

Spirit Journal - November 2022

Preview

Happy Thanksgiving! This edition includes:

- A greeting and reflection from our new coordinator, Jack Lloyd
- An invitation to be part of an Advent Retreat offered at the Siena Retreat Center in Racine by our friends at Contemplative Outreach of Southeast Wisconsin, December 8-11
- The announcement of an online workshop called *Simple Presence*, offered by Alan Krema in January
- Information about an Introductory Centering Prayer Workshop also coming up in January at Holy Family Parish, Inverness
- A listing of additional retreats and workshops that may be of interest to you, plus a new website to explore
- *The Eagle Dance* - a reflection by Johanna Ash, our "New Mexico correspondent"
- Information about available Centering Prayer groups, in-person and online
- *Insights* from Thomas Berry, Thich Nhat Hanh, Desmond Tutu and Thomas Keating

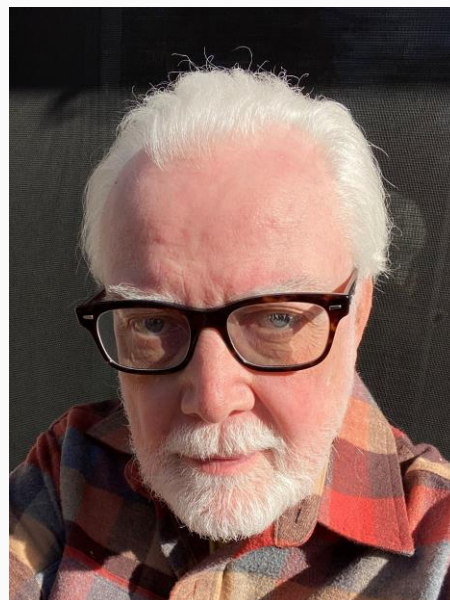
Please help us make *Spirit Journal* an interactive forum. Your insights are very welcome! If you would like to send us something you've written or just explore an idea, please contact the newsletter editor at news@centeringprayerchicago.org.

A greeting from our new coordinator, Jack Lloyd

Grace and Gratitude

Hello to all members and friends of
Contemplative Outreach Chicago!

I'm writing to introduce myself as the new coordinator of our chapter. During the summer, Alan Krema stepped aside from this role - after six great years he was "term limited." I'm so happy to report that Alan will continue supporting us as a very active volunteer, and now he'll have more time to share his wisdom through teaching. I'm looking forward to his workshop, *Simple Presence*, early in the new year. (See below for more information.)



When Alan stepped aside, our core volunteer group (the "circle of service") invited me to consider taking on the role of coordinator and, after a period of discernment, I said yes. We're a very collaborative group and it helps a lot that, as my fellow circle member Sandy Janowski has put it, "We are all co-coordinators." (If you might be interested in volunteering, please let me know: coordinator@centeringprayerchicago.org.)

With Thanksgiving coming up in a few days, I'd like to share some personal thoughts about grace and gratitude. When I was growing up on Long Island in the middle of the last century, my parents, brother and I attended Grace Church, but I don't recall ever thinking about what "grace" actually meant or why the church's founders, in the middle of the 19th century, might have chosen that name. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, grace is "the spontaneous, unmerited gift of the divine favor." Every moment, to the extent we exist, survive and thrive, we do so by God's grace, which is "unmerited."

As a young adult in the 1970s, I had no way to know that three Trappist monks in Massachusetts - Thomas Keating, William Menninger and Basil Pennington – were studying one of the most important texts of Christian mysticism, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, which was written by an anonymous author during the 14th Century. Inspired, the three monks distilled the book's teachings, along with other things they had learned or intuited, and created the practice of Centering Prayer. The monks' practice was meant to offer the direct experience of God's "presence and action within" to those of us who live "in the world," not just to their fellow monastics.

Father Keating – who died in 2018 - founded and led Contemplative Outreach, which has grown to be a true global resource, sustaining his legacy and teaching Centering Prayer and related contemplative practices. Contemplative Outreach Chicago is one of more than 90 chapters that support and contribute to this work in the US and other countries.

This wonderful flow of grace finally touched me personally in 2014. At 64, I had come to feel very intensely that I needed a way to strengthen my awareness of God's presence and to experience it more frequently, if possible, even continuously. By "chance," I came across an online article about Centering Prayer and then read Thomas Keating's wonderful book *Open Mind, Open Heart*. Next came an introductory workshop, then joining a prayer group. All of this felt like being "led" to what was needed – it wasn't something I was doing; it was something that was happening to me. Because you are reading this, it's likely you have had or are having a similar experience of grace and transformation.

Because we know this grace is unmerited and its source is ineffable, we respond with a sort of deep, mystified gratitude. So, Happy Thanksgiving to all! How wonderful that we have a specific, designated holiday to remind us to stay conscious, always, of all of our blessings.



*An Advent Retreat with
Contemplative Outreach of Southeast Wisconsin*

***Entering the Mystical Mandala:
Centering Oneself in the Sacred Circle***

***December 8-11, In-Person at Siena Retreat Center - Racine,
Wisconsin***

This retreat will explore the universal symbol of the sacred circle known as the “mandala” and why we are naturally drawn to this sacred shape.

Together we will experience how and why entering the process of creating and working with mandalas fosters physical, psychological and spiritual grounding in our lives. Attendees will be invited to create four mandalas as part of the retreat. The retreat will include opportunities for art sharing where participants can process their experience in creating their mandala art. No previous art ability is needed to participate in this retreat. Everyone, experienced artist or not, will benefit from attending and creating. Mandala creating and conferences will be surrounded by the gift of silence as well as regularly scheduled group Centering Prayer sessions. Meet your spiritual inner artist. All are welcome!

Presenter: The Rev. Dr. Shawn Kafader is an ordained non-denominational clergy person, licensed Mental Health Counselor, certified Expressive Arts Therapist, certified Art4Healing® Facilitator, trained SoulCollage® Facilitator, and Artist. He is a commissioned workshop presenter with Contemplative Outreach having offered workshops and retreats both in-person and on-line. Mandala art has been Shawn's main art-making form for over thirty years.



[More information and registration.](#)



Simple Presence
A Contemplative Prayer
Experience with the Vision of
Contemplative Outreach

Presented by

Alan Krema

Saturday, January 21

10:00 AM to 12:00 PM (US/Canada Central), via Zoom

Sponsored by Contemplative Outreach Chicago

In *Simple Presence*, the divine Presence becomes an invitation for our community to listen deeply to the Spirit's movement and action within.

The event will offer a communal prayer experience dedicated to contemplation of the Vision Statement of Contemplative Outreach: "*We embrace transformation in Christ, both in ourselves and in others, through the practice of Centering Prayer.*"

Each participant enters into inner awareness individually and then opens to the source of the Presence, which is shared by other members of the group. The underlying commonality of the intention is held sacred.

Simple Presence is being offered to those who are engaged with Contemplative Outreach on any level or simply have an interest in this community. It will be

assumed that participants have a regular Centering Prayer practice and are familiar with Lectio Divina and the Welcoming Prayer.

The workshop will include embodied prayer, chant, reflective readings, Centering Prayer, Welcoming Prayer, and wisdom sharing. Come prepared to sit in *Simple Presence* with the sacred words of the Vision.

This prayerful event will be approximately two hours in length and will be presented online using Zoom.

Presenter: Alan Krema has been a facilitator and leader in Contemplative Outreach Chicago since 2000 and has recently retired as chapter coordinator. Some of his other affiliations:



- Wisdom Waypoints Wisdom guide
- Center for Action and Contemplation Living School
- Shalem Institute: “Transforming Community: Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups and Retreats”

[More information and registration](#)



Introductory Centering Prayer Workshop

January 21, 9:00 AM-3:00 PM

In-Person at Holy Family Parish, Inverness, Illinois

If you're new to Centering Prayer or would like to deepen and reinvigorate your practice, please consider participating in this workshop. Introductory workshop presenters are specially trained and commissioned in teaching this short course. The day's program explores the place of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition, the conceptual background of Centering Prayer, psychological processes, and insights into establishing Centering Prayer as a way of life.

Presenters: JoAnne McElroy, MA is a spiritual director who enters the personal encounter of spiritual direction with earnest care, intention and deep listening. She holds a Master of Arts in Contemporary Spirituality and a post-graduate Certificate in Spiritual Direction from the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University of Chicago. Her contemplative approach to spiritual direction incorporates the arts, nature and centering prayer, finding God in the ordinary places of life. Practicing Centering Prayer for over ten years, Joanne became a commissioned presenter in 2018 and is now a member of the Circle of Service for Contemplative Outreach Chicago. JoAnne's *specialties include* Celtic Spirituality, Centering Prayer, and Women's Spirituality.

Bill McElroy has a Master's degree in Spirituality and Spiritual Direction from the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University of Chicago. He has served as a lay minister and spiritual leader at the parish, diocesan and national level for the past three-plus decades. Bill takes a contemplative approach in his work as a spiritual director, listening for the many ways God speaks to us through silence and nature. He is a commissioned presenter of Centering Prayer, which he has practiced for over 20 years. He was the Founding Convener of Illinois Men As Learners and Elders, a men's spirituality

organization founded by Richard Rohr, OFM.

For more information and registration, please contact
Mary Whiteside: mwhiteside@holyparish.org

Other Workshops and Retreats (and a New Website) You Might Like to Know About

An e-retreat from Contemplative Outreach Ltd. in partnership with Spirituality & Practice

The Grace of the Four Consents, November 24 – December 22

This e-course for Advent includes Scripture, imagery and specially recorded teachings by Thomas Keating on the topic of the four consents. The four consents are invitations to welcome all of life – birth, growth, suffering, dying and death – as God’s precious gifts and to appreciate the universe with all its beauty and potentialities.

First consent: Our basic goodness

Second consent: Participation

Third consent: Diminishment

Fourth consent: Transformation in Christ

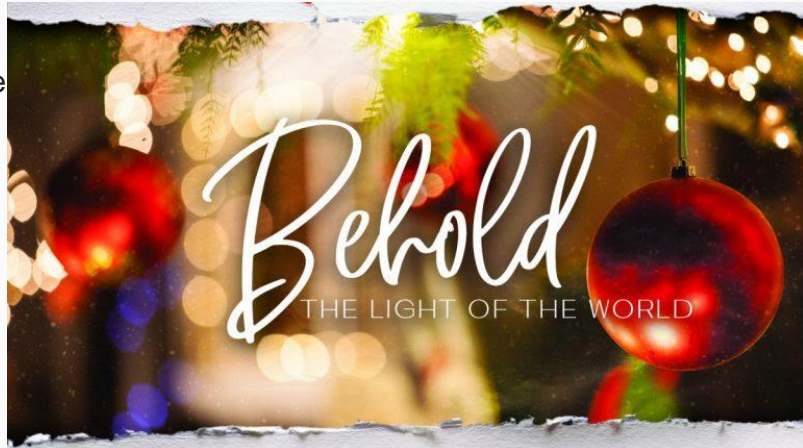
Other mystical writers will also be quoted as meditations to inform and enrich the contemplative life. It might be said that the spiritual journey is a series of consents, an accumulation of our Yes to God in big and small ways, day after day after day. Our practices, which start out as structures to encourage and assist our softening to Yes, over time become a way of life, a way of being in constant relationship with the Beloved.

[More information and registration.](#)

From the Christos Center for Spiritual Direction

BEHOLD: A Contemplative Advent Retreat – Dec. 2-4 in Mundelein, Illinois

This retreat is intended for anyone desiring time away with the Lord and to enter the season of Advent more prayerfully. It will be a time of rest, comfort, strengthening and encouragement. Come away...move inside,



turn inward to behold God's restoring Light. This retreat will incorporate optional times of prayer, silence, Scripture meditation, music, art, nature and rest. Come as you are, receive what you need. As Thomas Keating wrote: "Advent is a quiet, contemplative time of waiting for the Light, the Light who came to be the light of the whole human race."

[More information and registration.](#)

From the Mind & Life Institute

A New Website: Insights - Journey Into the Heart of Contemplative Science

Since 1987, the Mind & Life Institute has been working at the intersection of science and contemplative wisdom. The organization has hosted dozens of dialogues with leading thinkers and funded cutting-



edge research to better understand the human mind, in order to seed and grow the field of contemplative science.

Topics to explore on the new website include Understanding the Mind; Personal Well-Being; Compassionate Communities; and the Human-Earth Connection.

[Link to the website.](#)

The Eagle Dance

by Johanna Ash

The Inter-Tribal Ceremonial during the summer of 2022 in Gallup, New Mexico had the theme “One Beat.” I had never been to it, and it felt important for me to go. COVID had been so very hard on New Mexico’s Native Peoples. Geographically, they are our neighbors, an ongoing, struggling people. The lack of electricity or plumbing in many homes resulted in huge numbers of deaths of elders, teachers and leaders. Hundreds of Navajo and Hopi



people died with this epidemic, and COVID wasn't done with them yet. I had helped make masks - almost one thousand of them - and I needed closure.

Once my husband Bill and I arrived at Red Rocks State Park on the outskirts of Gallup, we learned there would be no parade that evening, but there would be a processional. This event used to be touted as the largest Powwow in America. I remembered the Gathering of Nations this past spring, which had hundreds of tribes and people celebrating the sheer joy of being together. Honored guests tonight were Inuits from Alaska, representatives from the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma, and a Maori group from New Zealand. Yet, this processional may have had only 70 people. Few Puebloans were there.

We wandered around the park, admiring the rosy light that reflected off the monumental sandstone cliffs surrounding the arena. They held the heat of the season but there was a pleasant breeze coming between the rocks. Cottonwood trees gave their beautiful contrast against the red rocks and azure sky. Different Native bands had set up food booths, and we enjoyed a Navajo taco...fried bread covered in ground beef and green chili. It smelled wonderful and we enjoyed it with a good appetite. We waited for our cinnamon bun still baking in the hornos (adobe ovens). Juniper and pinon logs were neatly stacked against the wall, and the burning woods' aroma added to the atmosphere.

Nearby, a group of youths were working on their Eagle Dance. They were of different ages, maybe from five years old to fourteen or so. It looked as if it may have been their first time dancing together.

The kids didn't all have on their full regalia yet. Some were in only their tee shirts and shorts. Our inexperienced eyes could not tell from which tribe or Pueblo they came. Generally the Eagle Dance is considered a request for blessings. Their instructor was careful, directing the distance they danced apart and how their arms would symbolize the wings of the Eagles. He quietly spoke to the group about what it was like to act the part of an eagle. The boys looked at him with respect. I imagined the story he told them, to help them prepare to represent these holy birds, the bearers of Great Blessings.

Eagles are messengers of God. They are the ones who travel between earth and heaven. They are emblems for wisdom, strength and power. Natives offer dances to ask for an intervention or for a blessing. Resiliency is a word used a great deal here in New Mexico. Blessings from above help the People endure. It is impossible for me to be among them and not connect with their history, their present and their future. For me to be present with the Natives is a form of prayer.

As spectators, Bill and I settled in on the concrete benches of the arena. The announcer of the evening was introducing the schedule and the drumming and singing circle was ready. A few families were coming into the circle of packed red earth. Children waited with their older brothers and sisters as parents walked back to the car to get their folding chairs. A preschooler had on her jingle dress and pirouetted listening to the bells. Her brother was chasing a friend. Groups were gathering outside the entry discussing in what order they would enter.

The drums began. They formed the connection between our ears and our hearts. They set the pace for the groups coming in. The singing, in which ever language it was, tied up my heart. Soaring into the skies, the prayers followed the words. There is a special way to dance in a procession, much like walking the labyrinth. Half steps are taken with confidence and with balance. The children dancing the Eagle Dance were first, to set the tone of the evening. They danced with sweeping arms and stooping backs. Their arms were an extension of themselves, guiding the directions of their circles. Their feet pounded the rhythm of the drums as they soared and swooped around the arena. Their wings stretched as far as they could, reaching the skies, sweeping across the earth. It was easy to see them as eagles. They did a really fine job. I was so proud of them, they had given much honor to their families. Now with the guests entering the space, it was time to rest.

It is always endearing to see children when they are performing and doing their best as they develop new skills. The lasting image for me was seeing them in a neat line, squatting in the dirt while the final guests arrived. It wasn't time for the dancers to leave just yet. Those kids, sitting in the dirt were something

else! The boys were not used to their regalia and their feathered arms kept getting in the way. Their arms would twitch and tickle the other. You can guess their antsy-ness. The feathers are holy, gathered and given after being blessed. They are not to touch the earth. The children could not get comfortable. They had been told to sit still, and not to fidget. I was distracted and missed their leader showing them how to sit, but when I next saw them, they had it figured out. They were squatting with their arms over their knees and their hands dangling. Each looked so quiet, a ball of feathers. The boys appeared to have mastered being still. Peaceful. Settled.

As I practice Centering Prayer there is a realization that I always encounter. For just a nano second there is a transition for me like knocking on the door and having been invited in. The moment with the boys was like that; peaceful sky above, beaten earth below, magnificent cliffs all around. We were together and it was good. In the far distant sky, I heard the piercing shriek of an eagle.

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 five 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 Sarah Hillabrant, (773) 509-1095, yoopergirl37@gmail.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 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.
- 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 Meditation Chapel

Meditation Chapel is an independent, nonprofit global platform with which Contemplative Outreach Ltd. partners to encourage groups and individuals in a life of contemplative practice. Therefore, the global website of our parent organization features this Online Meditation Chapel, which is very easy to use and provides the opportunity to see, hear and join in silent prayer with others from all over the world.

Registering for Meditation Chapel – You must first register to attend the meetings in the Chapel. You can do so at this link: <https://meditationchapel.org/getting-started/>. Once registered, you will receive the chapel links and can then check the [calendar](#) to pick one or more groups convenient for your schedule..

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.* A friend writes: “I have

been attending meditation in the virtual Keating Chapel and had a lovely experience. The facilitator was very good!"

Healing Together: A Gathering of Consciousness – In silence we focus on an intention for peace and healing. 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 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 -

For some the ultimate mystery of things is experienced in the depth of the inner self, for others in the human community, for still others in the Earth process [nature] itself. Yet in each instance the full sense of communion seems to be present.

- Thomas Berry

People usually consider walking on water or in thin air a miracle. But I think the real miracle is not to walk either on water or in thin air, but to walk on earth. Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize: a blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black, curious eyes of a child -- our own two eyes. All is a miracle.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

In the end what matters is not how good we are but how good God is. Not how much we love Him but how much He loves us. And God loves us whoever we are, whatever we've done or failed to do, whatever we believe or can't.

- Desmond Tutu

To live in the presence of God on a continuous basis can become a kind of fourth dimension to our three-dimensional world, forming an invisible but real background to everything that we do or that happens in our lives.

- Thomas Keating

Your Turn

Please write in to contribute your ideas or to comment on any aspect of *Spirit Journal*. For example, you are most welcome 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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Contemplative Outreach
