

Spirit Journal - June 2021

Preview

This issue marks the beginning of *Spirit Journal's* seventh year of publication - thanks to all of our readers for your continued interest!

The June issue features:

- An interview about the meaning of Juneteenth (our new national holiday, as of this week) with Leslie Geer of Contemplative Outreach Atlanta
- A look back at the recently concluded Living Flame 2 program
- Information about a new film to be released July 6th by the Mind & Life Institute: *Evolution of the Heart*, conversations with the Dalai Lama, including a link to a two-and-a-half minute trailer
- News about several contemplative events and resources to support your journey
- *Insights* from Richard Rohr, Thomas Keating, Seccho, and Susan Saltzberg

Please share your ideas! Help *Spirit Journal* continue as a vibrant conversation by emailing the editor at the address provided at the end of the newsletter.

Juneteenth Interview with Leslie Geer

As you probably already know, the US has a new national holiday as of this week – Juneteenth – also known as Freedom Day or Jubilee Day. Juneteenth commemorates the day in 1865, two-and-a-half years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, when federal troops arrived in Galveston, Texas to take control of the state and ensure that all enslaved people be freed.



Leslie Geer is a member of Contemplative Outreach Atlanta, and the following interview was originally published in their newsletter. She leads Centering Prayer Groups at St. Anthony of Padua.

1. What does Juneteenth mean to you? It is a day when our freedom was documented, the day that inspired hope.

2. How did you learn about Juneteenth? Growing up in Denver, Colorado, we've been celebrating Juneteenth since I was a teenager. I am going home this weekend, and my family and I plan to attend the events going on in my old community. There is a two-day festival with arts, booths and food, as well as the annual parade Saturday morning.

3. What stories did your family tell? I had not heard about the Tulsa Black Wall Street Massacre. I do remember reading about Emmett Till in *Jet* and *Ebony Magazine* articles, with the published photos of his body. It was devastating. I believe my folks told me just enough so that I would be **aware**, but not to be so horrified that I would feel like I couldn't have a life.

4. What would you like us to know? That no matter what, people of color walk out the door and into all rooms with our color. We don't know how we will be received, perceived, or accepted on any given day. We are not all the same, and we all have our biases. However, it truly takes our prayerful and close relationship with God to understand how we are supposed to love. It is through prayer that our eyes and ears are opened: "Open Mind, Open Heart," right?

5. What do you wish others could know and do? I wish that others would take the time to learn, study, find out, and take interest in African American history.

I'm in a group that my friend and his partner started last year during Covid. We've found that there are many things we are all learning at the same time. Our dialogue has not always been easy, although we have known each other for many years. I'm also in a core group of 14 parishes who are working diligently to form an antiracist platform to establish a "conversation" for the Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta.

The contemplative part of Centering Prayer really is God's action within. Just like reconciliation is difficult and uncomfortable, racial dialogue and discussions about police brutality are difficult and uncomfortable. The awareness God gives us in contemplation is His nudging us to correct.

6. Where can we learn more? Four great books: Ibram X. Kendi's *Stamped from the Beginning* and *How to be an Antiracist*, DiAngelo and Dyson's *White Fragility*, and Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste*. PBS is airing some great programs now. Join a group or participate in the [21 day Ignatian Racial Equity challenge](#) or the [Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing](#).

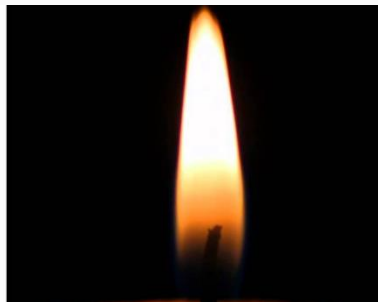
25 Participants Complete Living Flame 2

Contemplative Outreach Chicago's presentation of the Living Flame 2 program - seven half-day Saturday workshops over a five-month period - concluded in May.

Commissioned presenters

from Contemplative Outreach's national organization presented in-depth spiritual

studies enhanced by small group breakout sessions. Phil Jackson, a past coordinator of our chapter, organized the program, with ongoing help from Charlie Welsh and John Parkolap.



The participants' evaluations of the program were consistently positive. Here are some sample comments participants offered about each of the seven sessions:

#1 - Reclaiming Our Roots, led by Richard Bonacci (CA): "... the content on the Abbas and Ammas surprised and inspired me ..."

#2 - Lectio Divina 2, led by Nancy Stimac (CT) and Lesley O'Connor (Ireland): "... loved the experience of practicing Lectio from the monastic way ... amazing presenters ... very prepared, very informative ..."

#3 - Contemplative Living, led by Susan Rush (NM): "... awesome materials ... Susan poured out the wisdom of the Centering Prayer masters and drenched us in their insights and her own profound thoughts and spiritual rituals, such as chanting and gesturing ..."

#4 - The Forgiveness Prayer, led by Nancy Cord-Baran (PA): "... I have a sense of inner peace after this session today, and an enthusiasm to add this Forgiveness Prayer Process to my practice every day!"

#5 - Soul Friending, led by Marilyn Webb (IN): "... outstanding presentation of materials ... this was a topic of great interest to me ... I didn't have a good understanding of what soul friending was ... this presentation expanded my understanding ..."

#6 - Psychological Experience of CP, led by Mary Dwyer (PA): "... loved her sense of presence, her authenticity, and the ease with which she presented her material both from reading and lived experience ... Bravo!"

#7 - Dark Night of Spirit, led by Susan Komis (MO): "... a very good presentation ... a lot of information ... Susan was exceptional!"

In a final, post-program survey, 62% of those responding indicated that the Forgiveness Prayer was the most impactful session for them.

Last fall, we conducted a member survey and 68% of those responding indicated a high level of interest in the Living Flame 1 and 2 programs. This just-completed Living Flame 2 program has not only introduced us to eight experts who can present to our broader membership in the future, but also to a number of other chapters who – like us – are intent on developing an effective ongoing Living Flame program, and with whom we can collaborate in that effort.

New Film from the Mind & Life Institute Premieres on the Dalai Lama's Birthday

On July 6, Mind & Life will honor the Dalai Lama's birthday with the release of *Evolution of the Heart*. The 36-minute film chronicles conversations between the Dalai Lama, evolutionary biologist David Sloan Wilson, and social scientist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela. The film emerged from a 2019 Mind & Life event, "Conversations on Compassion, Interconnection, and Transformation," held in Dharamsala, India.

The film explores questions at the heart of the human condition. Can we consciously evolve to be kinder and more compassionate? How do we reconcile the needs of the individual with those of society? And what makes true forgiveness possible? David points to a sea change

that has occurred in evolutionary science toward a focus on altruism and prosociality. Pumla describes the African philosophy of ubuntu that laid the groundwork for healing in the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa. All three speakers point to steps each of us can take to advance the Dalai Lama's call to create an "ethics for the whole world."

The film will be available—for free—on Mind & Life's website beginning July 6th - [watch the trailer.](#)

Events and Resources

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

Shalem Institute's Annual Gerald May Seminar July 16-17

The Shalem Institute's Gerald May Seminar will be held on Zoom this year, live and interactive with the Rev. Michael Battle. The intention is to offer a spacious, open, experiential, and interactive day, with presentations, prayer, art, and music, including sharing in pairs and/or small groups, as well.

Drawing upon the three-fold stages of Christian mysticism, the Friday evening talk will explore the first mystical stage of purgation, connecting it to both contemplative prayer and restorative justice. Desmond Tutu's life, ubuntu theology, and spiritual practices ground this talk, showing how justice and prayer fit together. The Saturday morning retreat session will explore illumination, the second stage of Christian mysticism, focusing on the connection between contemplative prayer and social activism, using the examples of St. Antony of Egypt, St. Hildegard of Bingen and Desmond Tutu. The morning retreat time also includes Centering Prayer, music, and art. Saturday afternoon will focus on the last mystical stage of union with God, exploring vestiges of union with God through restorative justice, pilgrimage and forgiveness. Caution is urged in



recognizing this last mystical stage, especially for Christians who live in the global north. This concluding afternoon retreat time also includes space for discernment about what God might be inviting you and your community into with regard to reconciliation.

Michael Battle, PhD is the Herbert Thompson Professor of Church and Society and Director of the Desmond Tutu Center at General Theological Seminary in New York. He received an undergraduate degree from Duke University, a Master's of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, a Master's of Sacred Theology from Yale University and a Ph.D. in theology and ethics, also from Duke University. He was ordained a priest by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1993.

For more complete information and a chance to register, please visit the [Shalem Institute website](#).

Coming Soon: Bob Mischke on the "Guard of the Heart" Practice

This Zoom 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 date and time for the workshop are TBD - for updates, please visit the [Contemplative Outreach of Colorado website](#).

Enneagram Workshop at Healing Gardens June 26; 11th Step Welcoming Prayer Practice July 10

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

- Enneagram Workshop, Level 1: Saturday June 26, 8:45 to 11:30am and 12:30-2:30pm outdoors (or via Zoom if inclement weather).
- 11th Step Retreat - The Welcoming Prayer Practice: Saturday July 10 9:45am-2:00pm

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.

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@dmarqui.com 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

The most amazing fact about Jesus, unlike almost any other religious founder, is that he found God in disorder and imperfection—and told us that we must do the same or we would never be content on this earth.

- Richard Rohr

The basic disposition in the spiritual journey is the capacity to accept all reality; God, ourselves, other people, and all creation as they are.

- Thomas Keating

What life can compare with this? Sitting quietly by the window, I watch the leaves fall and the flowers bloom, as the seasons come and go.

- Seccho

Meditation is a microcosm, a model, a mirror. The skills we practice when we sit are transferrable to the rest of our lives.

- Susan Salzberg

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.

