

## *Spirit Journal - March 2023*

### **Preview**

This issue includes

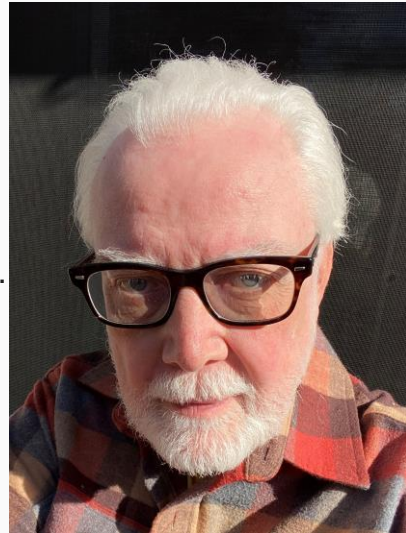
- An invitation to register for *The Way of the Mystic: St. Teresa's Life and Teaching*, a Zoom workshop with Juliana Cesano, which will take place on Saturday March 25
- Details about - and your first chance to register for - *Ubuntu and Contemplation*, coming on May 13 with Michael Battle
- A save-the-date notice for our six-day summer Intensive/Post-Intensive at the Siena Retreat Center, scheduled for July 23-29
- A listing of nine more offerings of potential interest to you, from multiple Contemplative Outreach chapters and other groups
- A lovely reflection, *In the Garden*, from our frequent contributor Johanna Ash
- Information about available Centering Prayer groups, in-person and online
- *Insights* from Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, and John of the Cross

We invite you to help us create the next edition of *Spirit Journal*. Your suggestions 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).

### ***The Way of the Mystic***

by Jack Lloyd

A few year's back, Contemplative Outreach Chicago conducted an in-depth survey of our members. Among other things, we learned that many people want opportunities to learn about the great mystics of the past, people like Julian of Norwich, Meister Eckhart, and Hildegard of Bingen.



As we continue trying to serve that interest, we're bringing you an online workshop on Saint Teresa of Avila on Saturday March 25, led by Juliana Cesano. Teresa led an eventful and sometimes difficult life in 16th Century Spain. In one of her great books, *The Interior Castle*, she wrote:

*It's tempting to think that if God would only grant you internal favors, you would be able to withstand external challenges. His Majesty [a name Teresa uses for God] knows what is best for us. He does not require our opinion on the matter and, in fact, has every right to point out that we don't have any idea what we're asking for. Remember: all you have to do as you begin to cultivate the practice of prayer is to prepare yourself with sincere effort and intent to bring your will into harmony with the will of God.*

(Quoted in Richard Rohr's [Daily Meditation](#) - March 14, 2023)

The quote reminds me of Thomas Keating's remark that: "*Transformation is something only God can do.*" Please join us if you can on March 25 to learn about St. Teresa's life and her unique spiritual path.

Looking further ahead, please consider taking part in Michael Battle's workshop, *Ubuntu and Contemplation*, in May. This event is part of an ongoing and expanding collaboration with other contemplative groups, which helps us have the resources to sponsor a wider range of events for our members. Many of you may remember Michael's outstanding workshop *Releasing an Enslaved Spirit*, presented in January 2022. It will be wonderful to have him back - this time to introduce us to Ubuntu, an ancient and inspiring African

philosophy of human interdependence and unity.

See below for further information and registration for both these events. And thank you for being a part of Contemplative Outreach Chicago!

***Saturday March 25***  
***The Way of the Mystic:***  
***St. Teresa of Avila's Life and Teaching***



**Presented via Zoom by**

**Juliana Cesano**

**of the Theosophical Society in America**

**Saturday **March 25****

**10:00 AM to 12:00 PM (US/Canada Central)**

One of Christianity's inspiring saints, Teresa of Avila, brought to the world the experience of the ecstatic love for God in a most unique way. The journey

within of this passionate mystic of the 16th century conveys with clarity and depth the path of surrendering the lower to the Higher.

Teresa's ascetic approach is accepted as a classical exposition of the contemplative life, and her spiritual writings are among the most widely read to this day. Her recognized masterpieces on the progress of the soul toward God through prayer and contemplation include *The Interior Castle* and *Exclamations of the Soul to God*.

This workshop will begin with 20 minutes of Centering Prayer and will then explore Teresa's life and her teachings. Ahead of her time, neither illness nor the persecution of the Inquisition was able to extinguish the inner fire of this courageous woman.

(Above portrait of St. Teresa painted by Frei Jual de la Miseria in 1576.)

**Presenter:** Juliana Cesano is a third-generation Theosophist and has been actively involved with the Society's work for over 25 years. Originally from Argentina, she spent two years volunteering at the International Theosophical Society's headquarters in Chennai, India, before becoming a staff member at the Theosophical Society in America, which is located on a beautiful campus in Wheaton, Illinois. Juliana is an international speaker, the manager of the Quest Book Shop, and the Membership Education Director for the Theosophical Society in America.



(The Theosophical Society is dedicated to promoting the unity of humanity; fostering religious and racial understanding by encouraging the study of religion, philosophy, and science; and furthering the discovery of the spiritual aspect of life and of human beings.)



[More information and registration.](#)

***Ubuntu and Contemplation:***  
How an Indigenous African Philosophy  
Maps Our Spiritual Path to Global Community



**Zoom Workshop with Michael Battle**

**Saturday May 13, 2023**

**9:30AM-12:30PM Central**

**Sponsored by the Contemplative Outreach Chapters of Chicago, Atlanta, Colorado, and Maryland/Washington, along with Metanoia Journey (Austin) and Closer Than Breath**

Emerging from the ancient cultural traditions of sub-Saharan Africa, the deeply communitarian philosophy known as Ubuntu challenges Western habits of mind in ways that complement and complete the experience of contemplation. In this workshop, we hope to bring together people from diverse backgrounds who share an interest in contemplation. Together we will learn about Ubuntu as we pray through, think about and practice how to release the natural unity the Holy Spirit constantly offers the world.

Michael Battle writes:

*By educating participants with a common spiritual framework, Ubuntu becomes the basis for a unified social movement that not only mitigates racism and other sources of human division and misunderstanding, but participates in how the Holy Spirit is healing the world—not simply by changing minds, but more by changing hearts in which our minds are inextricably linked.*

*Ubuntu Circles provide a format for small group discussions that can foster understandings across racial and other human divides with the backdrop of the Holy Spirit's power of Pentecost. Ubuntu Circles promote St. Francis of Assisi's wisdom:*

***“Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.”***

*We learn through Ubuntu Circles how to do the impossible—change hearts concerning racism—by contemplating our own change we wish to see manifest in the world.*

In Centering Prayer and other contemplative practices, we find a path that opens us up to oneness – both union with God and unity with all human beings, including those who may seem different from us in race, culture, religion, or national origin. As we move into this more connected state of awareness, it is

essential to do so communally, rather than just individually – and grasping the message of Ubuntu is a big step toward the ability to love our neighbors as ourselves.

**Presenter:** The Very Rev. [Michael Battle](#), Ph.D. is a featured keynote speaker and leader of many clergy and lay retreats. Some readers may remember his very inspiring workshop from January 2022, *Releasing an Enslaved Spirit*. He is the Herbert Thompson Professor of Church and



Society and Director of the Desmond Tutu Center at General Theological Seminary in New York. Through 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 Episcopal House of Bishops and, in 2008, was chaplain to the global Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops. Michael has published eleven books, including *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* (2009) and 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 Ph.D. in theology and ethics, also from Duke University. He was ordained a priest by Archbishop Tutu in 1993.

[More information and registration.](#)

Save the Dates!

***Six-Day Advanced Intensive/Post-Intensive  
Retreat - July 23-29, Siena Retreat Center,  
Racine***



Presented by Contemplative Outreach Chicago, this extended retreat will immerse participants in the practice of Centering Prayer. This two track retreat will allow the participants to come together for Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina, and meal times. The retreat will provide an atmosphere of silence, solitude and community.

More information will be coming soon - for now, please save the dates.

## ***Other Contemplative Workshops, Retreats and Events of Interest***

From Contemplative Outreach of Atlanta

### ***This Afternoon through Sunday: Peace in Troubled Times Centering Prayer Retreat via Zoom***

Delve into a deeply spiritual experience growing closer to God on a two-night Centering Prayer Retreat on Zoom. Transform and deepen your relationship with God through Centering Prayer. Renew your mind by absorbing the wisdom of mystics. We will be able to maintain an atmosphere of silence during the retreat in our own homes by accessing our Zoom connection.

[More information and registration.](#)

From Closer Than Breath

### ***This Sunday: Deeper Mind, Deeper Heart: Exploring the Intersection of Insight Meditation and Centering Prayer***

This half day online retreat will explore the similarities and differences between the Buddhist practice of Insight Meditation and the Christian practice of Centering Prayer. The unifying theme will be the emphasis in both traditions on *intention*, *receptivity* and *interior silence*. The goal will be to explore how these two traditions can be approached as complementary, affording a deepening spiritual journey when practiced together.

The retreat, led by Keith Kristich and Ted Jones, will include: meditation instruction, periods of silent meditation in both practices, and time for questions and discussion.

[More information and registration.](#)

From Contemplative Outreach of Colorado  
***Seven Week Course: Creating Self-Compassion Through Centering Prayer, April 13 - May 25 via Zoom***

A foundational gift of practicing centering prayer is that we also begin caring for our mental and emotional well-being during our prayer sits. Fortunately, this is also one definition of self-compassion. Frequently, we start noticing this gift with a simple thought like, “my days feel better since I began centering prayer.” Centering prayer creates self-compassion because it requires us to learn and repeat the process of awareness (being present), acceptance, and letting go while consenting to the presence and action of the Divine within us.

What is happening in our brains biologically as we repeat this process of awareness, acceptance, and letting go? How does this process impact our mental and emotional well-being? Over the seven weeks, this course will explore the physical changes centering prayer brings about in our brains. Then we will explore the corresponding mental, emotional, and spiritual transformations resulting from those changes. Most importantly, in every class, we will practice tools for creating self-compassion by discussing what we experience; we will learn from each other. Through this weekly repetition, participants will habituate several new ways of caring for themselves. As we practice, our lives will feel more meaningful, grounded, and empowered to share ourselves in the world through God-given grace.

**Presenter:** Blair Ashley has deep contemplative insights. He has practiced centering prayer and self-compassion for the past twenty-eight years. Blair now teaches Self-Compassion and Communication at a trade school, a US Army base (yes, the Army), and to dozens of private clients worldwide. Blair always

learns alongside the students in his seminars.

[More information and registration.](#)

From the International Thomas Merton Society  
***Tuesdays with Merton Webinar Series, plus an In-Person  
Conference in June in Notre Dame Indiana***

ITMS's ongoing *Tuesdays with Merton* webinar series continues on April 14 at 7:00 PM Central with a session entitled *Beyond the Blurbs: Thomas Merton and St. Augustine*. Presented by Patrick F. O'Connell, this topic provides a fascinating and illuminating window on the development of various aspects of Merton's own spirituality, which was associated with Augustine's from the moment his autobiography appeared with comparisons to the *Confessions* on its cover. For more information on this and other upcoming Tuesday evening presentations, [click here](#).



Additionally, ITMS has announced its 18th annual General Meeting: *Sophia Comes Forth, Reaching*, in-person, June 22-25 at St. Mary's College in Notre Dame Indiana (about two hours from Chicago). This event features multiple speakers and workshops on a range of Merton-related topics. [Complete information here.](#)

From Contemplative Outreach of Maryland and Washington  
***How Contemplation Can Heal a Violent World: Going  
Deeper, April 15 via Zoom***

This half-day retreat, facilitated by Kathleen Blank Riether, will feature three recorded excerpts from the Rt. Rev. Eugene Taylor Sutton's presentation on

contemplation and nonviolence given during COMW's 25th Anniversary Retreat in September 2022.

The excerpts will focus on the different faces of violence, the spirituality of nonviolence and nonviolence in action. Before each video, participants will prepare to listen deeply by sitting together in Centering Prayer. We will listen to each video as though engaging in Lectio Divina, noting any word or phrase that especially resonates as God speaking to us personally. After each video, we will be invited to share the word or phrase that resonated with us as the Spirit's call to non-violent action in our personal and communal lives. We will conclude our retreat with a final prayer and blessing.

[More information and registration.](#)

From Contemplative Outreach of Southeast Wisconsin  
***A Unique 12 Step Centering Prayer Retreat,  
May 4-7, Siena Retreat Center in Racine***

"First Things First - Faith in Recovery" will focus on recovery and the power of story, in the silence of Centering Prayer.

This retreat will explore the essential principles that formed the first steps of The 12 Step program of recovery now known as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). As we view and discuss the engaging interplay between Bill W. and Dr. Bob, we see how the lives of two desperate men, their families and friends, and an historic convergence of events forged the foundation of faith integral in their recovery and in the formation of AA's foundational first three steps.

Through viewing, discussion, journaling, and reflection we see how these essential principles formed spiritual practices in their lives and established a program of recovery grounded in faith. During our time together, may the voice of our stories contribute to the integrity of recovery's indispensable first fruit of spiritual awakening.

[More information and registration.](#)

From the Contemplative Outreach of Central Iowa  
***Toward Emptiness: an Eight Day Post-Intensive***

## ***Centering Prayer Retreat, July 14-21 in Rock Island Illinois***

This Post-Intensive Retreat will consist of continuous periods of Centering Prayer from before sunrise until the dinner hour, with breaks for meals. Attendees may participate in as much prayer as they are called to. Short pauses for entering and leaving the silence will be offered every 30 minutes. There will be no teaching and no reading during this immersion in silence. Veteran retreat leaders Chris Frantsvog and Paul Witmer look forward to hosting you for this journey into deep silence.

[More information and registration.](#)

## From the Contemplative Outreach of St. Louis ***Eight Day Centering Prayer Retreat, August 4-11 in Eureka Missouri***

This retreat offers an in-depth experience of silent prayer for those who already have an established practice of Centering Prayer of six months or more. It is an opportunity for deeper union with God through communal sharing of silence and stillness. For those making their first week-long silent retreat, the “Intensive” track will offer periods of silent prayer as well as presentation and discussion of videos by Fr. Thomas Keating. The simultaneous “Post-Intensive” track, for those who have already completed an Intensive retreat, includes more periods of silent prayer instead of the videos.

The retreat leader is Fr. Bill Sheehan, who has been an integral voice for Centering Prayer even since the earliest days of the movement. Over the past four decades, he has continually provided his wisdom and presence to the Centering Prayer community.

[More information and registration.](#)

From Contemplative Outreach Ltd.  
***Online Living Flame Program***

The national Living Flame Service Team (LFST) is offering a one-time only event to celebrate the 30-year anniversary of the Living Flame program!

This foundational program has been implemented in chapters across the United States and abroad (Iceland). As host of Living Flame I this fall, the LFST is offering the program on Zoom to individuals and to small chapters or groups of five or less, globally.

The Living Flame Program is a seven-day offering of in-depth spiritual study and enrichment presented over seven months by commissioned presenters of Contemplative Outreach, Ltd. It is designed to heighten the awareness of the dynamics of Centering Prayer in the context of the spiritual journey. Participation in this program is for the entire series that will include presentations on seven topics supporting the practice of Centering Prayer. The online program begins this September and will end in April 2024.

A brochure describing the Living Flame program is available [here](#). The number of participants will be limited to 40 "screens," so please act now if you're interested participating. [To register, click here.](#)

A Reflection  
***In the Garden***

by Johanna Ash

(New Mexico, October 2022) We bought this home five years ago and are gradually redeveloping the vineyard to an earlier glory.

The vineyard is a quarter of an acre, and was planted about 20 years back. Over the years many vines had died due to lack of irrigation. There are 120

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vines now with many plants growing back from their roots once we started regular watering. Irrigation is overhead with water lines tied to wires. The lines take constant maintenance due to the birds pecking holes in the lines for water. Sometimes in the morning there are geysers coming from pecked lines. It does give a new meaning to the expression "walking the line."



The drip irrigation lines are tied to the wires that support the grape vines and we tie the longest vines against the wires as well to stabilize them in the strong west winds of the Southwest. One of my favorite sounds is hearing the water coming from the lines and splashing against the sand, watering the plants. It is like hearing a gentle brook running against the rocks. One day I hope to have a bench in the vineyard to sit and listen and pray.

I always feel as if I walk on holy ground there. There are so many references to Christ being the vine and we, the branches. Today, my question to my husband, Bill: did the wineskins of the Bible compare to the carboys of today? And I mention that friends are asking questions about our wine. We give most of it away as gifts. There is an alchemy that happens with grapes. Bill loves the process, the chemistry involved in developing wine. The appeal for him is not the end-product, as we drink little wine.

He answers that no, the wineskins were the containers for serving. Amphoras were what the wine developed in. We do not use amphoras. Wine, in glass

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bottles, from previous years' harvest is stored in the linen closet and in the master bedroom closet. Carboys are in our adult son's bedroom. We have a tiny house, with no space for a wine cellar. The kitchen after harvest has buckets of wine. We try hard to keep them out of the way, under the window and away from the pantry door. This year there are three huge 25-gallon ones. Picking the 500 pounds of grapes went easily this year as the summer had finally cooled off. We picked searching for the clusters, chasing away the wasps and beetles. Now, the valves are bubbling, releasing the excess yeast. The wine will be poured into the carboys soon for clarification.

Since the irrigation lines water entire rows, we have started filling in the spaces that have no vines with vegetables. In the summer, we had watermelon, tomatoes, chili peppers, raspberry and blackberry bushes. I got a freezer to help put up the extra food.

As Bill and I walk, we talk about the soil, about preparations needed for winter. I think of the farmers and opportunities of offering excess food to those less fortunate. Gleaning. In east Texas the sweet potato fields are offered after being harvested by machines to those who collect the potatoes by hand and donate the pickings to the food pantries. In the back of my mind, I think of the food pantries around here who could benefit if I don't want to store the surplus of my garden.

We have red trailing roses planted against the vineyard fencing and that is where we go next. They are new plants. This is their second year and the branches are growing out of the fencing. It is time to tie them back. I use the salvage edging I had cut from the fleece blankets made and donated to the Linus Project. The action feels similar to knotting the prayer blankets at church. Those blankets are beautiful quilts sewn by women of the church and hung in the sanctuary to be knotted by the congregation. Each two weeks there are different ones. The strings are long and the blanket is hung low enough so we can send a prayer up as we knot the strings. The blankets are given to those in the congregation in special need.

After walking the vineyard, we pass through the gate into what I call the sand lot. The lot was scraped clear of horse manure before we bought the house.

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Where it was empty and barren when we first moved here, now it is full of volunteer plants. With the natural rainfall of six inches annually, we are getting chamisa and asters blooming. There are sage bushes growing. We have transplanted cactus that appears out of nowhere. The surprise this year is the datura. It is a poisonous plant but we have no livestock or grandchildren, so we leave it and the dozens of smaller plants. The trumpet flower plant is huge...at least ten feet across and five feet tall. The blossoms are stunning, lasting for only a day or two. They are white with a blue trim at the top of the petals. The seed pods are like the dragon fruit in the grocery stores except woody. Only good for interest, the plants are watched all year. We let the plants die naturally and watch where the new plants grow. If the plant is in the way, we pull it up.

Our Maximilian sunflowers are blooming profusely and add a golden color. I love their sunny blooms, wishing they would last longer than two weeks. The cosmos I sowed is finally blooming. I took a small space in the orchard and fenced it against the rabbits that eat almost everything we plant. I poured two wild flower seed packets into the space and one flower emerged. It is tall, taller than any other cosmos I have ever seen, at least five feet. Lots of flowers are on it and they are a stunning purple. Not the shade we have on the purple asters here, but the more intense shade of the mountain asters. I am so pleased.



I am thinking again about the wineskins and Christ turning old wine into new. And I am reflecting on the amphora. I had to google the proper term to write here for you. In the year 2000 Italian professor Giorgio Stabile found original 14th century documents that clarified that @ was a unit of quantity, and measured by the amphora or jars. Amphora are the terra cotta vessels we know were used in the past to carry wine as well as grain. In the 14th century @ was used to signify "at the price of". Somehow in mankind's' wisdom we have taken a container used for measuring wine and grain and given it a new purpose, a linking with the entire world. Christ renews in the internet. It is holy communion constantly. We thought we were walking alone but Jesus is with us all the time.

## ***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:

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- 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 [loridressel@gmail.com](mailto: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](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. 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!”

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**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](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***

*Christ has no body now but mine. He prays in me, works in me, looks through my eyes, speaks through my words, works through my hands, walks with my feet and loves with me here.*

- Teresa of Avila

*Only the hand that erases can write the true thing.*

- Meister Eckhart

*Like billowing clouds, like the incessant gurgle of the brook, the longing of the spirit can never be stilled.*

- Hildegard of Bingen

*Seek in reading and you will find in meditation; knock in prayer and it will be opened to you in contemplation.*

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- John of the Cross

## ***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).



**Contemplative Outreach**

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