other up-coming opportunities—like the Intensive Centering **Prayer Retreat** (July 21-30) or an individually directed **Spirituality Center Retreat** (August 6-11) to reserve one of our **Hermitages**: 320.363/8927 or www.sbm.osb.org or mholicky@csbsju.edu or eantony@csbsju.edu.

Silent Weekend Retreat for Men & Women

Fr. Matt Linn's ever popular health and healing July retreats at Christ the King have a new theme this year, —**"Do This and You Will Live: Becoming Fully Alive"**— Jesus' Good Samaritan parable is famous because it is the key to receive and share in the fullness of life. We go through life either being the suffering victim by the side of the road, the fearful priest, or the Good Samaritan spontaneously stopping to share because he is so full of life.

This retreat will heal the times we have been a victim, are suffering now or anxious about the future. Then we will no longer be half alive but fully alive with the courage, compassion, and wisdom of the Good Samaritan. As the parable promises, "Do this and you will live" fully – right now and forever.

Friday, July 14, at 7:00 p.m. (or earlier)–

Sunday, July 16, after lunch, In-person @ 8:00

Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN

For information or registration about this or other upcoming opportunities—like **Men and Women's Silent Weekend Retreat: the Theology and Spirituality of Sexuality** (August 4-6): www.kingshouse.com or 763.682.1394 or christtheking@kingshouse.com.

Let Mystery Guide You: Jump and the net will appear

Sometimes, life can feel big, messy, and filled with the unknown. Sometimes, life can feel caught up in details and tasks. Sometimes, we do not see a clear way forward or the way appears in mystery. If you find yourself in any of these spaces, a time to decompress

"Alone with you . . .

. . . in the gathering darkness, it would be easier, Lord, if I could reach out and embrace you with the power of my mind. But only love can pierce the darkness in which alone you can be found . . ."

The Cloud of Unknowing

and clear mind, body, and spirit is waiting for you.

This August retreat offers you space to explore themes of the **Walk to Emmaus** and how Mystery shows up in unexpected places to guide your ongoing spiritual awakening. With opportunities to reflect in our Peace Garden and in meaningful conversation with others, this is a special time of breaking bread and breaking open your divine connection with Spirit.

Join us—in-person or via Zoom-- in this week-long retreat as Angela Guadalupe helps us soak in the ways that Divine Presence walks with us in everyday life:

In-person (includes meals and lodging):

Monday, Aug. 7, at 9:30 a.m.- Fri., Aug. 11, at Noon

Via Zoom: **Morning and afternoon sessions, Monday-**

Thursday + Morning session on Friday

Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, in the Gathering Place

116 8th Avenue SE, Little Falls, MN

For information about this and other up-coming opportunities—like our free family-friendly **Green Fair Fold Festival** (Aug. 2): 320.632.0688 or fpminfo@fslf.org or jdeering@fslf.org or www.fslh.org.

The Spiritual Journey

Are you seeking a deeper path? Are you discerning a new path forward? The Spiritual Journey Week at Ghost Ranch—in the High Desert of northern New Mexico—creates time and space to be still, listen and cultivate deeper meaning in your life.

In the community of other seekers, the guided contemplative experiences, time for solitude in nature, and our sharing of our personal stories and wisdom will help us restore our souls and rest deeply. Past participants have been grateful for the friendships that were kindled in the closeness of the small group experience.

Accept this invitation to take time for yourself for spiritual nourishment, all within an ancient landscape celebrating God’s creation and sacred community:

Monday-Sunday, August 14-20

Sponsor: **Stillpoint Center for Christian Spirituality**

Held at **Casa del Sol, Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, NM**

For information or registration for this or other up-coming opportunities—like **Youth Week: “Attitudes at Altitude”** (July 25-30) : 505.685.1000 or

info@ghostranch.org or www.ghostranch.org.

“Healing is not forcing the sun to shine, but letting go of what blocks the light.”

Stephen and Andrea Levine,
Healing into Life and Death

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And there are many other Opportunities, offered by other area organizations and Spirituality Centers:

### Ritual, Nature, and the Creative Process

This is an opportunity to integrate the wisdom of meditation, the joy of art, and the love of nature into this outdoor mandala making, meditative arts experience. It is a practice in relating and welcoming impermanence. It is an opportunity to experience creativity and mindfulness in nature.

**What to Bring?** Honor your relationship with nature by gathering any garden flowers, buds and leaves, sticks or twigs of similar size, acorns, pinecones, stones or seed pods from your yard or walks—and bring a journal, pen/pencil, a water bottle:

**Saturday, June 3, 10:00 a.m.-Noon** - In-person only

**Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality**

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

For information about this and many other up-coming opportunities—like **Restorative Art and Healing at Innisfree Farm** (June 10-11): 651.696.2794 or

[www.wisdomwayscenter.org](http://www.wisdomwayscenter.org) or

[office@wisdomwayscenter.org](mailto:office@wisdomwayscenter.org).

### Is Spiritual Direction for Me?

For answers to your questions. To learn about how spiritual direction can benefit you and those you serve, and to hear directly from spiritual directors and directees, join us and other area Spirituality Centers on **June 6th, 7:00-8:30 p.m.** at St. Thomas More Catholic

“One of my favorite places of prayer . . .

. . . at New Harmony is the **Angel of Compassion**. She is a life-size human figure of gleaming bronze, placed beneath a twelve-foot granite archway, under which she is passing, her head and entire posture inclining forward. The archway has always felt to me like the archway of the present moment, the archway of every moment.

And the Angel is like a messenger of the Living Presence, inclining with compassion, accompanying us and our world as we enter the archway of the present . . .”

John Philip Newell,  
*A New Harmony*

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Church, 1079 Summit Avenue, St. Paul

**Loyola Spirituality Center**

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

For information or registration or other up-coming opportunities—like our Thursday morning Centering Prayer and Thursday evening Examen: 651.641.0008 or [info@loyolaspiritualitycenter.org](mailto:info@loyolaspiritualitycenter.org) or [www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org](http://www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org).

**The Community for Christian Meditation**

Christianity has a deep tradition of silent prayer in the form of contemplation or meditation. This community setting will practice Christian meditation in the tradition of **Fr. John Main**, OSB, learning to quiet the mind and open our hearts to divine presence.

If you are new to meditation, this is a gentle place to start. If you have an established meditative practice, deepen your practice by sharing it in community. Followers of Thomas Merton will find a home here. Drop-ins are welcome:

**First and third Wednesdays, 6:30-7:30 p.m.**

**June 7, 21 – July 5, 19 - August 2, 16**

**Franciscan Spirituality Center**

**920 Market Street, La Crosse WI**

For information or registration for this and other up-coming opportunities—like our monthly Visio Divina or the **Women's Summer Solstice Retreat** (June 22-25): 608.791.5295 or [fscenter@fspa.org](mailto:fscenter@fspa.org) or [www.fscenter.org](http://www.fscenter.org).

**Holy Quiet: Generative Silence,**

**a writer's retreat for women**

Emily Wilmer is back. Back after her earlier years here when her husband, Fr. David Keller, was the Founding Warden of the Episcopal House of Prayer. As some will remember, Emily is an accomplished poet and retreat leader. This weekend retreat is for you to work on your

**Where life can be found**

“The present moment is where life can be found.

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

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

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

Thich Nhat Hanh,  
*The Present Moment*

current writing or make a beginning on something new.

Our days will be wrapped in silent meditation and contemplative prayer, with stretches of time for writing, shared meals, and group reflection at day's end:

**Thursday, July 6, at 5:00 p.m.–**

**Sunday, July 9, at 10:30 a.m.**

Held at the **St. John's Abbey Guesthouse, Collegeville**

(Nice individual rooms with writing table and bath, and a Commons for gatherings)

For more information or to register, contact Emily at: [amma.emily.wilmer@gmail.com](mailto:amma.emily.wilmer@gmail.com) or 828.319.7240.

**Dreams: The Secret Language of the Soul**

The Scriptures view dreams as possible messages from the Divine. Psychologist Carl Jung said, “The dream is a little hidden door in the innermost and most secret recesses of the soul.” Come examine the symbolism of dream images and their psychological and spiritual implications:

**Saturday, July 8, 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m.**

**St. Scholastica Monastery, at-McCabe Renewal Center**

**2123 Abbotsford Avenue, Duluth, MN**

For information or registration for this and other up-coming opportunities—like our monthly Visio Divina: 218.724.5266 or [www.retreatduluth.org](http://www.retreatduluth.org) or [retreat@duluthosb.org](mailto:retreat@duluthosb.org).

**Kenosis and Pleroma**

This retreat is an opportunity for deep reflection and prayer. It is the most intensive retreat we offer at the House of Prayer, intended for serious spiritual seekers. Much of the week, including almost all meals, will be in silence, and participants should have previous experience on a silent retreat.

Together, we will engage in contemplation to support a reorientation to God. We will also have time for personal reflection, relaxation, and open spaces:

**Saturday, July 15, at 5:30 p.m.-**

**Sunday, July 23, at 1:00 p.m.**

**The Episcopal House of Prayer,**

**14215 Fruit Farm Road, Collegeville, MN**

For information or registration for this and other up-coming opportunities—like the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Retreat (August 10-15): [houseprayer@csbsju.edu](mailto:houseprayer@csbsju.edu) or [www.ehouseofprayer.org](http://www.ehouseofprayer.org) or 320.363.3293 or [houseprayer@csbsju.edu](mailto:houseprayer@csbsju.edu).

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## Reading Opportunities

### Devotions, The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver by Mary Oliver

A subjective but considered sense is that the modern poet most frequently quoted in the sermons and talks we hear and the articles and books we read may well be Mary Oliver [1935-2019]. At their core, her poems proclaim, “**Be Present . . . Pay Attention,**” and then show what can be seen and experienced when one does.

As many will remember, most of her poems came from her long walks and close observation of the natural world in Ohio and New England, noticing details and patterns in nature and seeing in them aspects of human nature and the human world, drawing deep comfort from the consistency of the natural world, entering into it and becoming a part of it.

Mary Oliver’s first book of poems was published in 1963; *American Primitive* won the Pulitzer in 1983; and her *Devotions*, her twentieth book of poems, was published shortly after her death in 2019. In mid-April this year, after a very long winter, on the fourth day of clear blue skies and bright sun and temperatures in the upper eighties, . . . on a day that felt wonderfully liberating and carefree, . . . on a whim, it was decided to randomly open *Devotions* each day for a month and see what would happen.

On the first day—April 15th—the book opened to “Lingering in Happiness,” which began,

#### Knowing

“The contemplative stance is to seek to be open to the experience of God’s presence, and to all experience, . . . to be open to silence and to ambiguity and to Mystery . . .”

Richard Rohr,  
*Daily Meditation*, date mis-recorded

“The mystics of all the major faith traditions assert that direct, immediate knowing is possible, . . . that such Knowing is not based on reason or deduction, but on communion, . . . that such Knowing is intimate, and that this intimacy is transformational.

We come to resemble that which we know. . . .”

Richard Rohr,  
*Daily Meditation*, 2 August 2018

“After rain after many days without rain, . . .  
the roots of the oaks will have their share,”  
But which—on that day—seemed instead to be saying,  
“After months of snow and more snow, . . .  
four days of lingering in happiness,”

On the second day, it was “Toad,”  
“I was walking by. He was sitting there. . . . I squatted  
beside him, at the edge of the path. He didn’t move.  
I began to talk. I talked about summer, and about time.  
The pleasures of eating, the terrors of the night.  
About this cup we call a life. About happiness.  
And how good it feels,  
the heat of the sun between the shoulder blades. . . .

He might have been Buddha—did not move, blink, or  
frown, not a tear fell from those gold-rimmed eyes  
as the refined anguish of language passed over him . . . .”

On the third day, words from Mary Oliver’s “Luna”  
opened Richard Rohr’s *Daily Meditation*. And the book  
opened to “The Summer Day,”

“Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean—the one  
who is eating sugar out of my hand . . .

I don’t know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention,  
how to fall down into the grass,  
how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed,  
how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.

Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn’t everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life? . . . .”

Day after day. And a thought kept coming, a thought  
that may very well have been one of Mary Oliver’s own,  
“*Acting on a whim is what we ought to more often do.*”

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**Afterwords:** continued from back page.

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A good week. One that began with a surprise and ended  
with the recognition that within the Zen Buddhist and  
Christian (and Sufi and Kabbalah and other) faith traditions—  
although the details vary—the  
contemplative way of seeing and interpreting the world is  
essentially the same: **Many lamps, One flame . . .**



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## Address Service Requested

“The Lord will keep you . . .”  
“Jump and the net will appear . . .”  
“Dreams” the Secret Language of the soul . . .”  
“A shared stance. . .”

## Afterwords: “A shared stance . . .”

Checking the morning’s emails on March 19th turned out not to be its normal routine task, offering a modest surprise. The March/April/May *Thin Places* was just out and had included an appreciation of Fr. Richard Rohr and his long ministry, occasioned by his eightieth birthday on March 20 and by his gentle pulling back from active leadership of the Center for Action and Contemplation, which he had founded in Albuquerque in 1987. The issue’s lead Meditation had been written by the Chief Priest of the Minnesota Zen Buddhist Meditation Center, *Thin Places*’ first by a non-Christian author. The previous issue’s Meditation—which described a powerful thin place experience its Christian author had shared with his Muslim neighbor—also reflected the essential similarity of the contemplative within all the major faith traditions.

Then, opening the emails that morning, there they both were. As the titles showed, Fr. Richard’s Daily Meditations for the week were to underline the basic likeness of a core element of the contemplative within two faith traditions: “**Adopting** [the Zen Buddhist] **Beginner’s Mind** . . . [and Jesus’] **Be Present as a Child.**” Zen Buddhist writers assert the deep need for preserving a Beginner’s Mind, for preserving “an attitude of openness, eagerness, curiosity, and lack of preconceptions,” an attitude that is intrinsic among true beginners but that is challenging among those with more learning and experience, “where a person becomes so accustomed to ways of doing and thinking that they do not easily consider or acknowledge new ideas or approaches.” There is a deep need, if truth or reality is to be seen, to not allow self or ego or conscious or unconscious ideas and values and conclusions to get in the way.

And the Daily Meditations for the week would also show that the Zen Buddhist necessity for keeping a Beginner’s Mind is very much the same as the need to be fully Present, . . . to have “the mind and heart of a child” . . . to have “the delight and curiosity of small children” . . . a natural and unconscious “humility and openness and teachability” . . . a state of mind and heart that adults can recapture, at least in part, “through silent meditation and often in solitude, [catching] glimpses or longer periods of awareness” . . . and more . . .