



# The Center for Christian Spirituality

A ministry of Chapelwood United Methodist Church

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## At the Center

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*At the Center* is a periodic e-newsletter from The Center for Christian Spirituality. Please reply to [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org) if you wish to be removed from this mailing list.



### ***Why We Do What We Do: A Personal Reflection by Jerry***

A couple of months ago Melissa Maher and Chris Archer in Chapelwood's Serving Ministry asked me to tag-team a Sunday School class with them at Chapelwood. They were to teach a class of twenty-somethings about the place of missions and serving in a Christian's life-experience. They invited me to take one of their four Sundays to talk about mission/action/service in the context of prayer, spirituality, and contemplation. I agreed to do so, though I admit to some hesitancy.

I was hesitant because in my experience youth and young adults often don't get spiritual formation. They may like the language of spirituality and find some of the practices *cool*, but generally they are on the uphill side of 40. They are still striving, still achieving, and still building a life; thus, they haven't yet hit the life-wall that says to them, "I cannot do life on my own . . . the journey must be about building an inner life since I cannot build an adequate outer life!"

My next confession is that when I speak to a relatively young group about spirituality and contemplation, I generally go prepared for all sorts of objections. I'm *armed* with answers to their imagined questions, as if it were up to me to defend contemplative life and practice. Ha! What a joke! (Well, I might as well be honest!!)

So I showed up that day last month to say a word to seven or eight young adults about spiritual formation and contemplative practice. I laid out my understanding of spiritual formation and its place in the life of the follower of Jesus. I said that spiritual formation should be the first concern of God's Church, our primary purpose. We should be helping people develop a relationship with God that is deep and sturdy and able to sustain them through the storms of life, as well as a relationship that helps persons turn their faces toward the world with the compassion and love of Christ. I talked about how mission and *doing* in the world flows from a spiritual core where we are connected deeply to God. I said that our personal transformation leads to the transformation of the world.

It was a presentation many of you have heard me make at different times. Then they started asking questions . . . but they weren't the usual *young adult questions* I anticipated.

"Why hasn't anyone said these things to us before?" they asked (with some indignation, I might add).

"Do you mean there are people around here at Chapelwood who could help us with spirituality?"

"Why don't you take a Sunday morning and say these things to the whole church? People don't really know what you've just told us, but as soon as you say it, they'll know that it's true!"

I was astounded, absolutely astonished. It wasn't at all the response I anticipated. I've experienced some of those *marker moments* in my own life where I heard something or saw something for the first time, and some part of my being deep inside leapt up as if to say, "I've been waiting a lifetime for this!" The class seemed to be that kind of moment for some of those young adults.

While I didn't really expect that kind of response from a group of young adults, the morning reaffirmed for me why we do what we do in The Center for Christian Spirituality. We offer contemplative worship, classes on spiritual formation, prayer retreats, and small group experiences that engage this hunger of the human soul. We provide tools for spiritual formation, so that each person can use the tools and discover their own unique way with God, doing so in a way that makes a difference in the world. What we do, I believe, meets the most basic longing of the human soul. The morning renewed my gratitude for Chapelwood, for a place to engage in

this kind of ministry, and for our congregation's leadership who makes this kind of ministry possible.

Many of you reading these words are a part of this ministry. You have affirmed it by your own hunger, but your participation in it. Some of you became a part of it with some trepidation, not sure where the road would take you. Others of you came because something deep inside you drew you toward it, though you couldn't explain why. Still others have come because you've seen friends, folks you admire, changed from the inside out and you want to know how that happened. There are as many different stories as people. I'm very grateful that you have put a part of your life into The Center.

By the way, last week I was invited to preach in the three Sunday morning sanctuary services at Chapelwood on November 16. I've accepted the invitation. I'll do an abbreviated presentation about spiritual formation and the contemplative life, similar to what I did in that Sunday School class.

The young lady said that morning, "Why don't you take a Sunday morning and say these things to the whole church?" So that's what I'm going to do. I'll say what many of you already know, but what will be new to many who hear.

Please pray for me as I communicate these things that are at the core of life. And pray for those who hear on Nov. 16.

Peace and love,  
Jerry

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## Poetry

EYE MASK  
by Denise Levertov

In this dark I rest,  
unready for the light which dawns  
day after day,  
eager to be shared.  
Black silk, shelter me.  
I need  
more of the night before I open  
eyes and heart  
to illumination. I must still  
grow in the dark like a root  
not ready, not ready at all.

THIRST (from John 4:4 – 6)  
by Jerry Webber

Who is that solitary  
wearied at noon-day  
casting a deep shadow  
into the still and sunken water

Without containers  
for capturing the flow  
life seeping out of cupped hands  
fertilizing the parched earth

Some kind of Drink  
roaming the world  
must pass through Samaria –  
and Galena Park –  
searching for the thirsty?

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## Stewardship of Prayer Nov. 9 & 16

Chapelwood's annual Stewardship of Prayer emphasis this year will provide opportunities for practical, hands-on praying. We're providing opportunities for you to experience prayer, to explore some areas of prayer you may not have explored previously.

First, in all three sanctuary services (8:25, 9:45, & 11:10 a.m.) on November 9 & 16, we will experience a different form of extended prayer. The prayer will be experiential and participatory . . . that is, I won't be someone praying *for* us as much as leading *all of us* into an experience of prayer.

Second, on those Sundays there will be other opportunities to experience different forms of prayer. Last Sunday we experienced intercessory prayer at prayer stations in the Fellowship Hall.

### **November 9**

From 9:30 – 10:00, 10:45 – 11:15, or 12:15 – 12:45 you may come to the Chapel to experience listening prayer by praying with the Scriptures and a more contemplative form known as *centering prayer*. Leaders will give guidance for the prayer at each period.

### **November 16**

From 9:30 – 12:45 you may experience walking prayer with a labyrinth in the Fellowship Hall. Labyrinths were used in European cathedrals of the Middle Ages when persons could

no longer make pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Churches encouraged persons to walk and pray on the labyrinth as a symbol of the spiritual journey and the pilgrimage of faith we are invited to make with God. The movements toward the center (inward) and toward the outer edge (outward) symbolize the spiritual journey. The labyrinth will be open for walking and praying from 9:30 – 12:45, with persons available to answer questions from 9:30 – 10:00, 10:45 – 11:15, and 12:15 – 12:45.

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## Formation Study on John's Gospel continues . . .

The spiritual formation study of John's Gospel led by Jerry Webber, *From Signs to Soul: Inner Movements in John's Gospel*, continues Nov. 5, 12, and 19. The class meets in LC201. The class provides resources for participants to bring the Scripture into their own lives and prayer. Each class includes time for sharing how the texts have illumined our own praying and how the Gospel has gotten into our own lives.

The class meets Wednesday evenings at 6:30 p.m. in LC201.

If you have participated in the class and missed a session or two, audio c.d.'s are available either in a set or individually. There is a nominal cost for each c.d. Contact Nancy Sterling at 713/354-4458 or [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org) for information about audio recordings of the classes.

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## Advent Prayer Retreat: Dec. 4

The Center for Christian Spirituality will offer an Advent Prayer Retreat on Thursday, Dec. 4 at the Cenacle Retreat House (420 N. Kirkwood). The retreat will offer space to turn our hearts toward God in prayer, meditation, and reflection as we enter the Advent season.

Through the day of retreat we will live in a rhythm that includes common prayer as a group; brief presentations around the Advent theme; quiet time for praying, walking, resting, and creating; and time for group interaction. Jerry Webber will be our retreat guide for the day.

Cost for the retreat is \$40 for the day, which includes materials, lunch, and use of the Cenacle facilities. Because of space considerations at the Cenacle, the retreat will be limited to 25 persons. A limited amount of scholarship assistance is available if needed. Please register with Nancy Sterling at 713/354-4458 or [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org).

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## Advent Listening Class: Dec. 3, 10, & 17

For three Wednesdays in Advent, The Center for Christian Spirituality offers space to slow down and pay attention to what God is birthing in each of us and in our world. The class is called, "Advent Listening," and it involves listening with our hearts to the Gospel birth narratives, then praying with them in a variety of ways. We'll utilize silence and solitude, journaling and icons, art and creative expression, and other means to listen more deeply to the Story. We'll listen to find how our story is connected to the larger Story of God.

Room LC201 will be converted into a *retreat space* each evening as we listen to the Gospel birth narratives, then interact with them creatively, either sitting quietly with them or engaging in some form of creative expression. The class is *hands-on* and experiential. Participants will have an opportunity to share their experiences in listening each evening.

The class takes place Dec. 3, 10, and 17 at 6:30 p.m. in LC201. For information or to sign-up for these classes, please contact Nancy Sterling at (713) 354-4458 or [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org).

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## *Sacred Space 2009* Resource for *Lectio Divina* Available

Last year about 60 persons made use of the resource for daily Scripture readings called *Sacred Space 2008*. First provided by Irish Jesuits as a website for prayer ([www.sacredspace.ie](http://www.sacredspace.ie)), the book includes a prayer movement with daily Scriptures for *lectio divina*. I've used it for a number of years as a part of my personal daily practice. Last year after we mentioned it in our fall newsletter a number of you discovered the resource as well.

The Scriptures for prayer begin with the Advent season, which begins Sunday, November 30. We're making *Sacred Space 2009* available as a resource for common prayer for any who would like to use it. Copies are available through The Center for Christian Spirituality for **\$11 (regular price \$14.95)**. As I've said before, it is not our intention to get into the book-selling business. We are, however, in the prayer and community-building business, and this seems like a good opportunity to make strides in those two areas.

Contact Nancy Sterling at (713)354-4458 or [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org) if you are interested in *Sacred Space 2009*.

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## Prayer Shawl Ministry

Last spring during Faith in Action, Prayer Scarves were knit, blessed and put in storage, waiting to be distributed as tactile symbols of God's love this winter to those living on the streets. Last month, Landon Schott, Mercy Street's Director of Youth, and his youth group took 35 of them during their monthly ministry downtown to the city's homeless near St. John's UMC, where they serve food, have first aid items (mostly band aids) and visit with those who come by. Members of the Prayer Shawl Ministry joined them on Saturday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, taking along some knit & crocheted scarves and hats.

If you are interested in joining us, listed below are our meeting schedule:

**First and Third Tuesday of each month, 10:30 a.m. Next meetings are November 4 & 18.  
Second Monday of each month, 4:00 p.m. Next meeting is November 10.**

Also, Mercy Street's Prayer Shawl Ministry meets the Third Thursday evening of each month at 7:00p.m., upstairs in the Conference Room.

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## Opportunities for Centering Prayer and *Lectio Divina*

Group centering prayer and *lectio divina* is now offered four times each week. The prayer times are offered for anyone interested in these prayer practices in the Bride's Room (behind the Sanctuary). Nancy Sterling facilitates these gatherings. You may come to any or all of the prayer times offered.

Mondays at 9:00 a.m.  
Tuesdays at 9:30 a.m.  
Wednesdays at 9:00 a.m.  
Thursdays at 9:30 a.m.

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## SHALEM SW Regional Gathering February 9–13 in San Antonio

### *Radical Presence: The Ground of Spiritual Leadership*

February 9-13, 2009; Monday – Friday  
Oblate Renewal Center, 5700 Blanco Road, San Antonio, TX 78216  
[www.shalem.org](http://www.shalem.org)

Participants will be joining clergy and laity from a variety of denominations and communities in this region who hunger for a deeper spiritual life and who assist others in listening to the Spirit.

This five-day residential conference and retreat begins with a workshop on the heart of spiritual leadership led by Shalem's Founder and Senior Fellow, Tilden Edwards, with a focus on the contemplative promise for our lives and communities. The workshop will lead into a time of retreat for direct listening to the guidance of the Spirit. There will also be time for sharing experiences and insights and networking with other participants.

We pray that our time together will help "seed" all of life with contemplative awareness and deepen Love's way in the world.

All who share a desire for Spirit-led leadership are welcome!

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## Library Resources

The Center has a modest lending library of books, tapes, CDs, and DVDs to lend. The selection is continually growing. Most topics and authors are complementary with the classes and retreats offered by The Center for Christian Spirituality. You can take a look in LC201. A sampling of tapes, CDs, and DVDs includes:

- *Freedom of Simplicity: Finding Harmony in a Complex World* by Richard J. Foster
- *The Secret Message of Jesus* by Brian D. McLaren
- *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross
- *Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila
- *The Contemplative Journey* and *The Spiritual Journey* by Fr. Thomas Keating
- *A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* by Paula D'Arcy and Richard Rohr
- *The Power of Forgiveness* by Martin Dobelmeier w/ Elie Wiesel & Thich Nhat Hanh

Contact Nancy Sterling at (713) 354-4458 or [nsterling@chapelwood.org](mailto:nsterling@chapelwood.org) if you are interested in checking out any materials.

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Check out the website . . .

[www.centerforchristianspirituality.org](http://www.centerforchristianspirituality.org)

Have you checked out our website at [www.centerforchristianspirituality.org](http://www.centerforchristianspirituality.org)? We try to keep the website current with classes, retreats, and other opportunities offered through The Center for Christian Spirituality, as well as offer some helps for spiritual formation and contemplative practice.