



Thin Places

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The Light within . . . *for what happens next . . .*

by the Rev. Sally Johnson

I recently returned from taking our youngest son to Seattle University for his freshman year, and it was a bittersweet experience in many ways. I am thrilled that he is embarking on the wonderful adventure of learning and growing in such a beautiful city. I am also filled with the loss of his sweet energy in our home and the wonderful presence of youth, coming and going. I am excited for the freedom of being “empty nesters,” as so many want to call us. And I am filled with the loss of the years of parenting now behind us. For both my son and me, it is a time of transition we could plan for. But it will only be in the living out of these days that we will come to see their true gifts.

Father Steve Sundborg, the President of the University and a gifted storyteller, welcomed us at the opening convocation. Addressing these fresh faced young people, he likened their journey to a hike he had recently taken in the Cascade Mountains. He told of climbing a sunlit incline only to come to a tunnel, which he guessed could have been nearly two miles long. As he entered he was aware of the light that existed behind him, the light from which he had come. And someplace far out in the distance he could see a tiny pinpoint of light, a light towards which he was traveling.

As he walked further he found himself enveloped by darkness and (being somewhat claustrophobic) felt himself beginning to panic. He turned back toward the entrance, with the thought of returning to the safety of the light. But-not wanting to give in to the panic-he stilled himself. And in the stillness he was able to remember the Light that was within him . . . the light of the Holy that travels with each of us, always.

Standing there in that darkened tunnel, Father Steve stood firmly planted in a metaphor for our living: We come from the Light. We return to the Light. And all the while, we carry the Light within us.

He told this story for the students, reminding them that they had come from the light of all that had shaped them thus far, their parents, their communities, their schools and teachers . . . that the journey they were traveling was an unknown, a light in the distance yet to be discovered . . . but that they each carried the Light within as they went forward along the way.

All good storytellers know their audiences, and Father Steve was no exception. He told this story not only for the students but for the parents who sat there as well. Especially for those of us sending their last child off to college, the life we have known is now a thing of the past. Like so many at the convocation, I have now returned home to a life that is unfa-

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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



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1200 Marquette Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2419
612.332.3421
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miliar, and yet to be discovered. I am in a time of great transition. . . .

One of my favorite poems is by Colman Barks and comes from *Prayers for a Thousand Years: Blessings and Expressions of Hope for a New Millennium*:

A child stood on his seat in a restaurant,
holding the railing of the chairback
as though to address a courtroom,
"Nobody knows what's going to happen next."
Then, his turning-slide back down to his food,
relieved and proud to say the truth,
as were we to hear it.

And isn't it true? None of us knows what is going to happen next. And yet we are all held someplace between the Light from whence we have come and the Light to which we are going. Along the path, our Blessing is to pay attention to the Light that lives within.

Being present to that Light can often be a challenge for me. Life's distractions can trick me into ignoring its Presence. When this happens all manner of chaos ensues. And yet its gentle nudging-often through prayer-pulls me back so I may continue faithfully walking, through dark tunnels, and up sunlit mountains.

With the dawning of each new day there is transition. It is the stuff of our living, and who would have it any other way? My son's transition from the light of home to the newness of the university is his to live. My transition from holding the nest in which he has grown to my 'what next?' remains a marvelous mystery. Now, for all of us facing the what next in our lives, perhaps we can join J. Philip Newell in praying:

Thanks be to you, O God,
for the night
and its light,
for stars that emerge out of evening skies
and the white moon's radiance.
Thanks be to you
for the earth's unfolding of colour
and the bright sheen of creatures from
ocean depths.
In the darkness of the world
and in the night of my own soul
let me be looking with longing for light
let me be looking in hope.

The Rev. Sally Howell Johnson is Minister of Worship and Spiritual Formation at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church in Minneapolis. She writes a daily blog which reflects her encounters with the Holy in the everyday. It can be read at www.HennepinChurch.org/Pause. She can be reached at Sally@haumc.org.

Thomas Merton's Christmas Letter, 1966

"Most of you, even with all that you have to suffer, are much better off than you realize. Yet even when things are exteriorly 'all right,' the heart can be full of so much pain. It becomes all the more difficult today because we are used to thinking that there are explanations for everything. But there is no explanation for most of what goes on in our own hearts, and we cannot account for it all.

No use resorting to mental tranquilizers that even religious explanations sometimes offer. Faith must be deeper than that, rooted in the unknown, and in the abyss of darkness that is the ground of our being. No use teasing the darkness to try to make answers grow out of it.

But if we can learn how to have a deep inner patience, things solve themselves (or God solves them, if you prefer). But do not expect to see how. . . . Just learn to wait, and do what you can, and help other people."

Thomas Merton, *The Road to Joy*

ONGOING OPPORTUNITIES

Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality

On the hilltop, on the road, at the crossways,
Wisdom takes her stand.

She has built herself a house, . . . prepared her wine,
and laid her table.

Proverbs 8:2, 9:2

At the crossways of Randolph and Fairview in St. Paul, in the Carondelet Center, on the campus of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet, Wisdom Ways Center for Spirituality has found its home and laid her table.

Here at Wisdom Ways people are invited to the crossways of Christian spirituality, womanist and feminist thought, ecumenical and inter-religious conversations, and social action for justice and peace. Established in 1994, Wisdom Ways is a spirituality ministry where seekers are welcomed to a sacred walk of life that explores the spiritual dimensions of contemporary life and vital issues of our time.

Our year-round programs seek to widen theological discourse, foster critical thought and reflection on life, and deepen spiritual practices. Programs include a monthly spiritual spa, seasonal rituals, an annual autumn soul conference, meditation offerings, presentations by spiritual leaders and theologians, and labyrinth walks: all providing opportunities to re-imagine and embody all that we can be as agents of transformation in church and society. Inclusive of peoples from diverse spiritual traditions and experiences, these programs encourage imagination, honor creation, and integrate the voice of the feminine.

A new initiative for Wisdom Ways focuses on children's spirituality, with programs offered for and about children, and for adults with children in their lives. Two upcoming programs for children are 'Winter Light' (on December 12th) and December 20th and 'Winter Solstice' on December 20th.

Please visit www.wisdomwayscenter.org for complete program offerings or call Rev. Barbara Lund, Director, for additional information, 651.696.2790.

Come to Wisdom Ways to learn with others in the ever-widening circle of conversations, explorations and practices that support spirituality within our contemporary culture.

St. Brigid's Day at Wisdom Ways:

"A Habit of the Wildest Bounty,"

St. Brigid had "a habit of the wildest bounty," a phrase that captures her extravagant penchant for generosity. From a young age this created, at times, a struggle with those around her. Learn more about this remarkable woman in company with Jan Richardson, artist, author, ordained minister in the United Methodist Church, and oblate of St. Brigid of Kildare Monastery:

Monday, February 1—6:00-9:00 p.m.

also:

Winter Solstice

Sunday, December 20—5:00-6:30 p.m.

and:

Contemplative Day of Prayer

Saturday, December 12—8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Carondelet Center, 1890 Randolph Avenue, St. Paul
For information or registration: 651.696.2788 or wisdomways@csjstpaul.org or www.wisdomwayscenter.org.

Leaders of the One Hundred and Ten Denominations

. . . that make up the National Council of Churches included a Taizé Morning Prayer as part of their annual General Assembly, held in Minneapolis in November. Subsequent inquiries about regularly held Taizé Prayers in the area made it clear that our "Ongoing Opportunities" information is out-dated and incomplete.

Do you know someone who might like to read *Thin Places?* (It's sent free to all who request it.)

Do you know of an up-coming "Opportunity" that might be of interest to others?

If 'yes' to either, please contact Kathy Fisher at: kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421

To help put this right, PLEASE take just a moment and let us know, thinplaces@msn.com of your **Taizé Prayer opportunity** or of others you have attended.

Just: *who holds it* and *when or where* is all that is needed. Thank you for helping.

For those who may not be familiar with the Taizé Community . . . here is an extract from the National Council's morning bulletin:

"The Taizé Community (www.taize.fr) was founded in 1940 by Brother Roger, a Swiss Protestant who moved to the small village of Taizé in central France to help Jews escape from Nazi Germany. This community in Taizé now numbers over 100 brothers, who come from Catholic and Protestant traditions.

Taizé's ministry is broadly ecumenical and focuses especially on young adults. Every year, over 100,000 Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox young people (and some older adults), from scores of countries, make a pilgrimage to Taizé for a week, to pray in community in the Church of Reconciliation three times each day, and to engage in Bible study, sharing, and communal work.

The community's outreach is global: not only by welcoming people to Taizé itself, but through gatherings, large and small, held in cities in Europe, Africa and Asia. The Taizé Community also sends brothers to live in small fraternities among the poor throughout the world.

Taizé is perhaps most widely known for its music, which engages people from across the globe through simple, repetitive chants, which are sung in many languages. These sung prayers, drawn from Scripture and set to simple melodies, are sometimes sung as canons. The repetition of these phrases contributes toward deepening the meditation message, instilling prayer and contributing toward a sense of community among those worshipping together."

"We shape clay into a pot,
but it is the emptiness inside
that holds whatever we want."

Lao-Tzu, the founding figure of Taoism

"Something inside me
has reached to the place
where the world is breathing."

Kabir, the great 15th century mystic poet from India

Robert Bly, *The Kabir Book: Forty-Four of the Ecstatic Poems*

A Taizé Prayer in Minneapolis recently discovered

. . . seeks to embody the true ecumenical reality of the Taizé Community by gathering alternately in a Catholic and a Methodist Church. And there is more. In the words of one of its leaders,

“since this prayer is meant to be ecumenical, we wish to do it in that spirit! So, beyond simply inviting ALL from any other churches to come and take part, we also are open to collaborating with any other churches in the area who may be interested in some supportive roles—planning together, including others as music ministers or readers, and even considering other churches as one of the rotating sites in this collaboration”:

Wednesday: Dec. 9, March 3, May 19—7:00-8:00 p.m.

St. Francis Cabrini Catholic Church
1500 Franklin Avenue SE, Minneapolis

Wednesday: Jan. 20, April 21—6:30-7:30 p.m.

Prospect Park United Methodist Church
22 Orlin Avenue SE, Minneapolis

For information: 612.529.8628 or
Chris@cabrinimn.org.

In addition to their long-established **First Friday Taizé Prayer** . . . St. Stephen's offers a Contemplative Worship service each week. The Holy Eucharist is celebrated in the tranquility of the glass-fronted Chapel, overlooking Minnehaha Creek. Traditional hymns, organ music, and a brief homily are features of this weekly intimate gathering of God's faithful people. Guests are always welcome and expected:

Every Sunday, 7:30-8:15 a.m.

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
4439 West 50th Street, Edina

For information: 952.920.0595 or
lreynolds@ststephens.com or www.ststephens.com.

Come Away My Beloved and Rest Awhile

After a busy week Jesus invited his disciples to come away and rest awhile. This informal contemplative gathering is a one-hour retreat from busyness to focus on God in quiet and reflection, simple song in the style of Taizé and prayer. An opportunity to “sit” and “be” and let the Spirit move among us:

Every second Monday: Nov. 30, Dec. 14, Jan. 11—6:45-8:00 p.m.

Christ the King Lutheran Church
1900 NW 7th Street, New Brighton

For information: 651.633.7547 or 612.781.2788 or
joannnesser@msn.com.

Taizé Prayer Podcast

You can now listen to a Taizé service from Taizé on your computer or mobile device. Go to the Taizé website at: www.taize.fr/en_article681.html.

Have you ever thought about going to Taizé?

If you have, here is a way to begin exploring the possibility: Why come to Taizé?

www.taize.fr/en_article5336.html

Who can come and when?

www.taize.fr/en_article5335.html

What are the meetings about?

www.taize.fr/en_article5337.html

Where will we stay? What should we bring with us?

www.taize.fr/en_article5338.html

What's a good way to prepare?

www.taize.fr/en_article5339.html

What about the costs?

www.taize.fr/en_article5344.html

How long can we stay?

www.taize.fr/en_article5345.html

Further information: Bringing a group of young people to Taizé

www.taize.fr/en_article5349.html

Further information: adults aged 30 and over

www.taize.fr/en_article5347.html

Further information: families

www.taize.fr/en_article5348.html

Registration

www.taize.fr/en_article78.html

Friends of Silence

Nam Merrill (whose *Psalms for Praying* has been treasured by many readers and whose latest book is *Journey into Love: from Fear to Freedom*) has also been writing—for over 22 years—a monthly newsletter, *Friends of Silence*, which encourages readers to reverence Silence, prayer and contemplation by sharing quoted extracts from her wide-ranging reading. Each issue's theme explores the question, **“Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?”**

To receive a sample issue or to be added to the mailing list:

Friends of Silence

129 Skunk Hollow Road, Jericho, VT 05465

**“Sometimes our Light goes out
but is blown into flame
by another human being.
Each of us owes deepest thanks
to those
who have rekindled this Light.”**

Albert Schweitzer (on companionship)

Waiting in Joyful Hope

Advent is a time of waiting. And as we wait, amidst the busyness of the season, it often helps to stop, to take an hour, to take some intentional time away.

All are welcome at this Advent Evening Prayer. Seasonal Readings, Music with Local Musicians and Quiet, in a peaceful setting:

**Mondays of Advent: Nov. 30, Dec. 7, 14, 21—
7:00-8:00 p.m.**

Sabbath House, 3228 Portland Ave. So., Minneapolis
For information: 612.822.2623—or just come!

Living Contemplative Prayer

Led by a former Benedictine monk, these evenings together will offer an opportunity to experience centering prayer and—in addition—to explore how we who are not monastics can live full, contemplative lives:

**Monday Evenings, Nov. 30, Dec. 7, 14, 21—
6:45-8:00 p.m.**

Loyola Spirituality Center
389 North Oxford Street, St. Paul
For information or registration: davidroth64@yahoo.com
or 651.641.0008 or www.loyolaspirtualitycenter.org

Reflections during Advent

Please join us for a time of quiet prayer, scripture reading, and reflection in a welcoming setting, reception afterwards:

Thursday, December 3—7:00-8:30 p.m.

St. Stanislaus Catholic Church,
398 Superior Street, St. Paul
For information and directions: 651.699.7247.

An Advent Mary Retreat

Tuesday, December 8-9:30 a.m.—3:30 p.m.

Spend a quiet day with Mary of Nazareth, an ordinary Jewish woman whose life was indistinguishable from many others. She cooked, sewed and cleaned. She prayed, conversed and served the needs of her family. Yet what we see in the biblical stories of Jesus' birth shows that Mary's life was extraordinary:

Tuesday, December 8—9:30 a.m.—3:30 p.m.

also:

Spa Day at the Monastery

Saturday, January 20—9:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.

Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict's Monastery, St. Joseph
For information or registration: 320.36.7116
or dmanuel@csbsju.edu or www.sbm.osb.org.

ARC Solstice Retreat: Coming home to ourselves and the world around us

In each of us are aspects of self we embrace and those we'd rather ignore. As we approach the winter solstice, the opportunity to explore both light and dark parts of ourselves beckons. Join with members of the ARC resident community for fellowship and their healthy homemade meals. And even more, come together to celebrate and embrace the wholeness of who we are . . . through reflection, prayer and ritual:

Friday Evening to Sunday Afternoon, December 11-13
also:

New Year's Eve Retreat:**Nurturing hope in troubled times**

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

Thursday Afternoon, December 31, to

Friday at Noon, January 1

ARC Ecumenical Retreat Community
1680 373rd Avenue NE, Stanchfield, MN
For information or registration: 763.689.3540
or office@arcretreat.org or www.arcretreat.org.

In addition to **Taizé Candlelight Prayer** (every 2nd Tues. at 7:00 p.m.) St. Matthews is offering a retreat,

Advent: Beginning and Ending

When Mary said, "yes" to a new chapter of her story, she had no idea what she was getting herself in for: neither do we. And as we over a lifetime prepare for an end, what elements of our stories must we resolve? what loose ends tie together?

The Indwelling Presence

"Everything exposed to the Light itself becomes light," says Ephesians 5:14. In prayer, we merely keep returning the divine gaze; and we become its reflection, almost in spite of ourselves (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The word 'prayer' has too often been trivialized by making it into a way of getting what you want. But 'prayer' is an umbrella word for any interior journey or practice that allows you to experience faith, hope, and love within yourself.

It is not a technique for getting things, a pious exercise that somehow makes God happy, or a requirement for entry into heaven. It is much more like practicing heaven now. . . ."

Richard Rohr

The Naked Now, Learning to See as the Mystics See

During this morning together, we will reflect on our new beginnings as well as how we might live more intentionally toward our end:

Saturday, December 12—9:00 a.m. to Noon

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church,

136 Carter Avenue, St. Paul

For information or registration: 651.645.3058 or rector@stmatthewsmn.org.

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 15—7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

also:

Spirit-Matter Experiential Prayer

This workshop is for anyone wanting to honor their humanness and wholeness more. Integration of spirit/mind/body will be encouraged through explanation and practice of deep breathing and progressive relaxation (connecting body to spirit), mindfulness (connecting mind to spirit), and gratitude (connecting spirit to spirit). Prayer opportunities using our bodies will include aromas, plants, music, poetry, and food:

Saturday, February 6—9:00 a.m. to noon

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation

1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes

For information: 651-653-8207 or www.christoscenter.org.

“Prayer is not the same thing as Prayers”

... Prayers are important. Saying Psalms in the morning is a good way to head into the day more prayerfully. So is going to church, where I can add my voice to those of a whole congregation, with their ancient, beautiful cadences.

Still, prayer is more than saying set prayers at set times. Prayer is waking up to the presence of God no matter where I am or what I am doing. When I am fully alert to whatever or whoever is right in front of me, when I am electrically aware of the tremendous gift of being alive, when I am able to give myself wholly to the moment I am in—I am in prayer.

Prayer is happening, and it is not necessarily something that I am doing.

God is happening, and I am lucky to know that I am in The Midst.”

Barbara Brown Taylor,
An Altar in the World

Food for the Hungry Soul:

Spiritual Formation and the Christian Life

This is a year-long series exploring ways to draw closer to the Divine, ways to discover the Presence of God within us, ways to attend faithfully to the inward journey.

This portion of the series draws particularly upon the richness of human experience coming down to us through the various religious traditions:

- **Catholic Spirituality: How do Catholics Pray?** with Fr. Michael O'Connell, December 16.
- **Doing It: Living as a Jew** with Rabbi Joseph Edelheit, January 6.
- **Spirituality in Islam** with Dr. Hamdy El-Sawaf, January 13.
- **Spirituality and the Emergent Church** with Dr. Tony Jones, January 20.
- **Buddhist Spirituality: Cultivation of Kindness and Compassion** with Lisa Ebert, January 27.
- **Growing in Holiness: the role of Spiritual Disciplines in the Christian Faith** with Paul Karos, February 3.

All are on **Wednesday Evenings, 6:30-8:00 p.m.**

also:

A 'Sound' Spirituality with Dr. Dirk Lange and Dr. Melanie Ohnstad

At the heart of Christian spiritual practices we find the Psalms—literally 'praise songs' to God. Music has carried the prayers of generations and has been the driving force of many reforms in the life of the Christian Community.

This workshop explores the multi-dimensions of music and prayer through the example of psalms, the Reformation, the Community of Taizé, and much more. No musical expertise is needed to enjoy and participate. You are invited to bring a favorite CD or piece of music to share:

Saturday, February 6—8:30 a.m. to Noon

Westminster Presbyterian Church, in the Meisel Room

1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

For full information: 612.332.3421 or

KMichael@wpc-mpls.org or

www.ewestminster.org/adult_education.

Crossing the Threshold

This annual New Year's retreat provides a one-of-a-kind opportunity for you to celebrate the transition from one year to the next in the peace of a Benedictine monastery. With a combination of presentation, conversation, reflection and prayer, we will create a framework for welcoming the year 2010:

Thursday at 4:00 p.m., to Friday at 10:00 a.m.—December 31 to January 1

also:

Journey with Scripture through Advent

Prepare for Advent by entering more deeply-through Lectio Divina and guided conversation-into Scriptural texts that will open your heart to the miracle and true meaning of the Incarnation:

Four Tuesdays, 9:30-11:00 a.m. starting December 1
and:

**Benedictine Spirituality as Ecumenical Resource
Humility, Hospitality, Conversation**

Dec. 3, 9:00 a.m. to noon

Nurturing the Common Good

Jan. 14, 9:00 a.m. to noon

Led by a Presbyterian pastor who is also an author, Professor of Christian Education and Oblate at St. John's Abbey, these workshops will help people of all denominations find inspiration and guidance for daily living in the values of St. Benedict.

plus:

**The People Who Walk in Darkness Have Seen
a Great Light**

Saturday, Dec. 19—9:00 a.m. to noon

Finding Self for the Sake of Others

Thursday, Jan. 21—7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

St. Paul's Monastery, 2675 Benet Road, St. Paul
For information or registration: 651.777.7251

benedictinecenter@stpaulsmonastery.org

**"Following the Mystics through the Narrow Gates"
with James Finley, Richard Rohr,
and Cynthia Bourgeault**

Jesus said, "Narrow is the gate that leads to life and few there are who enter it." In this conference we will follow the mystics through this narrow gate, through the mysterious process in which we realize God is the very reality of ourselves, of others, and of all things.

Seeing God in all things and all things in God, we experience the peace that surpasses understanding:

Friday, Jan. 22, at 1:30 p.m. to Sunday, Jan. 24

At noon on **Thurs., Jan. 21—3:00-6:00 p.m.: an**

**Optional workshop, "Silence and Breath: An
Introduction to Sacred Chant," with Cynthia
Bourgeault**

Sponsored by the Center for Action and Contemplation

Hotel Albuquerque at Old Town, Albuquerque, NM

For information or registration:

www.cacradicalgrace.org/conferences/YB10

or 505 242.9588 or info@cacradicalgrace.org.

**Work Internships at the Center for Action and
Contemplation**

This is a special opportunity to:

- Engage in a spiritual formation program rooted in the

integration of action and contemplation

- Work to support the mission of the CAC
- Live in a communal environment with other work interns

05/31/10 - 08/13/10-application deadline: January 4

08/30/10 - 05/13/11-deadline: March 1, 2010

08/30/10 - 80/12/11-deadline: march 1, 2010

For additional information: 505.242.9588, ext. 128 or
formation@cacradicalgrace.org or
www.cacradicalgrace.org.

LOOKING AHEAD:

J. Philip Newell Returns to the Twin Cities

Philip is returning to Minnesota in February for "A New Harmony: The Spirit, the Earth, and the Human Soul," a series of presentations in which he continues to explore the insights Celtic Christianity offers us for deepening our experience of the presence of God all around us. Titles of individual presentations still to come, but you are invited to save the dates:

**Friday Evening through Sunday Morning
February 26-28**

Colonial Church, 6200 Colonial Way, Edina

For information: watch www.colonialchurch.org or call 952.925.2711.

"All we have . . ."

"The poems and blessings of the Celtic people can renew in us a vision which [can help us find God's presence in the every-day-ness of our lives]. Much in their lives that was humdrum, back-breaking, unrewarding may seem to us romantic, colored by our nostalgia for their simpler and less complex world. Yet it was their attitude of accepting, enjoying, rejoicing over, transforming whatever lay to hand that was at the heart of their religious experience. The mundane was the edge of glory. . . ."

Esther de Waal,

God Under My Roof; Celtic Songs and Blessings

**"All we have between us is a loaf;
all we have between us is a table:
as we break the bread together
we will recognize our brother,
and we'll stay with one another,
breaking bread,
for a time."**

Iona Abbey Worship Book



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“the Light within . . .”
“ . . . not the absence of sound . . .”



AFTERWORDS: “. . .not the absence of sound . . .”

The recent General Assembly of the National Council of Churches was a bustling place. Two hundred and thirty senior officials from most of the one hundred and ten different denominations which make up the National Council had come together in Minneapolis for back to back committee meetings and workshops (dealing with a wide range of proposals and initiatives), enhanced and lubricated by countless personal greetings and conversations among friends, who had come together from across the land.

The hallways and meeting places were noisy, but it seemed that they were noisy with the enthusiasm of dedicated and efficient people, representing many traditions, yet seeking to work together as parts of the larger Body of Christ. Like the Taizé Community in France, the National Council is intentionally ecumenical. It was perhaps this welcoming and empowering sense of being “many members, yet one body” that was most strongly felt.

On the second full day of the Assembly, the Morning Prayer was “led in the Taizé tradition.” Full as their schedules were, nearly everyone had already gathered before the Prayer began, sitting quietly in a semi-circle, with Br. Eric’s Cross on the altar surrounded by green growing plants and lighted white candles. And as the worship began, it felt as though those gathered together were not just there but were fully present.

Perhaps for that reason the sung prayers and, particularly, the times of silence were allowed to linger. . . . And why did the silence satisfy? . . . Words (about another intentional community, recently read in *Friends of Silence*) came to mind:

“Sometimes there would be a rush of noisy visitors and the Silence of the monastery would be shattered. This would upset the monks; but not the master, who seemed just as content with the noise as with the Silence. To those protesting he said one day,

**‘Silence is not the absence of sound,
but the absence of self.’”**