

Spirit Journal - December 2021



Photo by Christian Gloor

Merry Christmas!

Here's a preview of what you'll find in this issue:

- An Advent/Christmas reflection from Al Krema
- Information about *Releasing an Enslaved Spirit*, a three-hour Saturday morning Zoom workshop coming up in January with Michael Battle
- The announcement of a Zoom workshop coming up in February on the practice of *BioSpiritual Focusing*
- Information about available Centering Prayer groups, in-person and online
- *Insights* from Srimad Bhagavatam, St. John of the Cross, Hans Denker, and Mother Teresa

In 2022, please be sure to share your reactions and reflections with us to help make *Spirit Journal* a vibrant conversation! If you would like to submit

something you've written or just explore an idea, please contact the newsletter editor at news@centeringprayerchicago.org.

Fiat: Our Consent to the Presence and Action of the Divine

On behalf of our circle of service I would like to extend to each of you a very blessed Advent and a sacred merry Christmas. We are blessed with your presence and grateful for you to be with us.

Advent is such a special time and provides us with such liminal space. We easily move across space-time as we hold in our hearts' loved ones from other places and other times. Some of our loved ones are in different locations and some are passed on to another realm of being in Christ.

As I practice Centering Prayer this time of year, I can feel the spaciousness that comes with letting go of thoughts and sentiments, and allowing the presence and action of the Holy Spirit to be in me and to move in me.

Our consent to the presence and action of the divine in each of us may be signified in one word, *fiat* (*Latin* for "let it be done"). In this season we feel the opening to a growing presence within us, a patient waiting for the loving expressions that arise in our families and communities. We bear Christ in the womb of our soul and we become whole in a fractured world.

As we sit with the scripture of Mary and the annunciation, may each of our souls glorify the Lord. Through our smiles and hugs, contributions and gifts, and prayer in word and song, I pray that all may see Christ's eternal radiant face.

There is a [poem by Denise Levertov](#) titled *Annunciation* that is a prayerful consideration of Mary's *fiat*.

In Christ's love,

Alan

Releasing and Enslaved Spirit



***A Workshop on Communal Contemplative Spirituality with
Michael Battle - Saturday Morning, January 22 via Zoom***

**Co-sponsored by Contemplative Outreach Chicago
and Contemplative Outreach Atlanta**

Providing an indication of where this workshop will take us, Rev. Battle quotes St. John of the Cross:

*The soul that is attached to anything however much good there may be in it,
will not arrive at the liberty of divine union.*

*For whether it be a strong wire rope or a slender and delicate thread that holds
the bird,
it matters not, if it really holds it fast,*

For, until the cord be broken the bird cannot fly.

(Ascent of Mt. Carmel, Book One, 11)

In this workshop, it is our hope to bring together people from diverse backgrounds who share an interest in contemplation. Together we will pray through, think about and practice how to be more Communally diverse in Contemplative Spirituality — how to release the natural unity the Holy Spirit constantly offers the world.

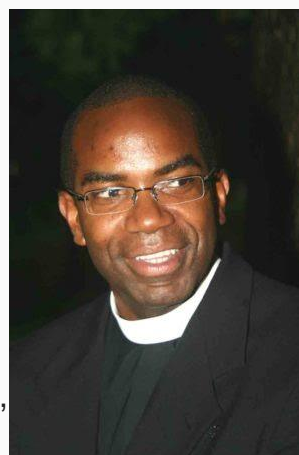
The workshop will begin with a 20-30 minute contemplative experience led by Contemplative Outreach. This will include Centering Prayer as well as a brief guided meditation to expand our experience and open our hearts.

Then, building on St. John's powerful insight, Rev. Battle will lead an interactive and deeply spiritual workshop incorporating presentations, art, music, and pauses for reflection. The intention is to uncover, describe and practice approaches that can help us begin to "break the cord," removing constraints and divisions within our own individual hearts and across the wider contemplative movement. There will be pauses for silence, small group sharing, and discernment about what God may be inviting our community into with regard to spiritual/racial union.

About Michael Battle

A featured keynote speaker and leader of many clergy and lay retreats, the Very Rev. Michael Battle, Ph.D. is currently appointed as Herbert Thompson Professor of Church and Society and Director of the Desmond Tutu Center at General Theological Seminary in New York,

In his PeaceBattle Institute he works on subjects of diversity, spirituality, prayer, race and reconciliation. He has also served as chaplain to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Congressman John Lewis, the House of Bishops and, in 2008, was chaplain to the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops.



Battle has published eleven books, including his latest: *Desmond Tutu: A Spiritual Biography of South Africa's Confessor*. He has an undergraduate degree from Duke University, received his master's of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary, a master's of Sacred Theology from Yale University and a PhD in theology and ethics, also from Duke University. He was ordained a priest by Archbishop Tutu in 1993.

[Click here to read more on Michael Battle's website.](#)

We invite all to join us on this sacred journey toward Communal Contemplative Spirituality. [Click Here to Register](#)

Body Presence and Contemplative Awareness



***An Introduction to BioSpiritual Focusing Presented
by Mike Smoolca - Saturday, February 12th, 2022 via Zoom***

**Co-Sponsored by Contemplative Outreach Chicago
and Contemplative Outreach of Connecticut**

BioSpiritual Focusing allows you to directly access the Wisdom of your Body and the healing experience of God's grace that comes with attending to the body feelings you carry within. At its most profound level it gives you access to your membership as the collective Body of Christ.

In this experiential workshop you will be introduced to the overall method of BioSpiritual Focusing and be given some tools and awareness you can apply to enhance your own sense of Body Presence and Contemplative Awareness.

About Mike Smoolca

Mike Smoolca is an experienced contemplative group and workshop facilitator and a dedicated teacher and student of contemplation and contemplative practices. He is a commissioned Contemplative Outreach presenter of Centering Prayer, Lectio Divine and Welcoming Prayer. Mike is coordinator for the Christian Contemplative Experience at Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center, Contemplative Outreach of Connecticut and the Northern Connecticut Chapter of the International Thomas Merton Society. Mike is a practicing spiritual director and supervisor, as well as a BioSpiritual Focusing companion and instructor.



We hope you will want to take part in this important workshop. [Click Here for more information and to Register](#)

Centering Prayer Groups In-Person and Online

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.

- 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 & Canada) 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

Learn to look with an equal eye upon all beings, seeing the one Self in all.

- Srimad Bhagavatam

It is impossible for the will to attain to the sweetness and bliss of the divine union otherwise than in detachment.

- St. John of the Cross

God forces no one, for love cannot compel, and God's service, therefore, is a thing of perfect freedom.

- Hans Denck

The fruit of silence is prayer, the fruit of prayer is faith, the fruit of faith is love and the fruit of love is silence.

- Mother Teresa

Your Turn

Please write in to contribute your ideas or to comment on any aspect of *Spirit Journal*. For example, you are invited to submit something you've written on a spiritual topic, or to let us know about an upcoming event, or send 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.

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