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## Dreams as Thin Places . . .

by the Rev. Dr. Geoff Nelson

My dreams are the nightly thin places that I pass through, and paying attention to them has enriched my prayer life for decades. If you are familiar with *lectio divina*, my practice is a dream *lectio*. I begin by writing out the dream narrative, then listening to it and thinking about it and doing a rudimentary interpretation, and then forming my prayer for the day. Like *lectio divina*, it is not a matter of intellectually analyzing or explicating but a way of opening myself to what I am being offered.

My dream practice has helped me in my life of faith. First, my dreams speak honestly to me, indicating how I really feel, uncensored and sometimes in raw pictures. My dreams do not accept the advice I heard growing up, “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all.” My dreams do not always speak nice—but they do speak honestly.

My dreams also help me prioritize my life, reminding me of things that otherwise might slip below the radar of my conscious living. They help me care for my congregation. If I dream of someone I have seen or talked to lately, I use the fact that I dreamt of them to encourage me to pray for them, to think more deeply about them, perhaps to phone them or visit them. My dreams are an added source of information or insight about my life. These first two values of dreams can be used by anyone, whether or not they consider themselves religious.

A third way my dreams help me, more specifically religious, is through the relationship between dreams and prayer. Carl Jung defined “synchronicity” as “the not uncommonly observed ‘coincidence’ of subjective and objective happenings, which just cannot be explained causally, at least not in the present state of our knowledge.” Perhaps you can remember a time when you were thinking of someone you had not heard from in years and, shortly after your thinking about them, they called or you received a letter from them. Many of us can think of “coincidences” like these in our lives. One of the former Archbishops of Canterbury said once that he didn’t believe in coincidence, but that the more he prayed, the more it happened.

These occurrences do seem to happen more often the more we work with our dreams or the more we pray. This connection between dreamwork and prayer has become a regular part of my life. My wife and I enjoy comparing our frequent synchronicities. And many Biblical stories testify to this kind of connection.

The fourth way dreams have helped in my spiritual life is a kind of Biblical literacy that enables me to be more comfortable with such Bible stories and images as Ezekiel’s visions,

“*Dreams as Thin Places* . . . continues on page 2

page 3

Ongoing Opportunities

page 4

One-Time Opportunities

page 7

Reading Opportunities

page 8

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



**WESTMINSTER**  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

1200 Marquette Avenue  
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2419  
612.332.3421  
www.eWestminster.org

Look for *Thin Places* at: [www.thinplaces.us](http://www.thinplaces.us) or [www.eWestminster.org/thin\\_places](http://www.eWestminster.org/thin_places)

Jesus’ parables and—especially—the book of *Revelation*. All those strange symbols and images in *Revelation* come right out of the Old Testament and the inter-testamental literature of the Jewish religion. It’s as if someone took all those images and put them into a blender, turned it on and then poured out the mix. The result is a new combination of images that help us understand Jesus and offer new possibilities for life and for the church. In the same way my dreams take images, places, characters and actions from my life, mix them up, and present me with new visions of my life and new future possibilities.

And my dream practice has also helped through what are called “Big Dreams,” dreams so powerful that they may stay with me for years, changing my life. These particularly powerful dreams provide healing or help for things that may have been bothering me for years or with serious current challenges. Such dreams may not happen often, but—like the experience of prayer and coincidence—the more we pay attention the more likely we are to have these “big dreams.”

This has been some my experience as I’ve prayed with my dreams for over thirty years. And the experience is open to all. We all dream. But very few of us take our dreams seriously, using them as a source of information and help for our lives. Dreams are thin places available to each of us every time we sleep.

Because my own experience with dream *lectio* has seemed so enriching, I have been eager to share it with others. In working with dream groups, I have found that there are some basic cautions about dreamwork. First of all, like other spiritual practices—labyrinths, centering prayer, *lectio divina*—one needs to actually experience it, to not just read about it or think about it, to begin to gain a sense of what it is. In addition, one must be ready for some honest self-reflection. Many people are initially curious about their dreams, but when they realize their dreams may be telling them deeper things about themselves than they are accustomed to facing, they decide dream work is not for them. And, finally, dreamwork can make us very self-absorbed, thus moving us in a direction away from faithful service to Jesus Christ.

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](mailto:kfisher@wpc-mpls.org) or 612.332.3421.

If you think you might like to begin to pay attention to your own dreams, you might start by recalling and recording them. They are often vivid in your memory within the first few moments of waking, but if you don’t keep some record, you will be surprised at how easily you forget them. You can also begin to pray your dreams, asking God what they mean or to show you further dreams that will help. I have found it a great help to be able to share dreams with others, especially within a small group or with a trusted friend, and there is abundant available literature to which you can turn as you begin to seek to be attentive to your dreams.

Dreams are a universally available means of contact with the Holy Spirit, ready thin places, just waiting for us to pay attention to them. They are God’s gift to us. . . .

*Geoff Nelson is pastor of Whittier (California) Presbyterian Church and a trained spiritual director and labyrinth facilitator who has worked with dream groups in churches for many years. His chapter on the attitudes of Luther and Calvin towards the dream texts in the Bible will appear in **Dreams in Christianity and Islam**, soon to be released by Rutgers University Press. Geoff sends occasional emails, “Dreams News,” to all who are interested. He may be reached at: [ggnelson@ix.netcom.com](mailto:ggnelson@ix.netcom.com).*

#### The Gift

“Caedmon [of Whitby, d. 680, the earliest English Christian poet] **went straight to the cattle shed to check on his beasts, then threw himself down on his bed and passed into a fitful sleep. In his dreams a man stood before him, ‘Sing for me, Caedmon,’ he said. ‘Sing for me.’**

‘I can’t sing,’ Caedmon protested. ‘Why do you think I’m out here in the cattle shed, instead of inside at the feast?’

‘Sing anyway. Sing for me.’

‘I don’t know what to sing.’

‘Sing about the beginning of the world, and sing about creation.’

So Caedmon sang a song of praise to the Guardian of heaven, the Father of glory. And in his dream he was able to sing a song so beautiful that it could make you cry.

When he awoke, the song was still with him, and he sang it for God and for himself. He sang it for the steward of all the farmlands of the abbey. He sang it for Abbess Hilda herself, [and] he sang it for the people of Whitby and everyone in the countryside round about them. . . .’

from *Celtic Daily Prayer: Prayers and Readings*  
from the Northumbria Community

**For Hungry Hearts:**

*Hungryhearts* is a quarterly journal on spirituality. Now in its seventeenth year, it is published by the National Office of Spiritual Formation of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and is sent free to anyone of any denomination who asks to receive it.

*Hungryhearts* is guided by its definition of Spiritual Formation as “the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all creation. The Spirit works not only in the lives of individuals but also in the church, shaping it into the Body of Christ.

We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through certain practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit’s touch, disciplines such as sabbath keeping, works of compassion and justice, discernment, worship, Scripture study, hospitality, spiritual friendships, and contemplative silence.”

Each issue explores a single theme: “Pilgrimage and Place,” “Children and Spirituality: Live as Children of Light,” “For Love and Justice,” “Dietrich Bonhoeffer: the Politics of Spirituality,” “Daily Prayer: Time Made Holy,” “Piercing Heaven: the Power of Short Prayer,” “Celtic Spirituality: A World Alive with God’s Presence,” “A Wonderful Communion: A Reformed Look at Mysticism,” “Being with the Saints: Models for All Christians” (see “**Reading Opportunities**” below).

*Hungryhearts* is an excellent resource, one that has seemed well worth exploring.

For information or to request a sample copy: 888.728.7228, ext. 5306 or [ada.middleton@pcusa.org](mailto:ada.middleton@pcusa.org) or [www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/hungryhearts](http://www.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/hungryhearts).

**Taizé Evening Prayer**

In the Chapel, overlooking a flowing stream, you will find sung prayer, Scripture, and silence in a candle-lit setting. (St. Stephen’s Evening Prayer is now the longest running, regularly scheduled Taizé Prayer in the region.):

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

St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church, in the Chapel  
4439 West 50th Street, Edina  
For information: 952.920.0595.

**Praying with the Mystics Series**

Make a date with Merton, Hildegard, Howard Thurman and more through this free monthly ongoing series. Join us on **First Thursday** evenings as we immerse ourselves in the stories of ordinary men and women who led extraordinary, God-gifted lives. Learn what they have to teach us today and how their lives can still inspire and influence us:

- **John Woolman** (June 2, 7:30-9:00 p.m.)—an itinerant Quaker preacher who traveled throughout the American colonies advocating against slavery, war, and the plight of the poor.

- **Teresa of Avila** (August 4)—a prominent 16th century Spanish mystic, Carmelite nun, reformer, and teacher of prayer.

- **Dorothy Day** (September 8)—a 20th century lay-woman who co-founded the non-violent, pacifist Catholic Worker movement.

- **George MacLeod** (October 6)—a Scottish soldier and clergyman who was the founder of the Iona Community, an ecumenical Christian community committed to seeking new ways of living the Gospel in today’s world. . . . [and more to come . . .]

Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, Bethesda, MD  
For information on this and their many other opportunities, in D.C. and across the country: [www.shalem.org](http://www.shalem.org) or [kit@shalem.org](mailto:kit@shalem.org) or 301.897.7334, ext. 200.

**Centering Prayer**

“God is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere” [Alan of Lille, 11th century]. Come join our circle of Prayer:

**Wednesdays, 7:15-8:00 p.m.**

Franciscan Poor Clares  
8650 Russell Avenue South, Bloomington  
For information: [www.poorclaresminneapolis.org](http://www.poorclaresminneapolis.org)  
or 952.881.4766.

A newsletter received from a long-time reader begins by asking: “**Did she just say what I think she said?**”

“My mom died a couple of years ago. On the night of her wake and reviewal, the church was very busy-lots of people coming and going. There came a point in the evening though when I was able to spend a couple of moments alone with my mom at the side of her casket. Standing there, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed a tiny elderly woman slowly move to my side.

I didn’t know her, and we didn’t speak immediately. She looked at mom, then she looked at me, then she looked back at mom and in a thick German accent said, ‘*Dat is de best lookin’ corpse I ever saw!*’ Long pause. . . ‘Uh-huh,’ I nodded. ‘Thanks for coming.’ But the truth is I wanted to put my arms around her and hug her. She had recognized me as a son, and in her sideways way was trying to find something comforting to say.

‘*Dat is de best lookin’ corpse I ever saw!*’ The phrase has come back to me many times since, speaking to me of the

kindness my new German friend intended, but also in a different way. Here's what hits me. We are always in danger of becoming the best looking corpse anyone ever saw. We're always in danger of looking buffed and polished on the outside while dying on the inside.

How do we attend to our inner life so that it becomes true of us what the Apostle once said: "Outwardly we are wasting away, but inwardly we are being renewed day by day"? What choices are we each being called to today that would nourish our inner life? What is God inviting us to choose or to avoid? To obey or to flee? God's word, planted in our hearts and attended with loving care, grows up into lushness and life.

May we help each other cultivate our hearts in Christ in this new season of green growing things."

Joel Warne and his wife, Gerri, lead WellSpring Life Resources.

For information: [www.wellrefreshed.com](http://www.wellrefreshed.com) or [info@wellrefreshed.com](mailto:info@wellrefreshed.com).

## ONE-TIME OPPORTUNITIES

**"You shall be like a garden . . . "**

**"Let me hear, let me hear, what you will speak . . . "**

This **Quiet Worship** will draw upon these words and music by J. Philip Newell, who has just completed his second visit to the Twin Cities.

As the words and music will convey, late May is both the time of Pentecost—the beginning of the growth of the Church on earth—and the joyful beginning of the season of green growing things throughout the land.

Following worship, all are invited to gather in the Heller Commons for coffee or tea and muffins to greet this month's Worship Leader, Sr. Joan Tuberty, and special guests from the longest continuously active Centering Prayer group in the area, which she founded at St. Olaf Catholic Church and which has met faithfully every Saturday morning for more than sixteen years:

**Saturday, May 30, 9:00 - 10:15 a.m.**

Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the Chapel  
1200 Marquette, Minneapolis

For information: [www.ewestminster.org](http://www.ewestminster.org)  
or [kfisher@wpc-mpls.org](mailto:kfisher@wpc-mpls.org).

### **Esther de Waal, a Special Opportunity**

Internationally celebrated author Esther de Waal, an Anglican and a Benedictine Oblate, will be guest retreat leader at the Benedictine Center for two significant events in early June:

## ONE-TIME OPPORTUNITIES

### **An Evening Presentation, "Benedict's Vision in Difficult Times"**

Faced with the crises of his own era, Benedict reminded people of God's enduring presence. He knew then, as we do now, that we journey through difficult times with hope because we form community with one another. Esther de Waal shares her deep understanding of Benedictine spirituality as she reflects on its lessons for these difficult times:

**Thursday, June 4, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.**

also:

### **A Retreat, "Seeking Life: The Baptismal Invitation of the Rule of St. Benedict"**

Taking its theme from her newest book, this retreat encourages participants to look deeper into the transformative power of baptism and its call to a life-long life in Christ. Guests are invited to join the monastic community afterward for Sunday Eucharist and brunch:

**Friday, June 4, at 7:00 p.m. to Sunday, June 7, at 11:00 a.m.**

The Benedictine Center, Saint Paul's Monastery  
2675 Benet Road, Maplewood

For information: 651.777.7251  
or [www.stpaulsmonastery.org](http://www.stpaulsmonastery.org).

### **Women Artists in the Jewish and Christian Traditions**

Sponsored by **WomenSpirit**, this is an exhibit featuring art by eight women—four each from Judaism and Christianity—from the Twin Cities area celebrating our differences and commonalities. "May this wonderfully

Lectio . . .

**"Prayer is a source of loving for you.  
in total selflessness, abandon yourself,  
body and spirit.**

**Every day go deeply into a few lines  
of the Scriptures,  
to be brought face to face  
with Another,  
with the Risen Lord.**

**In silence, let the living word of Christ  
be born in you,  
then put it into practice right away!"**

Brother Roger, visiting Mother Teresa, in Calcutta

rich and diverse sacred art be a medium for awareness, appreciation, mutual respect and understanding among religions and communities.”

**Reception and panel discussion, Thursday, June 11, at 5:30 p.m.**

**Exhibit open Saturdays (10:00 a.m. - 6:30 p.m.), Sundays (7:30 a.m. - 8:00 p.m.) through June 28**

Basilica of St. Mary, John XXIII Gallery & Teresa of Calcutta Hall

Hennepin Avenue at N. 16th Street, Minneapolis

For information: [www.womenspirit-TwinCities.org](http://www.womenspirit-TwinCities.org) or 612.317.3438.

### **Transition, Transformation, and New Aspirations**

How to use life's major transitions—marriage, divorce, unemployment, career change, retirement, among others—to redefine ourselves and shape a future true to your own inner voice. An opportunity for help in opening new doors:

**Friday evening to Sunday afternoon, June 19 - 21**  
also

### **Educator's Retreat**

Take time for reflection and renewal, time to remember your purpose as an educator, time to revisit your commitment to those you teach, time at this lovely wooded center, time before the new school year begins:

**Wednesday, August 12, at 10:00 a.m. —**

**Friday, August 14, at 10:00 a.m.**

ARC Ecumenical Retreat Community  
1680 373rd Avenue NE, Stanchfield, MN

For information or registration: 763.689.3540  
or [office@arcetreat.org](mailto:office@arcetreat.org) or [www.arcetreat.org](http://www.arcetreat.org).

### **Men as Learners and Elders**

The “Men's Rites of Passage Retreat,” led by Richard Rohr, is returning to Minnesota. As those who filled it full in 2007 discovered, this five-day, four-night retreat is a deeply prayerful experience that builds on the classic patterns of male initiation through teaching and rituals that will be both simple and moving. Each day includes group prayer, major teachings on central masculine spirituality themes, quiet time for reflection, and sharing in the context of the ‘home group.’

These five days offer insight into masculine spirituality, a time to savor the healing and awesome power of nature, an opportunity to examine life's priorities and to ask questions about the ‘next step,’ and an invitation to listen to the ‘quiet voice of God’:

**Wednesday, June 24 to Sunday, June 28**

Audubon Center of the North Woods, Sandstone, MN

For information or an application: 612.803.7430  
or [koneal26@charter.net](mailto:koneal26@charter.net) or [www.malespirituality.org](http://www.malespirituality.org).

### **The Practice of Sabbath**

This is an opportunity to follow the command to “Keep holy the Sabbath,” to spend a day learning, reflecting, practicing how to keep the Sabbath . . . in this culture . . . in this century . . . right here.

“Like a path through the forest,” Wayne Muller writes, “Sabbath creates a marker for ourselves so that—if we are lost—we can find our way back to our center. ‘Remember the Sabbath’ means ‘Remember to delight in your life, in the fruits of your labor, [and] remember to stop and offer thanks for the wonder of it’:

**Saturday, June 27, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

also: **Saturday, September 19, 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

Sabbath House, 3228 Portland Ave. So., Minneapolis

For information or registration: 612.822.2623

or [sabbathhouse@fslf.org](mailto:sabbathhouse@fslf.org).

### **Approaching Easter**

“I was dreaming that I was treading the streets of the Holy City, pottering about like a tourist. In my wandering I came upon the museum of that city of our dream. I went in, and a courteous attendant conducted me around. Many things were conspicuous by their absence. There was no Pope's ring, nor even the ink-bottle that Luther is said to have thrown at the devil, nor Wesley's seal and keys. I saw a widow's mite and the feather of a little bird. I saw some swaddling clothes, a hammer, and three nails, and a few thorns. I saw a bit of fishing-net and the broken oar of a boat . . . but I cannot enumerate all I saw, nor describe all I felt.

Whilst I was turning over a common drinking cup which had a very honorable place, I whispered to the attendant, ‘Have you not got a towel and basin among your collection?’ ‘No,’ he said, ‘not here; you see they are in constant use.’

And then I knew that I was in the Holy City, and amid the redeemed society.

Knowing that He came from God and went to God, Jesus took a towel and basin. . . .”

A. E. Whitman, quoted in  
*Celtic Daily Prayer: Prayers and Readings  
from the Northumbria Community*

**School of Contemplative Wisdom (Week 1)**

From time immemorial there have been Wisdom schools to raise human consciousness, thereby transforming society. Concerned with life lived in the fullness of human being and consciousness, Wisdom has been transmitted across time as a treasury of theory and practice to teach us how to awaken.

Once again, Cynthia Bourgeault, Lynn Bauman, and Ward Bauman will direct an academy where participants will gather to learn, transform their way of living, and be raised to higher levels of understanding and consciousness:

**Sunday, July 19 at supper to Saturday, July 25, after lunch**

also: **Week 2 of the Wisdom School, August 2-8**

and: **Benedictine Experience, Sept. 22-27**

**Opening Oneself to Life**

“Yesterday Father Cellarer lent me the Jeep. I did not ask for it, he just lent it to me out of the goodness of his heart, so that I would be able to go over on the far side of the knobs. I had never driven a car before . . .

I took it and started off gaily all by myself in the woods. It had been raining heavily. All the roads were deep in mud. It took me some time to discover the front-wheel drive. I skidded into the ditches and got out again, I went through creeks, I got stuck in the mud, I bumped into trees.

Once, when I was on the main road, I stalled trying to get out of the front-wheel drive and ended up sideways in the middle of the road with a car coming down the hill straight at me. Thank heaven I am still alive. At the moment I didn't seem to care if I lived or died. I drove the Jeep madly into the forest in a happy, rosy fog of confusion and delight. We romped over trestles and went splashing through puddles a foot deep, rushing madly into the underbrush and back out again.

Finally I got the thing back to the monastery covered with mud from stem to stern. I stood in choir at Vespers dizzy with the thought, ‘I have been driving a Jeep!’”

This remembered experience of Thomas Merton's [from his *Entering the Silence, Journals Volume I*] seems . . . in its specificity, and the jumble of its details, and the sudden peril of the on-rushing car . . . more like an account of a dream than of the real-life experience of a cloistered monk. But it seems, also, to be hugely attractive in its uninhibited and joyful openness to life.

The Episcopal House of Prayer, Collegeville  
For information or registration: 320.363.3293  
or [houseprayer@csbsju.edu](mailto:houseprayer@csbsju.edu).

**Intensive Centering Prayer Retreat**

A silent retreat for those who have been practicing centering prayer for at least six months. Each day will have three one-hour sessions of centering prayer in 20 or 30 minute segments with a 5-minute contemplative walk between segments. Daily videotapes on the spiritual and psychological foundations of Christian contemplative prayer will be shown with time for questions, reflective comments and discussion:

**Sunday, July 26, at 6:30 p.m. to Tuesday, August 4, at 1:00 p.m.**

Saint Benedict's Monastery, in the Spirituality Center, St. Joseph, MN

For information or registration: 320.363.7112  
or [dmanuel@csbsju.edu](mailto:dmanuel@csbsju.edu) or [www.sbm.osb.org](http://www.sbm.osb.org).

**The Desert as Thin Place**

There are a variety of definitions for thin place. Certainly, the high desert in which Ghost Ranch is located is undeniably a geographical magnet of thinness. Each day of this retreat we will explore a different dimension of this thinness, discover its connection with biblical stories, make a visit to specific desert locations that illustrate “thin,” and practice a spiritual discipline that helps us uncover the depth of thinness. The retreat will be led by a long-time reader of *Thin Places*.

**Monday, October 5, to Sunday, October 11**

Two of the many other retreat opportunities offered this summer include:

**“Grief and Forgiveness: The Desert Landscape of the Soul,” June 8-14,**

**“Ritual & Loving the Earth,” June 22-28**

**with Marty Haugen and others**

Casa del Sol at Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, NM

For more complete details or to request a catalog: 505.685.4333 or [www.ghostranch.org](http://www.ghostranch.org).

**Annual Conference of Contemplative Outreach:**

**“Consenting to Divine Love: 25 Years of Contemplative Outreach”**

Featuring Fr. Thomas Keating, OCSO, founder of Contemplative Outreach:

**September 24 - 27, 2009**

Wyndham O'Hare Hotel, Chicago, Illinois.

Details to follow on: [www.contemplativeoutreach.org](http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org).

*The New Book of Festivals and Commemorations: A Proposed Common Calendar of Saints*, by Philip H. Pfatteicher. Available online [from \$32].

A generation ago, the recent publication and apparently warm reception of *The New Book of Festivals and Commemorations: A Proposed Common Calendar of Saints* might have come as a surprise to many. For was not part of the protest of the Reformers based upon the conviction that “We are to worship God alone” and that “Jesus Christ is the only one who bridges the gap between us mortals and the Almighty”?

But, as Dr. Pfatteicher notes in the “Introduction,” the proposal is actually an outgrowth of a renewed interest in saints that has been going on for the last half century, with revisions of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox lists, with significantly expanded calendars drawn up by Episcopal and Lutheran councils, and also with work done by Presbyterians and others. And—even more importantly—the proposal is an outgrowth of a changing understanding of saints and of the enriching role they can play in the life of the church.

**So, what or who is a saint?** In the words of a Presbyterian task force assigned responsibility for developing a book of daily prayer [*Hungryhearts*, XII, 4, p. 14], “The Greek word translated as ‘saint’ literally means ‘holy one.’ A saint is someone claimed by God to belong to God forever. . . . The holy ones of God are always human, real people. They are made of flesh and blood, not plaster and paint.” And in the understanding of *A Proposed Common Calendar*, saints are not “saints” (i.e., without imperfections) but human persons like ourselves with weaknesses and failings but also “people in whom the holy and life-giving Spirit of God is clearly at work.”

These definitions are both broader and narrower than some. They are broader than the definition of a saint as one who has successfully passed through the stages towards canonization (valuable as that process has proven to be down through the ages). And they are both narrower and “richer than the simple assertion one often hears, especially in some Protestant circles, ‘We are all saints’” [Pfatteicher]. For, “When everyone is a ‘saint’ then no one is a ‘Saint.’ We have so broadened the definition as to leave it empty and limp. And the stories of God’s holy ones can get lost in a kind of fog of forgetfulness” [*Hungryhearts*].

The entry for each day (not every date is filled, this being still a proposed common calendar) contains a brief biography of the saint or background on that day, . . . a brief bibliography, . . . a selected reading [“It is an ancient custom . . . that those commemorated should speak on their feast days, addressing us through a reading from something

they have written or an appropriate selection from another writer.”] . . . And often the entry ends with a suggested prayer for that day, or some other Proper.

For example, June 15 offers,

“**Evelyn Underhill, Teacher**, who by her prolific writing, lectures, retreats, and publications made the life and literary utterances of the mystics of every denomination or none accessible to a wide readership, was born in England in 1875 and educated at King’s College . . . . An honest and earnest inquirer, her religious life moved in stages. . . . Her most mature and lasting work is *Worship*, published in 1936. . . . [and more]”

And it offers a reading from her *Light of Christ*:

From the outside, the magnificent windows in a church look “dull, thick, grubby. But then we open the door and go inside—leave the outer world, enter the inner world—and the universal light floods through the windows, and bathes us in their colour and beauty and significance, and shows us things of which we had never dreamed . . . .”

“And in the same way we cannot realize God and all our Lord’s lovely meaning and His eternal Truth and Beauty from the outside. One constantly hears people commenting on Christianity from outside and missing the point every time. They are on the wrong side of the wall. How important it is for us to be familiar with the inner vision.

It is from within the place of prayer, recollection, worship and love, where the altar is, where the sacrifice is made, where we are all bound together in a life of communion and self-giving to God, that we fully and truly receive the revelation which is made through Christ. . . .”

This volume seems ongoingly helpful. As a *Book of Festivals and Commemorations*, it contains entries for the most important days in the church’s year plus other commemorations, in addition to its *Proposed Common Calendar of Saints*, making it a useful reference work. More personally, selections from its daily entries can be included in morning or evening prayers and other devotions. Even more personally, one can look up one’s own birthday (or perhaps, even more powerfully, one’s baptismal date) to find a potential saint to claim as one’s special spiritual companion.

And however it is used, “Such a common calendar can serve as a further means of binding Christians closer to one another in the communion of saints by enhancing their memory of the rich history of the church.” It “can expand our understanding of the size and extent of the church. For the church is larger than the individual congregation, larger than the denomination, larger even than the whole church on earth. It includes all those who have gone before us in faith and whom we recall.” And it can help us to remember who we are as Children of God.



Westminster Presbyterian Church  
1200 Marquette Avenue  
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2419

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“Dreams as Thin Places . . .”  
“Ecumenical convergences . . .”



## AFTERWORDS: “Ecumenical convergences . . .”

A Franciscan Sister, who was a Resident Scholar at the Ecumenical Institute in Collegetown, once said, “You Reformed folks are teaching us how to preach, and we Catholics are teaching you how to pray.” This seems likely to be so, perhaps especially at the Institute. And it seems even more widely so that the center of ecumenism is shifting from an earlier search for those lowest-common-denominator-elements upon which everyone could agree towards a recognition that there are riches available in our various denominations which—rather than separate us—show us the rich diversity of the ways we Christians have learned to worship God.

Sixteen years ago, the “Preface” in the Presbyterian’s *Book of Common Worship* declared quite unequivocally that “during the past thirty years the Christian churches throughout the world have seen a reformation in worship unequalled in any other century. While styles vary between traditions, the shape of the liturgy among the various Christian traditions is witnessing a remarkable convergence. . . . We also share a common liturgical calendar. [And] in celebrating the festivals and seasons, we find a certain unity as together we draw our life from the saving events of God in history.”

A concrete sign of this “remarkable convergence” may be the growing use of the *Revised Common Lectionary*, which is now embraced in whole or in part by many denominations. A homily or a sermon preached at Hennepin Avenue Methodist or St. Mark’s Episcopal or Westminster Presbyterian or the Basilica of St. Mary or Central Lutheran on any given Sunday might well begin with the reading of the same Biblical texts.

One more recent sign may be the *Proposed Common Calendar of Saints*, noticed in “Reading Opportunities,” which—in addition to Catholic and Orthodox lists—draws upon earlier calendars done by Episcopalian and Lutheran councils, and also on work done by Presbyterians and others. And this particular convergence certainly seems to have emerged from a growing appreciation for the guidance and encouragement available to us through the lives and witness of pilgrims—like Antony of Egypt or Julian of Norwich or Dag Hammarskjöld of Sweden—who have gone before us on the Way.

This convergence—this interest not in lowest-common-denominator elements of Christian practice but in our rich diversity—also seems to be nourished and sustained by the experiences of individual Christians who have intentionally or circumstantially opened themselves to worship with others. At least, if one were to go to any one of the scores of “Opportunities” noticed in *Thin Places*, one would almost certainly see gathered together—although not readily distinguishable as such—Methodists and Episcopalians and Lutherans and Catholics and more. . . .

Over all, it seems that what is happening is that a stolid meat-and-potatoes-person is discovering the rich diversity of ethnic cuisines. **“Thanks be for these ecumenical convergences . . . which expand, and enliven, and enrich us as we seek to be faithful members of the Body of Christ.”**