

## *Spirit Journal - October 2022*

### **Preview**

This Fall Workshop edition of includes:

- A reflection on the 2022 One-Day Fall Workshop - coming up on October 29 via Zoom - by the workshop presenter, Carl McColman
- A recommendation from Jack Lloyd, who suggests that you may want to consider taking part in a unique meditation program currently offered by the Theosophical Society
- A listing of additional retreats and workshops that may be of interest to you, plus a new website to explore
- Information about available Centering Prayer groups, in-person and online
- *Insights* from Thomas Keating, Lao Tsu, Barbara Holmes, and the Buddha

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](mailto:news@centeringprayerchicago.org).

A pre-retreat reflection from Carl McColman

### ***Silence and Imagination - We Need Both***

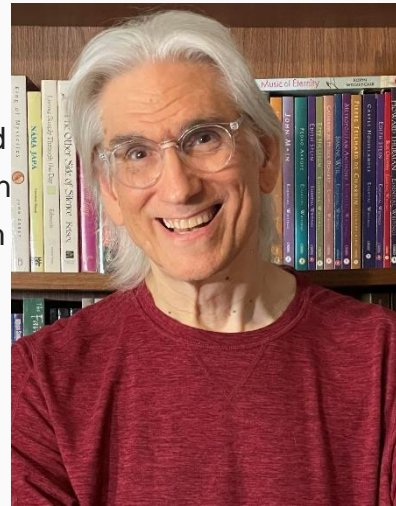
***On Saturday, October 29, Carl McColman will be leading our Annual Fall Workshop: an online day of reflection on Centering Prayer and the Mystical Imagination.***

***If you'd like to explore how to integrate silent prayer with imaginative prayer, this program may be for you. To learn more and to register, please click here:***

**[Centering Prayer and the Mystical Imagination.](#)**

A few years ago, a popular contemporary Christian rock band called Mercy Me had a

hit song called “I Can Only Imagine.” The band’s lead singer wrote the song for his father, who was dying at the time; the song tells of imagining what eternal life is like: imagining the beauty of heaven, the joy to be found in the presence of Christ. For Mercy Me, the imagination is a doorway into a beautiful experience of intimacy with God through Christ.



The song works because, after all, the human imagination is powerful. It’s fun to imagine what it must be like to be reunited with family and loved ones in heaven. Here on earth, children love to imagine a world of wonders, shaped by generous “imaginary beings” like Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy. And while we adults sometimes seem to lose sight of the imagination thanks to our busy, oh-so-practical lives, the ongoing popularity of fantasy stories like the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Marvel Comics are reminders that even for grown-ups, the human imagination is truly a source of entertainment — and also wisdom and insight.

How does the imagination relate to prayer? As someone who finds great joy and spiritual nourishment in the practice of Centering Prayer, I know that this particular way of praying is not about the imagination at all! In fact, in Centering Prayer, any interior ideas, daydreams or imaginings are viewed simply as “thoughts” that we learn to let go of during prayer, gently returning to a simple Sacred Word that empowers us to rest in the wordless beauty of *silence* in the present moment.

The great Trappist monk and mystic Thomas Merton once gave a lecture where he had some interesting things to say about the human imagination. “Imagination is your interior sense,” he remarked. Recognizing that for many people imagination is just another word for fantasy or make-believe, Merton went on to say “imagination is not fantasy, imagination is creative.” In this particular talk Merton was speaking about poetry, but he might have said this about any type of artistic endeavor. To be an artist is to a person who imagines.

Merton is famous as a poet and a writer, so it only makes sense that he would value the imagination as a doorway to creativity. But Merton is also renowned for his wisdom as a Christian contemplative and mystic — and is widely credited as inspiring the

monks who started the Centering Prayer movement in the 1970s. Centering Prayer is famous for its emphasis on *silence* and *stillness* as important ways to consent to God's presence and action in our hearts and lives. How does this square with the "creative" quality of the imagination?

I'd like to suggest that silence and the imagination go together in the spiritual life, just like a diamond goes together with its setting in a beautiful gold ring. Without the ring, a diamond could get lost, but without a diamond, even a gold ring's beauty is diminished. For spiritual seekers, silence and meditation and contemplation are like a sparkling diamond, while the imagination — and the stories and teachings of faith that inspire the imagination — are like the shiny gold ring with its prongs that hold the diamond in place.

The diamond is not the gold, and vice versa. Silence and imagination have different roles to play in the spiritual life. But just because they are different does not mean only one is necessary, or that one is better or more important than the other. Human beings need silence, and we also need the creative spark that we discover in our imagination. A well balanced spirituality encompasses both.

Someone who truly understood this was Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Society of Jesus and the creator of the 30-day program of Spiritual Exercises. Ignatius emphasized using the imagination in prayer, whether that means reviewing the ups and downs of daily life in the Prayer of Examen, or using creative visualization to imagine interacting with Christ as a kind of interactive/imaginative way of praying. The Spiritual Exercises can help you feel closer to Jesus by imagining a more intimate relationship with him. It's not the same thing as Centering Prayer, and it's a good idea to try to understand the difference between prayer that is centered in silence, and meditations that are structured around the imagination. Like gold and the diamond, these very different styles of prayer can compliment each other beautifully.

*“Imagination is more important than knowledge.  
For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand,  
while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there  
ever will be to know and understand.”*

— Albert Einstein, [\*On Cosmic Religion and Other Opinions and Aphorisms\*](#)



***Centering Prayer and the Mystical Imagination***  
***A Mini-Retreat with Carl McColman***  
***Live via Zoom - Saturday October 29 - 10am-3pm***

[Click here for more details and secure online registration.](#)

Program Recommendation:

***A Unique Online Series Explores a Buddhist  
Meditation Approach and the Teachings of Thomas  
Keating***

by Jack Lloyd

For the past several months, I've been participating via Zoom in a Sunday meditation group led by Juliana Cesano of the Theosophical Society in America, which has its headquarters in Wheaton, Illinois. Juliana is a wonderful meditation teacher, and the program she is offering this fall will explore Thomas Keating's teachings in the context of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, as well as the Buddhist practice of loving-kindness meditation (Metta). This inter-spiritual combination of topics would likely be of interest to many Centering Prayer practitioners.

The Theosophical Society describes the program as follows:

*This meditation group is an invitation to nurture your commitment to a spiritual*

*practice. Each week, a topic related to meditation is presented and followed by a guided meditation that transitions into 15 minutes of silence. This fall we will explore the practice of Metta or Maitri (loving-kindness) as seen in the Theravada and Tibetan Buddhist traditions respectively, as well as the practice of Centering Prayer, as taught by Fr. Thomas Keating, based on the teachings of The Cloud of Unknowing. Both beginners and seasoned practitioners are welcome to join.*

**Juliana Cesano** has been actively involved with the Theosophical Society's work for over 25 years. She currently serves as the Member Education Director at the National Center of the TS in America. She is an international speaker, and her main focus over the past 15 years has been the transformational power of contemplative practices.



[More information and registration.](#)

## ***Other Retreats, Workshops and a New Website***

*From Contemplative Outreach of Colorado*

***A Tale of Two Thomases (Thomas Keating and Thomas Berry) -  
Saturday November 12 via Zoom***

In this course, Rick Klein will speak about the parallels and divergences between the paths of Thomas Berry and Thomas Keating. Rick is convinced “the only way to fully follow either the road of Thomas Berry or the road of Thomas Keating, is to travel both roads. Not one followed by the other, but both roads at the same time. Although the roads appear separate, they are in essence forever linked. Berry’s Universe Story and Keating’s Spiritual Journey connect whenever ... action meets contemplation, matter meets spirit, being meets doing, meaning meets purpose ... in intentional awareness”

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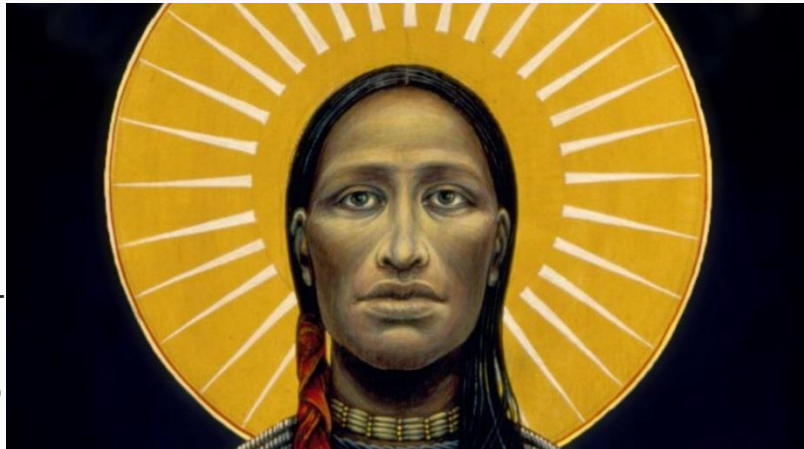
**Rick Klein** gives talks and workshops on contemplative spirituality throughout Colorado. He is a teacher of Centering Prayer and has presented workshops on science and spirituality, compassion, and mysticism at the Center for Contemplative Living. He is a past facilitator and teacher in the Benedictine Spiritual Formation Program offered by Benet Hill Monastery.

[More information and registration.](#)

*From Contemplative Outreach of Atlanta*

***We Gather Together - Holy Trinity Big Sit - Saturday, Nov 12 via Zoom***

This meaningful morning exploring the Holy Trinity theme is inspired by the First Nations' translation of the New Testament. This Big Sit incorporates two 20-minute silent Centering Prayer sessions with Lectio Divina (sacred reading four times), Taizé chant, and a Visio Divina meditation inspired by Father John Giuliani's Holy Trinity.

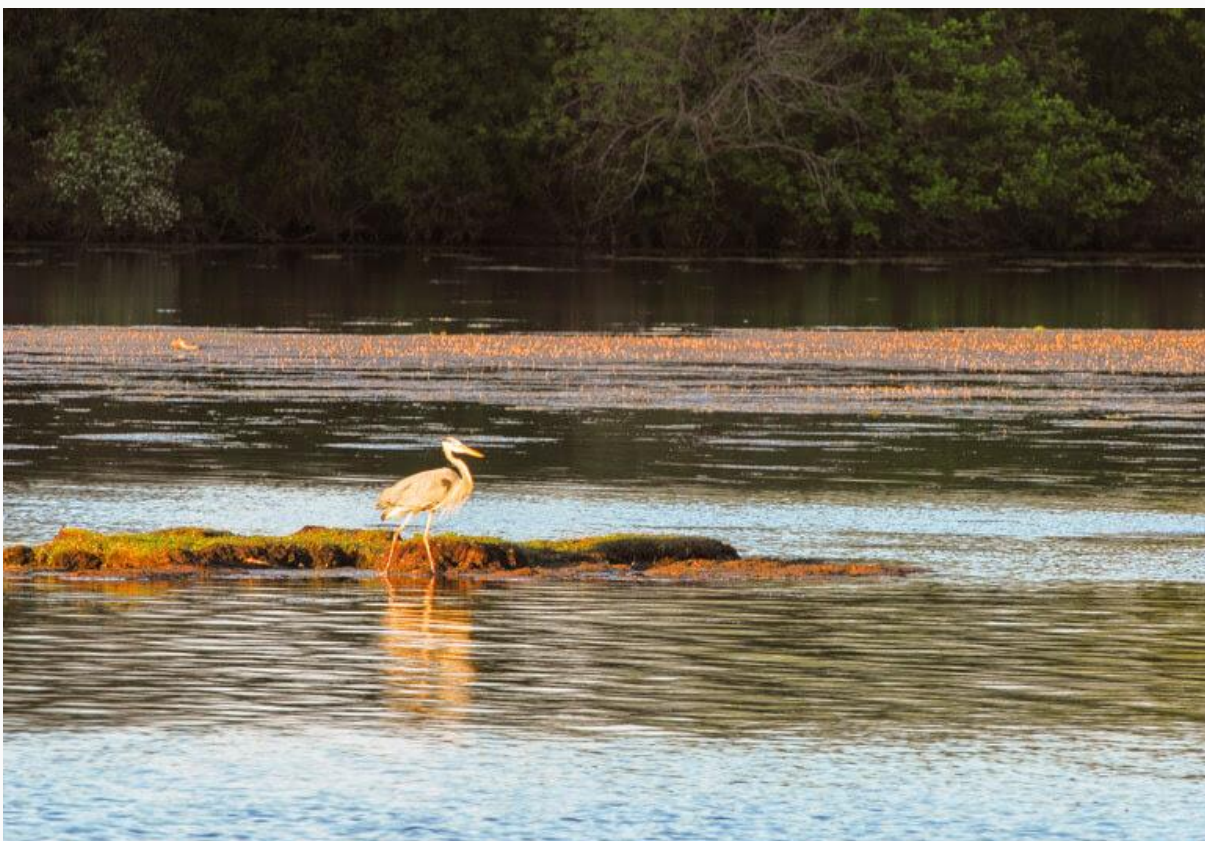


[More information and registration.](#)

*At Benet Lake Retreat Center*

***Silent Retreat Weekend - November 11 - 13, 2022***





This is an opportunity to leave the distractions and noise of your daily life behind for just a weekend and enter the silence of this retreat offering. There will be time for 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.

Benet Lake Retreat Center is 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](http://BenetLake.org)) Space will be limited; early registration is encouraged. Proof of vaccinations (including both booster shots) is required prior to the retreat.

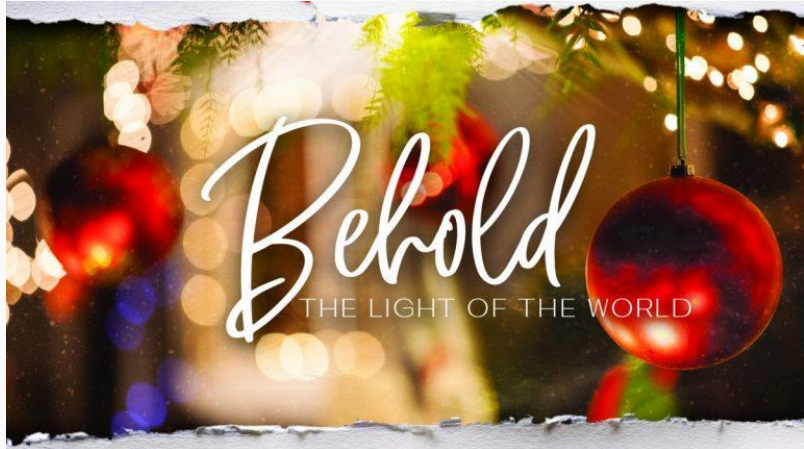
**Retreat leaders: Esther Simonson and Spencer Foon**

For further information and registration, please contact Esther Simonson @ [emsino61@gmail.com](mailto:emsino61@gmail.com).

*From the the Christos Center for Spiritual Direction*

## ***BEHOLD: A Contemplative Advent Retreat – Dec. 2-4 – Mundelein, IL***

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.](#)

## ***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](mailto: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](mailto:yoopergirl37@gmail.com)
- Centering Prayer Group every Saturday 9:30-10:30am. Contact Bill Epperly at [bill@integralawakenings.com](mailto:bill@integralawakenings.com)
- St. Katharine Drexel Church every Tuesday 8:30-9:30am. Contact Lori Dressel at [lorijdressel@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:rmmagiera@gmail.com)

### ***Offerings in the Meditation Chapel***

Meditation Chapel is an independent, nonprofit global platform with which Contemplative Outreach Ltd supports and 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. 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 2022. 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](mailto:marylapham2@gmail.com).

**Please let us know about any additional events and resources you're aware of.**  
**Write to:** [news@centeringprayerchicago.org](mailto:news@centeringprayerchicago.org)

## ***Insights***

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*We all have the innate capacity to manifest God because we are already that image by virtue of being created.*

- Thomas Keating

*When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be.*

- Lao Tsu

*In the beginning there is darkness. It is the womb out of which we are born. Darkness may be the blessed dimming of ego-driven striving, a destination and condition of safety and repose.*

- Barbara Holmes

Three things cannot be long hidden - the sun, the moon, and the truth.

- Gautama Buddha

## ***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](mailto:news@centeringprayerchicago.org).

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