

## *Spirit Journal - March 2024*

### **Preview**

This edition includes:

- The awarding of the very first Alan Krema Scholarship - congratulations to Rosemary Armocida!
- Our first announcement of an April 27 workshop on Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle* - live or online with Juliana Cesano
- An invitation from Contemplative Outreach of Colorado to their March 23 workshop with our good friend Michael Battle - *Contemplative Prayer and African Christian Mysticism* - live or online
- Information about a Zoom workshop we are co-sponsoring with Contemplative Outreach of Atlanta on May 10, with Dr. Carmen Acevedo Butcher
- An invitation to an in-person Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop to be presented in Plainfield on March 23 by JoAnne and Bill McElroy
- 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 Carmen Acevedo Butcher, Teresa of Avila, Michael Battle, and Thomas Keating

We invite you to get more involved with Contemplative Outreach Chicago. Please help make *Spirit Journal* a lively conversation we can enjoy together. 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!

## ***Congratulations to Rosemary Armocida, the Recipient of the First Alan Crema Scholarship!***

The inaugural recipient of the Alan Crema Scholarship has been chosen! Additional scholarships may still be awarded in 2024, so don't hesitate to apply.

The Scholarship is designed to support the development of wisdom leaders who will work to enhance the modern contemplative movement. Rosemary Armocida, who has been practicing Centering Prayer for many years, will use her scholarship to help pay for her studies in the two-year Spiritual Guidance Training Program at Siena Retreat Center.

Is 2024 is the year for you to take advantage of the Alan Crema Scholarship? If you feel a calling, 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.

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 Alan Crema Scholarship. Good luck!





## ***The Interior Castle: Exploring the Depths of the Soul***

***With Juliana Cesano***

***In-person in Wheaton or online, April 27***

***A special practice-based spiritual experience from Contemplative  
Outreach Chicago and the Theosophical Society in America.***

In 1577, St. Teresa of Avila wrote *The Interior Castle* after she received a vision picturing “the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of a very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms.” This castle has seven mansions or dwellings. Each one of them represents a different stage on the spiritual path. In the center of this castle is the Sun, or the King, who gives all the splendor and beauty to the rest of the castle. The closer we approach the center, the greater the light.

***Believe the incredible truth that the Beloved has chosen for his  
dwelling place the core of your own being because that is the single  
most beautiful place in all creation. Waste no time. Enter the center  
of your soul.***

***– Miribai Starr (Introduction to *The Interior Castle*)***

This workshop will explore and experience:

- The spiritual path as described in this great classic of Christian mystical literature
- The nature of each mansion and the conditions for progression
- How to discern where we are and our next step toward the Divine Center
- The stages of prayer and the practices and virtues that aid us in each stage
- A contemplative practice based on St Teresa's teachings

**Note:** *All registered participants will have the option of attending in person or watching online through a private YouTube link that will be shared via email.*

**Presenter:** Juliana Cesano is an international speaker, and her main focus over the past 15 years has been the transformational power of contemplative practices. She is a third-generation Theosophist who has been actively involved in the Society's work for more than 25 years. She became a staff member at the National Center of the Theosophical Society in America in 2007, where she currently serves as the Member Education Director and the National Secretary.



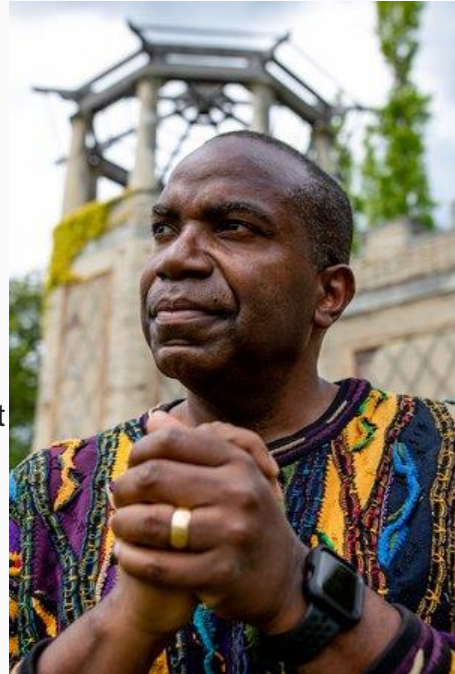
[More information and registration](#)

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

*"The essence of African Christian mysticism (founded in the desert tradition of monasticism) is not taught but caught."*

- Michael Battle

African 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.

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.

**Note:** *By registering, you will also receive a link to a video recording of this workshop, available to view at your convenience for two weeks.*

**Presenter:** 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. 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. Battle

has published eleven books, including his latest: *Desmond Tutu: A Spiritual Biography of South Africa's Confessor*. His PeaceBattle Institute works on subjects of diversity, spirituality, prayer, race and reconciliation.

[More information and registration](#)

**From Contemplative Outreach of Atlanta and Chicago  
*Coloring Outside the Lines by  
Returning to Elementary Questioning:  
How Should I Contemplate?***

**With Dr. Carmen Acevedo Butcher  
May 10 via Zoom**

Join us for a morning with Dr. Carmen Acevedo Butcher as she guides us in this session with the purpose of deepening and personalizing our own practice, both individually and collectively, with a heart for becoming more self- and others- compassionate.

What do historical and contemporary contemplative experts say about how contemplation should be done? How can we take their teachings to reimagine and reinvigorate our own spiritual practices and paths? Carmen will explore works by well-known contemplatives such as the anonymous author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, the Rev. Dr. Barbara Holmes, Brother Lawrence, the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, and more.

**Presenter:** Carmen Acevedo Butcher is an internationally acclaimed speaker, author, educator, and poet. An award-winning translator, she has made accessible works of Early Modern French, German, Latin, Middle English, and Old English, by writers including the seventeenth-century friar Brother Lawrence, Hildegard of Bingen, Mechthild of Magdeburg, the *Cloud's* Anonymous, Julian of Norwich, and tenth-century Benedictine monk Ælfric of Eynsham. Carmen's translation of *The Cloud of Unknowing* (2018) won an Author of the Year award from the Georgia Writers Association in 2010. Her tenth book, *Practice of the Presence*, is a revolutionary translation of the wisdom of Brother Lawrence, released in 2022.



[More information and registration](#)

## ***Centering Prayer Introductory Workshop – Saturday March 23 In-person in Plainfield, Illinois***

Centering Prayer is a receptive method of Christian silent prayer that deepens our relationship with God, the Indwelling Presence ... a prayer in which we can experience God's presence within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than consciousness itself.

If you are new to Centering Prayer or would like to deepen and reinvigorate your practice, please consider participating in this workshop. Introductory Workshop presenters are specifically trained in this 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.

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*When: Saturday, March 23*

*Time: 9:30am (Immediately after morning Mass) - 3pm*

*Where: Stewardship/Unity Room at St. Mary Immaculate,  
15629 Rte 59, Plainfield*

*Cost: \$25 (includes box lunch) - Pay at the event*

**Presenters:**

JoAnne McElroy, M.A. is a presenter of Introduction to Centering Prayer, a spiritual director and workshop presenter. She has been a member of Contemplative Outreach Chicago since 2012, and is now a member of the Circle of Service leadership team. JoAnne's practice of Centering Prayer and her experience in nature brought her to a sense of stillness to deeply listen to Holy presence and action within that inspires her connection to God.



Bill McElroy, M.A. has served as a lay minister and leader at the parish, diocesan and national level for the last four decades. His spirituality is contemplative and he has practiced Centering Prayer and been a member of Contemplative Outreach in support of that for 30 years. In addition to his involvement with the local chapter he was appointed Founding Convener of the IL Chapter of Illuman, formerly known as Men As Learners and Elders (MALEs), founded by Richard Rohr, OFM, and continues to serve on its Council of Elders.

[More information and registration](#)

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

To learn about even more upcoming workshops and retreats, download and have a look at this recently updated [annual calendar](#). It provides a comprehensive listing of Chicago-area and online programs we're currently aware of - 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, [yoofergirl37@gmail.com](mailto:yoofergirl37@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, [Katiairel@aol.com](mailto:Katiairel@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***

*Our modern, western culture understands Jesus and Christ in a very particular way. What unique understanding do these contemplatives of old have to teach us about Jesus and Christ?*

- Carmen Acevedo Butcher

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*Trust God that you are exactly  
where you are meant to be.*

- Teresa of Avila

*Together let us pray through, think about and practice how to be  
more Communally diverse in Contemplative Spirituality — how to  
release the natural unity the Holy Spirit constantly offers the world.*

- Michael Battle

*Those who seek Ultimate Reality perceive themselves as citizens of  
the Earth. Their first loyalty is to the entire human family. They  
transcend the particularities of race, nationality and religion  
without reacting against them or trying to destroy them. They  
recognize the profound human values that the world religions  
enshrine. They work to preserve and enhance these values, but not  
at the cost of dividing the fundamental unity of the human family.  
They belong to an emerging global community.*

- 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](mailto:news@centeringprayerchicago.org).

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