

Spirit Journal - November 2021

Preview

Here's what you'll find in the November issue:

- Information about *Releasing an Enslaved Spirit*, a three-hour Saturday morning Zoom workshop coming up in January with Michael Battle
- A description of an in-person Advent weekend retreat sponsored by Contemplative Outreach of Southeast Wisconsin
- A reflection on *kenosis* and wisdom by Alan Krema
- Information about available Centering Prayer groups, in-person and online
- Thanksgiving *Insights* from Kahlil Gibran, Maya Angelou, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Eckhart Tolle

Please share your reactions and reflections with us to help make *Spirit Journal* an even more 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.

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**

Michael Battle points out something we all may have noticed: that events and organizations working to encourage Christian spirituality and contemplative life seem to attract a certain demographic, predominantly white and westernized. Those who look, act, and seem different from this demographic often find no access point. Publishers, spiritual leaders, and socially conscious folks are deeply aware of this binding apart and often grieve the fact that many Christians do not pray together.

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.

Providing an indication of where the 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)

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.

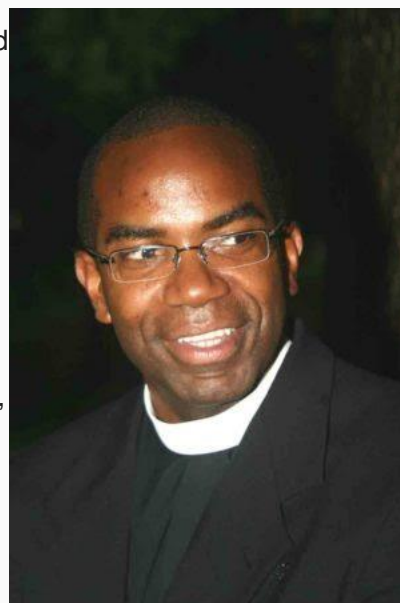
In Centering Prayer and other contemplative practices, we find a path that opens us up to oneness, while the racial divide denies this reality, insisting instead on the “otherness” of those who may be different from us in appearance or culture. As we open to a greater and more connected state of awareness, it is essential to do so communally, rather than just individually — to share our being more openly with others, including others of different backgrounds.

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](#)



***From Contemplative Outreach of Southeast Wisconsin:
Unfolding the Advent Journey, a Weekend Retreat with
Shawn Kafader - December 9-12 in Racine Wisconsin***

This in-person advent weekend retreat at the Siena Retreat Center on the shores of Lake Michigan will explore the familiar characters of the Advent story from a contemplative perspective. How can these people of old invite us into a deeper contemplative stance in our advent journey? Together we will look at the invitations of the prophets, angels, shepherds, sages, the innkeeper and Herod, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus as patterns for a contemplative advent journey.

The Rev. Dr. Shawn Kafader is an ordained non-denominational Christian minister, Licensed Profession Clinical Counselor, Certified Expressive Arts Therapist and Certified Art for Healing Facilitator. Shawn has engaged in various contemplative practices for over 30 years. He is a commissioned presenter with Contemplative Outreach Ministries where he has offered many workshops and extended retreats.

Complete information and registration are at the [Contemplative Outreach of Southeast Wisconsin website](#).

Grounded in Our Source



by Alan Krema

These thoughts were inspired by my recent experience of rereading and discussing *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* by Cynthia Bourgeault as part of a “Wisdom Book Practice Circle,” a program of *Northeast Wisdom/Wisdom Waypoints*.

As many of you know, I’ve been reading and studying with Cynthia for quite a few years now, and her “wisdom way of knowing” has truly deepened my appreciation of Centering Prayer and my experience of contemplation more generally. I hope you will find these reflections helpful, and I would welcome any comments or questions you may have.

For the participants, our small Wisdom Book Practice Circles were a deepening and an opening to our Christian calling to self-emptying (*kenosis*) and self-opening, leading to a great love expressed in our relationships with God and our human family.

The method of Centering Prayer as taught to a spiritual student in the 14th century by the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, was an invitation to keep the longing for the love of God close to heart with simplicity of expression and eloquent desire. It was also taught as the way to keep one’s whole being and consciousness centered and attentive to our divine nature.

The author of the *Cloud* was not giving a method to practice for 20 minutes twice a day. Rather, the intention is to keep consent to the divine always before us, in all of our activity. As monastics have recognized for centuries, through the practice of *Lectio Divina*, the way to do that is to acknowledge the mind’s thoughts, allow them, and finally to move

beyond those thoughts and whatever imaginings and ideas they want to hold.

It's as if the thoughts are moved from the mind into a more spacious place where they are present but not dominating us. We sense that we are grounded in our Source and that all of our fellow beings are there, also manifesting from the same Source. We cannot help but love them "as our self." This sensation is not a thought and cannot even be held by the limits of the mind. It can however, be paid attention to as if floating on the sea, we are held and suspended in an energetic field, a field of love.

If we open ourselves to a continual path of growth in the practice of Centering Prayer, we find that there is no stopping place, no fixed boundary to our practice. We know that the steady and persistent practice of Centering Prayer twice daily fortifies us and keeps the "muscle tone" of letting go and opening. Our intention and consent continue as we rise from our meditation cushion. We are motivated by love and desire to keep centered as we are immersed in all of our daily work and activity. Our center is where we find our wholeness and our connection to the human family.

We do this through practice that allows us to pay attention interiorly while working externally with others. This does not come without effort and work, and such attention relies on the energetic field we establish in meditation. We do this through intentional practice, similar to the Welcoming practice.

In the Wisdom Work, this practice is also known as conscious work performed with "inner tasks." Inner tasks come from the teachings of G.I. Gurdjieff and have become an important part of our Wisdom lineage. Inner tasks are essentially about supporting our work with waking up to our automatic patterns and becoming present in the conditions of our lives as they are. They begin with the foundational work of self-observation. This is something only we can do for ourselves and it brings with it self-knowledge that allows us to continually consent to our greater Being. ([Click here for an example of an inner task.](#))

Personally, I want to express my desire to reconcile the Christianity I knew as a child and young man with what I have come to know as Truth in my years of contemplative work. Beyond the doctrine and ritual observance, I learned early that love is or should be

infused in all of our lives as a Christian practice. The knowledge we acquire through inner somatic awareness is reliable and love is the work of relationship not controlled by the mind. As Julien of Norwich pointed out long ago: *“Our soul must perform two duties. The one is we must reverently wonder and be surprised; the other is we must gently let go and let be always taking pleasure in God.”*

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 loridressel@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.
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- 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 - Happy Thanksgiving!

You pray in your distress and in your need; would that you might pray also in the fullness of your joy and in your days of abundance.

- Kahlil Gibran

*Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer.
And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good.*

- Maya Angelou

*Cultivate the habit of being grateful for every good thing that comes to you,
and to give thanks continuously.*

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

*Acknowledging the good that you already have in your life is the foundation
for all abundance.*

- Eckhart Tolle

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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