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Bar None . . . the inclusivity of all of us . . .

by The Most Rev. Dr. E. Brian Carsten, O.C.C.A.

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An ecumenical sampler of events and resources for spiritual growth, with a particular interest in the contemplative spiritual journey, published by the Spiritual Growth Community of Westminster Presbyterian Church

Henry is the inmate. He is twenty-seven years old, a veteran of this jail who—this trip around—awaits a trial on theft charges. He is short, brick solid, dark as a walnut. He is angry about many things. I am the jail chaplain. I am thirty years old, a ten-year veteran of walking the central city streets. I am tall, light-skinned and getting frustrated.

I have spent six hours back in the blocks dealing with a vast array of needs and wants that feel like needs. Everyone is soaked with sweat. I want to go home and on the way fill my lungs with fresh air. Henry, on the other hand, wants me to stay and talk with him. He is hoping I will take him out of the blocks to a quiet corner where we can talk. He is now yelling at me to pay attention to him as I walk up to the main jail door away from the blocks.

Something in me snaps. I step back, reach through the bars and grab Henry’s sweaty t-shirt, pulling his face flush against the iron. Henry isn’t moving and his eyes are popping wide open as he screams, “Preachers aren’t supposed to do this!” I look first into his eyes, then over my shoulder at the guards who have up until now been bored with the July evening routine. They are staring at me in disbelief.

I hear myself say in a measured, quiet voice, “Henry, the only real difference between us is that you are on that side of the bars and I am on this side. I’m going home. I’ll see you tomorrow. Good night.” I release my vice-grip on Henry’s t-shirt, turn to the main door, signal the guards to open it and walk out into the fresh air. As I drive home I reflect on what I had just done, a bit smug in my self-congratulatory humility.

“In this nature (the nature of God) rests both our ultimate dignity and our responsibility of reverencing this divine dignity in others and of supporting a social fabric that embodies such respect.”

Tilden Edwards,
Living in the Presence

My encounter with Henry happened more than three decades ago. In the ensuing years I have come to appreciate that the bars that divide people are peculiar thin places. It seems to me now that whatever the bars are that divide us and serve to “keep us safe” from one another, those bars serve as places where God most intensely dwells, most profoundly awaits

Bar None...the inclusivity of all of us . . . concludes on page 2



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Look for *Thin Places* at: www.thinplaces.us or www.ewestminster.org/thinplaces.asp

our companionship.

Henry is beloved of God. I am beloved of God

It is as Teilhard de Chardin once wrote: "By means of all created things, without exception, the divine assails us, penetrates us and molds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas in fact we live steeped in its burning layers."

Keep us, O God, in the burning, and penetrate the bars that divide us so that we may be molded into who we already are in your heart.

Fr. Carsten now serves as the presiding Archbishop of the Orthodox-Catholic Church of America. Both now and throughout his ministry, his pastoral care has been particularly extended to those working in police and fire agencies, to prison ministries, to hospital chaplaincies, to what he calls the "emergency services" ministry. Fr. Carsten may be reached at: ebc7695@aol.com. (Information about the O.C.C.A. may be found at: www.orthodoxcatholicchurch.org.)

ON-GOING OPPORTUNITIES

The Quarterly Yoke Letter:

Renewing the Spirit . . . Renewing the Mind . . .

This quarterly newsletter deals with contemporary spiritual issues and has a particular interest in Quaker spiritual traditions. It is written by the Rev. James Newby, who wrote the lead meditation for the autumn issue of *Thin Places* last year. To request a sample issue or to be added to the (free) mailing list, contact him at: jnewby2915@aol.com.

A Celtic Journey into the Mysteries

Pilgrim Lutheran Church is offering a new season of monthly Celtic contemplative worship services. This year's theme is "Exile & Return: One People Gathering on God's Earth," and the **September 9** theme is "Peregrination: On the Road We Live as Travelers."

Do you know of anyone who might like to receive *Thin Places*? It's sent free to all who request it.
Or do you know of an up-coming "Opportunity" that might be of interest to others?
If so, please contact Kathy Fisher:
kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421

ON-GOING OPPORTUNITIES

Nordic Contemplative Evening Prayer

Pilgrim Lutheran is also beginning its fourth season of monthly Nordic worship. This year's theme is "Exile & Return: Held in the Embrace of God"; the **September 23** theme is "Folk På Vandring: People on Pilgrimage."

A Celtic Journey, the 2nd Sunday of most months, beginning at 6:51 p.m.

Nordic Contemplative Evening Prayer, 4th Sunday, at 6:51 p.m.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church

1935 St. Clair Avenue, St. Paul

For information: 651.699.6886 or www.pilgrimstpaul.org

Taizé Evening Prayer

Sung prayer, Scripture, silence in a candle-lit setting in the Chapel, overlooking a flowing stream.

(This is now the longest regularly scheduled Taizé Prayer in the metro area.)

First Friday of each month, 8:00-9:00 p.m.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

4439 West 50th Street, Edina

For information: 952.920.0595.

Taizé Prayer

This hour of quiet, gentle communal prayer is simple enough that it requires no previous experience, yet so rich that people come every month.

The Third Friday of each month, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

Benedictine Center, St. Paul's Monastery

2675 Larpenteur Avenue East, St. Paul

For information: 651.777.7251 or

benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org.

Quiet Worship

Begin a weekend by taking some time to be quiet and to be present—some time for prayer, for Scripture, for silence and sung prayers from Taizé.

The service on **September 29** will be special for it will be the first Quiet Worship back in the Chapel, which has just been extensively renovated, in part to make it more welcoming for contemplative worship. The service will be led by Westminster's Senior Pastor, Timothy Hart-Andersen, and will include the sacrament of Communion.

Last Saturday of each month (3rd Saturday in November & December), 9:00-9:45 a.m.

Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the Chapel

1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

For information: 612.332.3421 or kfisher@wpc-mpls.org

Introduction to Centering Prayer

If you have wondered about Centering Prayer as a spiritual practice, this is an opportunity to learn more about it and—much more importantly—to experience it.

St. Olaf's is the longest regularly scheduled Centering Prayer group in the area. Join them for three Saturdays in September to learn about Centering Prayer—no registration required, just come as you are and you will be welcomed.

Three Saturdays: September 8, 15, 22-9:00-11:00 a.m.

St. Olaf Catholic Church, in Cowley Hall
215 South 8th Street, Minneapolis
For information: 612.767.6212 or
sr.joantuberty@juno.com

Retreat in Everyday Living

An eight week retreat—a program of Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality—meeting once a week for two hours at St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral. At this Scriptural Retreat, you will learn the age-old spiritual concepts practiced by St Ignatius Loyola.

No previous Bible study or theology background is necessary, only a desire and willingness to know God. By journaling your experience between sessions, and sharing it with others in the group, you will be nurtured and nourished by one another. But the most important aspect of the Retreat will be to have the opportunity to listen to God and to our inner selves. The Retreat will be led by two trained facilitators and spiritual directors.

Eight Mondays, beginning September 10, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral
519 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis
For information or registration: 651.696.2798

International Day of Peace Taizé Service

In response to the United Nations' declared International Day of Peace, to "be devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples," you are invited to take part in an evening ecumenical Taizé service. The Taizé Prayer service combines quiet, meditative worship and sung prayers, focusing upon peace within ourselves and among all peoples. All are welcome.

On the following afternoon (the actual Day of Peace), you are also invited to a Prayer Vigil, held in a sanctuary decorated with Peace Posters created by children. Prayer and Scripture readings will be offered on the hour; servicemen and woman who have lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan in the past year will be remembered by name. You may join us at anytime during the afternoon for silent prayer, to light a candle for peace, or to walk the

labyrinth in the sanctuary floor in silent meditation. Both Opportunities are offered by the Peace Prayer Group at Shepherd of the Lake.

Taizé Prayer: Thursday, September 20, 7:00-8:00 p.m.**Peace Vigil: Friday, September 21, Noon-4:00 p.m.**

Shepherd of the Lake Lutheran Church
13760 McKenna Road NW, Prior Lake
For information: 952.447.2007 or www.sollc.org

"Awake and Aware"

A retreat focusing on closeness with Christ through prayer and Scripture. Its first session is Friday evening, with everyone then going home for a quiet evening. Saturday morning we return to spend the day working with four central prayer experiences from the life of Christ and the Scriptures. Bring a Bible, a journal and a willingness to enter into some significant periods of quiet as we pray together and look for God's presence in our ordinary lives.

Friday, Sept. 28, at 7:00 p.m. to**Saturday, Sept. 29, at 3:00 p.m.**

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation
1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes
For information or registration: 651.635.8207 or
www.christstocenter.org

The Center for Spiritual Development, at The Retreat

The Rev. Dick Rice has been appointed Director of the recently established Center for Spiritual Development at The Retreat, located near the Wayzata Big Woods.

The Retreat, itself, teaches the essentials of recovery as embodied in the spirituality of the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Staff and volunteers who have walked a similar path share their experiences and help guests take the necessary actions to find the spiritual framework necessary to recover from their alcoholism or

**"Contrary to popular understanding,
contemplation does not imply quietness or withdrawal.**

**Instead, it is the quality of
immediate,
open presence
that is directly
involved with
life-as-it-is."**

Gerald May,
The Awakened Heart

"The Lord is among the saucepans."

Teresa of Avila

chemical dependency. Our success is largely based on our ability to involve the larger community in our mission to help people find the spiritual path to healthy recovery. (The Retreat—on the former Cenacle grounds—is also available to individuals and others seeking a safe and hospitable place in which to conduct their own retreats.)

The recently opened Center for Spiritual Development focuses upon the belief that on-going spiritual growth is essential to long term sobriety and to a successful and fulfilling life. The Center offers retreats as well as individual and group direction for those seeking to deepen their commitment to spiritual renewal. Guests explore the basic spiritual principles that give meaning to life and provide the framework for continued development. Beginning in September, Fr. Rice will offer at least one weekend retreat each month.

The first of the Fall Spiritual Retreats will be: “Time for Goodbye, Time for Hello”

A retreat focusing on transitions. We will explore in the presence of God and each other the endings and beginnings of our lives at this time and the way we typically deal with both. Presentations, prayer, meditation, group discussion and individual reflection will be part of the weekend contemplative experience.

**Friday, Sept. 28, at 5:00 p.m. to
Sunday, Sept. 30, at 1:00 p.m.**

The Retreat, 1221 Wayzata Blvd East, Wayzata
For information about The Retreat or for registration for this or any Fall Spiritual Retreat: 952.476.0566 or www.theretreat.org.

“Celebrating Hildegard of Bingen—Her World, Our World”

Living from 1098 to 1179, Hildegard of Bingen was a woman of her time and of her place—the Rhineland of northern Europe. Hildegard was a writer, musician, healer, artist, abbess, organizer and mystic. She corresponded with and influenced emperors and popes. Her healing modalities continue to influence the medical field today. Her feast day is celebrated in late September.

Join the celebration this year as we explore Hildegard and Her World during Dr. Kimberly Lowelle Seward’s evening lecture, incorporating decades of Hildegard research, her own interdisciplinary fields of study and her summer, 2007, research in Germany. We will explore the correlation of what was happening in Hildegard’s world during her (long) lifetime with her life and work.

**“We’re not human beings on a spiritual journey,
we are spiritual beings on a human journey.”**

Teilhard de Chardin

The next morning, reflect on Hildegard and Our World as Dr. Seward considers the contemporary labyrinth at the site of the monastery where Hildegard grew up and how it relates to the journeys of our own time. Mary Kaye Medinger, M.A., rooted in her own long study of Hildegard, will invite participants to make connections with the New Universe Story. Carolyn Bornhauser, MA, will reflect on contemporary applications of Hildegard’s influence in Germany and lead the group in an experience of Sacred Circle Dance, focused on Hildegard’s concept of “veriditas”/greening power and the life force that courses through all of creation.

**Friday, Sept. 28, at 7:00 p.m. to
Saturday, Sept. 29 at 12:30 p.m.**

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality
1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul
For information or registration: 651.696.2788 or www.wisdomwayscenter.org.

“Taking Jesus Seriously: Learning Buddhist Meditation for Christians”

Be at peace, that you may bring peace to others. War begins with the internal turmoil of individual people, their desires, and frustrations. Peace begins with the internal harmony of individual people, their self-knowledge, and surrender to the divine.

This class is an invitation to become a peaceful person. Replace turmoil with harmony, replace desire and frustration with self-knowledge, and surrender to the divine. Paul said, “I live now not I but Christ lives in me.” That will be our goal. Doge said, “To study the self is to forget the self.” That will be our method.

There are 12 weekly sessions, each is half meditation and half question and answer. You must attend eight. Daily meditation is expected. The text is *Taking Jesus Seriously* by John Cowan, who will lead the retreat.

Twelve Wednesdays: Oct. 3 to Dec. 19, 7:00-8:00 p.m.

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality
1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul
For information or registration: 651.696.2788 or www.wisdomwayscenter.org—see also:

The 14th Annual Soul Conference, “Restoring an Earth Community: Ecology, Faith and Religions”
and also: **A Hedgerow Initiative Course, “Elemental Theologies: Restoring the Wonder and Wisdom of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water”**

“The Welcoming Prayer:

A Contemplative Prayer Practice”

A central message in all spiritual traditions is the practice and experience of “letting go.” The act of surrendering

our well-developed and over-protected egos or false self is a difficult task for everyone on the spiritual quest. The Welcoming Prayer is a simple and practical way to let go, a subtle yet effective way to truly experience the peace of saying, “Not my will but Thine be done.”

Terry Shaughnessy, the newly selected Executive Director of the Loyola Center for Spirituality, will present this workshop over two nights in early October. You will be introduced to the Welcoming Prayer as a spiritual practice the first evening. You’ll have an intervening week to experience the practice before returning to explore further the movements of the Welcoming Prayer in your life.

**Two Thursday Evenings, October 4 and 11,
6:30-8:30 p.m.**

Loyola Center for Spirituality,
389 North Oxford Street, St. Paul
For information or registration: 651.641.0008 or
tnessy@comcast.net or www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org.

“In the Dark before Dawn: Thomas Merton, Poet”

Hosted by The Thomas Merton Center, this conference will focus on Merton’s poetry, offering presentations by scholars who have studied him, talks by poets who knew him, and opportunities to listen to recordings of Merton reading his own poetry.

The conference takes its title from the recently published, *In the Dark before Dawn: New Selected Poems of Thomas Merton*, with an Introduction by Lynn Szabo and a Forward by Kathleen Norris.

Friday, Oct. 19, at 5:30 p.m. to

Saturday, Oct. 20, at 9:00 p.m.

The Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University
2001 Newberg Road, Louisville, KY
For information or registration: 502.452.8177 or
www.merton.org/poetry

“Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton” Retreats

These retreats are offered by The Merton Institute for Contemplative Living and are held at their retreat center proximate to Merton’s monastery, the Abbey of Gethsemani.

They are based on the Institute’s eight-part “Bridges to Contemplative Living” series (noticed below in the **Reading Opportunities** section). As in the books, individual Sessions include selected readings from Merton and others, “contemplative dialogue” on the readings and prayer in common. Each session focuses on some aspect of our lives’ basic relationships—with self, our neighbors, with nature and with God. By paying attention to these relationships in daily living, we become “contemplatives”

who are learning that “our everyday life is our spiritual life” [Merton].

No prior knowledge of Merton or the Bridges is needed for participation. These retreats are an intimate experience, including no more than twelve participants who share lunches and dinners in common, with opportunities to participate in the prayers of the monks at Gethsemane.

The retreat listed below is the first for which there are openings—but there are six other possibilities between now and Advent. Check the website for details:
www.mertoninstitute.org/retreats.php.

Friday, Oct. 19, at 4:00 p.m. to

Sunday, Oct. 21, at 2:15 p.m.

Bethany Spring Retreat Center,
near the Abbey of Gethsemani, KY
For information or registration: 800.886.7275 or
vhurst@mertoninstitute.org or
www.mertoninstitute.org/retreats.php

“Reflections on *The Interior Castle* of Teresa of Avila”

Many of us probably know of *The Interior Castle* but have never really read it. Minnesota Contemplative Outreach is hosting this Retreat Day as an opportunity to learn more about Teresa and her stages of prayer—recollection, quiet, union. The presenter, Susan Komis, is a member of the National Contemplative Outreach Staff. There will also be a time for Centering Prayer.

No pre-registration is necessary, but seating is limited to 120 people. A \$25 donation is suggested. Bring a bag lunch, coffee provided. Free parking across the street in the Energy Ramp, which may be entered from 3rd or 4th Avenue.

Saturday, November 3, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

St. Olaf Catholic Church,
in the Chapel and the Gathering Room
215 South 8th Street, Minneapolis
For information: 612.767.6212 or rcwebbers@brainerd.net

“Dancing with God”

A weekend retreat, led by the Rev. Dr. David Keller, founding Steward of The House of Prayer, author of *Oasis of Wisdom: The World of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*.

The desert mothers and fathers lived in a world filled with conflict and major institutional changes. Terrorism and political unrest were common, along with contentious battles between religious traditions and within infant Christianity. It was a period of the scattering of the human spirit and loss of awareness of the sanctity and beauty of life. In the midst of this chaos were men and women who devoted themselves to a restoration of beauty

and compassion in human living. A simple goal, but difficult to embody without commitment to God's grace.

This retreat will focus on several of these ancient women and men and the wisdom they learned from daily life. Our goal will not be to mimic their lives, but to let them inspire us to risk finding wisdom in our own and the courage to "dance with God" in a scattered world.

Friday, Nov. 9, with supper to

Sunday, Nov. 11, after lunch

The Episcopal House of Prayer, Colledgeville

For information and registration: 320.632.3293 or www.ehouseofprayer.org

The Celebration Continues: "Julian"

Linda Loving's one-woman play, *Julian*, has been filmed as it was produced on location in Norwich, England. As those who have seen a live performance will attest, it is a moving and powerful presentation of an English mystic who—in the 13th century—"laid great stress on the motherly nature and love of God, and who developed a sane optimism about the universe and the relative unimportance of sin, compared to the good and grace which it allows."

Loyola Spirituality Center—as the finale to their 30th Anniversary Celebration—is pleased to present the local premiere of this film. After the showing, a panel of area scholars will discuss mystics, mysticism and their relevance in the 21st century. All are invited.

Sunday, December 2, 3:00-5:00 p.m.

The Minnesota History Center Theater
345 Kellogg Blvd. West, St. Paul

For information or tickets: 651.641.0008 or www.loyolaspirtualitycenter.org

**"In life's trials, little by little we realize
that the source of joy does not lie
in extraordinary abilities
or great expertise,
but rather in the humble giving of ourselves
in order to understand others
with kind-heartedness.
Joy is always there
lying in wait for us
when simplicity
is united
to kind-heartedness
in our daily lives."**

Brother Roger of Taizé,
remembering his death, on 16 August 2005,
finding the Community which he formed to be both model and
comfort, sensing how deeply it seems shaped by prayer to live
from the heart of Christ: forgive, forgive...

***Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton*, Edited by Jonathan Montaldo and Robert G. Toth**
Volumes One and Two (of what will soon be an eight-part series) are available in the Lowe Library or from the Merton Institute for Contemplative Living at: www.contemplativeliving.org/bridges.php [\$6 each].

The small books in this new series—the first volume is entitled, "Entering the School of Your Experience"; the second, "Becoming Who You Already Are"—are designed especially for use by small groups. But (as an experiment has shown), they may also be used by an individual seeking to be more intentional about contemplative living.

Each volume contains a sequence of selected writings from Merton and others, supplemented by suggestions for reflection and dialogue. All of the writings and all of the suggestions seem centered on Merton's conviction that **"our spiritual life is our everyday lived experience, that there is no separation between them."**

As explained in the Introduction, Merton taught Gethsemani's new monks that all the events of their lives—past and present—were also 'words' for guidance of their spiritual lives. And, therefore, that they ought then to develop the habit of receiving life's events as words of God's instruction to them. Merton, they go on to explain, taught a way of praying that urges us [in Merton's words] to "enter deeply into the school of life itself," making **"our whole life a meditation, a learning from God, a school of wisdom."**

Although not mentioned in this text, Merton's teaching seems fully in keeping with the intention of The Welcoming Prayer as a spiritual practice: "Welcome, welcome, welcome, I welcome everything that comes to me in this moment . . . I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions, persons, situations and conclusions . . ." And perhaps, even more basically, it reflects St. Paul's assertion that all of life is worship, for those who seek to do God's will: **"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances . . ."** [I Thes. 5:16-18]

The substance in these volumes is in their selected readings. But their lasting helpfulness might come from their invitation to reflect upon and discuss the readings through a practice the authors call "contemplative dialogue":

"Contemplative Dialogue is a 'safe place' for open sharing and discussion. It is not outcome-oriented. It's not even about fully understanding or comprehending what one reads or hears. The focus is on listening rather than thinking about how we will respond to what we just heard. Simply hearing and accepting another's point of view and reflecting on it can inform

and enlighten our own perspective in a way that debating or analyzing it cannot. The pace of conversation is slower in contemplative dialogue . . .”

The authors go on to offer specific guidance through *Eight Principles for Entering into Contemplative Dialogue*. Done as here encouraged, this practice enriches the experience of *Bridges*. And, as a bonus, it teaches a practice which one might bring to many other situations.

Karl Rahner said it, too: **“Everyday life must become itself our prayer.”**

Perhaps—however it is said—this is the essence of living contemplatively . . . and the goal of these helpful volumes.

***The Way of the Dreamcatcher, Spirit Lessons with Robert Lax: Poet, Peacemaker, Sage*, by S.T. Georgiou. Available in the Lowe Library or online at: <http://store.novalis.ca>, then use keyword: “dreamcatcher” [\$5].**

Thomas Merton met Robert Lax when they were both in college at Columbia, and Lax remained thereafter [in Merton’s words] “my best friend.” This book transcribes portions of the interviews a young seeker, S. T. Georgiou, had with Lax over six years in the late 1990s—interviews which grew into contemplative dialogues, as their friendship grew.

For Georgiou, these conversations gave substance to Merton’s saying that his friend “had a kind of inborn direction to the living God.” For the reader, this is a book in which to browse—listening to conversations which range from the personal and very human to the profound—perhaps finding words or ideas that resonate. Name your subject, and they probably talked about it. Cats? Married seekers? Books? . . .

Cats? [Georgiou asks] “I only have eighteen now. But they do have what seems to me to be a very good intuitive sense. They communicate clearly and perceptively with their eyes. They tend to get along with each other, whether or not they have reason to. They’re light on their feet. They can remain motionless for such a long time. Although they’re seldom known as ‘man’s best friend,’ I think they are. I guess I’m a cat person.”

Speaking of cats, is your personality more ‘cataphatic’ (God is knowable, as through love) or ‘apophatic’ (God is ultimately unknowable)? “Meow. (Laughter) Actually, I believe it’s both. It’s natural to have both of those things happening from moment to moment as we go through life. . . .”

You encouraged Merton to ‘become a saint’? “I think that it came about [when] I suggested to him that what everyone should be is . . . a saint, a holy person. By saint, we don’t mean a canonized saint, or a saint of any particular denomination; we simply mean a holy person. We are meant to be holy, all of us. We are all called to be saints. . . .”

It’s said that highly spiritual, holy people can’t feel comfortable if they are engaged in a relationship with one person because they can’t focus their complete love on the whole of humanity? “No, I don’t think that’s the case with me. My nature is to be solitary. It’s just the way I am. . . . But as far as the man-woman relationship goes, I think that’s a very good way to learn about love. The purest way to be together is to have children and raise a family, all in a loving, patient way. And that love should never go away . . .”

So what matters most in life? Live and let live? “No, cousin, it’s more like live and help live. It’s more like helping things to grow, even by a happy glance. It’s about putting into practice every good thing you know. In doing this, you help out everyone, everything. . . . Live and help live. . . .” [One of Lox’s poems reads: “turn jungle / to garden / without / destroying / a single / flower”]

What are you reading lately? “Every day I try to read a number of authors, such as Matthew Fox, Hildegard of Bingen, Moses Maimonides. And I’m going through Merton’s *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, Martin Buber’s *Ten Rungs*, and Jean Vanier’s *Meditations*. I also read from the *Psalms* daily—now there you’ll find wonderful poetry. And I like reading books on the Jewish mystics and the Sufi mystics too. *Conference of the Birds* by Farad al-Din Attar, a Sufi sage, has been a favorite of mine. But in all my reading, I’ve learned that it’s not how many books you read, but how well you know the choice few that are closest to your heart. . . .”

One would have liked to have had Robert Lax as one’s own friend, as one with whom to sit and dialogue . . .

S. T. Georgiou’s next book, *Mystic Street: Meditations on a Spiritual Path*, is due out soon.

**“The distance
to the Beloved
is only one step—
Why not, then,
take that step?”**

An unnamed Sufi poet



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Bar None. . . . Comtemplative Living



AFTERWORDS: Hospitality as a “spiritual practice”?

After a busy summer at the lake—or here at home—it may seem a little surprising to find “Hospitality” on a list of Christian “spiritual practices.” Hospitality [“. . . cordial and generous reception of or disposition toward guests . . . an instance of cordial and generous treatment of guests . . .”] certainly seems like something we ought to practice. But what’s “spiritual” about it? Isn’t it just what we try to do? Isn’t it just a part of normal living, seeking to be open and welcoming and helpful to those whom we know or whom we meet?

But, perhaps, that may be just the point: Hospitality is not something we do in some special time set apart from our daily life. And thinking about that may help to enrich our understanding of what a “spiritual practice” may be.

For, in some sense, hospitality is not even something we set out specifically to do. In Peter Morales’ words, “hospitality is love in action.” And if that be so, hospitality may be one of the ways we show—in Thomas Merton’s words—that,

**“our spiritual life is our everyday lived experience,
that there is no separation between them.”**

“The disposition of hospitality,” it has been said, “flows from the inside out.” And if it does flow from our inner being, our true self, perhaps we can feel more fully the words of Teilhard de Chardin,

**“We’re not human beings on a spiritual journey,
we are spiritual beings on a human journey.”**

As the summer ends, perhaps we can seek to “welcome as Christ” each one we meet, in our daily lives.