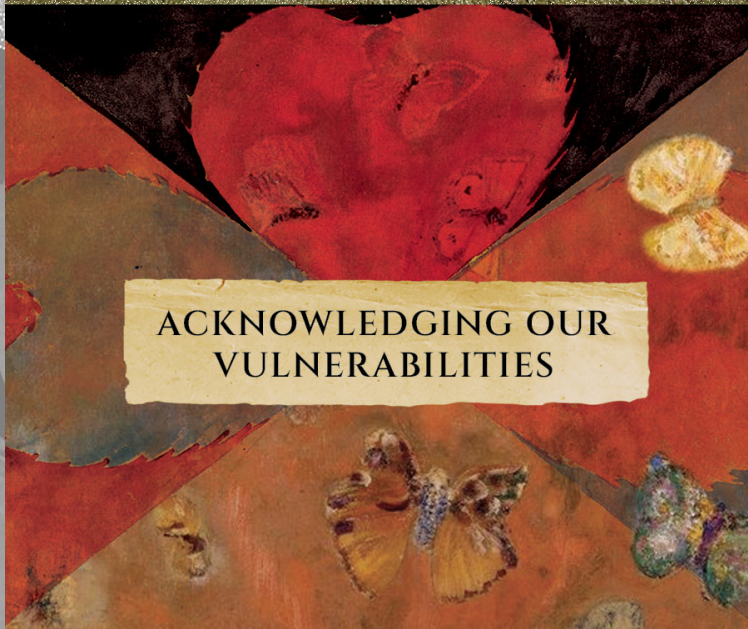


June 2024  
Volume 36  
Number 6



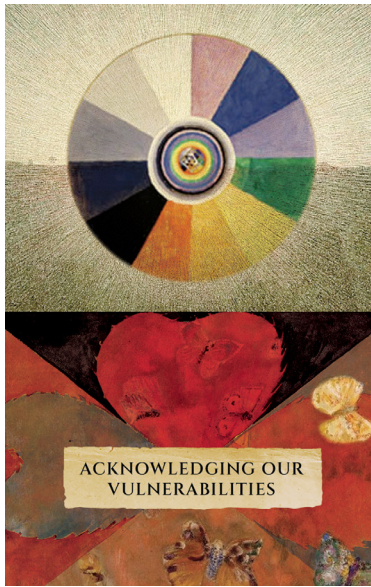
# The Mark

A Publication of The Church of Conscious Harmony ❖ A Contemplative Christian Community



ACKNOWLEDGING OUR  
VULNERABILITIES





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... *then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.* 1 Corinthians 13:12

## ANNUAL AIM: HOLY UNKNOWING

### THE DIGESTION OF IMPRESSIONS THROUGH ILLNESS AND VULNERABILITY

BY RUSTY NELSON

However far any one of us is destined to travel on this wilderness, journey, learning to lean into the diminishment, to live with paradox and unknowing, and to celebrate the creativity without dissociating from the pain are all vital survival skills as we humans collectively feel our way into the new beginning.

Cynthia Bourgeault, "Thomas Keating's The Secret Embrace," an e-course offered by Spirituality & Practice

*"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"*

*He woke up and rebuked the wind,  
and said to the sea,  
"Peace! Be still."*

*Then the wind ceased,  
and there was a dead calm.*

*He said to them,*

*"Why are you afraid?"*

*Have you still no faith?"*

Mark 4:38-40

The greater our attachment to that which is outside of ourselves, the greater is our overall level of fear and vulnerability to loss.

... Where am I looking to get love rather than to give it?

The more loving we are, the less vulnerable we are to grief and loss, and the less we need to seek attachments.

David Hawkins, *Letting Go: The Pathway of Surrender*

Feeling particularly vulnerable, my wife, Sue Young, and I were driving from Austin to MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston for a second opinion. The first opinion was chronic myelomonocytic leukemia, treatable by a bone marrow transplant. Worst case, I assumed that MD Anderson would verify that diagnosis, yet there was a lingering attachment to the idea that the leukemia diagnosis was wrong and I would go on living a "normal" life.

The previous night in The Journey School, Robin Bloor was taking questions after his teaching. He made a comment that perhaps

the purpose of a human life was to effectively digest impressions. I was struck – knowing this comment was relevant for my spiritual journey and believing it was big! I just did not know how big or how relevant, but there was a willingness to lean into this unknowing.

The MD Anderson appointment was late in the afternoon on Friday, September 19, 2022. Our hematologist verified the initial diagnosis, but also indicated that some of my measurements had increased significantly over the last month. He wanted me to check into the hospital immediately.

The shocking news pierced

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every aspect of my life and my life with Sue. My hopes, dreams and attachments were turned upside down. I had never experienced a greater example of the inherent vulnerability to loss and life.

I was told to expect a two-week hospital stay followed by two weeks of out-patient care. The goal of the prompt treatment was to prepare my body for a stem cell transplant. If all went as planned, I would be in Houston for four months. After that, I could return to Austin and start a slow recovery process that could last another couple of years.

I observed a fragment of my personality responding to this shock as a vulnerable victim. I could see how this “why me” attitude would be a dark companion for the remainder of my life. I knew that I did not want to travel with this companion! I reached for the proverbial rope and the idea of “effectively digesting impressions” came to meet me.

I wondered.... What would happen if I treated everything going on around me as an impression to be effectively digested? What if the leukemia diagnosis was not sad news happening to me, but an impression to be digested? What if suddenly checking into the hospital was not a case of horrible luck, but an impression to be digested? What if the need for temporary housing in Houston was not the ultimate

hassle, but an impression to be digested? What if the moment the doctor shook Sue’s hand, touched my shoulder and shared a deep moment of sacred silence was an impression to be effectively digested? What if my ability to do this Work of Inner Christianity under these circumstances had a direct bearing on Earth’s ability to play its cosmic role?

What does it mean to effectively digest an impression? For me, the idea initially works on a vibratory, phonetic level. The sound of the syllables together gave me space between the impression and how I took in the impression. I likened effective digestion of an impression to effective digestion of food. Taste the impression. Chew the impression well. Pray that your Being has the capacity to transform the impression into a finer, more positive energy.


This moment of metanoia had a profound effect on how I was able to respond to this life-changing event. At so many points in the journey, Sue and I were met with extraordinary Grace. One of my daughters was able to source a living situation in Houston that did not cost us anything. Sue’s employer gave her three months of paid leave. Heroes at my job were able to serve my customers in my absence. Sue and I grew closer together through

the experience.

As I started to realize the profound impact this idea was having on my healing, I started imagining these impressions as living beings. Imagine an impression having hopes and desires. What might these be? As a receiver of that impression, imagine you wanting the best for this impression. The impression becomes a fellow being that you want to do right by. The impression is not something to handle, but someone to love.

This pondering led to a song lyric written from the perspective of an impression:

“I am an impression  
Part of a succession  
Praying for digestion  
Into something finer  
Will you know how to treat me?  
Will you take me in deeply?  
Let me change completely  
Into something higher”

In following David Hawkins’ recommendation, “The more loving we are, the less vulnerable we are to grief and loss, and the less we need to seek attachments.” As we let go and let God, we experience deeper, loving, and intimate relationships with the impressions that come our way. We are here for impressions and impressions are here for us. How we digest them can make all the difference for those in our lives, in the world, and even the universe. 

## THE WORK OF INNER CHRISTIANITY

### BEING VULNERABLE BY SANDRA ELY

Maurice Nicoll shares this insight in *The Psychological Commentaries*, “The experiences we have are necessary for us. ... We must be awake to the conscious view that the experience belongs to us because our being needs it in order to develop. ... To take life-experiences as material for work on oneself is a reversal of the usual way of taking them. Once you pity yourself, or identify in some other way, ... you are no longer doing the Work. Now, in all this it is your weak spot – that is, where you are most vulnerable – that prevents you from using these experiences instead of letting them use you. Of course, if you never observe yourself, you will never see your weak spot. There may be more than one. These weak spots ... can only be strengthened by means of the Work.”

In my experience, strengthening weak spots happen when I consciously choose to be vulnerable. This vulnerability comes from a place of strength and requires me to bear the difficulty of being human and the pain of waiting for something to shift. When I can just sit there and bear it, accept what is, feel the feelings, remember that I am held and loved, and have faith that this too shall pass, then indeed the vulnerable

spots are strengthened. Without difficult experiences, one may not be transformed as deeply and as thoroughly.

In acknowledging weak spots, I feel fear, resistance, disconnection and being guarded. I see Ts that want to look good and have it all together, that think they know what is best (including what others need), and that tell me I’m falling short. This stings. For example, when I make a big mistake, especially if it was avoidable, feelings of embarrassment, shame, remorse, and self-justification may arise and torturously linger. The good news is I can Work to release the grip of such experiences.


Resisting vulnerability isolates and builds barriers that disconnect me from others, from my true Self and from Thy will. This fear-based self-protection attitude wants to keep me safe and comfortable but constricts flow and keeps me from connecting with higher centers and possibilities.

Opening to my vulnerabilities is dropping my guard to stand with courage and that connects me to unknown possibilities. Feelings of discomfort fade into receptiveness, a willingness to let it be or lean into uncertainty, to risk exposure and wait. Being vulnerable is trusting the process,


## CORE FOUNDATIONAL BOOKS

The Church of Conscious Harmony recommends 23 books as essential reading for growth and transformation on the spiritual journey. Copies are on display in the Praxis Center. One core foundational book will appear in these pages each month.

*Meetings with Remarkable Men*  
by G.I. Gurdjieff

These are the memoirs of the great mystic and teacher who inspired a generation of disciples and followers before, during and briefly after the Second World War. Gurdjieff introduces us to some of the companions he encountered in his travels to the most remote regions of Central Asia. With colorful episodes from his adventures, he brings to life the story of his own relentless search for a real and universal knowledge. The book can be read as a fascinating narrative or psychological autobiography, but the meaning of its contents can be better appreciated in relation to the expositions of his previously published ideas. 

waiting for guidance, inspiration, wisdom – all the gifts of the Spirit.

Remember, we can Work in the moment or later. When we are conscious, nothing is lost! 

For more experience with the Work teachings, please join the Thursday evening online classes hosted by The Journey School.



## FOUNDATIONS

THE MIND OF CHRIST BY MARY ANNE BEST

The year was 2007. The call and the invitation for the annual aim, *The Mind of Christ*, invited us to turn inward away from the sense-based mind of the world and live from the Indwelling Presence, which is always and everywhere informing us of the Truth and Goodness of all manifestation. In practicing *The Mind of Christ*, we aimed to participate in life on a different scale with our understanding at the level of the Sun/Son in the Ray of Creation. We were given new eyes to see ... and new ears to hear.

We remembered the words of Fr. Thomas Keating: "By taking into ourselves the mind of Christ with [Christ's] dispositions, we will begin to function out of the various bodies of Christ. We will bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, the Beatitudes. The intention of identification with the mind of Christ is an infusion of enormous energy into the psychological atmosphere of the planet. Because of its inherent power, it can reach those places in the world that seem to be immersed in violence, hatred, and the very

reverse of the mind of Christ."

In 2007, we aimed to put on the mind of Christ and to ponder and manifest the fruits of the Spirit and the Beatitudes.

We affirmed:

"Blessed is the mind of Christ.  
Blessed are they that wish  
for the mind of Christ."

Our prayer for each of us was:

"May Divine grace be given  
to reinforce our will to complete  
abandonment in God,  
our Beatitude, that we may  
become a beatitude  
for all humanity. Amen."

We wished to keep our intention and participation engaged, anticipating second force, entropy and the Law of the Octave. We wished ... and wished again. We affirmed:

Here, by grace ...  
We aim to know the Living God.  
We are fed the teachings.  
We are called to practice.  
We have community.  
We are grateful. Let us awaken.

Gloria in Excelsis Deo! 2007  
was a good year. ☸



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*But whenever you pray, go into your inner room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. Matthew 6:6*

## CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER

### DIVINE LOVE IS VULNERABILITY BY SANDRA ELY

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As contemplatives, we are giving our lives to God and know he is love and is here now, whatever the outer circumstances appear to be. Let us remember Jesus said, “Love each other as I have loved you,” and “You can tell my disciples by their love.”

Fr. Thomas Keating shares in his book *The Heart of the World*, “Vulnerability means to be hurt over and over again without seeking to love less, but more. Divine Love is sheer vulnerability; sheer openness to giving. To experience death many times over and also encounter the joy of ever rising again ... the best way to receive Divine Love is to give it away, the more we give away the more we increase our capacity to receive.”

Barbara Cook, our emeritus minister, previously wrote in *The Mark* how she thanks God for Fr. Thomas and for Centering Prayer. “Through this practice we begin to see God everywhere, with the x-ray eyes of faith, even in the most God-awful circumstances. ... Our calling is to be fully human and fully divine. Our

example is Jesus, who showed us how to love when being betrayed, abandoned, falsely accused, met with refusal of the gift of love, and eventually crucified. He did not love less but more, saying at last, *Father forgive them for they know not what they do.*”

Barbara continues, “Centering Prayer is a beautiful prayer that opens us to receive God’s love and be healed of our self-centeredness. Through its practice we begin to love as God loves us, fully, mercifully, without conditions, and forgiving without limit.

We find ourselves willing to be vulnerable; to being hurt over and over again; and not loving less, but loving more. That is how God enters our world and how our false-self dies to its tiny world to be reborn as Christ, now fully capable of loving as God loves.”

Upheld by prayer and faith, may we be vulnerably open to giving and receiving this love. ☸

For more information and events involving Centering Prayer, please check our website. The offerings are plentiful, including daily services and monthly retreats.

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## COMMUNITY PRACTICE

JUNE-AUGUST

### PRACTICING HOSPITALITY

During these summer months in the midst of our travels and hosting, we are invited to ponder and practice a new quality of presence through hospitality. Practicing hospitality is a contemplative practice, an inner disposition. The host serves and, at the same time, the guest has a gift to give. Anxiety, hurriedness, much doing can block the reciprocal gift that hospitality can bring. Contemplative hospitality is mutuality shared in stillness of being-presence. Hospitality is love in action. Discover its gifts in both giving and receiving. ☸

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# COMMUNITY READING

JUNE-AUGUST

*The Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*  
by Douglas Christie



What might it mean to behold the world with such depth and feeling that it is no longer possible to imagine it as something separate from ourselves, or to live without regard for its well-being? In *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind*, Douglas Christie proposes a distinctively contemplative approach to ecological thought and practice that can help restore our sense of the Earth as a sacred place.

Christie suggests it is the quality of our attention to the natural world that must change if we are to learn how to live in a sustainable relationship with other living organisms and with one another. He notes that there is a deep and pervasive hunger for a more integrated way of apprehending and inhabiting the living world and for a way of responding to the ecological crisis that expresses our deepest moral and spiritual values.

Christie explores how the wisdom of ancient and modern contemplative traditions can inspire both an honest reckoning with the destructive patterns of thought and behavior and a greater sense of care and responsibility for all living beings. These traditions can help us cultivate the simple, spacious awareness of the enduring beauty and wholeness of the natural world and all life that are necessary if we are to live with greater purpose and meaning, and with less harm to our planet and one another. The book is also a primer on the contemplative mind and a gift for the awakening of the heart. ☸

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## SUNDAY MESSAGE THEMES

JUNE-AUGUST

THE EXTRAORDINARY PARABLES OF JESUS

During the summer season of Ordinary Time, we will explore the extraordinary Parables of Jesus in the spirit of Holy Unknowing – with a wish that these parables might challenge and inspire us to let go of our ordinary models of reality and envision a renewed sense of ourselves, others, and the Kingdom of God. ☸

## JUNE CALENDAR

For more details,  
visit [consciousharmony.com](http://consciousharmony.com)  
or call 512-347-9673

### SPECIAL EVENTS

\*Introduction to Centering Prayer Class  
Jun 1 9am-noon & 4 consecutive Tuesdays  
noon-1:15pm Register online \$15

5-Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
(at Cedarbrake Renewal Center)  
Experience the healing love of God  
Jun 7-11 \$650 Register online

Art of Moving Meditation Enrichment  
Explore Tai Chi and Qi Gong with  
Centering Prayer \$30  
June 15 8:30am-4pm Register online

Half-Day Centering Prayer Retreat at CCH  
Jun 23 noon-4pm Register online

### MONTHLY

1st Sundays Caritas Donations  
Bring non-perishables to CCH  
or donate to [caritasofaustin.org](http://caritasofaustin.org)

### WEEKLY

Wednesdays

†Contemplative Service 6-7pm

Thursdays

\*The Journey School Class 7-8:30pm

Fridays

❖Communion Service in Sacristy 7:40am

Saturdays

\*Centering Prayer Support Group 7:35am

Sundays

†Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina 8-9am

❖Intercessory Prayer 9:30am Room 302

†Worship Service 10-11:30am

❖Youth Program (preK-12) 10-11:30am

DAILY

†Centering Prayer Service 7-7:35am

\*Centering Prayer 6-6:20pm

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\*Please join via online video options.  
Contact the website for accessible links  
and more information.  
†In person and online ❖In-person only at CCH

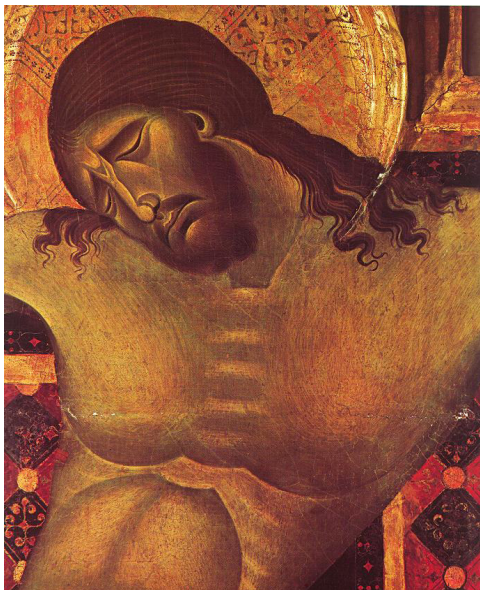


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*I cannot do anything on my own ...*

*I do not seek my own will  
but the will of the one who sent me.*

John 5:30

## SHEER VULNERABILITY

The crucifix is the sign and expression of the total vulnerability of Jesus: the outstretched arms, the open heart, the forgiveness of everything and everyone. This sheer vulnerability made him wide open both to suffering *and* to joy. ... Only in the heart of one with boundless readiness to forgive could there have been the pain of Peter's triple denial, and afterwards the joy of reinstating him as chief of the apostles. ... If Jesus were to receive the consoling sympathy of the women of Jerusalem, he had to endure the hatred and contempt of those who took pleasure in his death. ... If it had not been possible for him to experience abandonment by the Father, there could not have been an infinite depth to his total gift of himself to the Father. ... If he had not been buried in the tomb, he could not have risen from the dead. Vulnerability means to be hurt over and over again without seeming to love less, but more.

Thomas Keating, *The Heart of the World*