



“We the Association of Contemplative Women, exist to foster and support the contemplative journey of our members. Rooted in the Christian contemplative tradition, we live in a diversity of ways a life of prayer.” This newsletter seeks to help carry out that tradition by providing a vehicle for sharing our journeys. The views expressed in this ACW Newsletter are those of the authors and not necessarily the views of the ACW or the editor.

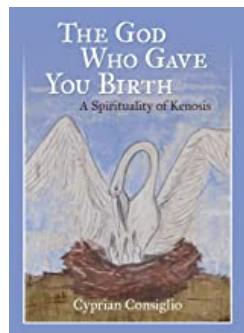
January 2022 Volume 135 - President: Carol Marie Hemish, SSND 170 Good Counsel Drive Mankato MN 56001-3138

**MEET OUR PRESENTER: *Cyprian Consiglio***

The presenter for our ACW General Assembly in September 2022 is Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam. He is a monk from the New Camadoli Monastery in Big Sur, California, currently serving the community as Prior.

I first met Cyprian at the annual meeting of the Liturgical Composers Forum. I think it was the late 90’s. We were at the same table for the banquet, so we shared more than I had the opportunity to do with many other composers that year. I knew . . . and more importantly . . . I *felt* something special about him. That must have been one of his early years at Big Sur. In the book *The Hermits of Big Sur* by Paula Huston, there are some paragraphs about Cyprian. I found out about his life in between when we first met and my contacts with him now as we prepare for the General Assembly. He has traveled, explored other traditions, continued to compose and record music as well as live the hermit life as a Camadoli monk.

Reading his life and hearing of the many places and ways he has followed his heart and acted in the freedom it takes to respond to the calls of God, I want to know more from him. I sense here is one who is faithful to the God-quest so many of us live, or desire to live more deeply. Since he is a musician and composer I may have had an initial attraction to him. Now, my attraction is because of the ways he shares about the inner journey and his deep knowledge of the wisdom of other traditions. His outer journey has taken him around the world which adds a richness for me. His sharing is both deep, gracious, respectful as well as challenging.



Reading his latest book, *The God Who Gave You Birth: A Spirituality of Kenosis*, I doubt he would have written it without the grace of his own on-going experience of and desire for kenosis. I look forward to his sharing on this topic of kenosis when we gather in person at King’s House in Belleville. Pray God, that covid will not stop us again from gathering in person.

Our General Assembly will meet September 1-6, 2022 at King’s House in Belleville, Illinois outside of St. Louis.  
 . Carol Marie

**Sign up for the next session of the ACW Email Book Group.**

We will read together the new book on kenosis by Cyprian Consiglio, OSB Cam: *The God Who Gave You Birth—A Spirituality of Kenosis*

Through scripture, the thoughts of theologians, Benedictine monasticism, Jewish and Islamic traditions, and along with his own personal reflections, Cyprian explores how we think of God as Jesus reveals God to be.

The book is available on digital editions and hard copy. We will begin on February 14 and read and reflect on each section for two weeks

Send an email to Terry Dowd at [dowdstd@hotmail.com](mailto:dowdstd@hotmail.com) to sign up.

Cyprian will be our guest speaker at our upcoming General Assembly.

## President's Letter

Happy new year to each of you.

It seems the new year came too quickly. I think part of it is that as a liturgist, we seem to have fewer days during the Christmas season this year. When the Feast of the Holy Family is the day after Christmas, and Epiphany, the day after the Feast of Mary, the Mother of God, I missed all those days in between to at least slow down and pause between one grand celebration and the next one. Nevertheless, time moves forward.

Time is a good topic for the month of January. I do not know why death also has come up in the last few days. Twice I got to share that I have a poem in the top drawer of my desk titled,

“Anniversary of the Day of My Death.” The point is simply that, though we do not know the actual date at this point, each year we live through whenever that date might come. Today, I am watching a beautiful snowfall here in Minnesota. Beautiful! Lots of small flakes adding to the snow that has been collecting on any horizontal surfaces



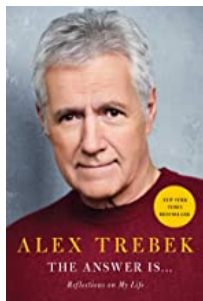
outside since mid-morning. I usually say, “These are my teacher prayers being answered 40 years late!” I loved snow days. The surprise of having a day at home was always such a gift. We even had some in St. Louis, but not too many. I suspect I can watch the snow fall and relax because I do not

need to go anywhere on the roads today. What would I do with surprise free time? Read and find time and space to walk. I am currently reading two

autobiographies, *The Answer Is . . .* by Alex Trebek and *Becoming* by Michelle Obama. All very different and yet they all hold my attention. I am

most challenged by Michelle's book because of her writing style, as well as

some of the things I have learned about her and her growing up. Makes me think we all should write our biography as honestly as she did, and do it for publishing, not just for our spiritual director or therapist. I am also reading *The God Who Gave You Birth* by Cyprian Consiglio. The cover article tells you a bit about this book.



I think I could make time to slow down if I began writing my autobiography. That is a commitment I think I can make, especially as the snow continues to fall. I encourage each of you to do the same. We have read some of these in the pages of this Newsletter in the past. I really enjoyed reading about our sisters on these pages and I know the leadership team would welcome others to share their stories. Think about it . . . I am sure I am not the only one who likes to get to know others of my ACW sisters. Happy writing in this new year.

. Carol Marie Hemish, SSND

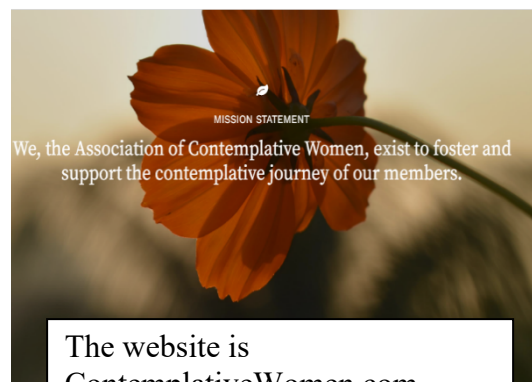
*The day after I finished this message, Krista Tippet's weekly email arrived in my inbox. The topic: "Living with Time." I would encourage you get acquainted to this weekly email, "The Pause" (used to be 'On Being') and follow what is of interest to you.*

## Website

Our new ACW website is up and running! The public pages tell our story and invite new women to join us. There are pictures of various members, quotes about contemplation from wisdom teachers and quotes from members about ACW. The Resources page has lists of documents, books and websites written or offered by our talented members.

The Members Only pages are meant for our use. We can tell our sisters something about ourselves on the Membership List. Share our meditations, poems, reflections and tributes in Mystics in Our Midst. Enjoy the photo gallery that will spark memories. Other resources include Books for the Journey and the ACW resource library. And you can check out information about how we are structured and work together.

Instructions about how to log into the website so that you have access to the Members Only pages will be included with the dues letter and on the Connections email.



The website is  
ContemplativeWomen.com  
If you have difficulty getting on  
contact Melissa Barbour or  
Terry Dowd

It has been an effort of love by Hildegarde Pleva, Melissa Barbour and me. We hope that you enjoy it and that it will help ACW continue to flourish

. Terry Dowd

## Prayer Circle News

Our Prayer Circle remains active and vibrant. We continue to meet monthly for quiet prayer. We are also nearing the end of our second year of meeting weekly for our prayer/reflection service that we began in March of 2020, when the churches closed. The support and care we experience for our contemplative journeys has been life giving and invaluable. We have come to know each other more deeply as we have prayed about, for and through a variety of topics and issues concerning our world at large, as well as personal needs of family and friends. We take turns facilitating and preparing the readings for sharing and reflection, thus drawing on the creativity and gifts of circle members.

We have considered the writings and drawn on the wisdom of a variety of contemplatives and spiritual masters from various traditions. These include Thomas Merton, St Francis of Assisi, Theresa of Lisieux, Beverly Lanzetta, Bernadette Roberts, Richard Rohr, Rumi and more. We have reflected on themes such as: *gratitude and relationship; sacredness of all creatures and creation; Christ in the Margins; Advent, kenosis and transformation; humility* and much, much more. From my experience and observation our prayer circle gives living witness to the Mission of ACW and my life is greatly enriched by the community shared with my circle sisters. (On the right is one of the prayers, shared as a gathering prayer by a circle member during one of our meetings.)

With gratitude,  
. Diane Caspers



*As we join together this day in the light of Your Presence, we are reminded that we are all one in the Divine Heart. May our longing for oneness transform our world. May our hearts be opened, in the very depths where we find you, God, to the glorious expression of your love found in all religions and spiritual traditions. You speak to us, Holy Mystery, in this diversity, and we are enriched and humbled by the breadth and depth of your Silence and of your Words. May our gathering together this day signify our hopes for the harmony of our planet, the alleviation of suffering, food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, and respect for the poor. May this flame be a testimony of our willingness to commit our lives to the advent of peace, loving all and embracing all in the family of creation. Amen.*

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## Remembering Taize

(Preface: Taize is a French tradition. People gather around the altar and sing repetitive hymns. From different traditions, in various languages. St Francis of Assisi has offered Taize prayer every Wednesday evening for more than 25 years. It is a simple service, with two cantors, a violinist and a piano player, all volunteers. The service has been suspended during the pandemic; however, the music director recorded a service for each of the four weeks of Advent which can be watched on YouTube. For the past 15 years, a small group did a meditative movement practice during the service).



French Taize Community

Taize.

I remember it well. Do you?

The darkened church. The candles. The incense.

The people gathered. Some sitting on the steps near the altar. Others in chairs in the old sanctuary. Still others sitting or lying in the pews.

And us. In the back. In the winter we were in darkness. In the summer, the light made us visible. Together we did the practice. Its repetitive movements became part of the repetitive songs. All one prayer. All one grace-filled vibration.

Together we all paused for the Lord's Prayer, singing to "our mother, our father". When our practice was complete, we would join the others near the violin and piano. Then sit in silence as the service ended.

The songs, many familiar, hold memories. Memories of lost ones. Memories of recoveries. Memories of those we came to know in the darkness, the stillness and the song. The hour was a collective breath of relief, a quiet space within our busy and sometimes noisy lives.

Nothing can replace it. Nothing can mimic it. But we can carry it - all of it - in our hearts, in our very being.

Taize. I remember it well. Do you?

. Sue Kenney

### **It is a Scary a Time**

(Note: This was written in March of 2020 but the message holds true today)

It is a scary time. It is a sacred time.

We wash our hands. Then wash them again.

We shy away from hands extended in greeting.

We shop for toilet paper and find none.

We ache for community gatherings and are told to stay home.

Yes. It is a scary time. No one knows when or how it will end.

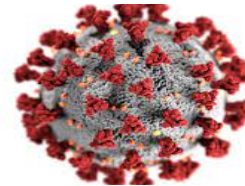
We hear scenarios of optimism and scenarios of doom.

What can we do? How can we be?

We read of vulnerable people. We listen to advice. On where to go or not. On how to relate or not.

We feel isolated yet we need community more than ever.

We feel helpless yet we are called to be there for one another.



The Italians sing from their balconies. Songs of joy. Songs of hope. Sacred songs echoing through the towns and villages. Sung by those imprisoned in their own homes. Begging for liberation. Aching for a hug, a smile, It is a time of worries. Worries about business declines. Of income decreases. Of unexpected expenses.

It is a time of losses. Of vacation plans cancelled. Of events postponed. Of community centers closed.

It is a time of doubt. About the severity of the crisis. Of the truthfulness of public statements. Of the capability of government.

But, it can be a reflective time, a sobering time, a slowing time. A time for foregoing the Starbucks drive through, the thoughtless spending, the constant frenzy of activity.

It can be a time to become reacquainted with our inner selves, the quiet voices that are lost in the daily hub bub. To be reintroduced to the Divine, that all pervading presence that we often ignore or fail to recognize.

So. What shall we make of this time? This unprecedented time in our lives. Shall we be overcome with fear, paralyzed by premonitions? Or can we embrace the sacred, quiet the chatter and trust the good in each of us, in all of us?

Yes. It is a scary time. It is a sacred time

. Sue Kenney

### **Minneapolis Cluster News**

Eight of us in the Minnesota cluster met **November 27th** via ZOOM. We began with our usual format of 20 minutes of meditation followed by a personal check-in of the members present.

Arlene asked us to think about "How this time, with its COVID restrictions, affects us spiritually going into 2022". We also brainstormed and planned our meetings for the coming year. A number of ideas were discussed several members volunteered to facilitate our monthly meeting (see schedule below)

We also decided to change our December meeting to January 1, instead of meeting on Christmas day. The 2022 Schedule is as follows. *And, since we are meeting virtually, please be reminded that our cluster welcomes new members, even if you are not residing in Minnesota. (If you wish to join our cluster, feel free to email Diane Caspers, [deecasp@gmail.com](mailto:deecasp@gmail.com) or call me 507 317 4783)*

January 1 - Suzanne Runte - **Topic: Living in God's Presence**

January 29 - Patsy Jones

February 26 - Mary Lou Ott

March 26 - Donna Welsh

April 30 - Terri Ellis

May 28 - Deb Fisher

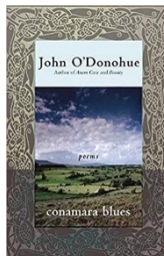
June 25 - Mary Sarazan

The individuals who are facilitating on these dates will send out their topics and more information before the meeting date.

A brief discussion on Richard Rohr's daily meditation column of November 7th "Telling Us How to See" followed.

A very blessed, happy, healthy and safe 2022 to all. I will leave all with a few lines from John O'Donohue's poem **At the End of the Year**

. Terri Ellis



### ***At the end of the Year***

**".....As this year draws to its end,  
We give thanks for the gifts it brought  
And how they became inlaid within  
Where neither time nor tide can touch  
them.....**

**We bless this year for all we learned,  
For all we loved and lost  
And for the quiet way it brought us  
Nearer to our invisible destination."**

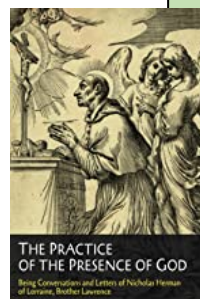
**On January 1**, nine of us met, via zoom, to bring in the New Year! We included in our thoughts and prayer, those who could not attend. Our meeting topic was "Living in God's Presence." For me (Suzanne Runte, who facilitated the meeting) it was meant to address living well in these Covid times.

Because God lives in each of us, after our check ins, everyone shared how they felt blessed by the woman who just spoke before them. I feel that we need human connection, especially during this time. I am impressed with the many long standing relationships we have in our cluster. Much love and beautiful reflections of the gifts each woman offers to us were shared. This was true for newer as well as long term members.

We all felt touched by what we heard about ourselves from our sisters, and we had a chance to reflect on each woman's blessed presence to all of us. It was a meaningful day!

I quoted from Brother Lawrence. (see box at the right)

. Suzanne Runte



### ***The Practice of the Presence of God.***

It is paradise to suffer and be with him; so that if in this life we would enjoy the peace of paradise we must accustom ourselves to a familiar, humble, affectionate conversation with Him. We must hinder our spirits' wandering from Him upon any occasion. We must make our heart a spiritual temple, wherein to adore Him incessantly.

## **From the Editor**

This month's big news for me is Nancy Rude's retirement as the alchemist who turns random submissions into a cohesive and readable newsletter. I will sorely miss her—her skill, patience, and cheer. She leaves a hole in our communications, that is for sure. Is there a member out there who'd be willing to try to fill her role? I'd be glad to answer questions...

At our monthly Leadership Team meeting earlier this month, Diane Caspers was in charge of our prayer/reflection. She'd asked us earlier to consider what we wanted to leave behind us in 2021, and what we wanted to find in 2022. Our answers were surprisingly varied and personal, and we wondered what answers others in ACW might offer.

What are you ready to leave behind you?  
What would you like to find in the new year?

If you'd be willing to share, drop me a line at [karenvaranauskas@yahoo.com](mailto:karenvaranauskas@yahoo.com), or call 989-506-3750 and leave a message.  
. Karen Varanauskas

### My retirement as formatter

There comes a time when the eyes don't work as well and the computer frustrations become too stressful. That is the time to let go and let someone else take over. It has been a privilege to format the newsletter and use my creative skills to do things I enjoy and to be of service for so long. Thank you all for that privilege. I will miss doing it but I will be relieved also. I hope you can find someone with similar and/or even better skills than I. (Basically I just used Microsoft office and Google images to do what I did. I never worked before in any professional capacity as a formatter of anything. I don't even know all the things that Microsoft Office can do. I learned by experimenting. And over the years I became fairly proficient with it.)

Anyway, I trust that all will go well with finding someone to carry on. Thanks for the journey.

I am including (at the right) my Christmas message in the card I created for my friends and family this year.  
. Nancy S. Rude

**Below is the card face.**



Celebrate!!!

A Birth foretold  
Love in human form  
A sign humanity is worth it  
Love needing protection  
Then and now  
Against the powers that be  
Powers seeking to destroy  
To destroy Love itself

Love, the remedy  
Against our soul sickness  
The sickness manifest in the destruction of truth  
Truth, a necessary ingredient to Love

Protect the Love within you  
The very meaning of life itself

May the love of the Christ with us  
bring you joy and hope this Christmas  
and throughout the new year.  
. Nancy Rude