

Reflections

magazine

From The Episcopal Diocese of West Texas

Fall/Winter 2015



The Practice of Everyday Contemplation

Because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."
Mark 6:31 (NIV)

The Fall/Winter 2015 edition of
Reflections magazine.

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About the Cover:

"Thistle Family" by Peter Szarmach balances the sharp focus of the plants against the backdrop of a busy field. The ordinary thistle is a symbol of resilience and hardiness, and its milk is known to have healing properties. See more of Peter's work, which you really should do, at www.composingbeauty.com

Read the magazine online at www.reflections-dwtx.org

This issue as a resource for further study

Because every issue of *Reflections* explores a single topic, the magazine lends itself to further study by individuals as well as small groups or Sunday morning classes.

The purpose of *Reflections* is not to give answers but rather to incite inquisitiveness.

The writers and editor of *Reflections* hope the magazine's contents will inspire further exploration and reflection on each topic, especially as the topics relate to daily life. Look for "To Practice" suggestions marked with a thistle at the end of each article. For additional resources, see pages 25-26.



We invite your feedback. If you have comments on this issue or suggestions for future issues, send a note to Marjorie George, editor, email below.

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Present and Accounted For

by Marjorie George

I suppose I should be more distraught about my team losing the Texas Tech/TCU game back in September. But I keep thinking about the final moments of the game.

Here's the play-by-play (as reported by espn.go.com): The lead had gone back and forth the entire game. Tech would make a TD, then TCU would answer with one of their own. With 8:22 left, TCU went ahead 48-45. Texas Tech answered after two clutch third-down plays on a 50-yard scoring pass with 5:55 to go.

The teams traded empty possessions before the Horned Frogs started at their own 47 and drove downfield for the winning touchdown.

But the Red Raiders didn't give up. On the final play of the game — after time had expired and a defensive penalty on TCU had extended the game, Tech's Mahomes found DeAndre Washington for a 24-yard gain. Down the field both teams sprinted, a sea of red/black and blue/silver, but the camera was honed in on Washington. As defenders approached, he pitched the football to a lineman, who pitched it to a receiver, who got the ball to Jakeem Grant. Was it possible? Was Tech going to score? But no, Grant was pushed out of bounds at the TCU 10 to end the game.

My own mental instant replay saw again those beautiful hand-offs. It was a ballet, the way the players had passed the football off one to the other in the midst of the moving mass. Wow, I thought, that's being focused.

In contemplative-living parlance, they were being present to the present. No one was thinking about the steak he was going to have for dinner, or if his helmet was on straight, or whether or not the tv camera was getting his best side.

Few of us possess that intensity of focus. Instead, our fickle minds refuse to stay in the present, jumping from yesterday's mistakes to tomorrow's anxieties.

We drive home from the office, the meeting, the appointment, arriving in our driveways with little awareness of how we actually got from there to here.

Worse, when we are not where we are, we miss a moment that will never come again. That mocking-bird sitting on the fence will never sing that particular note again.

The sun will never again play on the tree exactly as it does at this moment.

The look in the eyes of our spouse/lover/friend/child that asks for our attention right now will fade if ignored and, with enough discouragement, give up entirely.

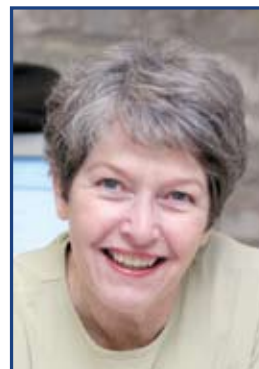
We may glimpse God in other times and other ways, but a moment of revelation missed will surely be our loss.

The contemplative life is one of awareness. It is focusing on the thing that is in front of us right now. It is listening to the sounds we hear, seeing what our eyes reveal, feeling what our bodies are feeling. It is being where we are right now, not where we were yesterday or might be tomorrow.

Of course this is not locker room talk, and football is hardly a contemplative activity. My husband's reaction to the whole thing was to walk away shaking his head and muttering, "shoulda won that one."

But apparently watching football can be illuminating. That few seconds of gridiron drama caused me to be a little more present to the present for the next few days.

And that is a win. *R*



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Being Quiet in an *Unquiet* World

by Daniel Morehead

Dear Lord, help me to be at peace, so that others may be at peace.

Life is not harder than it used to be. In fact, in most ways life is much easier than it used to be. But life is more hectic than it used to be.

The mental pace of life has increased exponentially. Whether we wish for it or not, we are bombarded by text messages, Facebook posts, faxes, calls, emails, billboards, tweets, television, free samples, advertisements, blah, blah, blah. There is simply no down time left.

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● *Being Quiet in an Unquiet World* from page 5

A few weeks ago I was on an interstate road trip, returning from a funeral. At 5 am in full darkness I pulled into a deserted rural gas station and began to pump my gas. I leaned on the car, staring absentmindedly at the whirling digits on the display. Eighteen inches from my face, a television turned itself on and began shouting "news" and advertisements. A small but well-protected speaker beamed urgent, distorted noise of faux-happiness and insistent encouragement. I looked around for some large metal object with which I could defend myself, but finding none I filled my tank and beat a hasty retreat to the relative safety of the interstate.

I do not know anyone who likes this. In truck stop form, most of us find it ugly and alienating.

Over and over, we will go out with God and return with shopping bags full of everything but God. And here again contemplation shall be our friend. If we can return to it, we can shed that stress and empty desire, and return to that which truly satisfies.

Far better to return to the peace of our own homes, where we can, unmolested, sit back, relax, and turn on our cell phones, computers, and televisions, and go through our messages, mail, websites, shows and books in our own way. Because in the end, we overstimulate ourselves. This dangerous kind

of overstimulation and haste is not the ugly and alienating kind; it is the kind filled with all that we desire, the forbidden fruit of the information age which is a "delight to the eyes" and "desirable for making one wise" (Gen 3:6). In the end, it is *I* who want faster downloads, *I* who get impatient in the grocery store line, *I* who curse other drivers for getting in my way, *I* who hurry my children along so we won't be late for church.

Contemplation is indeed the cure for all of this. For contemplation is, in one way, simply not doing. It is refraining from action, refraining from thinking, refraining from fantasizing, refraining from exploring. Contemplation is just being still in the presence of God, or better, being still and recognizing the presence of God. And this is the way it has always been defined in the Christian tradition: not thinking, not doing, not sensing and not feeling. Just stopping and remaining in that something greater than ourselves, that deep darkness which dazzles.

Happily, we do not have to know much about contemplation to do it. Reading about contemplation, knowing about contemplation, and talking about contemplation help only a little bit. Practicing contemplation, however poorly and sporadically, bears surprisingly good fruit. Fifteen minutes (though it seems like an eternity) is enough, and five minutes (though filled with distraction and doubt) will make an appreciable difference. If we can "not do" regularly enough, over a long enough period of time, we shall begin to slow down. We shall begin (after much second-guessing and boredom), to know true peace, true calm, true clarity, and true love. We shall begin to receive what God has to give us, to hear the voice of God through the insistent shouting of our own minds. And we shall finally, after much struggle and doubt, be in a position to offer those things to others. For we cannot give away what we do not have, and we cannot bring peace and love if we do not have peace and love to bring.

Of course, we will fail regularly as we attempt to bring peace into the world. We will, in the twinkling of an eye (or video screen), be swept back into the anxiety and urgency of the ephemeral and the unimportant. Over and over, we will go out with God and return with shopping bags full of everything but God. And here again contemplation shall be our friend. If we can return to it, we can shed that stress and empty desire, and return to

that which truly satisfies. Over and over, we will have to return, re-center, repent, and re-orient ourselves to God. Regular contemplation is a gathering of our scattered selves, a re-collection, an inspirational breathing in, so that we can again engage the world, and take God back into the headlong rush of the streams of life.

Taking peace and quiet out into the world will never mean effortless or stress-free living. It will never mean we are above it all, no longer subject to hurry and overstimulation. It will never mean that we can erase all of the wrongs and ills of the world, or alter the course of others' lives through a mere word or look. But it does mean that we will no longer inflict so much of our own hurt, hurry, and impatience on the rest of the world. And it does mean that we will sometimes be in a position to offer peace where there is fighting, grace where there is grasping, love where there is fear, and forgiveness where there is injury.

R

Daniel Morehead is a psychiatrist in private practice. He lives in San Antonio with his wife and 14-year-old son, where they attend St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Reach him at danielmoreheadmd@gmail.com.



To Practice

- **Declare some "no electronics" spaces and times in your home. So, for instance, the kids are not allowed to bring their iPhones to the dinner table. The backyard is off limits to anything digital.**
- **Let Sunday be Sabbath. Just for one day, don't work.**
- **Remember that talking on the phone — even if it is not hand-held — is as dangerous as driving drunk. Let voice mail get it. If your city does not have a "no phone while driving" law, work to enact one.**



The Garden as Contemplative Space:

How We See

Shapes What We See

By **Mary C. Earle**

My grandmothers were both dedicated gardeners, and some of my first awakenings to divine Presence came in their gardens.

Beth, my dad's mom, came from northern Louisiana and had a big formal garden. She won prizes for her flower arrangements and was not particularly happy if my sister and I were exploring her flowers.

On the other hand, Golda, my mother's mother, had grown up in the country west of Fort Worth. Her garden was less organized and big. Looking back on it, I have a sense that it was a hospitable place, where all kinds of roses and flowers and herbs could find welcome. I have vivid memories of watching Golda water the garden, facing east in early dawn light, backlit by the rose-gold rays of the sun. Shining droplets fell from the hose, not unlike the halos that we typically see on depictions of saints. Something about Golda's presence, her way of being in the garden and her ease with her grandkids' collective digging and exploring gave me an early taste of contemplation.

One of the first definitions I heard for contemplation was: "a long, loving look." In other words, contemplation is about seeing. It's about stopping long enough to behold and to wait for the divine Presence to be known. Contemplation, as Irish writer John O'Donohue used to say, leads us to know that "how we see shapes what we see." The gaze with which we behold another, behold the world, behold ourselves can be potentially transformative. When I was going on pilgrimages to Scotland, Ireland and Wales with Sister Cintra Pemberton, OSH (Order of St. Helena) she would encourage us to offer this prayer: "May I see with the eyes of Christ. May I behold all with love."

This is no easy path. We are encouraged by our culture to see in terms of black/white, right/wrong, in/out. Those polarities wear us out and keep us from seeing the presence of the Risen Christ in and through all that exists. Make no mistake: beholding all in love, remembering that how we see shapes what we see, is a rigorous contemplative process. And this is where gardening comes in for me.

Two years ago, after my husband, Doug, and I had both retired, during the spring and Lent I enrolled in an online class from the website "Living with the

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● *The Garden as Contemplative Space*

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Seasons," offered by author, gardener and naturalist Waverly Fitzgerald. The class was an invitation to observe closely five plants in my own yard as winter gave way to spring. First, each student picked trees and herbs and flowers to behold on a daily basis. Students came from all over the country, so we were reporting from the Pacific Northwest, from Texas, from New England, from the South. I decided to carefully watch a redbud tree, the yellow jasmine, the plumbagos (which had been trimmed almost to the ground after a freeze), the trumpet vine and the iris (the blue one I think of as Texas-tough; it came from my mother-in-law's yard).

Every morning, right after my prayers, I would go out to the yard in early dawn light with the border collies, and we would make notes about the shifts that we were beholding. For the plumbago,

The plants and I had been introduced, and we had spent good time together.

this took the form of a change in the color of the stems, as the plant began to gather strength to grow new branches. The redbud tree was already popping its first deep fuschia buds. The yellow jasmine was

getting new foliage and bringing forth buds.

The daily observation, I discovered, led to a deeper friendship with my own habitat. Long ago my friend Susan Hanson, a member of St. Mark's in San Marcos and a naturalist, taught me to learn the names of the plants in my yard. She also encouraged me to dedicate more and more space to Texas natives. So for some time I've known which plants were which. The plants and I had been introduced, and we had spent good time together.

And yet.

And yet, this daily practicing of attending, beholding and noticing the stirrings of spring in my own gardens became a deeply loving look. Those yellow jasmine were planted by some prior owner. Doug and I have lived here since 1990, and I've tended to take the jasmine for granted. I knew it was there. I loved its yellow blossoms and the way in which it offers good cover for birds. But I'd never really observed it. I discovered a tenderness for the plant, because it is so linked to my childhood in Texas. And I found that beholding its spring offering of buds and leaves felt like a tender privilege. How we see shapes what we see.

Over time, during the course of the six weeks, I also took photos with my iPhone. This allowed me to have a record of the changes in the plants. Some of these changes were truly dramatic. The plumbago went from bare stems to leafy branches and tiny blue buds. The redbud tree went through the full cycle of blossoms giving way to leaves. And in each instance, I was made more and more aware of the Life at work in every plant, in every cell of every plant, in the elements within each cell. In Colossians 1:17 we read, "In Christ all things hold together." I felt as if that were being preached to me by the place in which I abide, through the "words" of leaf, blossom and stem.

This practice of beholding has had its ripple effects. I find myself seeing anew in my neighborhood when I walk the dogs, and in my city, San Antonio, as I go about daily rounds. It affects the way I see other people, other cultures and the world. Contemplative practice, this way of beholding in love, can transform our way of seeing in meetings, worship, relationships, and even social policy. Beholding is a way of being open, of allowing our eyes to receive what is before us. When we pray to see with the eyes of Christ, we come a little closer to seeing the whole world in Him and knowing that world as holy ground. *R*



The Rev. Mary Earle is a retired priest, author, and retreat leader. Her latest book is *Marvelously Made: Gratefulness and the Body*, available from Church Publishing, from Viva Bookstore in San Antonio, and from Amazon. Reach Mary at mcearle48@gmail.com



To Practice

Engage the practice of "attending, beholding, and noticing" in your own yard as this fall turns to winter and then to spring.

Concentrate on a few plants in your yard or a single tree near where you live.

Or notice something else that changes over time -- a kitten or puppy, a new baby. They change greatly in just six months.

Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Tradition



In 1970, three Trappist monks at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts — Fathers William Meninger, Basil Pennington and Thomas Keating — resolved to respond to the Vatican II invitation to revive the contemplative teachings of early Christianity and present them in updated formats.

To do so, they reached back centuries to the ancient tradition of contemplative prayer. Drawing from the monastic practice of *Lectio Divina* and practices described in the anonymous fourteenth century classic *The Cloud of Unknowing* as well as the writings of Christian mystics, the monks developed a simple method of silent prayer for contemporary people.

The prayer came to be known as Centering Prayer in reference to Thomas Merton's description of contemplative prayer as prayer that is "centered entirely on the presence of God." The monks offered Centering Prayer workshops and retreats to both clergy and laypeople. Interest in the prayer spread, and shortly after the first intensive Centering Prayer retreat in 1983, the organization Contemplative Outreach was formed to support the growing network of Centering Prayer practitioners.

In the traditional understanding, says the Contemplative Outreach website, "contemplation, or contemplative prayer, is not something that can be achieved through will, but rather is God's gift. It is the opening of mind and heart — one's whole

being — to God. Contemplative prayer is a process of interior transformation. It is a relationship initiated by God and leading, if one consents, to divine union."

Today Centering Prayer is practiced by people all around the world, creating local and global networks of Christians in communion with Christ and each other and contributing to the renewal of the contemplative dimension of Christianity.

This information is largely from the website of Contemplative Outreach, where you can learn more about Centering Prayer and other contemplative practices.

www.contemplativeoutreach.org

Balanced with Action

- by the Rev. Mike Marsh from Interrupting the Silence
www.interruptingthesilence.com

Writing in the late sixth century, Gregory the Great (pope from 590 to 604 AD) recognized that contemplation and action are equally needed in the Christian's life. In his *The Pastoral Rule*, Gregory describes the priest's responsibilities as a combination of the active life of pastoral administration and the prayerful life of the remote ascetic. Here is what he says:

The spiritual director should not reduce his attention to the internal life because of external occupations, nor should he relinquish his care for external matters because of his anxiety for the internal life. Otherwise, he will either ruin his meditation because he is occupied by external concerns or else he will not give to his neighbor what he owes to them because he has devoted himself to the inner life only.

– *The Pastoral Rule*, Part II, Section 7

Though Gregory is writing to and for priests, his teaching is not limited to the ordained life. We all live with the tension and challenge of balancing both a life of action and a life of contemplation. How do we nurture a deep life of prayer and study and at the same time tend to the demands and joys of our marriage, children, school, work, and all the other stuff life offers and brings us? That is the same question with which Gregory and his priests struggled.

One clear insight from Gregory is that it is not one or the other – action or contemplation; both are equally necessary. Sometimes we use one as a way to ignore or avoid the other. So we stay busy doing good works but have no time to sit in the silence of prayer. Or we never leave the silence of prayer and study in order to feed the hungry, speak out for justice, or spend time with our spouse. These may be over-exaggerations, but they are real dangers and have found expression at various times in the history of the church as well as in individual lives.

Action and contemplation form and inform each other, whether we are lay, monastics, or ordained. You cannot have authentic action without contemplation, and you cannot have authentic contemplation without action. It becomes a matter of establishing congruence between our inner lives and outer lives. The intersection of our inner life and our outer life, our life of prayer and our life of action, becomes a point of sacrament – an outward and visible manifestation of an inward and spiritual grace.

Gregory does not give a lot of “how to” advice on this issue. Instead he helps us hear the call to our own wholeness and holiness and then sets us on that path, a path of both action and prayer.

Stop, Look, Listen

Remember hearing this as a child? Over and over our parents cautioned us to stop, look, and listen before crossing the street. We had to learn not to dart out into traffic but to pay attention to where we were and what was going on around us, especially when the streets were really busy.

These days, there is another danger in the world: the too-busy mind. We can get lost in it, get run over by racing thoughts, become deadened by lack of attention to ourselves and the world around and within us.

Because we already know how to stop, look, and listen, we could learn to employ this simple wisdom in a new way. We can remember to pause from time to time, to look at everything with quiet eyes, and to listen for the silent music of life just beneath the surface of things.

Stop

Stop the running commentary. The ceaseless scurrying through the day.

Stop the mindless scrolling on some device.

Stop judging, insisting, worrying, hating.

Stop stirring the pot.

Stop and take a breath.



Look

Look at the way sunlight touches things:
a flower, a table, your cat, the floor.



Listen

to your breath, the ticking of the clock, the dog's quiet snoring,
a breeze lifting leaves, the ocean's caress.

Listen to the silence
of yourself.

Hear the Silent Music.



**Words and photos by
Jana Orsinger. Jana
and her husband
attend Church of
Reconciliation in
San Antonio. After
many years of
teaching nutrition at
UTSA and a private
practice in nutrition
counseling, Jana
retired to attend to
family needs, turning
to photography as a
way of connecting
with peace and joy.**

Minding the Day

with Catherine Lillibridge

Catherine Lillibridge had an idea. When she learned about the work of Magdalene house in Nashville, where female victims of sex abuse and human trafficking have their lives changed, LEAH was born. LEAH, as Catherine explains it, is “A community in contemplation, prayer, and mindful action to engage in healing love with those in poverty, addiction, abusive relationships and human trafficking.”

She named it LEAH because she believes that Love's Energy Always Heals. The reason for the three steps of contemplation, prayer, and mindful action as a set, she says, “is because my experience with volunteerism, ministry, vocation and employment taught me that I burn out when I am only focused on action. I need the focused cycle of being in 1) contemplation and 2) prayer to partner with 3) action.”

On her blog, (www.leahtoday.wordpress.org) Catherine explains the three components:

Contemplation

I chose this word because it is a great word! It can mean meditation,

slowing down, and thoughtfully considering, among other things. When my mind is moving quickly and I am making decisions, I ask myself if I need to CONTEMPLATE this first. Con=with, Tem=time.

Taking time is always a good idea for me. Taking five seconds to consider my words, five minutes to consider my next action, or five days to pray about a decision creates prayerful space and productive action.

Prayer

When I pray, I connect to God. I detach from trying to fix or understand the problem. The cruelties that come across the news at lightning speed show beheadings to anyone who wants to watch. Families with the stressors and pressures of life sometimes imploding and sometimes exploding fill my thoughts and, thank God, my prayers. Prayer is my opportunity to lay the problems of the world and families at God's feet. It is my opportunity to put my feet to work in the world with mindful action. I don't sit around and wonder why and eat chocolate and drown my sorrows. Well, I don't do it every day anyway.

I have my phone set to alert me each day and a message pops up and says “Now. One prayer.” It is a great reminder that there is no time like the present to pray. I call it Flash Prayer.

Mindful Action

Mindful action is when I am aware that my thoughts, feelings and actions are in sync, and I respond to events and conversations in real time. Now that could mean that when I’m really upset, which involves my thoughts and feelings, my actions don’t need to blindly follow those thoughts and feelings. If I’m in sync and mindfully tuned in I realize I have an opportunity to respond and not knee-jerk react. I may need to leave the room instead of raising my voice. I may need to use the set of statements I learned while being a Girls On The Run coach: “I feel _____, when you _____, because _____. What I need from you is _____” instead of reacting with “If you hadn’t said that then I wouldn’t have said blank, blank, blank.”

Changing the way we have always been is not easy. Everyone in my family knows if I get too hungry then anyone is fair game to be snapped at. It takes a lot of self-observation and acceptance to see that “something needs to change and it is probably me,” as Paul Williams and Tracey Jackson say in *Gratitude and Trust: Six Affirmations That Will Change Your Life*.

“Mindfulness provides the pause that interrupts habitual reactions,” says Nancy J. Hill in *Unfolding: Slow Down, Drop In, Dare More*. Mindfulness is also like a muscle. If it isn’t practiced daily, the old patterns creep back in. The opposite is also true that a daily practice of mindfulness will lead to subtle changes that may surprise you. One time when we were on vacation my son said, “I’m starving. Mom, you are hungry aren’t you?” because he could count on me to always need a snack every couple of hours. He was a growing young man, and for some reason I always have the appetite of a linebacker (as a family member lovingly told me), but I had been applying mindfulness to my eating and had changed my eating habits -- like eating more protein earlier in the day. I realized a whole morning had passed with sightseeing and I didn’t have the “oh my gosh, I’m

so hungry I could eat my shoe” meltdown because I had been practicing mindful eating. *R*



Catherine Lillibridge is a member of St. David's Episcopal Church, San Antonio. In addition to her

LEAH ministry, she serves on the board of Magdalena House in San Antonio for women and their children who are escaping lives of trafficking and abuse and on the board of the diocesan Commission for Women's Ministries.



To Practice

Look at this word for 11 seconds – PEACE. You can count to 11 or look at a second hand on a clock (if you happen to have access to a clock with a face!). Notice your breathing. Is your breathing shallow? Notice your posture. Are you slumped over?

Now intentionally sit up and look at the word again. Take a deep breath and create a positive, engaged posture. Close your eyes for a moment and see if the word has internalized itself.

When you open your eyes, intentionally end this exercise by saying “That was easier than I thought” or some acknowledgement of the end, knowing that the practice of a minute’s worth of intentional mindfulness is accessible again just by realizing you want it.

Roots and Branches

by Jennifer Wickham

I have a confession to make. I have never in my life been able to do Centering Prayer. I've tried to do it many, many times. I quiet my mind. I find my sacred word. I sit. I try to be fully present. I try to let go. I strain. Sometimes I flat-out fall asleep. Eventually I stop trying and inevitably feel guilty that I cannot be the contemplative person I wish to be.

The same thing happens when I try to walk a labyrinth, meditate, or use an icon as a focal image for reflection. I've simply never been able to connect in a meaningful way to any of these particular contemplative practices, no matter how many times I've tried. It's not that I'm unable to maintain a posture of silence. Even though I tend to be a person of many words, dwelling in silence has never been uncomfortable for me.

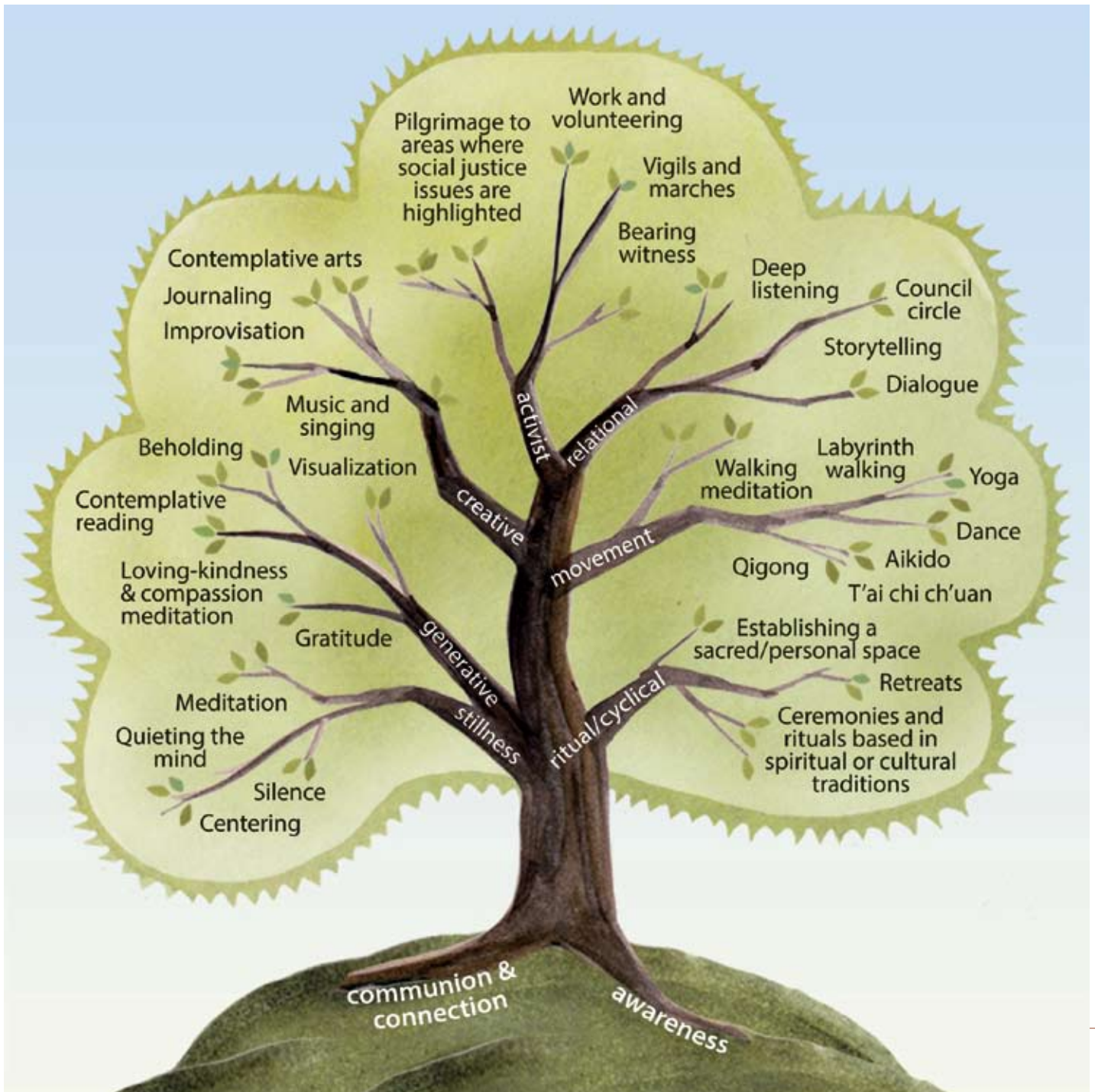
I always feel a bit guilty about admitting this to others. It's as if I'm confessing a deep, dark secret that reveals a failing in my spiritual character. Perhaps people will wonder if my faith is really as deep as I say it is. It is especially difficult to share my feelings with friends whose lives have been changed by these very same contemplative practices. I am often asked to walk, sit or meditate with my community, and sometimes I do. Most of the time, however, I politely decline and then feel a familiar pang of guilt, as if I am somehow rejecting them or — even worse — God. I certainly do not wish to imply that someone else's pathway to God isn't good enough for me. But by the same token, I don't want to feel that my own faith journey is somehow inadequate just because I can't connect with God using the same pathways others do.

Not too long ago I stumbled upon an image called the "Tree of Contemplative Practices" at the website of Contemplative Mind in Society (see: <http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree>). I had never seen anything like it. The basic idea of the image is this: all contemplative practices (and

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Understanding the Tree

On the Tree of Contemplative Practices, the roots symbolize the two intentions that are the foundation of all contemplative practices. The branches represent different groupings of practices. For example, Stillness Practices focus on quieting the mind and body in order to develop calmness and focus. Generative Practices may come in many different forms but share the common intent of generating thoughts and feelings, such as thoughts of devotion and compassion, rather than calming and quieting the mind. (Please note that such classifications are not definitive, and many practices could be included in more than one category.) Used with the permission of Contemplative Mind in Society.



● *Roots and Branches*

from page 18

there are many!) are rooted in two essential concepts: awareness and communion/connection. These provide the foundation from which contemplative practices grow. And as a tree branches in different directions as it grows, different practices will spring from these roots. But they are all a part of the same tree. People who engage in some type — any type — of contemplative practice essentially seek the same two things: a deeper awareness, and a desire for a fuller communion with God, people, and the world in which we live.

When looking closely at the image, one can see that the branches on the tree are incredibly diverse. This realization is what was so freeing for me. While there are, of course, the more familiar branches

representing the practices of stillness (meditation, silence, centering, etc.) and movement (labyrinth walking, yoga, dancing, etc.), it was a great joy to discover that there are other contemplative practices which involve creativity, ritual, relational interaction, activism, and approaches intended to generate thoughts and feelings rather than silence or emptiness. All of a sudden my love of music, pottery, weaving (and even coloring!) were elevated to a new level. I had always known they drew me closer to God, but it had never occurred to me to consider them acts of contemplative practice. My love of mission, theological reflection, volunteerism, gardening, and many other things also became more meaningful. The metaphor of the tree gave me a whole new perspective on the actions (and inactions) of my life.

What is important, then, is that I engage the activities of my life with intention. Intentionality is what transforms simple

Tactical Contemplation

The Institute for Contemplative Living describes itself as an "Electronic Contemplative Community for Active People" (<http://institute-contemplativeliving.org>). The ICL offers "a set of contemplative practices that serves as a resource from which we can draw to respond contemplatively to the realities and contingencies of daily, active living."

ICL explains it this way: We all use tactics every day in our lives. We may have a plan for a day, but the realities on the ground mitigate against achieving that plan. So we engage in tactics to respond to the realities of daily living to achieve our higher goals. Take, for example, planning a menu for a party. We plan out the ideal correlation of foods and drinks. But when we get to the grocery store, we discover that something is not available. There is no asparagus when we have planned for asparagus, so we substitute broccoli or some other vegetable. This is the use of tactics to achieve a goal.

The capacity to see God is not a set program. It is a larger goal set in place by a desire to contemplate. But daily life intrudes. We cannot sit for hours praying in silence alone because our days are filled with work, meetings, family obligations, and even church work! So we need to develop contemplative tactics that will allow us to see God in the midst of daily realities of living.

From <http://institute-contemplativeliving.org>. Used with permission.

activities into contemplative practices. When I am intentional, I find myself developing a deeper awareness and sense of connectedness. They're not vacuous exercises. They are opportunities to participate in the transcendent, and they become avenues for healing, maturation, rest, peacefulness, freedom from guilt and so much more. This is the life of abundance to which we are all called. Amen, amen, amen. *R*



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Christi. She attends All Saints' Episcopal Church. Reach her at jstwickham@gmail.com



To Practice

Contemplative Mind in Society offers a free download of a blank Tree that you can customize to include your own practices. What are you already doing that slows you down and brings you into the presence of God? Daily walks? Gardening? Personal retreats?

What activities might you take on that foster your awareness of God's presence in your life and lead you to connection with God and others?

Download the tree and use it to become more aware of your own contemplative practices. www.contemplativemind.org

Holy Dying



Edwin Sasek is the founder and president of the board of Abode Contemplative Care for the Dying, an interfaith nonprofit organization that provides care for those at the end of life in a contemplative setting. The ABODE Home, located in northeast San Antonio, can house three guests at a time who are receiving medical care from a hospice agency but don't have adequate housing or caregiving. Marjorie George, editor of *Reflections*, talked with Edwin about the concept of contemplative care at ABODE.

MG – ABODE is different from most institutional care. What makes this so?

ES – ABODE is an extension of the hospice concept of dying at home surrounded by people who love you, with familiar things, plants, animals, sights, smells — rather than in a hospital or nursing home. For the staff and volunteers at the ABODE home, the focus becomes “How can I be with you in your dying? How can I relieve some of that suffering? Can I bathe you, and feed you, comfort you, and be with you” — which are very human, compassionate acts. “Whenever you did it for my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me,” said Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel (25:40). How can we be with the dying person in his suffering — and not run away?

MG – Much of the care given at ABODE is by volunteers. Are they trained in contemplative care?

ES – For our volunteers, their professional skills and backgrounds are not as important as their willingness to sit at the bedside of someone who is dying and to be vulnerable. ABODE’s staff and volunteers help our guests make ABODE a home through the excellent training and the guidance of ABODE’s executive director, Jane Marie Young.

The hospice nurses and staff make regular visits, just as would be the case in anyone’s home. The guests and their loved ones have many opportunities for silence, for just being, and for talking about what is important to them. Staff and volunteers are always encouraged to be reflective about their work and relationships at ABODE.

Sometimes the work is hard, and support for staff and volunteers is necessary to care for others and for us. So there is ongoing training, learning and being in a contemplative setting. An interfaith meditation group meets every Monday evening at the home which is open to anyone.

MG – The concept of hospice care was developed in the United States in the 1970s. But it has a long history. How does your own history fit into that?

ES – A book we studied at the Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Hospice Institute in New Mexico while I was beginning a degree in Hospice and Grief Counseling discussed hospice care in the Middle Ages — a pilgrim making a journey could become sick along the way, and monasteries and convents would provide shelter and care. A seriously ill person may reach the end stages of life, so monks and sisters would give the dying person the best of everything they had — the best bedding, the best food and care. The perception was that this person would shortly be with God, the veil was thin. God was

present in a special way, preparing and transforming: “As the body grows weaker, the Spirit grows stonger,” as Paul writes in the second letter to the Corinthians (12:10). So the idea of forming a spiritual community to care for dying people was planted in me. Over the years since the mid-90s, working full-time as a hospice chaplain brought me into the lives of many who didn’t have a family member or a neighbor to help care for him; or family members had to work, or for any number of reasons the person was unable to live in her own home. Many people at the end of life are forced to give up their homes, their dignity, their ability to make their own decisions, Nursing homes are not always a good option. And, dying is certainly a spiritual process, not a medical event. So for many years I thought I’d like to gather a community that would take care of the dying, but I could never quite figure out the logistics.

MG – Did that idea stay with you?

ES – Yes, so around 2009, I gathered a group of about 20 people together whom I knew had a heart for what I was referring to as “contemplative hospice.” We were hospice doctors, nurses, chaplains, social workers and ministers, business people, artists and healers. My question was: “Is there such a thing as ‘contemplative hospice?’ Is it a type of care or a place?” Because I felt strongly that spiritual care is central to the care of the dying, I didn’t know if we would create a place, or a concept, or an organization.

We put the idea on the back burner and waited. Our group met regularly to study a book by Roshi Joan Halifax called *Being With Dying*. Then a year or so later my friend and colleague John McKelvey told me about the Toni and Trish House in Auburn, Michigan, which he opened in 2008, after working at Mother Theresa House in Lansing for a year. I knew immediately that was the model I wanted to follow. I reconvened the group in June of 2010, and we formed ABODE

MG – When did ABODE open?

ES – We welcomed our first guest in December 2014 after buying a beautiful property and designing and building a new home, which happened through the compassion and generosity of so many

individuals and organizations. We opened without a mortgage.

Unfortunately, in early June, we encountered a massive plumbing issue that resulted in the house flooding, and we had to vacate the house and have been under repair since then. Fortunately, insurance will cover almost all of the cost of repair. We expect to be fully operational again within the next month or so. All of the funding we collected through donations from individuals to cover repair will now be used for operating expenses.

MG – There is no cost for the dying person to live at ABODE. How do you fund the care?

ES – Through grants, memorials, corporate contributions, and donations. We have limited staff and rely on the help of our amazing volunteers. Our operating budget is \$270,000 a year.

MG – Final thoughts?

ES – The experience of establishing ABODE has taught me two things: we have to develop a contemplative spirituality to live fully, and it takes a long time to do that — it is practice that matters. When I was much younger I wanted the “burning bush” type of spirituality — big experience and then that’s that. But it does not work that way. I am reminded of what the Buddhists say: “Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water.”

R



The ABODE home. Learn more about Abode Contemplative Care for the Dying at their website www.Abodehome.org. Art by E. Gordon West.



Strolling

by Mary Carolyn Watson

In my mid-twenties I worked at Washington National Cathedral for several years, designing and teaching educational programs for children and adolescents.

I adored my job, but some days were pretty hectic filled with large unruly tour groups or throngs of overly inquisitive children. On such days, after the chaos subsided and everyone had climbed back on board the school bus, I would often retreat to a small chapel around the corner from my office to sit for a few blissful moments in silence and stillness. I always emerged feeling centered and renewed.

Now, over a decade later, as a mother of two young (often unruly and overly inquisitive) children of my own, my only option for escape is shutting myself in the bathroom while small fists pound the door and little shrill voices scream on the other side. Not exactly quiet and stillness! I never come out of these brief moments of retreat feeling any better than when I went in.

I had always assumed that contemplative practices required both quiet and stillness in order to

bring about a sense of peace or rejuvenation. I had also resigned myself to the fact that I wouldn't be able to regularly engage in any such practice until my children were older and a bit more independent. Then, about six months ago, I went on a walk. It was a gorgeous spring day so I strapped my two girls (aged three and one) into our double stroller and we walked the Museum Reach stretch of the Riverwalk. They rode only part of the way, also choosing to amble along on foot down the concrete path. We watched ducks swimming in the water, waved at several tour boats that motored by, and looked closely at many of the beautiful flowering plants growing beside the riverbank. My children also greeted every person we passed with a friendly smile and wave. There was noise and plenty of motion, and yet at the end of our walk I was surprised to find how refreshed and at peace I felt.

Quite unintentionally, I had stumbled upon a contemplative practice that I could do. Even better it was a practice that I could share with my children instead of trying to exclude them. We now go on walks at least several times a week. The Museum Reach is probably our favorite, but we also roam around our neighborhood or along several of the greenway paths close by.

Beyond enjoying the outdoors and God's creation, walking as a spiritual practice teaches us to slow down and live in the present. It encourages us to pay attention to the wonder of our surroundings and to joyfully greet each person we meet as a beloved child of God. It is a physical reminder to focus on the journey and not the destination, relishing the simple pleasures of small surprises along the way. *R*

Mary Carolyn Watson is a writer and stay-at-home mother. She lives in San Antonio with her husband and two daughters, where they attend St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Reach her at marycarolynwatson@gmail.com



•••▶ **The Institute for Contemplative Living** (the ICL) is an online site for discovery, study, exploration, and creative engagement with the contemplative tradition for active and engaged people who yearn for spiritual depth in their day-to-day lives.

It is an electronic contemplative community that provides workshops, retreats, and seminars for folks as well as connections to other people exploring their contemplative yearnings.

<http://institute-contemplativeliving.org>

•••▶ **The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society** transforms higher education by supporting and encouraging the use of contemplative practices and perspectives to create active learning and research environments that look deeply into experience and meaning for all in service of a more just and compassionate society. CMind organizes and hosts retreats, conferences, workshops, and webinars on contemplative methods in higher education; identifies and creates resources; and connects individuals and organizations through the ACMHE, a professional association for educators.

<http://www.contemplativemind.org>

•••▶ **Contemplative Outreach** is a spiritual network of individuals and small faith communities committed to living the contemplative dimension of the Gospel. The intent of Contemplative Outreach is to foster the process of transformation in Christ in one another through the practice of Centering Prayer.

<http://www.contemplativeoutreach.org>



Silent Night, Holy Night: A Retreat for Advent

November 27 - December 25, 2015

During Advent 2015, Contemplative Outreach will offer an online course to encourage a disposition of silence and stillness during this sacred and yet busy time of the year. This e-course will focus on the practices of Centering Prayer and variations of Lectio Divina – quiet, receptive reflection using Scripture, art and music. The teachings of Fr. Thomas Keating and other mystical writers will also explore the great themes of this season as they inform and enrich the contemplative life. These themes include:

- silence and stillness
- beauty and splendor
- inner preparation and expectation
- light
- becoming
- and Incarnation.

The retreat content will be shared via email, video and audio recordings, images, as well as links to musical selections.

To register or learn more:
<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/ecourses/course/view/188>

Resources

The Cathedral Park Meditation Walk and the Pavilion at the Bishop Jones Center

The 19 acres of natural and reclaimed grounds at the Bishop Jones Center in San Antonio have been sacred ground for thousands of years. Now, using a downloadable, self-guided audio tour, walkers can connect with God's spirit made palpable through his creation in this place.

The **Cathedral Park Meditation Walk** is available from the diocesan website at www.dwtx.org/CPWalk or by downloading a podcast. Instructions for downloading the prodcast are at the website.



The written script of the walk can also be printed from the website.

To listen to the tour, walkers need a smart phone or other audio device.

The **New Pavilion at Cathedral Park** was dedicated October 25 and is now available for use. The tree-house pavilion is built on pilings and is available via Torcido Road or via a pebbled path on the lower meadow of the Jones Center grounds. To book the space for a small group, call Leigh Saunders at the diocesan office, 210-824-5387 or email her at leigh.saunders@dwtx.org.

If you are at Cathedral Park, you are welcome to visit the Pavilion as long as it is not already in use. Check availability at the diocesan office.

For Small Groups

- Many **Centering Prayer** groups exist around the diocese. If you are not aware of one, start one in your own congregation. For a method on how to do Centering Prayer, go to www.contemplativeoutreach.org, Click on Resources, then All Documents.

- **The Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton Series** is a program of eight booklets that guide small-group participants in contemplative dialogue. Each booklet includes an introduction to Merton and contemplative living through prayers, readings from Merton and other spiritual masters, and questions for small group dialogue.

Contemplative dialogue is a method of reading together in silence, then sharing individual reflections on the readings. The focus in contemplative dialogue is on listening rather than formulating a response to what another is saying. The pace of conversation is slow, and participants are not required to share.

The booklets are available from Viva Bookstore (www.vivabooks.com) through January or at www.avemariapress.com

ReflectionsOnline

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- ***Breaking Away*** - Fall/Winter 2011
- ***Teach us to Pray*** - Spring/Summer 2012
- ***The Kingdom of God*** - Fall/Winter 2012
- ***The Holy Spirit*** - Spring/Summer 2013
- ***What We Can Still Learn from the Saints*** - Fall/Winter 2013
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