

Spirit Journal - July 2021

Preview

This issue features:

- A couple of important "save the date" announcements for a weekend retreat and a one-day workshop coming up this fall
- Information about an Introduction to Centering Prayer workshop coming right up on July 21 and 28 via Zoom.
- Two personal reflections: one from Sandy Janowski on her experience of a recent retreat and one from Linda Jackim on "unexpected arrivals of grace"
- An special invitation encouraging you to share a reflection or other piece of your own writing in *Spirit Journal*
- News about several other contemplative events and resources to support your journey
- *Insights* from Mirabai Starr, Cynthia Bourgeault, Howard Thurman, and Gerald May

Please share your ideas! Help *Spirit Journal* become an even more vibrant conversation by emailing the editor at the address provided at the end of the newsletter.

Save the Dates: Fall Retreat on October 8-10 and a Zoom One-Day Fall Workshop with Phileena Heuertz on November 13

Please save the dates now if you would like to participate in one or both of the events
Contemplative Outreach Chicago is planning for this fall:

- The Fall Retreat October 8-10 will be a "weekend immersion" in Centering Prayer at the beautiful La Salle Manor Retreat and Conference Center in rural Plano, Illinois. This event will also be available via Zoom. It will be led by Alan Krema, the coordinator of our Chicago chapter, and Mike Smoolca of Contemplative Outreach Connecticut, the retreat's co-sponsor. We will email additional information and a registration link soon.

- The One-Day Fall Workshop with Phileena Heuertz will take place via Zoom on Saturday, November 13. It will focus on "three-centered awareness" and the deeper, subtle, life-changing dynamics of contemplative prayer. Phileena is co-founder of the [Gravity Center for Contemplative Activism](#). Look for more information on this event in next month's newsletter.



We hope you will want to take part as we move gradually and carefully toward a full "post-pandemic" schedule of contemplative activities.

Coming Right Up: A Two-Session Introduction to Centering Prayer July 21 and 28 via Zoom

Are you Interested in learning more about the method of Centering Prayer, or do you know someone who is?

In this two-part workshop, participants will learn the method of Centering Prayer and its conceptual background. There will also be two opportunities to experience the prayer, followed by time for Q & A. The workshop is open to beginners as well as those who wish to deepen their practice. It will cover:

- Prayer as Relationship
- The Method of Centering Prayer
- Thoughts and the Use of the Sacred Word
- Deepening our Relationship with God



Centering Prayer is a receptive method of silent prayer that prepares us to receive the gift of contemplative prayer. Centering Prayer emphasizes prayer as a personal relationship with God and as a movement beyond conversation with Christ to communion with Christ.

Space is limited, so please register now. The two sessions are on consecutive Wednesdays, July 21 and 28, 6:00-8:00pm via Zoom. The program is offered on a free-will

donation basis, \$25 suggested. To register, [click here](#) or contact Bill Epperly at bill@integralawakenings.com) for more information.

Following the two-session Introduction, a six-week program, “Deepening Your Practice,” will also be offered. Beginners and long-time practitioners of Centering Prayer are invited to join this six-week long program, with a one-hour Zoom session each Wednesday evening August 4 – September 8.

Centering Prayer is a simple practice. Simple, but not easy to master. Participants will benefit from weekly gatherings which will include: brief tips on practicing Centering Prayer, 20 minutes of prayer time with the group, and time for Q & A afterwards. The goal is that you come away from the program confident in your practice and experiencing Centering Prayer at a new, deeper level. [Click here](#) to register for "Deepening Your Practice," or contact Bill Epperly (bill@integralawakenings.com) for more information.

About the presenters: Bill Epperly, PhD, is a research biochemist who left the lab in search of awakening. He is a workshop leader and spiritual director and is commissioned by Contemplative Outreach to teach the method of Centering Prayer. Bill is an adjunct faculty member at DePaul University where he teaches integral spirituality.

Sandy Janowski is a retired Social Worker, Addiction Counselor and Community College Adjunct Instructor. In 2009 she was commissioned by the Institute of Spiritual Companionship and has been a practitioner of Centering Prayer since 2001. Sandy serves on the Circle of Service for Contemplative Outreach Chicago. She is a mother, grandmother, and great grandmother.

A Reflection on the 2021 Intensive and Post Intensive Retreat – “Be Still and Know That I Am God”

Attendees at last month's Intensive and Post-Intensive Retreat in Racine, Wisconsin.

by Sandy Janowski

It's been about a month since the Intensive Post-Intensive Retreat at Siena Center. As I step back and reflect on the process, my trust and faith in God is deeper. I take off my hat and say "Thanks."

I had a pivotal phone conversation with Ann Koerner CSA, two months before the retreat. The sense that God had called us together was clear. The retreat leadership team was formed, Ann, myself and Kenny Kohberger. I knew Ann and Kenny from the 2019 retreat, never expecting we would lead the 2021 retreat together.

We zoomed at least six times, choosing videos, changing the schedule, assigning roles planning and preparing every detail. All decisions were made as a team. Ann was at the helm, full of Wisdom and experience. Something else was happening: We became soul-friends and we laughed and laughed and laughed together. Which shows how doing God's work, brings much laughter!

A week before the retreat I had an unexpected revelation. While doing *Lectio* with a translation of Psalm 25, the words lonely and afflicted popped out, I glossed over and then came back to them, "no, no." Staying open with the passage, trusting, returning, finally a quiet "yes"... resting, accepting, resistance gone. I was entering the retreat accepting my brokenness. Didn't Jesus feel lonely and afflicted? And Jesus went to His Father.

About Day 3 into the retreat I was bombarded with old messages, beliefs of '*not-good enough*,' '*bad girl*.' Boldly I cried out, "*I didn't come here for this!*" There was no rebuke, no judgments. Walking to the lake days later, I heard myself say, "*Yes, yes, You got me!*" The Loving Divine Presence, stillness, my insides calm and grateful.

I came to the retreat to serve, this was not 'my retreat.' Yet, "serving" served as catalyst, bringing up 'my stuff.' God choreographed this...from the pivotal phone call, the team soul-friending each other, coming as broken, unloading, and resting in God's love.

When we gathered for the Closing Ritual we were asked to remember how God had been with us during the retreat. "*What is it that God is calling me to remember as I return home?*" And God spoke,



I'm here, loving you always...

be not afraid

your are mine

come

come [dance with me](#)

Take me where you want me to go...

Unexpected Arrivals of Grace

by Linda Jackim

I stumbled upon the words *unexpected arrivals of grace* a few years ago. I think they capture the essence of those moments when I suddenly experience the truth of who God is and who I am. Such knowledge is not a product of the intellect but rather an “inner knowing” of the heart. I can't plan these occurrences nor can I predict them. They are often disguised and thus I can only cultivate a desire to recognize them and then wait in expectant hope.



This past week I received a birthday card and a long letter from my friend, Doris Walsh. As I eagerly read Doris' words, I could hear her voice and the Canadian accent I've come to enjoy. It didn't take long before she began to share her experience of an unexpected arrival of grace. It is with her permission that I share her story with you.

“Linda, the month of June has been a wonderful time for me in terms of experiencing God’s presence. Our comings and goings here in Newfoundland have been limited because of Covid. Now, Linda, you know I’m not a walker, however during June I started walking around our convent garden. I was filled with amazement as I noticed buds coming forth in their own time. Then I saw the leaves, their various shapes, lines and design. I can’t get over the beauty that is right in front of me.



So often I don’t even notice because I’m distracted or way too busy. I saw flowers. Oh my, there is such a variety of blooms, colors and ways in which flowers unfold. Some live for several days and others for only a few hours. There are fruit trees, berries and vegetables all so different and useful. Trees that looked dead are coming back to life. The soil and even the worms nourish the trees and plants. All this contributes to my wonderful life. Our God is truly a God of abundance. And I realized the power of the seed. All Nature needs is contained in that seed and . . . the seed of life is also in me.”

Meister Eckhart, Dominican mystic, theologian and philosopher, reminds us:

The seed of God is in us.
Given an intelligent and hard-working farmer,
it will thrive and grow up into God, whose seed it is;
and, accordingly, its fruits will be God-nature.

Pear seeds grow into pear trees,
nut seeds grow into nut trees,
and God seeds into God.

So may it be with us.

One Spirit . . . Many Voices

Since our newsletter got its start in 2015, it’s been intended as an *interactive open forum* in which members can share the experiences and insights that occur along each of our individual spiritual paths. Much like journaling, writing your own reflection can be a way to explore your

inner landscape while connecting with others and inspiring them.

This month's issue includes meaningful personal reflections from Sandy Janowski and Linda Jackim. *Spirit Journal* has published dozens of personal essays and poems since 2015. We encourage you to be bold and enter the conversation. You can write about any spiritual/contemplative topic or experience that has meaning for you or submit a drawing or work of art that stirred up something mystical in you. Here are a few possibilities:

- The fruits of Lectio Divina or Visio Divina
- A book review or reflection on a book, passage or quote that resonated with you
- Unexpected arrivals of grace – stories about how the Divine speaks to us through ordinary experiences
- Nature as teacher
- Meditation Chapel - a global experience
- Centering Prayer as an 11th Step
- Gardening, art making, baking bread, etc. as a spiritual practice
- Poetry, haiku

Again, these are just suggestions – please write as the Spirit moves you! If you would like to submit something you've written or just explore an idea, please contact the newsletter editor, Jack Lloyd, at news@centeringprayerchicago.org.

Please consider joining our conversation.

Events and Resources

You may wish to participate in some of these local, regional, and online events:

Coming Up at Healing Gardens

Healing Gardens, the idyllic contemplative center in St. Charles, offers two special activities soon:

- Silent Saturday Morning: Saturday August 21, 9:00am-noon
- Enneagram Workshop, Level 1: Saturday September 11, 8:45-11:30am and 12:30-2:30pm outdoors, or via Zoom if inclement weather. (Note that this was originally planned as a Level 2 workshop)



Please visit the [Healing Gardens website](#) for more information or to register. There are several other events on the calendar and, in addition, the gardens are open now for anyone who needs a Nature “fix.” To make arrangements, text 630-740-2597.

From Contemplative Outreach of Colorado: Bob Mischke on the "Guard of the Heart" Practice, October 23

This online workshop will teach the practice of “Guard of the Heart” (also referred to as “Watchfulness” or “Presence Practice”) and how it complements Centering Prayer, and the practices of the Welcoming Prayer and the Active Prayer Phrase. Participants will learn the three ways any afflictive thought or emotional disturbance can be instantly released as it arises.

According to Thomas Keating: “One practice to bring the effects of contemplative prayer into daily life is traditionally known as “Guard of the Heart.” This consists of letting go of every emotional disturbance as it arises and before we start thinking about it. This method is more sophisticated than dismantling the emotional programs for happiness because it deals with the whole of life. It expresses our ongoing intention to be with God in the present moment and sustains it.”

Bob Mischke, who has worked with Contemplative Outreach of Colorado for more than 25 years, learned this practice directly from Father Thomas. The workshop will take place Saturday October 23, 10:00am-1:00pm Central. For further

information, please visit the [Contemplative Outreach of Colorado website](#).

Centering Prayer Groups, In-Person and via Zoom

Participants who attend a Centering Prayer introductory workshop often decide to join an existing prayer group or form one of their own. The groups generally meet weekly or every other week to share their experience of Centering Prayer and growing relationship with God.

Many groups decide to view videos or read and discuss books by Fr. Thomas and others to deepen their individual understanding of their spiritual practices. Formats usually include a session of Centering Prayer and discussion and sharing. These small faith communities build trust and unity while encouraging and supporting members on their spiritual journey.

More than 40 Chicago-area prayer groups are listed on our [website](#). If you would like help finding a prayer group, please contact the facilitators' team leader at: groups@centeringprayerchicago.org.

While more and more prayer groups are returning to meeting in-person, here are four invitations to gather with Chicago-area Centering Prayer groups via Zoom. Listed below are the groups, times, and contact information.

- St. Clement's Centering Prayer Group every Saturday 9:30-10:30am. Contact Bill Epperly at bill@integralawakenings.com
- St. Katharine Drexel Church every Tuesday 8:30-9:30am. Contact Lori Dressel at lorijdressel@gmail.com
- The Healing Gardens - Centering Prayer with Lectio Divina, last Friday of each month, 10:30am-11:30pm. Contact Deb Marqui at deb@dmarquicom or text/call 630-740-259.
- Permanent Zoom group (not associated with an in-person group) Tuesday 6:00 - 7:00pm. Contact Rose Magiera for link and phone number – rmmagiera@gmail.com

Bill Epperly has also invited everyone to *Interspiritual Sundays* which gathers Sunday from 9:00-10:00am. You may contact Bill at bill@integralawakenings.com and he'll be happy to

share more information with you.

Offerings in the Contemplative Outreach Meditation Chapel

The national website of our parent organization features an Online Meditation Chapel that is very easy to use and provides the opportunity to see, hear and join in silent prayer with others from all over the world. You must first register to attend the meetings in the Chapel. You can do that by using the [calendar](#) link. Once you know what chapel your desired meeting is in, use the [chapel](#) link.

Meditation Groups – Groups meet via Zoom at all hours of the day and night and are open to anyone. *There is no cost/fee to attend, charging is prohibited.* A friend writes: “I have been attending meditation in the virtual Keating Chapel and had a lovely experience. The facilitator was very good!” For further information, visit the [calendar](#) or [chapel listing](#).

Healing Together: A Gathering of Consciousness – In silence we focus on an intention for peace and healing in 2020. The format is an opening prayer, a short reading, two 25-minute sessions of silent prayer with a short break in-between and closing prayer. These sessions are scheduled every Thursday from 11:00am to 12:00pm Central Time (US & Ca) in the Thomas Keating Chapel with Mary Lapham. You can contact Mary at marylapham2@gmail.com.

Please let us know about any additional events and resources you're aware of. Write to: news@centeringprayerchicago.org

Insights

This may sound more supernatural and rarified than it is but I believe we are all prophets, each one a mouthpiece for the Divine. This is no more extraordinary, and no less miraculous, than the fact that we can communicate through language, give birth, or compose music.

- Mirabai Starr

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” In this one sentence, the whole of the teaching is conveyed. What remains is for us to come to a greater

understanding of how this purification is actually accomplished: a critical issue on which Christian tradition is by no means unanimous.

- Cynthia Bourgeault

There are few things more devastating than to have it burned into you that you do not count and that no provisions are made for the literal protection of your person.

- Howard Thurman

Union with God already exists. Everyone always has been and always will be in union with God.

- Gerald May

Your Turn

Please write in to contribute your ideas or to comment on any aspect of *Spirit Journal*. Let us know if you are aware of an upcoming event you think others should know about, or send us an inspirational quote you'd like to share, or information about a book, website, podcast, or video you recommend. You can contribute by emailing the newsletter editor at news@centeringprayerchicago.org.
