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You Aren't Supposed to Be Here . . .

by the Rev. Peg Chamberlin

Near the church's front door, the words on the poster caught the eye, and then the memory, and then the mind and heart:

"Never place a period where God has placed a comma, . . ." [www.stillspeaking.com]

I remember that it was late that evening by the time we got to the end of the ritual that would move Kwanza Presbyterian Church from fellowship-status to the status of 'church.' Many speeches and blessings and thanksgivings and, finally, it was the pastors' time to speak. An energetic, married couple, they spoke of their commitment to each other and to the congregation. The woman, Rev. Alika Galloway, then began, and with tears of gratitude she said, "I wasn't supposed to be here." And my breath caught in my throat. "I wasn't supposed to be here." She went on to tell how as a woman, a Black woman, she wasn't supposed to become a preacher. She talked about growing up with a stutter, "I wasn't supposed to be here." And yet she was, she was there, triumphant, victorious, a survivor.

I thought of the book I had just finished, *The Secret Life of Bees*, now out as a movie. A young white girl runs away from her tyrannical father, her mother having died some years before. She runs away with her Black nanny who—inspired by the passage of the 1964 Voting Rights Act—boldly attempts to register. But she wasn't supposed to be there, according to some. Their journey brings them, via the sign of the Black Madonna, to a group of sisters, African-American, who are themselves survivors and more. They have found a way to thrive in the midst of a culture that said that they weren't supposed to be there.

These are two very hopeful witnesses to me: a white, Protestant, woman from a family of some privilege, who has even so had times when I was told I wasn't supposed to be here. The year was 1965, and the President of the Moravian Church was at church camp and announced, "If any of you think you are being called to ministry, please meet me in the chapel after lunch." I was hesitant, maybe embarrassed that someone would see me and think me quite audacious; but, nevertheless, I showed up. I was the only one who came. He hemmed and hawed, "Well, have you ever thought about being a teacher or a nurse? We certainly do need those vocations in the mission fields right now."

I didn't know enough to be mad; it was what it was, and I walked away. It would be four years before my denomination began to ordain woman, and I'd have to go through five majors and numerable vocational choices (including teaching) before I finally came back to where I had started. I graduated with a Master of Divinity degree and was ordained fifteen years after

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Afterwords

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



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PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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www.eWestminster.org

Look for *Thin Places* at: www.thinplaces.us or www.eWestminster.org/thin_places

that first meeting. How many women, for how many centuries, have been told that we're not supposed to be here? And yet 'here' is exactly where we are. And with tears of joy, like Rev. Alika, we tell our stories and carry on.

When I read of the Black Madonna in *The Secret Life of Bees* I felt that I was meeting another old friend and hopeful witness, for I've visited many Black Madonnas during travels in Europe. And it may be that part of the strong attraction that the Black Madonnas have had for me and for many others is that—in some way—they are also about commas instead of periods.

The 12th century Vierge de Turban is in a side chapel in a small church in the little town of Meymac (from the Celtic for 'spring') in the south of France. She is about 17 inches tall, carved from wood and painted in muted tones. She wears a golden turban-like headpiece and golden shoes with turned up toes. Her eyes seem closed. Her face is black, as are her hands. If one asks the clerics about the Black Madonnas, the answer is always the same. They are black because of their age, or because the candle-smoke has darkened them. Nobody seems to have a problem with the fact that Mary is reflected in the images of the church, but the fact that she is so often black seems to be a bit of a stumbling block.

In the little Mediterranean town of Tellaro, in the church of St. George, built above the retaining wall that struggles to hold back the Mediterranean, there is an image, a painting, of a Madonna and child. It is recorded that this painting was removed from Candia in 1670 before it was captured by the Turks. The Madonna and child appear with cherubs flying around the Madonna's head. The cherubs and the child have black faces and

hands, necks and bodies. The Madonna has black hands, black neck, black ears, and a white face. It is such a strikingly peculiar image that I immediately think someone had scoured that face and rubbed all the paint off. No one, of course, has an explanation to offer. We leave, and I continue to imagine that someone tried to prove to her that she wasn't supposed to be there.

There are more than 500 Black Madonna icons, paintings, and statues throughout Europe. They are the focus of many a pilgrimage. The ancient meaning of these Black Madonnas remains veiled. But as I walked back up the stone streets in Tellaro to catch a taxi to the ferry, I was sure of one thing: in the Madonna's tenacious hold over the many centuries, she offers a witness to me and to the voices that say, 'You aren't supposed to be here.' By her presence she whispers to any that will hear, "They are wrong, as wrong as they can be."

As a mark of punctuation, a period is called a "full stop." And there have been elements in my life's journey—and probably in everyone's—to which it was necessary to place a period.

But if we are to be fully open to God's call . . . if we are to—in the familiar words of the Quaker song—come down where we ought to be . . . we need to remember and treasure the task of the comma (the most humble of all the punctuation marks), which quietly invites each of us to be open to what is yet to come, . . . to what each of us is called to be.

The Rev. Peg Chamberlin, ordained in the Moravian Church in American-North, has been the Executive Director of the (15 denomination, 2000 congregation, 1.2 million member) Minnesota Council of Churches for the last fourteen years and next November will also become President of the (33 denomination, 100,000 congregation, 45 million member) National Council of Churches. Among many additional activities, she has been the long-term leader of the ecumenical Holy Week Retreat at Ghost Ranch, in the high desert of New Mexico. She may be reached at: pegchamberlin@mchurches.org.

A Kind of Selflessness

"It is a kind of love, is it not?

How the cup holds the tea,
How the chair stands sturdy and foursquare,
How the floor receives the bottoms of shoes
Or toes. How soles of feet know
Where they're supposed to be.

I've been thinking about the patience
Of ordinary things. How clothes
Wait respectfully in closets
And soap dries quietly in the dish,
And towels drink the wet
From the skin of the back.
And the lovely repetition of stairs.
And what is more generous than a window?"

from *Another River*, by Pat Schneider
(with thanks to Garrison Keillor)

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, kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

The Minnesota Council of Churches

The comfort of someone listening to you fully. The exhilaration of shared purpose and power in worship or at a rally. The sweet grace of knowing God's presence.

These moments of unity with ourselves, with each other, and with our Creator buoy and sustain us. They remind us that unity is of the essence of our faith. It is because our faith leads us towards oneness that The Minnesota Council of Churches exists.

Now in our 50th year [our 150th year, if we count our predecessor organization, the Minnesota Sunday School Society], we are at our core a partnership of fifteen denominations throughout Minnesota who confess our God-given interconnection with other Christians—through the second person of the Trinity, Jesus—and who affirm our God-given connectedness to the larger community through the first person of the Trinity, the Creator. Thus, every aspect of our programming is accomplished through partnership with other organizations, faith groups, and people like you.

As our mission statement declares, the Council seeks “to manifest unity in the church and to build common good in the world.” Accordingly, we are committed to partnership in all that we do, and we see this commitment as strengthening the very core of our civic infrastructure as well.

Just as we rely on our brother, or wife, or friend, or grandchild to help define and enrich who we are as individuals, we rely on our brothers and sisters of faith to help us define and enrich our faith. And our brothers and sisters in the Interfaith Community also enrich us, helping to define who we will be and what we will do as a united community.

Won't you join us? There are many ways to be part of these connections. From coordinating a Minnesota FoodShare drive for the local food shelf, to entering into dialogue with congregations of other faiths. From a day at the state capitol, framed in prayer and song, to our shared efforts to eliminate poverty. From personal changes toward more healthy homes and congregations, to getting rid of toxic products which hurt us all, to coordinating a Children's Sabbath.

For more information—or to explore how you might be a part—go to our website at www.mnchurches.org or contact us at mcc@mnchurches.org or 612.870.3600.

The School of the Pilgrim

This is a ministry devoted to exploring and encouraging a way of living in which we—individually and collectively—understand and lead our lives as pilgrims, on a life-

long unfolding pilgrimage.

The School of the Pilgrim does this by offering workshops and retreats in which participants learn to use ancient and contemporary practices of pilgrimage in daily living so that we may move closer to wholeness and a deepening relationship with God. A book, *Practicing Pilgrimage: Being and Becoming a Pilgrim Church*, which grew out of these workshops and retreats, has been accepted for publication in 2009.

The School also offers guided opportunities to step outside of our busy lives and undertake an intentional pilgrimage to sites throughout the world. In April 2009, for example, we are planning a pilgrimage to the Holy Land to experience the Passion Week and Easter celebrations of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth and the Sea of Galilee.

To learn more: www.schoolofthepilgrim.com (note the newly posted slide show) or brett@schoolofthepilgrim.com or 919.929.9064.

Contemplative Worship

This new offering is an experiential, experimental exploration of various musical and prayer styles and is a clear alternative to the services on Sunday mornings. Each offers a mixture of **Taizé** (simple prayer chants and contemplative silence), **Celtic** (seeking to blur the lines between the sacred and the ordinary) and **Quaker** (its use of simple hymns, of silence/meditation/contemplative, and of “speaking out of silence” to complete the “sermon” time). The sung prayers and simple hymns may be accompanied by instruments, including flute and harp.

The values that shape this service are hospitality, simplicity, silence, low—technology, participation, ritual, art, and creativity. Eucharist is celebrated weekly. It is based in a progressive theology that is rooted in the depths of the Christian tradition, and especially its Wisdom and mystical expressions.

It is hoped that this contemplative worship will be a place where “we slow down enough for God to catch up with us.”

Every Sunday Evening, 5:30-6:30 p.m.

The New Connection is an Extension of First United Methodist Church, St. Cloud, MN
For driving directions or information:
billmeier@fumc-stcloud.org or 320.251.0804.

Advent Evening Prayer

As dark nights lengthen, take time to gather in the candlelight, joining a justice-oriented community for evening

prayer, song, reflection, ritual, and to enjoy light refreshments together.

Sundays, Nov. 30, Dec. 7, 14, 21, 4:30—5:30 p.m.

College of St. Catherine, Our Lady of Victory Chapel

For information: 651.696.2788 or
wisdomways@csjstpaul.org.

Shalem Quiet Days

Those who may be near or visiting Washington, D.C., may wish to consider taking part in one of the many “Quiet Days” offered by the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. Recent and up-coming examples include:

Chanting Quiet Day, a day to experiment with the parameters of sound and silence.

Advent Quiet Day, a day of opening to transformation through meditations, silent reflections and optional sharing.

Hope, Longing & Expectation Quiet Day, a day to explore the relationship between hope, longing and expectation through the writings of poets such as Rumi and John O’Donohue.

Ash Wednesday Quiet Day, a day to pray for the journey of Lent.

also

Southwest Regional Gathering: “Radical Presence: The Ground of Spiritual Leadership, a Five-Day Residential Conference and Retreat led by Tilden Edwards and others in San Antonio, February 9-13.

For **Quiet Days** dates (usually on a Monday or Saturday) and for full details on the Southwest Regional Gathering: www.shalem.org or info@shalem.org or 301.897.7334.

“ . . . fully awake, fully active . . . ”

“Contemplation is life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is gratitude for life, for awareness, and for being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent, and infinitely abundant Source.

Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source. It knows the Source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes beyond reason and beyond simple faith... It is a more profound depth of faith, a knowledge too deep to be grasped in images, in words, or even in clear concepts.”

New Seeds of Contemplation, Thomas Merton
(Thomas Merton died accidentally on 10 December 1968, while taking part in an Interfaith Conference in Bangkok)

Advent Evening Prayer

Each week we will reflect with Seasonal Readings, Silence, and Music with local musicians. All are welcome.

Registration is not required.

Mondays of Advent (Dec. 1, 8, 15, 22), 7:00-8:00 p.m.

Sabbath House

3228 Portland Ave. South, Minneapolis

For information: 612.822.2623.

Taizé Evening Prayer

This monthly service of light, simple chant, Scripture, and silence focuses hearts and minds on the calming presence of God’s love. There is opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation during the service. All are welcome.

Second Tuesdays—Dec. 9, Jan. 13, Feb. 10, Mar. 10, Apr. 14, May 12—5:30-6:30 p.m.

Basilica of Saint Mary, in the Saint Joseph Chapel

88 North 17th Street, Minneapolis

For information: 612.333.1381 or TSalisbury@mary.org.

Celtic Contemplative Worship

For our Celtic worship, we draw prayers and texts from the *Carmina Gadelica* (“the songs and poems of the Gaels”) and from Scotland’s Iona Community. These prayers and readings address the mysteries and challenges of everyday life as well as emphasizing the life of God within creation.

Second Sundays at 6:51 p.m.,

September through Spring

also:

Nordic Contemplative Evening Prayer

Evening Prayer has been the usual prayer of people since the days of the early Christian church. Along with Morning Prayer, its liturgy attunes us to the holiness of time. We participate in these daily rhythms, praising God for the sun’s rising and a new day, thanking God for all the day has brought at day’s end, gathering to celebrate the sacred mysteries of our lives in the context of the mystery of God. Our Nordic roots run deep in the Twin Cities, Minnesota, and the whole upper Midwest region.

Fourth Sundays at 6:51 p.m., Sept.-Nov. & Jan. through Spring

Pilgrim Lutheran Church

1935 St. Clair, St. Paul

For information: www.pilgrimstpaul.org or
pilgrim@pilgrimstpaul.org or 651.699.6886.

A Christmas Celtic Evening Prayer

This evening's service will include traditional Celtic music, Christmas readings from Scripture, time for silence and meditation and for prayer. It will end with all present encircling the Chapel with lighted candles, a powerful way to see and be a part of the community of believers. Afterwards, please enjoy Scottish scones and tea and good fellowship in the Heller Commons.

Thursday, December 11, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the Chapel

1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

For information: 612.866.8752 or kfisher@wpc-mpls.org.

An Advent Contemplative/Centering Prayer

"We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature—trees, flowers, grasses—grow in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence. . . . We need silence to be able to touch souls." Mother Teresa

Our (recently established) Contemplative/Centering Prayer group is hosting a special time to reflect and rest during this busy time of joy and celebrations, an Advent Evening of quiet prayer, scripture readings and reflections, followed by a reception. All are welcome. (All are equally welcome at our monthly Prayer on the Third Thursday of each month, 7:00-8:15 p.m., in the Parish Center.)

Thursday, December 4, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

St. Stanislaus Catholic Church,

398 Superior Street, St. Paul

For information: 651.699.7247.

Spiritual Tool Box for Advent

Three meditations using the Advent Readings alongside music, armchair yoga and silence; creating a calming and reflective experience grounded in listening to God.

Sundays, December 7, 14, 21, 10:00-11:00 a.m.

St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, 519 Oak Grove, Mpls.

For information: 612.870.7800 or

churchoffice@ourcathedral.org or www.ourcathedral.org.

Advent/Solstice Retreat: "Journey into Mystery"

Through the reading of poetry and writings drawn from Scripture and the mystics, meditating with icons, praying the labyrinth, sharing contemplative worship and music, and—above all—waiting in silence, the weekend retreat will invite us to experience more profoundly the God who is the ground of our being and the creator of the cosmos.

**Friday, Dec. 12, at an evening tea,
to Sunday, Dec. 14, after lunch**

also

New Year's Eve Retreat: Old Acquaintance and New

See the New Year in prayerfully, with meditative worship and spiritually minded others.

Wednesday afternoon, Dec. 31,

to Thursday noon, Jan. 1, after brunch

Both retreats offer an opportunity to put aside for a bit the promises you have to keep and to spend some time watching, where the woods are lovely, dark and deep.

ARC Ecumenical Retreat Community, Stanchfield

For information or registration: 763.689.3540 or

office@arcetreat.org or www.acretreat.org.

"When guests speak of the comfort received here, the welcome, the acceptance, the kindness, I mentally pass the praise on to **the trees of ARC**, who receive it with their usual calm equanimity. The white pines in their stately asymmetry, the red pines straight and strong, the study oaks and guileless poplars: these trees are healers, I know. I know, because they heal me, too. . . ."

Jan Wiersma

Christmas Quiet

An annual candlelit service to ponder the gift of Christ's coming to our world. Come and join us for this meaningful Christos Advent tradition as we lift our voices and hearts in song and in silence to God. A time for refreshments and conversation follows.

Tuesday, December 16, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation,

1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes

also:

Making Space for God:**Reflections on the Practice of Fasting**

The opening panel presentation will invite you to examine your own attitudes about the spiritual practice of fasting. One can fast from anything or any activity that is habitual: food, entertainment, media/print, shopping . . .

In a culture of more, how might choosing less allow us to notice where our relationship with God is being crowded out? or invite us to pray for those who are poor? or help us attend more closely to life's rhythms of embracing emptiness (fasting) and abundance (feasting)? There will also be time for personal reflection and group discussion.

Monday, January 26, 2009 from 1:00-3:30 p.m.

Colonial Church of Edina, 6200 Colonial Way, Edina

For information: 651-653-8207 or

www.christoscenter.org.

The Practice of Fasting

Fasting, like the spiritual practice of Praying the Labyrinth, is experiencing a resurgence. As one example, the Presbyterian General Assembly (in the wake of the global food crisis) has issued a call for members to fast and pray during the first weekend of each month over this next year:

“Starting in October Presbyterians will be encouraged on a monthly basis to adopt the ancient spiritual practice of fasting, beginning on Friday evening and ending with Communion on Sunday morning. The year-long cycle of prayer and fasting—or the partaking of simple meals—will end October 16, 2009, on World Food Day.

Interpretive materials for each month are available at: www.pcusa.org/foodcrisis.”

This web-site offers excellent details on the background and practice of fasting, and fasting is not denominationally distinctive! You may wish to check it out—or attend the **“Making Space for God”** opportunity at Colonial Church of Edina—and to consider this ancient and modern spiritual practice.

Crossing the Threshold

This annual event provides a one-of-a-kind opportunity to note the transition from one year to the next. With a combination of presentation, conversation, reflection, and prayer, participants create a new framework for welcoming the start of 2009.

Wednesday, Dec. 31, at 4:00 p.m.

Thursday, Jan. 1 at 10:00 a.m.

The Benedictine Center, 2675 E. Larpenteur, Maplewood
For information or registration: 651.777.7251 or benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org.

Benedictine Days of Prayer

People of every background are invited to come together for a day to pray, a time and space set apart for spiritual renewal.

Praying at Christmas Time, January 9

Praying in Ordinary Time, February 13

Praying in Lent, March 10

also

“There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”

This weekend Lenten Retreat, at the new St. John’s Abbey Guesthouse, will explore the mercy of God as taught by Jesus in his interactions with sinners and in his parables, particularly those in Luke’s Gospel.

Friday, Feb. 27, at 6:00 p.m. to

Sunday, March 1, after lunch.

For information or registration for any of these Opportunities: rpierson@csbsju.edu or 320.363.3929 or www.saint-johnsabbey.org/retreats.

Listen Deeply: Bio-Spiritual Focusing Basics

Bio-Spiritual Focusing is a solidly grounded practice for cultivating a depth of listening to one’s own “body knowing” rather than to the messages and problem-solving techniques that come from the head alone (includes certificate, lunch and materials).

Saturday, January 24, 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

Sponsored by Loyola Spirituality Center

Held at the Benedictine Center in Maplewood

For information or registration: 651-641-008 or 651.777.7251.

Empowering Women as Peacemakers

This will be a showing and small group discussion of Sr. Joan Chittister’s video, “Women, Power, Peace” sponsored by **WomenSpirit**, the ecumenical collaboration of eleven Twin Cities organizations supporting women on their spiritual journeys. Sister Joan is an internationally known author and lecturer and Co-Chair of the UN-sponsored Global Peace Initiative of Women. Tickets at the door.

Sunday, January 25, 2:00-4:00 p.m.

Plymouth Congregational Church

1900 Nicollet Avenue, Minneapolis

For information: www.womenspirit-twincities.org or 612.823.5901.

Spa Day at the Monastery

Need a day for yourself? Want to pamper your body and spirit? We’ve got just the remedy . . . Spa Day at the Monastery. Come enjoy a selection of massage, Reiki, Feldenkrais, meditation, and other stress reducing therapies in the beautiful spaces of the Spirituality Center. You may bring a friend or make it a weekend and give your body and spirit a chance to reconnect!

Saturday, January 31, 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict’s Monastery, St. Joseph

For information or registration: dmanuel@csbsju.edu or 320.363.7116 or www.sbm.osb.org.

Iconography Classes: “The Face of Jesus”

“Icons are created for the sole purpose of offering access—through the gate of the visible—to the mystery of the invisible. They are painted to lead us into the inner room of prayer and bring us closer to the heart of God.” Henri Nouwen
Debra Korluka writes icons in the Byzantine tradition and

has studied and shown her work nationally and abroad. Drawing on her deep knowledge of the Eastern Orthodox tradition of creating and using icons as thresholds, as parts of a spiritual practice, Debra will lead a six-week Lenten course which will offer each participant an opportunity to learn to write an icon of the Face of Jesus.

This course will be supplemented by a separate series of adult education classes and an exhibition in the Westminster Gallery which will feature old and new icons, tell the story of how icons are written, and show how they are used in meditation and prayer.

**Tuesday Evenings-Feb. 17, 24, Mar. 10, 17, 24, 31,
6:30-9:00 p.m.**

Westminster Presbyterian Church, 1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

For information or to register for the course:
akorluka@aol.com or 651.439.4850

For information on the classes and the exhibition:
rschwartz@wpc-mpls.org or 612.866.8752.

Fr. Thomas Keating: “Transforming the Heart of the World: Living as a Contemplative Today”

Fr. Thomas, co-founder of the Centering Prayer movement, is returning to the Twin Cities. Earlier, exploring this evening’s discussion, he has suggested that, “The world lies under a pervasive sense of anguish, of being abandoned, or at least experiencing God as absent. Yet events that seem to turn our lives upside down and inside out are part of God’s redemptive plan, not only for us, but for the world in which we now live. God may be preparing a great awakening for the world, if God can find enough people to cooperate in this mysterious plan.”

All are invited to this rare opportunity to meet and listen to one of the spiritual giants of our time. Hosted by the Benedictine Center of St. Paul’s Monastery.

Friday, February 27, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Transformation Catholic Church,
6133 15th Street North, Oakdale

For information or registration:
benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org or
651.777.7251.

**“Be thou My Vision:
Celtic Spirituality in Ireland and Iona”**

This pilgrimage, sponsored by Christos Center, builds upon last year’s pilgrimage by offering even more quiet time to seek the presence of God, in settings where women and men of the fifth to tenth centuries engaged that Presence with all their souls. The natural environment of stone, water and greenness can lead to a vivid encounter with the

God of creation and the God of the cross. Patrick, Brigit and Columba—the three prime saints of Ireland—will be our mentors through their writings and prayers in their natural settings and in the “thin place” of Iona.

March 26-April 7, 2009

For information or to register: 952.881.7811 or
groups@gtd.org.

**Philip Newell, “Spirit with You:
A Celtic Way of Peace”**

Philip’s three-day return visit to the Twin Cities, **Tuesday through Thursday, May 19-21, 2009**, will begin with a breakfast gathering [7:30-9:00 a.m., Tuesday, at Hennepin Avenue Methodist] featuring a dialogue between Philip and Fr. Michael O’Connell on their shared interest in Celtic spirituality. And it will end with his leadership in the Sixth Annual *Thin Places* Ecumenical Worship Service [7:00-9:00 p.m., Thursday], which will culminate with his recently completed “Songs for the Earth: a Celtic Mass for Peace.”

Between these two Opportunities, here is what’s planned:

Tuesday—hosted by Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church and Mayflower Community Church—will explore “Christ of the Celts: The Healing of Creation” (working title) during a workshop at Hennepin Avenue [9:30 a.m.-2:00 p.m.], with an evening at Mayflower where Philip and Marty Haugen will offer a program of readings and music related to the healing of creation.

Wednesday—hosted by Wisdom Ways, Sacred Ground, and Pilgrim Lutheran Church—will explore “Peace among Peoples.” A professional development workshop, called “Sacred Conversations-Longing for Healing,” will be led by Philip [9:00-2:00 p.m., at Carondelet Center], with an evening homily by Philip and a Celtic Prayer Service [6:51-9:00 p.m., at Pilgrim Lutheran].

Thursday—hosted by The Episcopal House of Prayer, the Wesley Center for Spirituality and Westminster Presbyterian Church—will offer a daytime contemplative retreat, “Heart Peace” (tentative working title), led by Philip [9:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m.]; and the coming together of people from all three days for evening worship and Philip’s “Songs for the Earth: A Celtic Mass for Peace” [7:00-9:00 p.m.], both at Westminster.

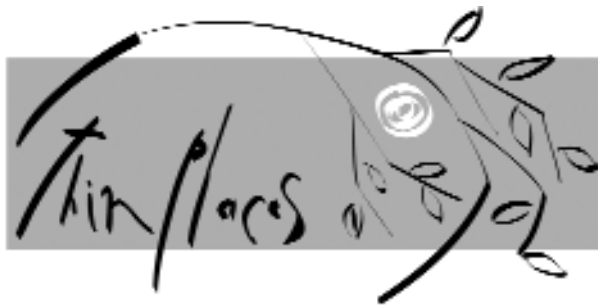
How to register for any or all of these Opportunities has not been finalized but will be available in a timely fashion. If you would like to be informed directly when that information is available, please send your name, mailing address, and e-mail address to: thinplaces_us@msn.com.



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“Thresholds . . . ”



AFTERWORDS: Thinking about Thresholds . . .

Thresholds . . . commas . . . thin places . . . liminality [from the Latin word for “a threshold,” sometimes defined as a time when “normal limits to thought, self-understanding and behavior are relaxed—a situation which can lead to new perspectives”] . . . **passages . . . the season of Advent . . .**

Thresholds are ripe with possibilities, *if* we are opening and welcoming to them. They often seem forward-looking and hope-full, offering possibilities for growth, invitations to new ways of thinking, new ways of experiencing.

Our doorsteps are thresholds, leading both out into the world, and inward to the privacy and sanctity of the home. One familiar Morning Prayer (drawing upon words from St. Patrick) begins, “Thanks be to you, God, for this world and for the time and space in which we live,” and ends, “I open myself to new experiences, I open myself to new relationships, Praising you for the gift of this day.”

But perhaps we limit ourselves if we see thresholds only as waypoints on our life’s journey, as pauses between what has been and what might be. At least—especially in our spiritual lives—thresholds often seem to be experienced as being outside of time. The experience of going deep in Centering Prayer is an experience of timelessness. The most powerful experiences of praying with Icons or praying the Labyrinth, seem to be rooted here in the everyday world but with the possibility of seeing through to the sacred and the eternal. When we become deeply immersed in the experience of sacred music, time seems to stand still. And perhaps many of us have experienced a profound sense of Oneness—of being connected to all creation and to God—through a particular experience in the natural world.

Perhaps this is so because—close to the center of our most powerful spiritual experiences—is a sense of being drawn into an awareness of God’s timeless and eternal presence within us, within our deepest and truest selves. We *are* part of the everyday world, with its before and afters. But we are also deeply connected to the timelessness of the Sacred.