

## *Spirit Journal - February 2024*

### **Preview**

In our February newsletter, you'll find:

- An invitation to join us tomorrow for a contemplative/musical experience - *Notes of Rest* with Julian Davis Reid - at St. Leonard's Ministry on February 15
- Information about an interfaith event with Carl McColman, which we are co-presenting with the Theological Society in America in March
- Thoughts from Alan Krema about the beginning of Lent and the very high level of current interest in Introductory Centering Prayer workshops
- A reminder that you are invited to apply for the Alan Krema Scholarship
- "A Lenten Pilgrimage" - snatches of spiritual memoir from Johanna Ash
- Notice of additional contemplative events coming up soon from the St. John of the Cross Christian Meditation Groups, and Contemplative Outreach chapters in Colorado and Southeast Wisconsin
- An updated calendar of events of interest, local and online, through the end of this year
- A listing of in-person and online prayer groups
- *Insights* from Thomas Merton, Esau McCaully, Walter Brueggemann, and Barbara Holmes

We invite you to get more involved with Contemplative Outreach Chicago. Please help make *Spirit Journal* a lively conversation. 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). Your participation is always welcome!

### **Tomorrow: Experience Notes of Rest at St. Leonard's Ministries**

***In-person with Julian Davis Reid on February 15***

This unique event brings [Notes of Rest](#) to the lovely St. Andrew's Church at [St. Leonard's Ministries](#), the very effective westside Chicago program that has been serving post-incarcerated people and greatly reducing recidivism - i.e., keeping people out of prison - since 1954!

Some readers may have experienced *Notes of Rest* when we presented Julian Davis Reid on Zoom in the spring of 2022. This musical-textual retreat is a Spirit-led ministry grounded in Christian Scripture and Black sacred music ([Rest Assured](#)) that invites people to receive God's gift of rest. Weaving together live piano music and reflections on a passage from the Bible, Julian will create a welcoming space for reflection on how to rely on God amidst uncertainty, transition, and even danger. Listen. Share. Flourish together.



In late 2022, St. Leonard's chaplain, Wes Smedley, approached Contemplative Outreach Chicago and asked if we would like to help introduce Centering Prayer to the program's participants. Alan Krema has been working to do just that, and this event is being offered free of charge to St. Leonard's residents and staff as part of that effort.

Other guests are most welcome at no charge, as well, although free-will offerings are appreciated. No registration is necessary. (If you do choose to contribute, any amount is welcome. The recommended contribution of \$25 helps defray the costs of presenting this event. A sponsorship contribution of \$50 helps support the ongoing work of Contemplative Outreach Chicago. If you'd like to make a donation, you may do so [here](#) or at the event.)

We hope to you will join us for *Notes of Rest* at St. Leonard's Ministries on Thursday, February 15, 6:30 – 8:00 PM. The event will be held in St. Andrew's

church on the St. Leonard's campus, 48 N. Hoyne St., Chicago.

## ***Braiding Your Mystical Practice: Integrating Eastern, Western, and Earth-Centered Approaches for Nurturing the Soul***

***Online March 2 with Carl McColman; presented in collaboration with the Theosophical Society in America***

Join [Carl McColman](#), author of books like *The New Big Book of Christian Mysticism* and *Spirit of the Celtic Gods and Goddesses* in a visionary experience of cultivating your contemplative heart through Eastern, Western, and nature-based wisdom.



Some readers will remember Carl from our 2022 Fall Workshop, *Centering Prayer and the Mystical Imagination*. We're delighted to work with TSA to welcome him back!

Drawing on his own work of integrating Celtic wisdom, Zen, and Christian mysticism, Carl weaves stories, myths, wisdom teachings, imaginal exercises, and deep silence together to celebrate our existential unity as children of one earth and one love. The program will be experiential, with time for meditation, contemplation, visualization, journaling and optional conversation.

As part of this online retreat experience, participants will:

- Practice several methods of meditation from around the world;
- Explore how the human heart is the ultimate teacher of mystical truth;
- Learn to see the mystical union underlying our cultural and religious differences;
- Visualize your unique path for living a joyful mystical life.

This hybrid event will take place at the Theosophical Society's headquarters in Wheaton, or you may participate online. It will also be recorded, with the recording available for on-demand viewing by registrants for two weeks following the program date.

**[Important note:** Because of our co-sponsorship of this event, you are invited to take advantage of the discount offered to Theosophical Society members. Be sure to choose the discounted price when registering.]

[More information and registration](#)

## ***Lent and Centering Prayer***

by Alan Krema

Today is the start of the Lenten season. Many of us are beginning to look forward to spring. As we engage the depth and mystery of the winter, we are encouraged to look inward, go to our inner room, and pray.



As we consider Lent before us, I have taken note this year of a remarkable number of churches and groups hosting Centering Prayer Introductory workshops. Having a workshop at the start of Lent brings the natural calling to practice Centering Prayer during Lent. It also makes the gathering into sacred space within a church community very inviting.

I have noticed that the number of groups and people we are inviting into Centering Prayer this month is like nothing I have seen in decades.

There is a group of five parishes on the Southside of Chicago participating in an introductory workshop and weekly communal centering prayer during Lent. There are also workshops at St. Edmund in Oak Park, St. Luke's Episcopal in

Evanston, Santa Maria Del Populo in Mundelein, St. Mary in Plainfield, and Kolbe House ministry. This represents several hundred people engaging with a Centering Prayer introductory workshop this month. Truly remarkable.

Kolbe house is a chaplaincy to Cook County jail. They have one or two Centering Prayer facilitators who lead the prayer inside the jail. The jail administration is open to holding CP groups on a much more extensive basis. With a simple email, 60 people joined a CP introduction and formation program to prepare to be facilitators in the jail.

As the group sat together during our first in-person session, so many of us realized the communal divine presence and the nurturing energy of sitting in Centering Prayer as a community.

This is very uplifting and is so revealing of the movement of the Holy Spirit within our contemplative community. The hunger and desire are there to open ourselves to the presence of God and to receive the fruits and gifts of the Spirit as we move into Lent and into the rest of our lives.

## ***An Invitation to Apply for the Alan Crema Scholarship***

Is 2024 is the year for you to take advantage of the Alan Crema Scholarship? The Scholarship is designed to support the development of wisdom leaders who will work to enhance the modern contemplative movement. If you feel a calling to develop your abilities to contribute in this way, we may be able to help you defray some of the costs of retreats, workshops, or courses of study you feel will help you continue to grow spiritually.

This new scholarship program is named in honor of Alan Crema, who stepped aside about a year ago after six extraordinary years as coordinator. Alan remains a valued and very active member of our core volunteer group.

If you feel you could benefit from financial support to help with the cost of

undertaking a program of study and reflection, we urge you to [click here for detailed information](#) and a chance to apply for the inaugural Alan Crema Scholarship. Good luck!

## ***A Lenten Pilgrimage***



by Johanna Ash

Last spring, my husband Bill and I drove to the Sangre de Cristo Mountains northeast of Santa Fe for an afternoon at El Santuario de Chimayo. It was no longer Lent but it was the first time in so long that it worked out for us to go. It is a beautiful place hugging the valley formed by the Rio Chiquito and has been a place of worship for over two centuries. Now it is a shrine dedicated for prayer and intentions for healing.

There are two chapels. One is the original one, the other is El Santo Nino (Holy Child). When you walk in there are many statues of the Christ Child and dozens and dozens of wooden, painted birds of all sorts. I am guessing they are of cottonwood or cedar, and they are songbirds, water birds, domesticated, wild, all types. Each baby Jesus is wearing fabric clothing. The Chimayo community that supports the Shrine is one that is traditionally Hispanic Catholic, and dressing the Holy Family is what they do. Jesus' extra clothes hang on wires stretched high against the thick adobe walls between the stuccoed corners and the deeply recessed windows. Printed requests are everywhere: no photos, no

cell phone use, quiet and respect for those praying.

It is all I can do to honor these requests, especially when we walk into the room set aside for mementos. It is like walking into a Holy Closet...except that it is a well-lit room with windows. It is walking into a photo album. Or a shoe store! Thousands of baby and toddler shoes are stapled into the cedar plank ceiling. They are sorted by size. Tiny sneakers, baptism shoes, orthopedics for infants learning to walk, soft soles, leather laced, every type is represented. One story declares that the shoes will be used by Jesus as he walks through humankind doing his good works. Photos of children cover the whitewashed walls so completely it is hard to see the plaster. Most are small but several propped against the shelves are larger. It is said that each pair of shoes, each photo represents a prayer offered for health, of hope, or of healing. Another part of the Santuario has a room filled with children's crutches.

Attached to the Santuario de Chimayo, the main chapel, is the "pocito", the well of Holy dirt. If you follow the proper sequence of prayer and use the holy dirt, miracles will happen. Special containers are sold in the gift shop, but Bill and I scrounge in our pockets and in my purse and come up with two facial masks we can use to carry the dirt. I kneel down on the bare dusty earth floor and reach deep into the well of river sand. There are trowels provided, and I take about a cup's worth. We wrap the dirt carefully in the masks, tie them up using the ear loops, and I place the package into my purse. When I get home, I tell my friends and offer the sacred dirt to them. Soon, I have takers.

Chimayo is a destination for pilgrimages during Good Friday. They commemorate the path Jesus took before his crucifixion. New Mexico's northern mountains have a strong history of Penitentes, a sect of Catholic men who believe in whipping themselves to atone for Christ's suffering. Men will walk miles and miles across the barren New Mexico landscape carrying wooden crosses. As one gets closer to Chimayo, many crosses have been erected on the sage and cactus covered mesa and hill tops marking the path. Their small chapels are scattered across the northern valleys and remote mountain tops. Locations are kept secret. Another pilgrimage story

commemorates the Bataan Death Marches of World War Two.

Holy Thursday and Good Friday have plenty of media coverage now. Now it is not the Penitentes or remembering the soldiers so much as ordinary citizens and devout believers making the pilgrimage. One year, wooden chips were left along the highways walked, each chip bearing a blessing for hope, faith, love. People give interviews sharing the reason and deeper meaning of their pilgrimages. A friend, Saryon, makes the trip this year. She leaves her car in Nambe, and walks the eight miles in darkness. The moon rises and is almost full providing light along the highways. Hearing this story reminds me of Ansel Adams' attempts at photographing Taos church under the night skies. I ask Saryon if the frogs were singing to welcome her as she approached the valley. She says that she saw fellow pilgrims recite their rosaries, and many participate in the mass offered.

There are so many pilgrimages. New Mexico has only a few. The ones taken to Chimayo are very dramatic, but there is another south of Albuquerque at Tome Hill. That walk is up a steep hill for three miles and once you are there you have the expanse of the desert in front of you. There are several mountain ranges you can see, and deep valleys. I don't think I could walk either of these pilgrimages right now, though. My health has not been strong in months.

I did, however, go on a three-day Silent Retreat in late January. It was sponsored by New Mexico Contemplative Outreach at the Norbertine Abbey, south of Albuquerque. The Abbey's elevation is such that I could see the airport and the studio for Netflix across I-25. Behind the Abbey is a huge solar field. It took me a while to stop resenting the intrusion of modern civilization and allow God room to enter. There is a wonderful path just east of the church, protected with cottonwood trees down the arroyo. Animals have burrows there, and the path rises up across the mesa. I found the peace and consolation I had been hoping for.

Dark nights of the soul come fairly frequently for some of us. Sometimes it is due to unanswered questions and impatience, but sometimes it is clinical

depression. If that is the case. no amount of talking to ourselves trying to rationalize or reframe will make a difference. Only medicine prescribed by a doctor works to resolve it.

Last winter was one of the worst for me. I was questioning how God could best use me as His tool or instrument. Whether I, like Christ, wouldn't be of better use dead. My thinking was very skewed, arrogant, and conceited, but that is how depression can work. No pilgrimage would have solved my dilemma.

By April, though, walking among the blooming trees of Chimayo, and strolling against the riverbed helped resolve my confusion. For the first time I felt I understood the resurrection and anticipation of the perennial hope of Easter. Lent was finished and there were some fine memories in honoring that time of year: glitter in ashes marked on our foreheads, bunny ears on people's heads as they came up for communion, handprints woven into the palm branches on Palm Sunday. The Pink Flamingo Basket was filled each Sunday by children's families, with tokens of the season - chocolate coins to remember Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. (Pink Flamingo Baskets are offered to the children during Lent where their offerings are collected and given during their Sunday School Classes. The flamingo theme is also tied into the flock of yard sculptures that are sent around to parishioners who are too old or weak to come to church. The older youth are responsible for seeing that these yardbirds are moved every few weeks - a fun way to let people know we are thinking of them.) A few people wore fantastic Easter Bonnets on Sunday. And there was music! We sang gorgeous music praising, worshiping, remembering.

This year, Easter Sunday falls on March 31. I can't wait to shout, Alleluia....He is risen, Again!!

## ***Additional Contemplative Events of Interest***

***From the SJC Christian Meditation Groups***

***Finding the Fruits of Meditation in Your***

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## ***Nervous System with Laura Bauhof Ph.D. - February 17, in person in Western Springs***

This Lenten morning of meditation is sponsored by the Christian Meditation groups at St. John of the Cross Church (5005 Wolf Rd, Western Springs, Illinois). Dr. Bauhof will present her case for meditation as a holistic practice that connects body, mind and spirit. There will be time for discussion and meditation.

**Presenter:** Laura Bauhoff is a licensed clinical psychologist and meditator who practices in the western suburbs.

Hospitality begins at 9:00 AM; program 9:30-noon. Free will offering appreciated; reservations requested but not required. Contact: billjoanbinder@sbcglobal.net.

## ***From Contemplative Outreach of Southeast Wisconsin A Welcoming Prayer Introductory Workshop – February 2024, in-person or via Zoom***

*God doesn't take away our difficulties . . .*

*God joins us in our difficulties.*

- Thomas Keating

As we go through each day the False Self manifests itself in many situations and ways. Afflictive emotions often flare up at these times; we become fearful, angry, anxious. In The Welcoming Prayer we invite the Spirit to join us in these situations. The Spirit brings God's healing power to the party, so to speak, and the healing of an aspect of the False Self that this situation has brought forth can progress. We are blessed.

The Welcoming Prayer helps to dismantle the acquired emotional programs that underly what we are experiencing. It addresses them where they are stored – in the body. Gradually, over time, with prayer, repeatedly bringing them into the light, the perfect love of the Most Holy, they are healed, removing the obstacles that keep God's all-powerful grace from flowing in and through us

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and out into a world in desperate need.

Contemplative Outreach of SE Wisconsin is offering the Welcoming Prayer Introductory Workshop in two parts on Zoom, February 19 and 26, or as a one-day in-person program in Elm Grove, Wisconsin on February 24.

[More information and registration](#) (online)

[More information and registration](#) (in person)

*From Contemplative Outreach of Colorado*  
***Contemplative Prayer and African Christian  
Mysticism, with Michael Battle - March 23, in-  
person or via Zoom***

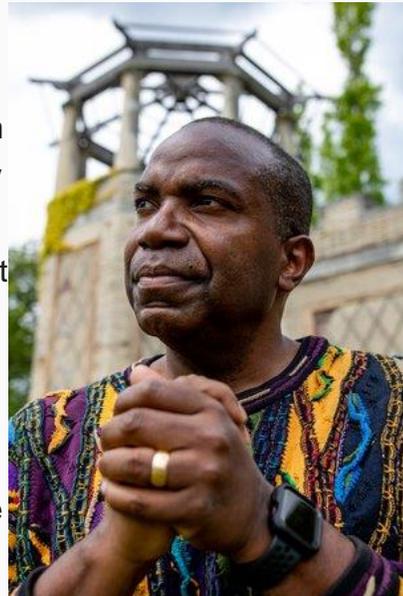
Very few speakers are as well-versed in this topic as Michael Battle, whose workshops for Contemplative Outreach Chicago in 2022 and 2023 have been highlights of our recent programming.

Michael holds that the essence of African Christian mysticism (founded in the desert tradition of monasticism) is not taught but caught. Such mysticism is a whole way of life. It is not an esoteric doctrine or a predetermined plan of ascetic practice. It is important to understand this, because there really is no way of talking about the way of prayer, or the spiritual teaching of God's life.

African Christian mystics did not try to systematize the way to God; instead, they relied upon the experience of a lifetime of striving to re-direct every aspect of body, mind, and soul to God. There was no Protestant or Catholic dichotomy of salvation based upon grace or work because salvation was caught up in how the community is so much more than the sum of individuals striving for heaven. And yet, personal prayer and personal salvation could be better understood through interpersonal prayer and interpersonal salvation.

This is summed up today through the contemporary lens of African Christian mysticism known as Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me. In short, African contemplative prayer is not only an activity undertaken each day, but also a life continually turned towards God.

**Presenter:** The Very Rev. Michael Battle, Ph.D. was ordained a priest by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1993. Battle's clergy experience, in addition to his academic work, makes him an internationally sought after speaker, teacher, writer and spiritual leader. In 2010, Battle was given one of the highest Anglican Church distinctions as "Six Preacher," by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams. A distinction given to only a few who demonstrate great dedication to the church that goes back to 16th century England and Thomas Cranmer. Battle has published eleven books, including his latest: *Desmond Tutu: A Spiritual Biography of South Africa's Confessor*. Battle's PeaceBattle Institute works on subjects of diversity, spirituality, prayer, race and reconciliation. In addition, Battle has served as pastor and spiritual director to thousands of clergy and laity. He has also served as chaplain to Archbishop Tutu, Congressman John Lewis, the Episcopal House of Bishops and the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops. In addition, Battle has served as vice president to the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, Arun Gandhi's Institute for Nonviolence. Battle and his wife, Raquel, were married by Archbishop Tutu and are parents to two daughters, Sage and Bliss, and a son, Zion. All of whom were baptized by Archbishop Tutu as well.



[More information and registration](#)

## ***The 2024 Contemplative Events Calendar***

To learn about even more upcoming workshops and retreats, download and have a look at this [annual calendar](#). It provides a comprehensive listing of

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Chicago-area and online programs we're currently aware of - 86 (!) listings now through December.

## ***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 ten invitations to gather with Centering Prayer groups via Zoom. Listed below are the groups, times, and contact information:

- Centering Prayer Group every Saturday 9:30-10:30am. Contact Bill Epperly at [bill@integralawakenings.com](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)
- St. Mary of Emig Centering Prayer Group Tuesday 6:30 – 7:30pm. Contact Rose Magiera for link and phone number – [rmmagiera@gmail.com](mailto:rmmagiera@gmail.com)
- North Park Covenant Church, Monday 7:15pm. Contact Sarah Hillabrant, (773) 509-1095, [yoopergirl37@gmail.com](mailto:yoopergirl37@gmail.com)

- Contemplative Worship, every Wednesday, 5:00pm. Contact Jenny Russel at – [jir8546@yahoo.com](mailto:jir8546@yahoo.com)
- St. Michael's Catholic Church, Schererville, Indiana, Monday, 6:00 PM. Contact Peggy Kolarik, [peggy.kolarik@att.net](mailto:peggy.kolarik@att.net), 219-322-1886
- Northern Illinois Zoom Centering Prayer Group, every Saturday 9:30 – 10:15am. Contact Anne Smith 815-245-4088 or Kathy Putnam 815-568-7641, [Katiarel@aol.com](mailto:Katiarel@aol.com)
- Contemplative Outreach of NYC & Beyond - Brief prayers, 20 minutes of silent meditation, followed by lectio divina. The full program lasts about 45 minutes. Contact: Jane Coakley at [coakley53@gmail.com](mailto:coakley53@gmail.com)
- Metanoia Journey (Austin, Texas) - Sunday morning "Centering Prayer/Lectio Divina" online service. Sundays, 8:30-9:30am Central. [Register here.](#)

### ***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!"

**Centering Down: Meditations with Howard Thurman for the BIPOC**

**Community** – Join Colleen Thomas and Leslie Geer in the virtual Meditation Chapel for a contemplative meeting place for those identifying as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color). We will reflect on the various writings and teachings of Howard Thurman. Our time together will include a 20-minute Centering Prayer sit, Lectio Divina, and faith-sharing. Every Monday, 9:30am Central: <https://meditationchapel.org/mary-of-magdala-chapel/>

**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***

*Even the darkest moments of the liturgy are filled with joy, and Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Lenten fast, is a day of happiness, a Christian feast.*

- Thomas Merton

*Both Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day present visions of the meaning of life. But Ash Wednesday offers the more radical hope. As it looks toward Jesus's death and resurrection, it dares to suggest that there is a divine love not limited by mortality, and that although we are sprinting to our graves, we might one day rise from them and face an affection that defies description.*

- Esau McCaully

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*I imagine Lent for you and for me as a great departure from the greedy, anxious antineighborliness of our economy, a great departure from our exclusionary politics that fears the other, a great departure from self-indulgent consumerism that devours creation. And then an arrival in a new neighborhood, because it is a gift to be simple, it is a gift to be free; it is a gift to come down where we ought to be.*

- Walter Brueggemann

*The accumulation of anything other than wisdom is foolish... Our wisdom is our power. Our wisdom is our gift to the generations that are coming.*

- Barbara Holmes

## ***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**