



Thin Places

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Number 51

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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



WESTMINSTER
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1200 Marquette Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2419
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www.eWestminster.org

“What am I doing here?,” I asked . . .

by the Rev. Michael J. O’Connell

It was a mid-month December Friday many years ago. I had made a mental note the year before not to schedule any unnecessary meetings or appointments the following December knowing that individual and family crises, illnesses and deaths occur more often at that time of year. I had resolved to have an open schedule and be less stressed the following Advent.

So much for resolutions. That year’s December schedule was again way too full! I felt harried and “had to” say mass at a nursing home. Not just any nursing home, but one I really disliked. The home had poor patient care, harassed low-paid staff, and smelled. Along with many severely disabled senior people, there were a number of young 20-30 year old paraplegics and quadriplegics—most of whom were victims of automobile and motorcycle accidents. It was a most unpleasant place.

The mass was in a small room. At the far end of the room, two men were smoking and watching television. The volume of the TV was turned up. On our end of the room, three patients had been brought into the room in wheelchairs. Two elderly people were strapped into their chairs and bent over, one with rigid features and saliva coming from her mouth. The other was quiet and had little affect. The third person was a young paraplegic man, non-communicative and seemingly depressed. The altar was two collapsible TV tables put together and covered with a cloth that hadn’t been washed in a long time.

My thoughts as I started the mass were, “What am I doing here?” The smoking TV watchers did not care what we were doing. And I wasn’t sure that my three congregants knew where they were. I felt like I had many more important things to do. The long dark nights and cold, cloudy days of December, with all the “to do” lists waiting for me, put me in a dark mood that was aggravated by the circumstances of this particular mass setting.

After I said the consecratory prayer, “This is my Body which will be given up for you,” I stopped and began to weep quietly. I couldn’t go on with the prayers. I didn’t know why I was reacting like this. Finally, after a few minutes, I composed myself, finished the mass and left the nursing home.

It took the rest of the day and honestly, these many years since, after celebrating thousands of masses, some with beauty and splendor and full participation, to understand that that mass, in that seemingly God-forsaken place, was and probably will be the most sacred Eucharist I will ever experience.

“What am I doing here?” . . . concludes on page 2

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

Jesus, who said, “This is my Body which will be given up for you,” was never so present, really present, than in the helpless, needy people who were there that day. They remind me that the mystery of the Incarnation is about looking for divine revelation in the poorest of the poor. As I meet and serve them, I am served by them.

And they remind me of my own radical helplessness and dependence on God. They are the faces of the Creator in the midst of creation. And it is only in Jesus’ surrender, in their surrender, and in my surrender, that I can receive the eternal, everlasting embrace of God’s redeeming love.

I can now name the tears I wept that day. They were and are . . . tears of gratitude.

Fr. Michael O’Connell is Co-Rector, Basilica of Saint Mary in downtown Minneapolis and Pastor, Church of the Ascension. He is the senior member of the Downtown Coalition, the ecumenical and interfaith gathering of the senior leaders of the larger downtown churches, synagogues, and mosques in Minneapolis. He may be reached at: NNache@mary.org.

Holy Communion

Eat. Drink. Remember.
who I am.

Eat. Drink. Remember.
who I am
so you can remember
who you are.

Eat. Drink. Remember.
who I am
so you can remember
who you are
and tell others.

Eat. Drink. Remember.
who I am
so you can remember
who you are
and tell others
so that all
God’s people
can live
in communion . . .
in holy communion.

Ann Weems

ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES

MICAH

Minnesota Institute of Contemplation and Healing, MICAH, is an ecumenical ministry for the practice and study of spiritual formation and leadership, healing and the arts. It is a contemplative Christian center at which we seek to create and to live out a holistic vision of being in communion with God, with others, and with the earth.

At MICAH we offer opportunities for physical, mental, and spiritual healing. Group and individual retreats are available throughout the year. A wooded prayer path, a labyrinth that overlooks the river valley and a half-day pilgrimage route are located on the rural MICAH property. The Integrative Medicine Center—created in partnership with RiverView Healthcare—offers a full range of complementary and alternative health and healing services. Our new Health and Spirituality offering is a one-year program, individually tailored to help people find a sense of wholeness and healing in their lives through telephone or in-person consultations. Our website, www.micahprays.org, provides details on upcoming events and retreats as well as weekly prayer journals and various articles on the spiritual life.

Much of our time at MICAH is spent simply listening to God and being in community with one another. We practice focusing our attention on God in our midst and then responding as Jesus calls us to “Follow me.” We

continue to make prayer a priority, seek to notice God’s movement, and journey to where God leads us. We invite you to do the same.

MICAH—a mission project of the First Presbyterian Church in Crookston, MN—was co-founded by the Rev. Daniel Wolpert whose excellent book, *Creating a Life with God: the Call of Ancient Prayer Practices*, has been read by many *Thin Places* readers. Dan or any of the staff can be reached through the website or at: 218-281-3284 or trey.crxpres@midconetwork.com

A Contemplative Work Opportunity, offered by MICAH

Spend an afternoon, a couple of days or a few weeks building a retreat center while learning what contemplative community is all about. Learn and experience what it means to notice God in the unhurried rhythm of work, rest, play, and quiet while taking part in the construction of an eco-friendly building.

When and how long? This contemplative building project will take place throughout June, July, August and September—we’ll put together the time and length of stay that best fits your schedule.

Who? Youth and adults, skilled and unskilled, groups and individuals who live near by and far away are all welcome.

Where? On the beautiful rural MICAH site nestled on

the banks of the Red Lake River near Crookston, MN.

Cost? Once you arrive, your only expense will be room and board. Several options for housing, including campsites, are available—we'll give you specific costs once we know your housing and menu needs.

Why go? It's a time of being attentive to Christ and a time of learning and practicing authentic community life in the midst of work, rest, play, and quiet.

For information or registration 218.281.4853 or micahprays@juno.com or www.micahprays.org

The Hermitage at Clearwater Forest

What would it be like if you had a time with no phones or e-mails to answer, no meetings to attend, no schedules to keep? . . . if you could stop and step aside and rest, perhaps with time to read and time to write, time to sit by the fire and time to walk in the woods, time to pray aloud and time to be silent? . . .

Deep in the woods at Clearwater Forest, two hours north of the Twin Cities, the Hermitage has a large picture window and a screened porch for nature watching. Inside you will find simple comforts, an extra-long bed, a comfortable chair, and a broad writing table. For your convenience there is electricity for lighting, a coffee maker, a microwave, and a small refrigerator. A propane fireplace provides warmth in cooler weather. And there are forest trails for walking.

Recognizing the crucial need for pastors and church professionals to take time for personal renewal, the Hermitage is available **at no cost**: to clergy and religious and to Christian Educators and Youth Directors—of every denomination. And it is available to all others at modest cost.

“A stitch in time . . .” . . . say it however you will . . . each of us is likely to be better mended, to be better able to serve, if we stop and take time to be away. Hermitages, since early times, have been places especially designed to help make this happen. The Hermitage at Clearwater Forest is just such a special place, open to all. And with a special welcome for pastors and church professionals.

The Clearwater Hermitage is available 7 days a week, year around

Presbyterian Clearwater Forest, Deerwood, MN
For information (or a brochure) or to reserve the Hermitage: 218.678.2325 or dj@clearwaterforest.org

The Taizé Community . . . Anybody Going?

Many, many people—including Rick Steves in a recent public television story—have climbed the hill to visit the Taizé Community and to join the Brothers for daily prayer in the Church of Reconciliation.

A recent *News by E-mail* from Taizé reports that this year, “like every year, during the quiet winter period, it

was young people from France who were the first to come. But others came too: many young people from schools in Portugal, a touching group of young orphans from Poland, young North Americans from the Episcopal Church, a group from Chile, Czechs, Italians . . .”

And in March two groups from Minnesota (Congregational and UCC) were there. **If you know of a group** considering a trip to Taizé—particularly if it would be willing to include others as part of the group—please let us know. Detailed information about the Taizé Community and about visits there can be found at their website, www.taize.fr

Please also let us know about Taizé services in Minnesota that have not previously been reported here.

Taizé Candlelight Prayer

All are welcome at our twice a month Taizé services, which include live musicians, a beautiful candle-filled sanctuary and prayer stations. Please join us.

First and Third Thursdays, September through May, 7:30-8:30 p.m.

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

2136 Carter Avenue, St. Paul

For information: 651.645.3058 or www.stmatthewsmn.org

St. Matthew's also offers **Centering Prayer** sessions each Saturday morning at 8:00 a.m., and an **Intergenerational Compline** service each Sunday evening, 7:00-7:30 p.m.

Early Evening Ecumenical Taizé Service

Come for the candlelight, the quiet, and the Sung Prayers of Taizé.

Third Thursday of each month, September through May, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

The Basilica of St. Mary, in the St. Joseph Chapel

On Hennepin Avenue between 16th & 17th Streets, Minneapolis

For information: 612.317.3402 or TSalisbury@mary.org

“this simple but difficult truth . . .”

The spiritual life can only be lived in the present moment, in the now. All the great religious traditions insist upon this simple but difficult truth.

When we go rushing ahead into the future or shrinking back into the past, we miss the hand of God, which can only touch us in the now.”

Cynthia Bourgeault, *Mystical Hope*
(The Rev. Bourgeault will be in Colledgeville and in Minneapolis in July)

The King's College Choir

For many years, on MPR, at 9:00 o'clock on Christmas Eve morning, a young boy's clear solo voice has sung, "Once in royal David's city Stood a lowly cattle shed, . . ." as the King's College Choir's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols begins. The Choir is coming to St. Paul.

Tuesday, April 8, 7:15 p.m.

St. Paul's Cathedral, 239 Selby Avenue

For information or tickets: 651.290.1221
or sacredground@sacredgroundspirit.org

Meister Eckhart: Prophet for the 21st Century

As we probe the thinking of this 13th century "heretic," we will be shocked at his relevance for today's seekers. He knew then, what we are seeking to discover now—and are needing so desperately. He was truly a man ahead of his time, just waiting to open us to the great mysteries of the Christian path. This course is a study in the ancient practices that truly transform the participant.

Mondays, April 7 to May 12, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

The Episcopal House of Prayer in the City,
425 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis

For information or registration: 320.363.3293 or
houseprayer@csbsju.edu

A Retreat in Everyday Living: an invaluable aid in establishing a habit of personal prayer

This eight-week scriptural retreat uses the Ignatian method of prayer to help establish personal prayer. You will learn spiritual concepts practiced by St. Ignatius including several methods of prayer, meditation, imagination, and contemplation. Journaling your reflections and sharing it with others will make this a deeply rich experience.

Participants are asked to make the following commitments: Faithful prayer daily (15-20 minutes), Attend every session, if possible, Keep a simple daily journal, Reflect on the journal and share something of their praying experience each week, Be open to the call of God.

Wednesdays, April 9-May 21, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Sacred Ground Center for Spirituality
1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For information or registration: 651.696.2798
or sacredground@sacredgroundspirit.org

**"This place where you are right now
God circled on a map for you."**

Hafiz (whose name means,
"one who knows the Qur'an by heart.")

Mutual Spiritual Growth among the Homeless

As many know, the ecumenical ministry of City House has been to "tend to the spiritual life of the poor, inspiring hope" by connecting those who are economically disadvantaged with trained spiritual directors. Part of their ministry has been at the drop-in homeless shelter at the Basilica of St. Mary.

At this evening gathering, a panel of guests who have received services at the shelter will talk about how their spirituality has changed them, as persons, and their life circumstances. Janice Andersen, Director of Christian Life at the Basilica, will tell about her decision to work among the poor and how this work has changed her. She will also talk about the life of St. Vincent DePaul—who he was, how he came to work with the poor and how it changed him.

Join us for an inspirational and informative evening.

Wednesday, April 9, 7:15-8:30 p.m.

The Basilica of St. Mary School, located just north of the church on West Laurel Avenue—the church is at Hennepin and 17th Street in Minneapolis
For information: 763.227.0686
or tomallen@city-house.org

Servant Leadership: New Thoughts on a Timeless Concept

Retiring Archbishop Harry Flynn will conclude this year's Faith and Work Breakfast Series with "Bread for the Journey." A rich and renewing spiritual life is necessary for a person to lead from within. A faith life rooted in regular spiritual practice helps to inform our decisions and inspire our choices for action. Archbishop Flynn has served through some extraordinarily challenging circumstances. How does he find spiritual nourishment to sustain him through those challenges? How can we each create practices to sustain our individual journey?

Thursday, April 10, 7:00-8:30 a.m.

St. Olaf Catholic Church, in Fleming Hall
215 South Eighth Street, Minneapolis
For information and tickets: 612.332.7471
or cbishop@saintolaf.org

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 you can answer, "yes," to either of these,
please contact Kathy Fisher at:
kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

Fifth Annual “*Thin Places* Ecumenical Worship Service” Thursday, May 8, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

This is a time each year when the readers and friends of *Thin Places* gather in the quiet and beauty of a century-old Sanctuary to worship together as a community.

The Worship. We shall gather around the altar with its candles and greenery and the Taizé Cross (brought here from the Taizé Community in France), joining voices in sung prayers from Taizé and litanies of spoken prayer, listening to Scripture and the music of ancient Celtic instruments, being together in silence, and then leaving in procession, bearing gifts for The Agape Table.

The Agape. As will be remembered, The Agape was the “love feast” celebrated by the earliest Christians, the meals (which may have been rooted in the common meals of Jesus with his disciples) that were provided after worship for religious fellowship and especially for charity to the poor. Continuing this ancient tradition, all who come are invited to bring a gift—of food for the Food Shelf, or a flower, or a poem, or whatever seems appropriate for a “love feast”—to place on The Agape Table, there to be blessed.

The Fellowship. Following worship and the placing of gifts on The Agape Table, we’ll gather in the Heller Commons for Scottish Scones and Tea, Fruit, and Bread, and fellowship. And then we shall be sent back out into the world to live as we are called.

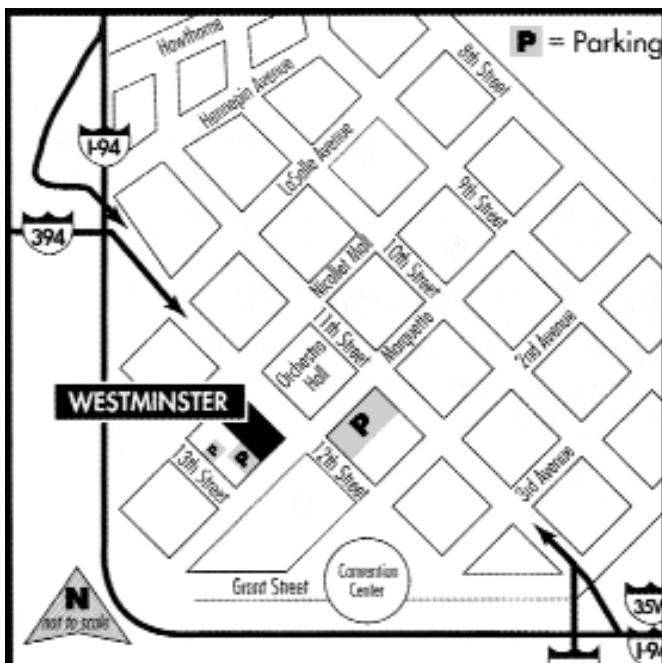
Worship leaders will include:

The Rev. Arthur Agnew, Bethesda Baptist Church
The Rev. Ward Bauman, The Episcopal House of Prayer
The Rt. Rev. John Klassen, OSB, Abbot, St. John’s Abbey
The Rev. Gary Klingsporn, Colonial Church of Edina
The Rev. Jan Wiersma, ARC Ecumenical Retreat Center
Elder Karen Gasche, Westminster Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Byron Thompson, Westminster Presbyterian Church

Thursday, May 8, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Westminster Presbyterian Church,
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis
For information: kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or
www.ewestminster.org

Because so many new readers have been welcomed during the last year, a special invitation is extended to those who have not previously taken part in this Ecumenical Worship Service



Parking at Westminster

Surface Lot: Enter on Marquette Ave. between 12th & 13th Streets. Marquette is one-way, going north.

Underground Parking: After 6pm, you may park in the underground garage at Wells Fargo Bank. Enter on 13th St. between Nicollet Mall & Marquette Ave.

Orchestra Hall Ramp: Commercial ramp located on Marquette Ave. between 11th & 12th Streets. Enter either on 11th St. or Marquette Ave. Other ramps are in the immediate area.

Street Parking at meters is available for those who are lucky. Please car pool if you can.

By Bus: Many bus routes stop at the corner of Nicollet Mall & 12th Street or the corner of Marquette Avenue & 12th Street. Contact Metro Transit for more information.

Journey-Work of the Stars: Religion, Science, and Poetry

In 1855 the poet Walt Whitman wrote, “I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars.” Now some of our best religious and scientific thinkers agree. Through conversation and contemplation—drawing on what cosmologists call The Universe Story and on the Biblical story, evolutionary spirituality, and poetry—we shall together ponder such beauty, meaning and mystery.

There will also be time for quiet and for walks in the woods, and we’ll share our meals with the resident members of the ARC community.

Friday, April 18, after supper to Sunday, April 20, after lunch

ARC Ecumenical Retreat Center, Stanchfield, MN
For information or registration: 763.689.3540
or office@arcretreat.org or www.arcretreat.org

Bishop John Shelby Spong: “Being the Church in a Postmodern World”

How will the church speak a word of God’s love in a post-modern reality? How will we communicate the Gospel in imaginative and engaging ways? What word of hope can the church bring to the public square? In town to take part in a seminar at United Theological Seminary (www.unitedseminary.org), Bishop Spong will explore important questions like these at this lecture open to the public.

Thursday, April 24, 7:30-9:00 p.m.

Plymouth Congregational Church,
1900 Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis
For information: 612.817.9338 or
www.plymouthcenter.org

Matins

**Somewhere, out at the edges, the night
Is turning and the waves of darkness
Begin to brighten the shore of dawn**

**The heavy dark falls back to earth
And the freed air goes wild with light,
The heart fills with fresh, bright breath
And thoughts stir to give birth to color.**

John O’Donohue

To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings

Learning from the Way of St. Benedict with Norvene Vest

• Benedictine Principals and Public Policy

Wednesday, April 30, 7:00-9:00 p.m. This lecture will explore how the Spirit can help us to find a way to hear one another—to listen with the ears of our hearts—as we converse on matters vital to the common good.

• Becoming Community: Benedictine Principles for Contemporary Christians Seeking Community

Friday, May 2, 7:00 p.m. to Sunday, May 4, 10:00 a.m. This retreat will explore insights of the Benedictine Rule about building a strong common life as well as personal growth toward ongoing “conversion heart” for God and neighbor.

These **first two opportunities** will be at The Benedictine Center, 2675 Larpenteur Avenue East, St. Paul.

For information or registration: 651.777.7251 or
klindstrom@usfamily.net or www.stpaulsmonastery.org

• A Professional Day:

The Affirmative Way of Spirituality

Monday, May 5, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. In this workshop, participants explore a variety of affirmative prayer modes, including the practices of *lectio divina*, walking and nature meditations, and reflections on life—all as ways to experience the liveliness of God in a sacramental appreciation of everyday life.

This opportunity will be at the Carondelet Center
1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For information: 651.696.2788 or
jremington@csjstpaul.org or www.wisdomwayscenter.org

May Day Ritual on the Labyrinth

Come to celebrate May Day by, first, learning something of the history and nature of labyrinths as spiritual places and, then, by the experience of slowly walking an outdoor labyrinth. Get in touch with something deeper and with the earth as your unshod feet press into the soft ground, as you move to the center and then back out into the world. Children are welcome.

Thursday, May 1, 12:00-1:00 p.m.

The Outdoor Labyrinth behind the Carondelet Center
1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul

For information: 651.696.2788 or
jremington@csjstpaul.org or www.wisdomwayscenter.org

Contemplative Nature Retreat

This retreat includes outdoor contemplative exercises to attune yourself to the natural world and to enhance your relationship with God through nature. Participants will receive a Nature Retreat Workbook, will come together for morning and evening prayer services, and will have

time (and instruction) for light yoga and breathing exercises and for personal spiritual direction.

Friday, May 2, after supper to Sunday, May 4, after brunch,

Villa Maria Center (www.villamariaretreats.org),
Frontenac, MN

For information or registration: 651.587.1443 or
davidroth64@yahoo.com

**Casa del Sol at Ghost Ranch:
A Contemplative Space in the High Desert
of Northern New Mexico**

The Rev. Dr. J. Philip Newell will again this summer be the resident Companion/Theologian for the Casa del Sol Spirituality and Retreat Center at Ghost Ranch. He will continue to help guide the Center in listening to the deep spiritual longings of those who journey to the high desert. In this process, the foundation stones for a “community” in the high desert are being laid.

Since the time of the Desert Mothers and Fathers, many have found the spirituality of the desert palpable and real. Some of the retreat opportunities offered there this summer include:

- **Grief and Forgiveness: The Desert Landscape of our Souls**, May 4-10,
- **Hearing Divine Whispers: Opening to God through Our Dreams**, June 9-15,
- **Wisdom of the Desert**, June 16-22,
- **and many more.**

Ghost Ranch Retreat Center, Abiquiu, NM

For more complete details or to request a catalog:
505.685.4333 or www.ghost ranch.org

Fifth Annual *Thin Places* Ecumenical Worship Service

Because so many new readers have been welcomed to *Thin Places* during this last year, a special invitation is extended to those who have not previously taken part in this annual Ecumenical Worship Service. Please see Page 5 for full details and parking directions.

Thursday, May 8, 7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Westminster Presbyterian Church,
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

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

**Women at the Well, A Spring Retreat:
“I believe! I Love! A Journey of Christian Discipleship
in an Ecological Age”**

How can we—in praying with John the Beloved Disciple, Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, Teilhard de Chardin, and the Earth Charter—grow in wisdom and

compassion as we live out our call to discipleship in this ecological age? Come together for an afternoon retreat, for a time of presentation, reflection and prayer.

Thursday, May 8, 1:00-4:00 p.m.

Women at the Well, The Carondelet Center
1890 Randolph Ave., St. Paul

For information or registration: 651-696-2760
or elincoln@usfamily.net

**The Festival of Homiletics: “Transformational
Preaching!”**

The 2008 Festival of Homiletics is coming to Minneapolis. The list of speakers and presenters includes Frederick Buechner, Garrison Keillor (on “Preaching in Lake Wobegon,” via video), Jim Wallis, Walter Brueggemann, Anna Carter Florence, The National Lutheran Choir, and much more. This might not be an especially “contemplative” gathering, but it does seem to be a special opportunity.

Monday to Friday, May 19 to 23

Central Lutheran Church,
333 South Twelfth Street, Minneapolis, and
Westminster Presbyterian Church,
1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

For full information: www.goodpreacher.com/festival

Spirit in the House!

This is a ten-day festival of plays, storytelling, and dance to explore spirituality and ethics through theater and Interfaith Dialogue. It is a safe and neutral venue where people can hear others tell their spiritual stories, be they Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Celtic, non-denominational or just ethical.

We have 33 different shows (165 performances), each coming from the heart of people who want to make the world a better place:

- **Dr. King’s Dream** Church theater at its finest, presented by Mixed Blood Theater. This performance has been ongoing

The Blessing

“The blessing of Prime under the tall pines,
in the cool of early morning, behind the hermitage.
The blessing of sawing wood, cutting grass,
cleaning house, washing dishes.
The blessing of a quiet, alert, concentrated,
fully “present” meditation.
The blessing of God’s presence and guidance.”

Thomas Merton, *Dancing in the Water of Life*

ing for 30 years; it is like having Dr. King in the pulpit.

- **The Diary of Adam and Eve** from the author/composers who did Fiddler on the Roof.
- Nationally famous storyteller Jim Stowell, presenting the experience of living in Northern Ireland during the Troubles between the Irish Catholics and the Irish Protestant Presbyterians.
- **Ragamala Dance Company** world famous south Indian Hindu performance. Fully costumed, in a style that is almost 1,000 years old. A superb example of the beauty of sacred dance.
- and much more . . .

Friday, May 23, through Sunday, June 1

Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church

511 Groveland Avenue, Minneapolis

For specific performances or more information:

612.823.6005 or sealtotal@aol.com

“The Human Face of God”

In this retreat, we will explore several different artists’ depictions of the face of Christ, the Human Face of God.

**You are—we all are—
the beloved of the Beloved One . . .**

**Make everything in you an ear,
each atom of your being
and you will hear at every moment
what the Source is whispering to you,
just to you and only to you
without any need for my words or anyone else’s.**

**You are—we all are—the beloved of the Beloved One
and in every moment, in every event of life,
the Beloved One is whispering to you
exactly what you need to hear and know.**

**Who can explain such a mystery?
It simply is.**

Rumi, *Light upon Light*

(This is the 800th anniversary year of Rumi’s birth. His poetry is sometimes a poetry of struggle, but it is much more often one of openness . . . of acceptance . . . of heart-peace . . . and of love in all its fullness. And it is particularly notable because it is not so much *about* anything as spoken from *within* something.)

Do you have a favorite Rumi poem?
If you do, please send it to us—we’d like to include one Rumi poem in each issue this anniversary year.)

There will be ample time for silent reflection between the conferences, for walks in the woods and along the lake, and the opportunity to join the monks of Saint John’s Abbey for their celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours each day.

**Friday, May 30, at 6:00 p.m. to Sunday,
June 1, at 1:00 pm.**

St. John’s Abbey, in the new Guesthouse, Colledgeville

For information and registration: 320.363.3929

or spiritlife@osb.org

Courage and Renewal

Each season has its own spiritual purpose, playing upon our soul’s preparing us for God’s harvest of our lives. Using the methodology of Parker Palmer, this weekend retreat will focus upon the metaphor of Spring with all its greening, growth and plethora of seeding, a sure sign of God’s hope and generosity.

What does this say to us? What is our response to this spiritual renewal? Where do we find the courage needed to respond to this optimistic endeavor? There will be ample time for private and communal prayer, reflection and solitude. This will be a time to listen deeply in order to hear what God is saying to us.

As all of the many who have been there will attest, the Oratory at The House of Prayer is a very special place.

Friday, June 6, at supper to Sunday, June 8, after lunch

The Episcopal House of Prayer, Colledgeville

For information or registration: 320.363.3293

or houseprayer@csbsju.edu

Shalem’s Midwest Regional Gathering in Indianapolis: “Radical Presence: The Ground of Spiritual Leadership”

This residential conference and retreat welcomes clergy and laity—whether beginner or seasoned spiritual leader—from all denominations and communities in the region who hunger for a deeper spiritual life and who assist others in listening to the Spirit. It begins with a workshop on the heart of spiritual leadership led by Shalem’s Founder and Senior Fellow, **Tilden Edwards**. The workshop will lead into a time of retreat for direct listening to the guidance of the Spirit. And there will also be time for sharing experiences and insights and networking with other participants.

Monday, June 23 to Friday, June 27

Our Lady of Fatima Retreat House, Indianapolis, IN

For information or registration: 301.897.7334

or info@shalem.org or www.shalem.org

To Bless the Space between Us: A Book of Blessings
by John O'Donohue.

Available in the Lowe Library, or online [\$16].

“Could you read a Sustaining Book, such as would help and comfort a Wedged Bear in Great Distress?” asked Pooh Bear” [A. A. Milne].

If you sometimes feel caught or wedged, if you sometimes feel a need to stop and explore the blessings that sustain you, or to give the gift of a blessing to a friend, reading this prayerful, playful, expanding book—by Irish poet, author (best known, Anam Cara, G alic for Soul Friend), and Celtic theologian, John O'Donohue—might be the thing for you.

This *Book of Blessings* will be the last gift we shall receive from John O'Donohue, who died in his sleep at fifty-two a few months ago. In an interview with Krista Tippett shortly before his death, he summarized some of his grounding beliefs: that “the visible world is the first shoreline of the invisible world,” . . . that there is a “quiet eternity” that flows into our hearts from “the invisible neighborhood of loving kindness,” . . . and that “the poignancy of being human is that you are the place where the invisible becomes visible and expressive.”

And this book seems to have welled up out of those beliefs. Many of the Blessings—which often need to be stayed with for a while, perhaps only one or a few taken at a time—start out on a shoreline that you seem to recognize as part of your own experience and then surprise you with an opening vista.

Each of the seven sections—Beginnings, Desires, Thresholds, Homecomings, States of Heart, Callings, Beyond Endings—opens with an exploration of the geography of that kind of experience (e.g., “To acknowledge and cross a threshold is always a challenge . . .”) and then includes specific Blessings within that experience.

There is a Blessing—O'Donohue is careful to say that they are not poems—“For a Friend on the Arrival of Illness,” and “For a Brother or Sister,” and “On Waking”:

I give thanks for arriving
Safely in a new dawn,
For the gift of eyes
To see the world,
The gift of mind
To feel at home
In my life.

The waves of possibility
Breaking on the shore of dawn,
The harvest of the past

That awaits my hunger,
And all the furtherings.
This new day will bring.

There is a Blessing “In Praise of the Earth,” and “On Meeting a Stranger,” and “For Someone Who Did You Wrong”:

While it struck outside,
It burrowed inside,
Made tunnels through
Every ground of confidence.
For days, it would lie still
Until a thought would start it. . . .

[Yet] somehow now
I have begun to glimpse
The unexpected fruit
Your dark gift had planted
And I thank you
For your unknown work.

There is a Blessing “For the Time of Necessary Decision,” and for “Grace after Meals,” and there is one for “The Inner History of a Day”:

We seldom notice how each day is a holy place
Where the eucharist of the ordinary happens,
Transforming our broken fragments
Into an eternal continuity that keeps us.
Somewhere in us a dignity presides
That is more gracious than the smallness
That fuels us with fear and force,
A dignity that trusts the form a day takes.
So at the end of this day, we give thanks
For being betrothed to the unknown
And for the secret work
Through which the mind of the day
And wisdom of the soul become one.

“There is a kindness that dwells deep down in things,” John O'Donohue wrote as he began the final section (“To Retrieve the Lost Art of Blessing”). Reading *To Bless the Space between Us: A Book of Blessings* makes one believe that there is.

Although he never quite puts it this way, John O'Donohue must certainly have believed that retrieving the lost art of the Blessing—learning to give and receive Blessings and to recognize the Blessings that are in our lives and the lives of others—would revive a spiritual practice that will enrich our lives, each day.



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**“What am I doing here?” I Asked . . .
Blessings between us. . .**



AFTERWORDS: The place God circled . . .

The morning news—although not new—feels almost overwhelming. The war, extreme human rights violations in Darfur and elsewhere, poverty taking its terrible toll both overseas and at home . . . so much suffering, so little it seems that I can do. Take heart! Join together with others to organize . . . write to congresspeople . . . contribute! But the disparity between the action and the need feels almost impossible to overcome. . . .

As the morning unfolds, two short sentences keep coming into mind—neither one new—seeming somehow intertwined. The first, by Hafiz, says what many other faith traditions seem to say: **“This place where you are right now God circled on a map for you.”** The only moment I can truly live is the present one. I can visit the past through memory and anticipate the future through imagination—both good—yet I lose if I live like one walking along a sun-dappled, forested path (perhaps with a vista opening up off on the right) but with eyes fixed forward, talking on a cell phone.

The second short sentence, Jesus nearing the end of his earthly ministry saying to the disciples simply, **“Love one another as I have loved you,”** also seems central in many traditions. But why do the two keep seeming intertwined? Are they pointing somehow towards what I can do? . . . towards what I can do that will feel more real and solid? Maybe.

We do need to seek to learn from the past and to plan for the future, and we do need to join together with others and write and contribute and do whatever we can. We must work at that. But the sentences seem to be saying that there is something deeper. We can labor on, but we must remember that we can only love the Lord, we can only love each one we meet, in the present moment—not in the past and not in the future.

And this feels liberating. For what we can do—and what undergirds and supports all else—is to seek to do the loving thing in this moment.

It is not easy, and we will often fail. But it is something real . . . something life-giving . . . something that we can seek to do in this place God circled on a map where we are right now. . . .