

February/March 2011
Year Twelve, Issue Three
Number 65

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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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Conversion . . .

by the Rev. Ward Bauman

If there has been a theme to my life, it would be conversion. It isn't that I like the word. In fact it continues to hold difficult connotations for me. But over time this seminal Christian experience has come to evoke within me a sense of awe, and of deep thankfulness.

Being raised a Christian fundamentalist I understood conversion most often to mean experiencing the shame of sinfulness, marked by a commitment to change behavior. Looking back, I realize that all my heroic efforts at conversion were noble but mostly futile. And this was probably because, at least for me, change driven by shame doesn't seem to last very long. Now, while an element of repentance remains, conversion—taking a truly significant step forward on my spiritual journey—is what happens naturally when I open myself to God's love so that the Beloved is able to work within me.

What I have come to see as my first real conversion experience came as a result of an untimely illness. As a young adult with a small family, I had gone to live in Iran. A response, I believed, to a calling from God. And since we were doing God's will, I also believed that God would take care of us. I understood myself to be among God's "saved" ones, while the Muslims amongst whom we were living were "lost." The proof and blessing of this was God's care for us, his children.

What ensued is very hard to describe. We were extremely vulnerable in this foreign land, working hand-to-mouth for a living, with no fall back plan, no return ticket home, nor any health insurance. We simply trusted God to take care of us. Then, during our second year there, I unexpectedly contracted hepatitis. I was forced to enter the hospital but had no way to pay for it. I had to quit working for the foreseeable future and was quarantined, away from my family. I spent a month in solitude—a very dark solitude. And for the first time in my life, I came to believe that God was not there for me. Alarmed, I began to lose faith.

I did survive this crisis of faith as did my family, and we remained in Iran for another three years. After a year of spiritual darkness, I began to find my way back to a new relationship with God. Rather than seeing God as a divine stern Parent and Judge, I began to experience God as a Divine Lover. And how I saw myself and others also began to change. For the first time in my life I became open to receiving a new understanding of God's love that included others I had excluded, especially the many generous Muslims among whom we lived.

And I felt more able to live with the paradoxes of faith. It wasn't that I received all the answers. I was (and am) still full of doubts and questions. But I have come to see, though I hadn't recognized or felt it so, that my Beloved had been with me through the dark year

"Conversion" . . . continues on page 2

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

of my discontent. And sometimes I get a glimpse that it is in these very moments when the Beloved One is most near. I now connect when T. S. Eliot writes in his poem “East Coker,”

*I said to my soul be still,
and let the darkness come upon you,
which shall be the darkness of God.*

I also came to feel that my “beliefs” about God were getting in the way of my new knowledge of this Divine Lover. And this seemed to bring a humility that made me more open and receptive in a radical way. Having “lost my faith,” I began a new living relationship with my Beloved One. Certainly, like Paul, I too often found myself doing what I did not want to do. Yet it felt like something really had changed.

Discovery of the mystical teachings of Meister Eckhart helped me on my way. He taught that if one is to come to know the Beloved One, then one has to let go of beliefs about God. This was one of the hardest things for me to do. But a life given to contemplative prayer prepared me. Through a growing prayer practice I came to trust the heart more and the mental cognition less. In time I could more often let go of whatever I thought I believed about God in order to, as Meister Eckhart says, “let God be God in me.”

Conversion was Jesus’ primary message. When he went throughout Judea teaching, “Repent, for the Kingdom of God is near to you” (Matt. 4:17), He was actually saying, “You must have a change in consciousness, or a change in your perception, if you are to realize that the Beloved One is with you.” Coming to understand this helps me to see that conversion or transformation is normative for the Christian life. And understanding this has made me more readily prepared for the continual changes that the spiritual life brings.

Life has given me, and will continue to give me, experiences that offer opportunities for conversion. I have come to see the Divine Lover in the midst of it all, working in and through me, and each and every person, to bring about a new creation.

*From the mud
emerges, the Lotus.
From the darkness
dawns, the Light.
From the silent realms
is heard, new Music.*

For more of Ward Bauman’s background and experience, please see “Reading Opportunities” on Page 7.

The Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict's Monastery

For those interested in retreats, spiritual direction, centering prayer, Benedictine spirituality and experiencing the life of a Benedictine monastery, the Spirituality Center at Saint Benedict’s Monastery in St. Joseph, Minnesota, is a wonderful place to visit.

Just six miles from St. Cloud and just over an hour from the Twin Cities, the Spirituality Center is easily accessible but a world away from the rush of urban life. The wooded grounds include hiking and cross country ski trails, a labyrinth, a gazebo and more.

And the rich cultural spaces of the monastery, including the Romanesque Sacred Heart Chapel built in 1914, a hundred-year-old Marian grotto and historic cemetery, and the Haehn Museum are also available for exploration and contemplation. We share a lovely campus with the College of Saint Benedict.

In addition to guest rooms in the Spirituality Center, for those wanting more solitude, the **Subiaco Hermitage** is available. It is fully equipped with a kitchenette, bathroom with shower, sitting area and single bed. The Spirituality Center itself also has a kitchen, and a cozy sitting room with a fireplace, and a meditation room.

People from many denominations come each year, both for private retreats and to take part in one of the Center’s programs. Guided retreats are offered for Lent and Advent and for practitioners of centering prayer, with other topics throughout the year. It is also possible to arrange a group retreat with your own speakers, or with the Spirituality Center staff. And for many a visit with a spiritual director is an important part of their time here.

During your stay you can pray the Liturgy of the Hours with the Sisters and attend Mass, where you’ll hear the monastery schola and our gifted musicians. All are welcomed.

For upcoming opportunities or for more information: visit the Spirituality Center page at www.sbm.osb.org, or contact us at dmanuel@csbsju.edu or call 320.363.7116.

**“The deepest level of communication
is not communication but communion.**

**It is wordless.
Beyond words . . . beyond speech
. . . beyond concept.”**

Thomas Merton

Breathing In the Compassion of God**Breathing Out Compassion to a Wounded World**

“The path of compassion is marked by signs of faith and forgiveness, hope and hospitality, tenderness and trust”
(from *The Conspiracy of Compassion* by Joseph Nassal).

This retreat includes presentations based on Nassal’s book along with time for quiet, for group sharing and optional participation in the monastic liturgies:

**Friday March 18 at 7:30 p.m. (check-in at 6:30 p.m.)
to Sunday, March 20, at 1:00 p.m.**

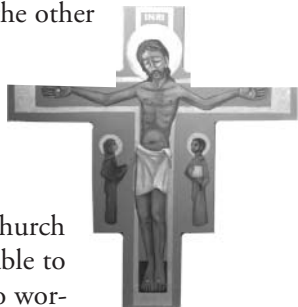
Saint Benedict’s Monastery, St. Joseph, MN

For information or registration: 320.363.7116 or
www.smb.osb.org/programs or dmanuel@csbsju.edu.

A Treasure in our Midst: our Taizé Cross

It’s one of only two. Br. Eric, the Taizé Community’s best-known artist, created two tall wooden crosses. One to be used every Friday at Evening Prayers in the Church of Reconciliation in Taizé, and the other as a back up.

But the back-up was never needed, and in 2001 was sold to an ecumenical group in the Twin Cities.



This one is housed at the Church Center on Franklin and is available to all who ask to use it, traveling to worship services at St. Paul’s Monastery, Calvary Lutheran in Bemidji, Minnehaha Methodist on Mendota

Heights, Westminster Presbyterian in Minneapolis and many other churches and spirituality centers throughout the region. In its travels, the Cross reflects and embodies the **intentional ecumenism of the Taizé Community** itself.

Recently a new case for the Cross was hand-crafted, protecting it and making it much easier to transport and move. Consider bringing it to your congregation. It and the associations which surround it make our Taizé Cross a special resource available to us all.

For information or to reserve it: 612.870.3610 or
d.wickner@mpls-synod.org.

**Do you know of anyone who might like to receive
*Thin Places?*** (It’s sent free to all who request it.)

**Or do you know of an up-coming Opportunity
that might be of interest to others?**

If ‘yes’ to either, please contact Kathy Fisher at:

kfisher@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

Contemplative Prayer Service

Our monthly contemplative prayer service is patterned after Holden Village’s “Prayer around the Cross,” offering A time together with God, to listen, reflect and pray,

Singing simple heartfelt songs,
keeping silence,
lighting candles,
and praying around the cross:

Second Sundays, 7:30-8:30 p.m.

February 13, “Healer of Our Every Ill”

March 13, “A Heart of Flesh”

Glendale United Methodist Church

13550 Glendale Road, Savage

For information: glendalechurch@msn.com or
952-894-5394 or www.glendalechurchumc.org.

Taizé Evening Prayer

All are welcome for this time of sung prayers from Taizé, music and silence:

Second Thursdays (but 3rd in March), 7:00-8:00 p.m.

St. Hubert Church, 8201 Main Street, Chanhassen

For information: 952.934.9106 or www.sthubert.org.
also:

**Lent Retreat in Daily Living: Following in the
Footsteps of Jesus**

This retreat offers an opportunity to experience the richness of Lent and Holy Week. It will focus on personal prayer and our experience of God in daily life. Through our prayer we will seek to enter experientially into the mind and heart of Jesus.

The retreat is designed for those beginning to pray in a personal way as well as for those who have been praying for years:

Practicing the Presence of God

“To reverence the real, to ‘practice the presence of God,’ as Brother Lawrence (c. 1614-1691) called it, requires vigilance and desire and a willingness to begin again and again.

And undertaking this practice—quietly bearing the mystery of God’s suffering and joy inside of ourselves—will not feel very spiritual. It will feel like we are on the edge rather than dealing with the essence.

But the edges of our lives—fully experienced, suffered, and enjoyed—lead us back to the center and substance of everything, where ‘there is only Christ, when he is everything, and he is in everything’ (*Col. 3:11*).

adapted from *Everything Belongs*, by Richard Rohr

Seven Mondays, March 7-April 18, 7:00-8:30 p.m.

For full details or to register: sjsabile@stthomas.edu or lynn.arnal@sthbert.org.

Contemplative Prayer

A prayer of silence, an experience of God's presence as the ground in which our being is rooted, the Source from whom our life emerges at every moment.

This service is a wonderful way to learn about and experience prayer:

Every Thursday, 8:00-8:30 a.m.

St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral, All Saints Chapel
519 Oak Grove Street, Minneapolis

For information on this and other opportunities:
612.870.7800 or www.ourcathedral.org.

Taizé Evening Prayer & Noon Worship during Lent

All are invited to gather around the peacefulness of a candle-lit table in the Great Hall for Taizé Evening Prayer, receiving the Ashes as Lent begins on **March 9th** and continuing each Wednesday evening through **April 20th**. Before each service, beginning at 5:30 p.m., a nice supper (at modest cost) and fellowship are to be found in the Refectory.

For those who live or work in downtown Minneapolis, there is also a Wednesday noon worship service in the Chapel—thirty minutes of music and quiet reflection. Worship will be followed by a modest lunch and fellowship in the Meisel Room:

Lenten Wednesdays, 12:00-12:30 and 6:30-7:00 p.m.

Westminster Presbyterian Church

1200 Marquette Avenue, Minneapolis

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

A Choice I Make

"The quality of life is in our own hands. Angela Foligno wrote, 'We should be peaceful in our words and deeds and in our way of life.'

This was ancient wisdom, tried and true. But reading it again, I understood it in a new way. In my journal I wrote,

'It's so true. Peace is a choice. If I didn't worry, didn't fear, didn't react negatively to things, I wouldn't be disturbed by them.'

Joan Chittister, in *Called to Question*

CAC: Integrating a Contemplative Lifestyle and Compassionate Action

Many might think (perhaps correctly) that Richard Rohr's is the clearest and soundest voice now being heard.

Here are two easy ways to listen to a pilgrim on a journey of contemplation and action:

- receive Fr. Richard's brief daily meditation via email, or
- register for his 2011 Webcast series (topics include "Falling Upward: Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life," "Wondrous Encounters," "A Dialogue on the Sacred Feminine and Masculine" and more.

To sign up for either, go to: www.cacradicalgrace.org.

A New Home for Friends of Silence

Friends of the late Nan Merrill are carrying forward the monthly newsletter she produced for twenty-two years in which she shared brief quotations (from many sources) as she explored the question, "Is there enough Silence for the Word to be heard?"

The new home base for *Friends of Silence* is the Rolling Ridge Study Retreat Center near Harper's Ferry, WV. To request a sample copy or to subscribe: 202.531.7572 or bsabath@rollingridge.net.

Minnesota Institute of Contemplation and Healing

MICAH is an ecumenical ministry to encourage the practice and study of spiritual formation and leadership, of healing, and of the arts.

We seek to create places where we can live out a holistic vision of being in communion with God, with others, and with the earth. We make prayer a priority, seek to notice God's movement, and journey to where God leads us.

Located on over 200 acres of quiet woods, rolling prairie, and refreshing riverbanks here in the Red River Valley, our Retreat Center offers a place to seek God without noise, rush or stress. We offer retreats, workshops, and cooperative programs through our Integrative Medicine Center. Check www.micahprays.org for details.

On its website, MICAH also offers online opportunities for physical, mental, and spiritual healing for those not close to Crookston, MN. Listen to pod-casts on spirituality and everyday life. Look at **Holy Doodles, Cartoons to Contemplate** and let your mind be stretched. Sign up for the year-long **Health and Spirituality** program and start becoming the person you were created to be. Or consider taking an on-line class, such as "**Leading a Life with God: the Practice of Spiritual Leadership**":

For information or registration: 218.281.4853 or www.micahprays.org or trey.crxpres@midconetwork.com.

Winter Light: Contemplative Prayer & Meditative Movement

This series is for anyone who wants to deepen their prayer life, release stress, and receive healing.

We will practice centering prayer combined with gentle meditative movements derived from yoga and Qigong. Bringing the body into our prayer is key to going deeper. Through meditative movement and silent prayer we learn to open the body, mind and heart more and more to the Divine Light, learning to let go of all that our bodies and minds are holding, opening ourselves to God who is within and all around us:

Four Mondays: Jan. 31 to Feb. 21, 6:45-8:00 p.m.

(a second series will begin in March)

Loyola Spirituality Center, 389 N. Oxford Street, St. Paul

For information or registration: loyola2@comcast.net
351.641.0008 or www.loyolaspiritualitycenter.org.

Becoming Love Day by Day

This retreat is a process of entering into a more intimate relationship with oneself and with Jesus, the Christ. We will use various New Testament readings, prayer experiences and meditations.

Participants are asked to commit to deep listening and to being open to personal transformation:

Four Saturdays: Feb. 5, 12, 19 & 26, 1:00-3:00 p.m.

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

For information or registration: 651.6396.2798
www.sacredgroundspirit.org.

Journey Inward, Journey Outward

Can personal faith and public response co-exist? How do we live within the tension of prayer and protest, of altar and street? How can we create greater balance in our faith journey?

Led by **Ruth Halvorson**, the Founder and first Director of ARC, this will be a time to reflect, to listen, and to share:

Friday, Feb. 11, at 7:00 p.m.-Sunday, Feb. 13 at 2:00

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

Spiritual R&R

Come and spend a quiet, relaxing and reflective day at the Spirituality Center, in a peaceful setting, reflecting on God's presence in your life. This no-cost day is a gift of the Sisters of Saint Benedict's Monastery. Come anytime and stay as long as you wish.

Optional opportunities include: Refreshments at 10:00 a.m., a presentation at 10:30 on Centering Prayer, and a closing gathering at 3:00 p.m.

Spend time in personal prayer, walking the labyrinth, reading in our library, relaxing in our beautiful lounge or just being. A visit with a spiritual companion as well as a neck and shoulder massage will be available:

Monday, Feb. 14; Friday, April 8; and Friday,

June 24, 9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m.

Spirituality Center, Saint Benedict's Monastery
104 Chapel Lane, St. Joseph, MN

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

Surrender

What is surrender, and why is it seen as so central to the process of discernment?

What does surrender look like, feel like, and sound like? What are we surrendering to? How do we know we are truly surrendered? What spiritual practices make us available to be surrendered?

Tom Allen, former head of City House, now at Loyola Spirituality Center, will lead us. Tom is himself in the process of surrendering to his new role as his wife's caregiver. Julie was recently diagnosed with young-onset Alzheimer's.

Come join us as we learn together, through our own experiences and stories:

Tuesday, February 15, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Christos Center for Spiritual Formation
1212 Holly Drive, Lino Lakes

For information or registration: www.christoscenter.org
or 651.653.8207 or janetchristoscenter@msn.com.

Barefoot Zone: Walking the Spiritual Path

The season of Lent calls us to be aware and awake to walking with the Divine in our everyday experiences of

“How do I know . . .

that what Christian proclamation talks about is the truth?

Here (in *John 8:31*) the Bible gives a strange answer. Not through open research, not through disinterested thinking and looking for truth. But only through a free, living effort to base one's life completely on the word of Christ, to live totally with him, to emulate him, to listen to him, to obey him. . . . Only in life does one know the truth, and the truth will make you free!”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

joy and sorrow, despair and hope, life, death and rebirth.

For the past four years Sally Johnson, the minister of Worship and Spiritual Formation at Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church in Minneapolis, has published a blog, *Pause*, that invites people to see the sacred in the everyday. Her new book, *Barefoot Zone*, draws from the richness of *Pause*.

Using music, guided writing exercises and excerpts from the book, we shall be invited to 'take off our shoes' and explore the holy ground of the Lenten journey:

Thursday, March 10, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

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

Twenty-four Hour Lenten Retreat Experience of Centering Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

The Lenten season offers an opportunity to nurture our inner life with God in a deeper way. Centering Prayer and *lectio divina*, among the oldest forms of prayer, invite us to become still before the Indwelling Presence of God in a stance of openness and surrender.

These 24 hours will include presentations and opportunities to experience Centering Prayer and *lectio divina*. We'll conclude with the celebration of Eucharist. All are welcome:

**Tuesday, March 15, at 2:00 p.m.-Wednesday,
March 16, at 2:00 p.m.**

Christ the King Retreat Center, Buffalo, MN

Candlemas Day, the "Thin Time" between Winter Solstice and Spring Equinox

"Today, Candlemas, is one of those ancient celebrations that morphed into a Christian feast of blessing and lighting candles. Both were pointing to the mythic 'shadow' times of life, threshold spaces, where God and mystery could be grasped in the interplay and interface between darkness and light. (November 1-2 was the other 'thin time,' which became All Saints and All Souls days.)

Let's use this 'thin time' to rediscover and accept our deepest nature. With those early Celtic Christians, we might ask ourselves,

**'How can I go deeper
with the simple daily tasks of this day?'**

based on Richard Rohr's Feb. 2, 2010,
Daily Meditation

For information or registration: 763.682.1394 or
www.kingshouse.com or JPilarski@kingshouse.com.

An Early Spring: The Poems of Clem and Elizabeth Nagel

Poets treasure the seasons, finding in each lessons about life, the mysteries of creation, and the promise and challenges of the future.

Accomplished poets and teachers of poetry, Elizabeth and Clem Nagel (he's also a long-time member of Wisdom Ways' Men's Spirituality group) will read and reflect on their poems as we welcome the return of Spring:

Tuesday, March 22, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

The Benedictine Center, St. Paul's Monastery
2675 Benet Road, St. Paul

For information or registration: 651.777.7251 or
www.stpaulsmonastery.org.

A Holy Week Retreat: A Journey into Easter

Part 1 will focus on the themes of "**Wind, Fire, Water and Earth.**" In preparation for Jesus' Passion and Resurrection, we will join in a communal time of prayer, reflection and retreat, beginning on Palm Sunday with dinner and worship. Each morning we will explore themes in Scripture and the teaching of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. Afternoons are free for reflection, rest, prayer or recreation.

Part 2, "In the Footsteps of Jesus" will focus on the themes of bread, pilgrimage, silence, and Easter. The pilgrimage portion of the week begins on Wednesday evening with a celebratory meal. New participants join those who have been on retreat throughout the week.

- on Thursday, we reflect on Jesus and the Abundant Life (Bread), join the Hermanos de Jesus (the Penitentes) in Abiquiu in the Stations of the Cross, and celebrate the Maundy Thursday liturgy with foot washing and Eucharist.
- on Good Friday, we join in the Pilgrimage to Chimayó. The day ends with prayer and anointing into the Great Silence of Holy Saturday, a day spent deep within, in contemplation with Jesus.
- We join the monks of Christ in the Desert Monastery very early on Sunday morning for the Great Vigil of Easter, before our sending forth and return to our homes.

This Holy Week Retreat at Ghost Ranch will once again be led by **The Rev. Peg Chamberlin**, current President of the National Council of Churches. Two Thin Places readers who took part in it ten years ago, say that it is the best retreat experience that they have had:

Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday, April 17-24

Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, NM

For information or registration: www.ghost ranch.org or
505.685.4333 or registrar@ghost ranch.org.

***Sacred Food for Soulful Living: Recipes from the House of Prayer Kitchen*, by the Rev. Ward Bauman**

As those who have made a retreat at the House of Prayer in Collegeville already know—in addition to being an ordained Episcopal priest and its Director—Ward Bauman is a creative, life-long cook.

He grew up in California, lived for many years in the Middle East, and—since coming to Minnesota—has been introduced to the foods of the American Middle West. In all three his interest in cooking led him to explore the ingredients, the methods of preparation, and the foods of the region. And in each he was particularly drawn to the natural and the organic.

Ward had begun to experiment with recipes even as a child, but his understanding that food can be more than food seems to have been truly awakened when he moved to Iran. As he says in the “Preface,”

“There I became a world citizen, exposed to the rich and varied cultures of the Middle East. I also came to love and value the great Mediterranean world with its grand cuisines and wisdom traditions. . . .

The great generosity and care with which food was offered not only reflected the hearts of the hosts but, by implication, the great abundance of God’s mercy toward all creation. This careful attention to food was evident throughout the Middle Eastern world, where meat was eaten sparingly and fruits and vegetables, raised locally and prepared with great thoughtfulness, were front and center. All of this demonstrated the healthiness, loving kindness and graciousness of that Divine life offering Itself to all through all.”

And, over time, he began to see his life becoming “more holistic, every aspect of my being affecting every other—body, soul, and spirit. . . . Becoming healthier spiritually means I must be awake and attentive to all levels of my being. My body-self is as much involved as my soul-self in this spiritual work.”

Thus, *Sacred Food for Soulful Living* turns out to be not only a collection of recipes but an outgrowth of essential portions of its author’s own spiritual journey.

Reading Ward’s hand-crafted recipes is a joy and a sharing of his travels: California Persimmon Cake . . . Belinda Egyptian Breakfast . . . Chickpea and Spinach Curry . . . Dolmas-Mediterranean Stuffed Vegetables . . . Ezekiel’s Bread . . . Greek Lenten Soup . . . Kasha Potato Strata (a signature dish of The House of Prayer) . . . Minnesota Tabbouleh . . . and many more.

Even better—since practicing spiritual practices certainly beats reading about them—you might wish to begin an adventure of your own by preparing one of these soul-full offerings yourself.

*In addition to being a priest and chef—and the author of this issue’s Meditation—Ward continues to be a seeker and a student. He grew up in the church in California; lived in Iran where he studied Sufism; studied meditation in a Zen Buddhist monastery; and with his brother, Lynn Bauman, and Cynthia Bourgeault has written **The Luminous Gospels**. He considers his spiritual mentor to be the great Christian German mystic, Meister Eckhart. He says with a grin, “spirituality is my schtick and life lived in fullness is my purpose.”*

Remembering

Thin Places remembers Westminster’s beloved Pastor Emeritus, **The Rev. Dr. Donald Meisel**, particularly on Candlemas Day.

Dr. Meisel’s favorite passage in the Bible was the Candlemas text (in *Luke 2, KJV*) describing Simeon beholding the infant Jesus brought to the Temple, taking the child in his arms, blessing God, and giving voice to the deep joy that flooded over him.

For several years after becoming our Pastor Emeritus, Dr. Meisel led the Candlemas Quiet Worship. Two years ago—after sixty years of ordained ministry—it was the last worship service he led before dying peacefully at home a few weeks later. In his rich, resonant voice he had read again the familiar words of Simeon’s prayer,

“**Lord, now lettest thou thy servant
depart in peace,
according to thy word:
for mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
which thou hast prepared
before the face of all people;
a light to lighten the Gentiles,
and the glory of thy people Israel.**”



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“Conversion . . .”
“Oneness . . .”



AFTERWORDS: “Oneness . . .”

As noted in its first issue twelve years ago, *Thin Places* takes its title from the Celtic Christian metaphor for those times and places when the boundary between the sacred and the everyday feels thin, when God's presence is more strongly felt.

For the Celtic Christians, and for Marcus Borg and Houston Smith, who were among the first modern writers to appreciate and to give renewed currency to "thin places," the metaphor does name an experience that almost all of us have had. Or will have. Those usually brief but powerful moments . . . perhaps in nature, or during special times in the Church year, through sacred music or Scripture, in worship, or in prayer . . . when our hearts are opened and God's presence felt. . . .

All of us, most of the time, do live in the world of ordinary experience. And when thin place experiences do come, at least at some level, it does seem like they happen when we are near the boundary of the everyday world, somehow seeing through to the world of the sacred. But when these experiences last for more than a moment, when they are most deeply felt, their true power seems to come from our sudden awareness that there are not two worlds . . . but only one. There is not a natural world and a supernatural world . . . but only one.

And it is this awareness that God is present in all of creation, and in each of us, that seems to flood over us . . . an unexpected gift that will support and nourish us on our way.

This is clearer now than it was in that first issue (which talked of a veil lifting "between the world of our ordinary experiences and the world of the sacred"). Yet, even so, a remembered passage from Sigurd Olson's *The Singing Wilderness* was also included. In it Olson describes his sunset climb to a great ridge called Robinson Peak in the Boundary Waters wilderness area. He remembers sitting there, looking out over the lakes and rivers and rugged hills of the Quetico-Superior, watching the sunset, listening to the soft sound of the thrushes and of his own breathing:

“The sun was trembling now on the edge of the ridge. It was alive, almost fluid and pulsating, and as I watched it sink I thought that I could feel the earth turning from it, actually feel its rotation. Overall was the silence of the wilderness, that sense of oneness which comes only when there are no distracting sights or sounds, when we listen with inward ears and see with inward eyes, when we feel and are aware with our entire beings rather than our senses.

“I thought as I sat there of the ancient admonition, 'Be still and know that I am God,' and knew that without stillness there can be no knowing, without stepping back from outside influences we cannot know what spirit means.”

A thin place.
Oneness.