

Spirit Journal - February 2022

Preview

To be honest, this is a pretty hefty issue. We've tried to make it easy to find what you're looking for, so go ahead and start scrolling! Here's a what you'll find:

- A reminder to register right away if you want to be part part of the workshop on *BioSpiritual Focusing* - it's this Saturday and there are only a few spaces left
- A lovely reflection on meaning, love and connection by Alan Krema
- Information on what looks to be a very worthwhile Lenten course on Desmond Tutu's spirituality, created by our friend Michael Battle and a South African team
- Invitations to other upcoming events: an in-person silent retreat in Benet Lake, Wisconsin and an online retreat with Susan Komis focused on Teresa of Avila
- Book Notes from Sandra Janowski: her impressions of *How To Be*, by Judith Valente and Brother Paul Quenon
- Some thoughts from Jack Lloyd on the potential impact of Michael Battle's January workshop, *Releasing an Enslaved Spirit*
- Information about available Centering Prayer groups, in-person and online
- *Insights* from Teresa of Avila, Alan Krema, Michael Battle, and Albert Camus

Please be sure to continue sharing 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.

This Saturday, February 12 Body Presence and Contemplative Awareness



If you are interested in this workshop on BioSpiritual Focusing, please note that attendance is limited and there are only a handful of spaces left. [Click here for more information and a chance to register.](#)

Deeper Meaning, Greater Love, Closer Connection



by Alan Crema

It is now February, and it is cold and snowy in Chicago. I am reflecting on my experiences from Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. For my family much was different this year, and a lot of that difference was in deeper meaning, greater love of each other, and closer connection with our Christian heritage.

Yes, we are now two years into the Covid pandemic and its concerns are still with us. So many of our brothers and sisters have died and we have so much stress on our healthcare workers. We are still careful in our family about getting together in person, and some of those close to us have contracted the virus.

And we engage in new ways of being with each other. When we do get together in person and we pay attention to each other it seems we are in greater love than we have ever known. We are also attentive to what we do together, our activities and gatherings. Our togetherness is precious and treasured. It feels like a new sense of awareness, even new consciousness.

Stepping into my Christian heritage, there was still very limited attendance at liturgy and there was no grandiose Christmas celebration with choir and music. No liturgical music with trumpets, kettle drums, and powerful organ vibration. However, I felt the Presence of God in me and in all those around me. Deeply present in the field of awareness in my whole being, my body, mind, and heart. Divine Presence manifest in sensations of vibration, spaciousness, as I breathe and hold my inner Being close.

Two weeks before Christmas I attended a retreat at a former Capuchin monastery in upstate New York. It was much like the monastery I lived in over 40 years ago as a Carmelite novice. The chapel, refectory, long corridors of cells, bathrooms at the end of the hallways, the beautiful grounds, all transported my awareness to another place and time. I felt very present to myself and my relationship with family and church. Back then, I knew deep

within me the Divine Presence, but the ways we had to articulate it and manifest it all had to do with achievement, advancement, and externals of liturgy.

On retreat, we spent the week in silence and gathered for teaching, eucharist, and meditation. There were many chants and advent songs. Gregorian chant, ancient advent hymns, and the Magnificat, all resonated in our cells and organs. We engaged our breath and heart, all flowing in our arteries and veins throughout our body, creating a field of energy to be experienced within and even without – extending from my physical being into the area around me and which did not have a fixed boundary.

I feel Presence in my bodily being as my heart extends my energy outward and feels the energy of the room entering me. I am present to the others in the room, both new people and dear ones I have known for years. We create a collective Being which is not about “I” belonging to this contemplative group, but feels more like a spacious place in a storied monastery in which is held the energy of a loving divine Presence. I feel the energy and it is not so easily dissipated into sentimental thoughts of cozy feel good oneness. I think it is due to the extended periods of centering prayer that leaves me ready and open to allow the sentiments and emotions to flow through and not grip me so tightly.

I feel as though I have a new relationship to time. My sense of my family over Christmas, and my Christian tradition both seem very much present in me and not as thought or memory. The meditation, chants, singing of “Silent Night,” all put me somewhere in a sharing of being in the tradition that I bear forth in me, and which wants to burst into the world during this season.

I returned home to interactions with family and my Centering Prayer group, which was engaged in a special contemplative holding of advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. I felt newness in myself and especially in our gatherings. There exists a collective divine indwelling which was felt by us all.

Entering the new year, we welcomed Michael Battle for a January workshop

entitled “Releasing the Enslaved Spirit.” An apt title revealing how the enslaved spirit of the false self is present in both the oppressed and the oppressor. We were led into some new spiritual ground as we touched the contemplative spirituality of the recently passed Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

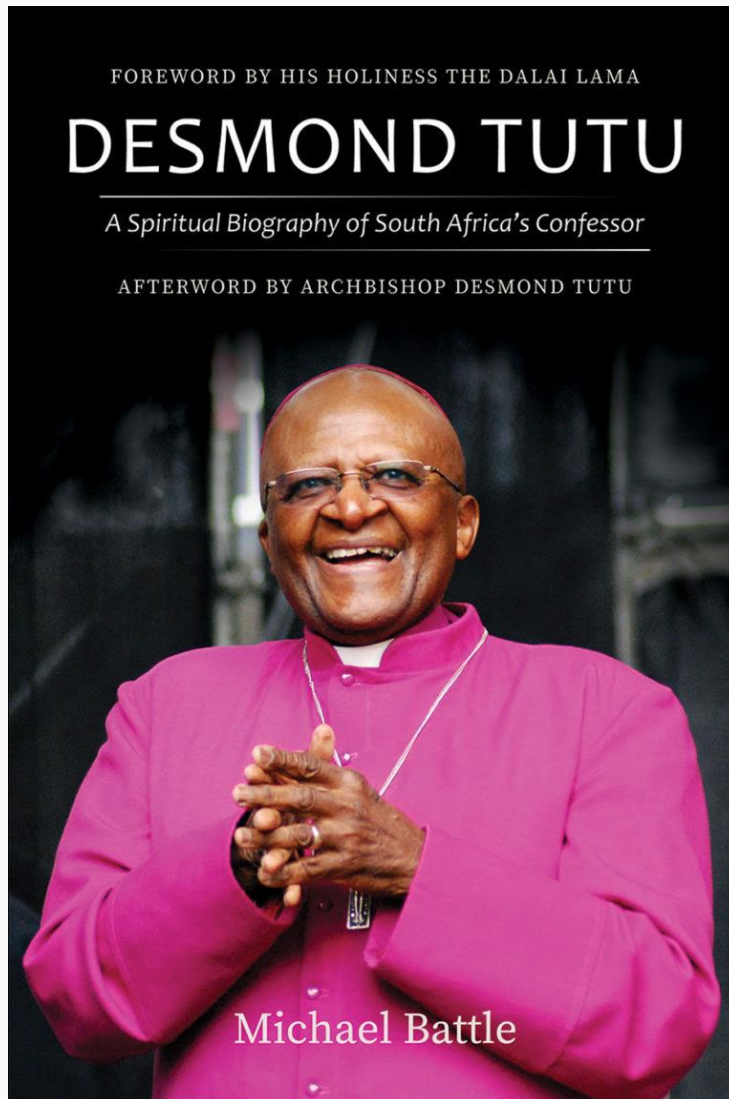
After our workshop, Michael Battle invited us to join him and the Centre for Christian Spirituality (CCS) in South Africa for a Lenten prayer series. The series will focus on Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s spirituality following the mystical cycles of Purgation, Illumination, and Union. Throughout the six weeks, participants will experience various spiritual exercises, ubuntu (gathering) circles, and spiritual music. This series will be similar to our workshop, but will have much more time to experience the mysticism arising from the Being of Desmond Tutu.

We of Contemplative Outreach Chicago have arranged to support and participate in this prayer along with Contemplative Outreach of South Africa, Atlanta, and Denver. We invite you to join us in this global prayer during the season of lent. I pray that all of our hearts will be opened to a new sense of engaging with our human family in a way that is connected deeply in both timelessness of Christianity and throughout our global geography. More information about this event is included in this newsletter.

I also want to invite you to join us for the BioSpiritual Focusing workshop to be held on Saturday, February 12. This is a method of opening to the divine indwelling as experienced in your body. The body that makes us who we are is an integral part of our incarnate being and can be of great help in expanding our contemplative awareness.

Mike Smoolca is our facilitator. Mike is coordinator of Contemplative Outreach Connecticut and is a certified companion for bio-spiritual focusing. Our intention along with Mike is for this event to be a prayer experience; it will include Centering Prayer. This is designed as a small and intimate workshop with a maximum of 30 participants, and there are only a few spaces left. A link to registration is included in the first item in this newsletter.

A Lenten Course: Desmond Tutu's Spirituality



This six week Lenten series of Zoom workshops begins on March 3.

Using Desmond Tutu's spiritual and life journey as a mirror to see God, other humans, the rest of creation, and yourself more clearly, this series is designed to deepen belief and engage in creative action for justice, reconciliation, and peace.

The Very Rev. Michael Battle and a South African team will teach about Archbishop Tutu's spiritual practice, the foundation upon which his heroic life rested. Rev. Battle and the SA

team will reveal insights they learned from Archbishop Tutu over several decades of his life, witness and ministry.

The course will focus on Tutu's spirituality within the framework of the mystical cycle of Purgation, Illumination and Union. Throughout the six weeks, participants will be exposed to various spiritual exercises, ubuntu circles and spiritual music. There will be time for sharing.

For those who attended Michael Battle's workshop *Releasing an Enslaved Spirit* last month, this program provides an opportunity to take a deeper dive into some of the ideas presented there, while also providing much additional content about Archbishop Tutu and the South African context.

The program is presented by South Africa's Centre for Christian Spirituality, PeaceBattle Institute, and Contemplative Outreach of South Africa. [Click here for complete information and an opportunity to register.](#)

Silent Retreat Weekend, Benet Lake Wisconsin, March 4 - 6



This retreat offers a chance to leave the distractions and noise of your daily life behind for just a weekend. You will have time for that much needed rest and rejuvenation as well as an opportunity to listen more deeply for that “still, small voice of God” that may be nudging you.

The setting is Benet Lake Retreat Center, located approximately 50 miles north of Chicago, just north of the Illinois/Wisconsin border. The retreat center rests quietly in the midst of over 400 acres and provides ample space for walking, prayer, and silence.

(BenetLake.org)

The theme of the weekend is Teasing out the Tangles. Outside of the opening and closing sessions, participants will be invited to engage in optional prayer practices and reflection exercises spread throughout the weekend. Silence will be a vital part of the retreat.

The retreat leaders are:

Esther Simonson, a graduate of the Shalem Institute’s program on Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups and Retreats, is a spiritual director, and a hospital chaplain. Esther will be available for a limited number of spiritual direction sessions during the weekend.

Spencer Foon, a graduate of Shalem Institute’s Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups and Retreats program who has facilitated contemplative prayer groups and retreats.

The registration deadline is February 16, but space is limited. Early registration is encouraged, and there is an early bird discount if you register on or before February 10. Proof of vaccinations (including booster shot) is required prior to the retreat.

For additional information and registration, please contact Becky Serpe

@ RebeccaSerpe17@gmail.com.

***The Seven Mansions of the Interior Castle of
Teresa of Avila, March 11-13
A Lenten Centering Prayer Retreat via Zoom***

Teresa of Avila is one of Christianity's great mystics and teachers. The Interior Castle is her final work and one of the most profound literary works on contemplation and

experiential mysticism.

St. Teresa wrote *The Interior Castle* to describe seven mansions of the inner life with God. Prayer stood at the center of her teaching. Her fidelity to prayer was a means of deepening her intimate relationship with God. She considered a life of prayer in terms of love.

The retreat will reflect on the light of St. Teresa's timeless insights into the human soul, its journey towards intimate relationship with God, and how Teresa's teaching is relevant to our personal contemporary spiritual journey today. There will be Centering Prayer sessions, presentations, Q & A opportunities, and small group gatherings via breakout rooms.

The retreat leader is Susan Komis, a gifted presenter who has served the contemplative network for over 25 years. She offers programs on contemplative spirituality and leads retreats. Susan is a long-time friend and mentor for Contemplative Outreach Chicago, and has led a number of excellent retreats and workshops here.

This retreat is sponsored by Contemplative Outreach of New Orleans and the School for Contemplative Living. [For more information and registration, please click here.](#)

Book Notes: "How to Be"



by Sandra Janowski

I am delighted to share with you how much I enjoyed reading *How To Be: A Monk and a Journalist Reflect on Living & Dying, Purpose & Prayer, Forgiveness & Friendship*. The book is a collection of letters between two spiritual friends, Judith Valente and Brother Paul Quenon.

Judith's name may be familiar to you, as she is active in the International Thomas Merton Society and has given several workshops for Contemplative Outreach Chicago. She is also a Benedictine Oblate, and retired staff writer for the *Washington Post and Wall Street Journal*., Brother Paul, OCSO, is a Cistercian monk of the Abbey of Gethsemane, a poet and author.

Reading slowly and reflecting on their words, I often felt like I was eaves-dropping. Halfway through I said out loud, "and where will you take me next?" I offer here thoughts that touched me, while reminding you they are taken out of context and their brilliance can be better appreciated by reading the book itself.

I was struck with Br. Paul's honest response to Judith in her query about meditation. Br. Paul shares how liberated he felt reading the American Buddhist nun Pema Chodron's words:

We should not meditate with any expectation that we will eventually get better at it. Likewise, we mustn't expect to become better people, or more enlightened people.

Br. Paul confesses:

I'm no better at meditation after sixty-plus years in the monastery.... than I ever was. In fact, meditation seems to have become more insufferable and drier to me, to the point where I have taken to oral prayer in which I recite psalms or a poem or hymn that I have memorized. (p. 122)

How liberated I felt reading this!

Another offering is about friendship. Judith heartfully writes about a three-week reunion with a very close friend that didn't go as she so desired.

Br. Paul toward the end of his return letter writes:

Ultimate friendship is not about what others have or how they look. It's not about how others can please me. It is pure, disinterested desire that others be who they are meant to be, and an abiding love even if they fail. In effect, that is the kind of love that God has for me. The more I can experience that divine love, the more capable I become of loving others in the same way. (p.103)

And one more, pondering on useless care. Here's an excerpt of a quote from Thomas Merton:

When you love another person, you forget yourself. This is what God asks of us....to love in such a way that we don't have to think about ourselves. God will think about us...so you are no longer worrying about whether you are virtuous or not, you just live. You live without care and without concern for anything of yourself. (p.146)

I leave you with these jewels, taken out of context. By reading this fine book and putting them into context, the depth and richness will be even more brilliant.

Maybe you *have* read the book, or maybe you will. Maybe you would like to respond by sharing something that struck you. I'd love to know how this book has affected others.

How to Be includes a study guide and offers stimulating reflections to ponder and share.

Thoughts on the Impact of Michael Battle's Recent Workshop, Releasing an Enslaved Spirit



by Jack Lloyd

Michael Battle's January 22 workshop, *Releasing an Enslaved Spirit*, connected in meaningful ways with many of the 150 or so people who participated, based on the results of our post-workshop evaluation survey. Personally, I found it very moving and inspiring, with the potential to help transform and improve Contemplative Outreach Chicago. [Click here if you would like to watch the video recording.](#)

If you weren't there, the workshop's primary theme was the obvious lack of diversity in our contemplative communities, and how that situation can begin to change. Michael's approach to the topic was fundamentally spiritual, based on the three classic stages of Christian mysticism: purgation, illumination, and union. It was also at times political, drawing inspiration from the life and work of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, whose deep contemplative spirituality enabled him to make a huge contribution to overcoming apartheid, and then to continue working for human liberation in South Africa and other parts of the world. Archbishop Tutu, who passed away at the end of last year, was Michael Battle's close friend and mentor.

As a volunteer with Contemplative Outreach Chicago for about seven years now, I know we have never had the intent to exclude non-white people, young people, LGBTQ+ people, or anyone else from any of our activities. Nevertheless, each time I attend one of our workshops or events, the people I meet there do fit a consistent profile: they are far older and whiter than the community we live in. They look like me. Very few Black or brown people join in.

This simply isn't good enough. Last year, we developed a "vision statement" for Contemplative Outreach Chicago, and one of the things we envisioned was creating a truly welcoming and diverse community. You may have noticed that we have featured more diverse speakers and themes over the past year, including a workshop on Howard Thurman and another on Antiracism, as well

as Michael Battle's recent presentation. We feel we may be beginning to make a little bit of progress, and we will continue in this direction. We will also redouble our efforts to find ways to reach out directly to our diverse neighbors across the region, and to invite their collaboration.

In Centering Prayer and other contemplative practices, we find a path that opens us up to oneness. As we move into 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. In his excellent workshop, Michael Battle defined an approach that can help us get there, as long as we commit to continuing the effort!

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.

- North Park Covenant Church, Monday 7:15pm. Contact Ingrid Forsberg Kenron, (773) 583-5285, ingridf23@hotmail.com
- 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

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

I thought of the soul as resembling a castle, formed of a single diamond or a very transparent crystal, and containing many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions.

- Teresa of Avila

I feel Presence in my bodily being as my heart extends my energy outward and feels the energy of the room entering me. I am present to the others in the room, both new people and dear ones I have known for years. We create a collective Being which is not about “I” belonging to this contemplative group, but feels more like a spacious place in a storied monastery in which is held the energy of a loving divine Presence.

- Alan Krema

God is with us, coaxing us all toward the kingdom of heaven.

- Michael Battle

Peace is the only battle worth waging,

- Albert Camus

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.

SILENCE • SOLITUDE



SOLIDARITY • SERVICE

Contemplative Outreach