

WCCM-USA

UPDATE AND NEWS

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Gathering at Black Mountain for **The Beauty and Silence Retreat**

Do you know that moment when you know (for sure) that winter is turning to spring? That's what greeted us as we gathered on Black Mountain for the Beauty & Silence Retreat, April 16-21 at Montreat Conference Center, North Carolina. The Dogwoods were abundant; the sounds of the mountain streams unmistakable; and the Rhododendron pregnant—but not quite ready. The air was crisp.

On Wednesday afternoon, we were off on a 'field trip' of sorts—an exercise written-up by Richard Rohr for retreats he's led in nature. The assignment was to go out, individually into the area. Then to pick one spot (under a tree branch, or maybe just off the pavement, beyond a stone or past some landmark) and choose that as a place to "step over the threshold." Once there—we were to speak no words, only seek God's Presence in the beauty and silence. We had more than an hour for our adventure. But before we left our setting, we were to write a Haiku and a Cinquain, and to offer a gesture of thanks and gratitude, before once again "stepping over the threshold" we chose and to come back to our contemplative worship time.

As we came forward during Communion, we brought our poetry forward, and placed it on the table as our offering which I experienced as a very sacred act.

I can't tell you whose beautiful words are sprinkled on this page. We each submitted our words anonymously. Sorry I could not fit them all on this page ... there are more to share than the space we have. But for me, this little ritual and time of sharing and receiving was a highlight of our time together.

We learned a wonderful phrase during the week which held us in our time on the mountain and which we also carry back with us into our ordinary lives. The phrase is "graced gaze." It means to already have within us (in our hearts) the beauty we want to see. For if we look with a graced gaze, everything we see is beautiful. Our meditation practice and our silence is how we cultivate that gaze.



Stream
Steady Gentle
Moving, Falling, Wandering
Going over many rocks
Peaceful

Fear not the stillness
Or the untrammelled choice
Breathe in the Beauty

A Tireless Journey
Effortless Seeking the Way
Clear, Cool, Water Flows

Water
Overflowing, Falling
Refreshing, Renewing,
Sustaining
Cannot be contained
Spirit

Dogwoods
Fragrant Blooms
Fleeting springtime harbinger
You shine from within
Mystery

CREEK
musical, elegant
meandering, refreshing,
mesmerizing
Welcoming all life forms
BROOK



It is my hope that if you could not join us for Beauty & Silence, you will take the time in the near future to join WCCM-USA for an up-coming retreat either in person or online. There are so many benefits/fruits of spending time with women and men who seek the heart of God in silence. You can watch this Newsletter for the offerings!

If you have an idea for a retreat or workshop day, please be in touch. Would love to hear what you might offer the WCCM-USA community! Seeing you with a beautiful gaze, Kathleen (bronagh.oblsb@icloud.com)

Creativity and Serendipity

“The camera is an instrument that teaches people to see without a camera”

—Dorothy Lange, photographer

Nature photography and meditation complement each other. Both are contemplative practices requiring reverence and discipline. Both continually teach me at deepening levels how to be still, silent, and present.

Creativity demands openness. Serendipity is looking for one thing and finding something unexpected that sparks the imagination. God arranges the serendipity. It’s my job to notice possibilities and use the camera at the right moment.

Numerous WCCM mentors have assisted my ongoing meditation practice after I got the gist of meditation by sitting alone for hours in south Texas photography blinds. I follow John Main’s instructions to “close your eyes lightly” when meditating indoors, but nature photography originally taught me how to meditate with eyes wide open outdoors.

Bird photographers envision such-and-such bird (say a cardinal) will land on a certain branch and hold its head at an angle just so sunlight glints off its eye. These desired ideal, pristine circumstances often don’t materialize, yet photography happens if I can be receptive to the images that show themselves as gifts.

Some of my favorite photographs are ones that I never could have preconceived. For example, I surprised myself by quickly dropping the goal of a closeup photo of a sandhill crane standing in the river to instead photograph cranes flying off in the distance against a colorful sunset sky.



This article was given as a Creative Response to Life. We invite others to send in articles that reveal their own experiences of balancing listening to teachers and actually entering the “kingdom” among us and in us in childlike wonder. Please send your submissions to: Sharon@wccm-usa.org.

How did I shift from my initial idea to re-imagining the photo? First, I took very lightly any expectations of myself and the resulting photograph. Second, I prayed for willingness to abandon preconceived plans and receive the images unfolding around me.

Meditation has taught me that photography is not acquiring photos as if they were possessions, but rather it’s about staying open to receive the images that nature and God gift me. I hope my photographs reflect wonder and gratitude. (Paula Dittrick)

A Call to Meditating Clergy

One of my favorite passages from St. Benedict’s Rule is, “An ordained priest who asks to be received into the monastery should not be accepted too quickly. If, however, he shows real perseverance in his request, he must understand that, if accepted, he will be bound to observe the full discipline of the Rule and may expect no relaxations” (Ch. 60).

Benedict didn’t think clergy were essential to monastic life and might even be suspect! But today, as our community seeks to develop contemplative consciousness within parishes and the wider church, meditating priests and pastors, of which I am one, may be well placed to further this effort.

The Executive Committee would like to learn what meditating clergy share in the life of the WCCM-USA community. Partly, we are interested in developing comradery and a network of support among clergy that meditate. We also wonder how such connections could release energy in parishes and regions for growing churches toward a more contemplative character.

So, if you are a meditating priest or pastor and this interests you, I would be delighted to hear from you—no perseverance needed—at matt@wccm-usa.org. (Matt Reeves - matt@wccm-usa.org)

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Thank You!

Days of “Risking Delight” at Bonnevaux

by Matt Reeves

The first week of May ten from the US community joined pilgrims from Trinidad, the UK, New Zealand, and across Europe, to share in the retreat, “Risking Delight,” led at Bonnevaux Centre for Peace by Rev. Dr. Sarah Bachelard. Sarah took her title from Jack Gilbert’s poem, “A Brief for the Defense,” which begins with a sense of the world many know well:

Sorrow everywhere. Slaughter everywhere. If babies are not starving someplace, they are starving somewhere else. With flies in their nostrils.

The week’s exploration on which Sarah set us came from the poem’s next line: “But we enjoy our lives because that’s what God wants.” “We must,” she claimed with Jack Gilbert, “risk delight.” But how to do this with authenticity, without irresponsible, willed disconnect from the plight of the world and of those close to us, let alone denial of our own struggle and pain?

Across the days, Sarah gave talks that probed such questions as: Why has the church so little spoken of joy as essential to God’s being? If a joyous God weaves the fabric of the universe, what do we do with a world of such trouble? What is the process of becoming liberated for deeper joy? Is joy an occasional privilege or is it necessary and fundamental to every moment of life?

Meditator that she is, Sarah resisted simplistic answers or sorting out the questions for us but ended talks by inviting us to reflection. To what extent have we understood God as essentially joyous? What in our own lives do we lament, and how must we give ourselves to lament to create space for the possibility of delight? What messages running through our heads inhibit the possibility of joy? How might authentic joy send us closer to the world’s trouble?

And of course, she claimed that meditation is a practice that opens us to delight simply in God’s joyous presence



with us, on days when we ourselves feel joyous and on days when we don’t.

The setting and community of Bonnevaux enhanced the gift of retreat with Sarah. The four times a day meditation with the daily office. Shared stories from fellow pilgrims. Grounds effulgent with spring—wildflower, birdsong, gentle breeze and sun. A special ceremony with Liz Stewart and her sister, led by Fr. Laurence, to inter the remains of Jay Stewart near where the altar of the old abbey once stood.

The pilgrimage days came with invitation that continues to ask for acceptance. In the words of another poem Sarah referenced, by Ellen Bass,

The Thing Is

to love life, to love it even
when you have no stomach for it
and everything you’ve held dear
crumbles like burnt paper in your hands...

For in and with us is a pain-bearing God who risked delight by living with us. A God whose overflowing joy, even when obscured, is closer than a said mantra away.



Photos: far left: Stained glass window in old Chapel, marked from Paris Studio 1800’s; near left photo: Linda Broadfoot receiving a blessing from Fr Laurence Freeman at her Oblate Novice ceremony. The setting is the meditation/prayer hall at Bonnevaux (the original barn.)

UPCOMING & CURRENT EVENTS

Monthly Monday Compline

via Zoom

Every First Monday of the Month

For your convenience, there will be a zoom group on the east coast and also a zoom group on the west coast.

Times: 8:00 PM Eastern and 7:00 PM Pacific
(You will need to translate to your time zone!)

See the e-invitation and register at this link:

<https://conta.cc/3r0cEW0>

for information:

Bill Hobbs (bhobbs@jesuitretreatcenter.org)

8:00 PM Eastern time

Patrice Jones (pvjharris1@gmail.com)

7:00 PM Pacific time

WCCM-USA Summer Community Day

Via Zoom — Let us all gather!

June 24, 2023

More Info: **Pat King** (patrickking50@gmail.com)

WCCM-USA End of Year Christmas Party

Via Zoom — Time to Celebrate

December 3, 2023

More Info: **Pat King** (patrickking50@gmail.com)

The Good Heart Seminar Recordings - Session Four

August 12, 2023

The Dalai Lama and Fr Laurence Freeman

Hosted online with Paul Dunn and Gene Bebeau

Essential Teaching Weekend

IN-PERSON

Chicago IL — July 21 - 23, 2023

(Contact **Betsy Spiering**: wccmchgo@gmail.com)

Save the Date!

More information to come!

2024 US NATIONAL CONFERENCE

July 12-14, 2024

New Harmony, Indiana

(where in 1991, WCCM was formally begun)

Watch your emails for invitations and more information

The Peace of Childhood: Introducing Meditation to Children



Jesuit Retreat Center

Parma, OH 44134

Tuesday, August 1 3:00 PM -

Thursday, August 3, 10:00 AM EST

For teachers and individuals with children in their lives

To register and for more information visit:

www.jesuitretreatcenter.org/calendar

Contact Us: WCCM-USA

WCCM-USA Administrative Office

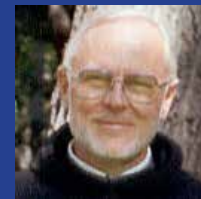
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NEWSLETTER

For article submissions,
please contact Sharon@wccm-usa.org

We appreciate your support of the publication of
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<https://wccm-usa.org>



*“Silence is really absolutely necessary for
the human spirit if it really is to thrive,
and not only just to thrive, but to be creative,
to have a creative response to life, to our
environment, to friends.”*

JOHN MAIN OSB

Word Into Silence