



CONTEMPLATIVE NETWORK

NEWS & VIEWS

Volume 2 No. 5 | Fourth Quarter 2022 | Jan Masterson, Editor

FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Rev. Gena Davis, M.B.A., M. Div.

Greetings! I am Gena Davis, one of the newer members of the Contemplative Network (CN) Board. From my earliest memories, silence has served my deepest longings for connection and Divine Presence. As a young girl, I remember hearing the wind rustling the leaves of the large tree in the backyard and telling my friend, “Shhhh, listen to the wind; it is God.” Across philosophical

and religious traditions, wind, breath, chi, prana, Spirit, pneuma, energy, life force are all words that describe God, or Source. This perennial knowing of Presence is innately accessible to all of us — *it is within us*.

Meditation helps us connect with this inner knowing. There are many types of meditation practices; those I have practiced point to the truth of Divine Presence in their own unique ways and languages. Christian contemplative prayer with the World Community for Christian Meditation is my foundational practice, and other meditation practices have expanded my experience of the sacred interconnectedness of all.

I was ordained to the priesthood in the Episcopal Church in 2010. It is my great joy to lead meditation groups, retreats and pilgrimages for integrating body-heart-mind-soul for wholeness and healing. I co-founded YogaMass to bring embodied spirituality to the sacred Christian ritual of receiving from Christ's table. I also facilitate a deeply transformative practice called Yoga Nidra meditation, which unlocks the innate healing potential within us and expands consciousness toward union with Divine Presence. During the pandemic, I was commissioned to offer inter-spiritual direction for finding your true and authentic path, honoring the perennial wisdom that arises in the heart.

Meditation is sitting in silence and stillness, and more. Mantra meditation helps to quiet the mind; guided meditations provide a steady movement into the energy body for healing and union within. Moving meditations, such as yoga, qigong, or walking a labyrinth engage the whole self. Forest or ocean bathing invites experiencing oneness in nature. I offer crystal bowl sound meditations with higher vibrational sound frequencies to bring balance, healing and deeper insights. I have discovered as I move through different stages of life, different meditation techniques are helpful. What meditative practices feed your soul? Are you being invited to explore deeper?

It is a blessing to serve on the Board of CN and support our ongoing groups, events and research. We hope to be a light on the path that you can draw upon

on your journey. I look forward to seeing you soon!

*"To make the right choices in life, you have to get in touch with your soul.
To do this, you need to experience solitude, which most people are afraid of.
Because in the silence, you hear the truth and know the solutions."*

Deepak Chopra

A CONVERSATION WITH...

***Kristin Guiney, JD.
Executive Director Angela House***

Our late co-founder and first chairman, Kim Kehoe, was instrumental in introducing Angela House to CN. He taught the residents Centering Prayer and led the group during his frequent visits. He believed strongly in their mission.

"The mission of Angela House is to successfully transition women into society after incarceration." Maureen O'Connell, OP, the Dominican nun who founded Angela House in 2001, believed it was unconscionable women had so little help and faced so many hurdles integrating back into society. She developed "a program of intervention focused on trauma-informed counseling, addiction recovery, employment readiness and personal and spiritual growth." Sister Maureen's inspiration for Angela House was her sister-in-law, Angela M. Schneider O'Connell, a fierce advocate for human rights. She believed everyone has "the right to love, grow and become the kind of person they want to be."

After serving as Executive Director for seventeen years, Sister Maureen decided it was time to retire. At the time, the current Executive Director, Kristin Guiney, JD., was searching for a new project to use the talents and tenacity developed as a foster parent between college and law school, an advocate for Case des Esperanza and a Harris County District Court judge. During her time

on the bench, the native Houstonian frequently referred women on probation to Angela House. She is passionate about providing a nurturing environment, helping vulnerable women regain their self-worth, find steady employment and reestablish family ties broken during their former lives. A perfect fit. One might suggest the Holy Spirit was at work.

Angela House can house up to sixteen women. If a woman works the program for at least four months, 87% successfully transition back into society. It takes \$15,000 to house, feed, clothe and provide medical, dental and mental health care, job training and other support for one year. 493 women and their families have been served since its founding in 2001.

Talking with Kristin, one can't help but be inspired by her passion and commitment to the women of Angel House. When asked if the residents might be willing to share their stories in our newsletter, she enthusiastically agreed, but firmly stated it would be each woman's decision to participate in the column. The first quarterly column from *The Women of Angela House* is below.

"The circles of women around us weave invisible nets of love that carry us when we are weak and sing with us when we are strong."

Susan Ariel Rainbow Kennedy
Nom de plume, Sark



The Women of Angela House

Angela House Opening Doors

By Michelle Johnson Bush

What a difference two years can make! My name is Michelle Johnson Bush. I am a proud alumna of Angela House. Almost two years ago, I was sitting in isolation in a Harris County jail cell facing 5 to 99 years for a felony. For more than 25 years I had used illicit drugs, prescription pain killers, and abused alcohol. As a result, I was separated from my children and family, homeless, labeled a criminal and jailed, maybe for the rest of my life.

The rationale behind addiction is it is a moral failing, that I am somehow defective. Angela House challenges this thinking by addressing the whole person, mind, body, and spirit. For years I lived in chaos surrounded by a den of thieves, in physically, emotionally, and mentally abusive relationships. I was raised in Acres Homes, Texas, by my single mother. I witnessed firsthand the assaults, drug deals, and various traumatic things. As a result, I suffered from anxiety, PTSD, and anger issues. The compassionate staff recognized my brokenness from incarceration and addiction.

What I received at Angela House cannot fit in a glossy brochure. Moral Recognition Therapy (MRT), the lead-in modality for residents, leads to enhanced moral reasoning, better decision-making and more appropriate behavior. The more I healed beyond drug addiction and alcoholism, issues about money, motherhood, sexuality, education, and sisterhood become glaringly apparent. Through the process of one-on-one therapy sessions and 12-step programs, I gained integrity, discipline, and courage to continue. My adaptability and self-esteem grew.

The unique approach of Angela House established a trust to be open to new ideas. My previously contentious family relationships are now miraculously reconstructed. I am a caring, nurturing, present mother. I am a successful and capable employee. I am a conscientious, diligent college student.

More amazingly, I believe I matter. I matter to my kids and play a foundational role in their future. I matter to my community. My success can be the catalyst for change for another woman struggling with addiction. I am empowered to

advocate for others. I have been offered a scholarship to complete a Project Management Certification to double my earning potential.

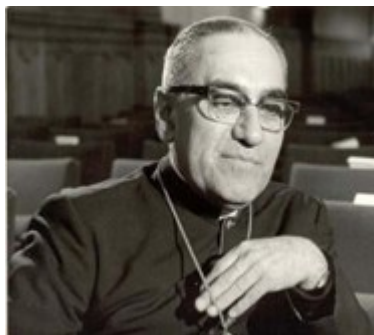
The supportive environment forges trust, empowers human potential, and inspires women to dream courageously. Angela House makes a difference between motherless children and happy families; between an unemployable addict and successful career women; the difference between drug-infested communities and revitalized neighborhoods.

Angela House is a powerful place. With great foresight, Sister Maureen recognized the need for a comprehensive and practical approach to help formerly incarcerated women go from surviving to thriving. From poverty to wage, suffering to success. Angela House is that bridge for many women and many more to come.

*"Once you've accepted your flaws,
no one can use them against you."*

Tyrion Lannister

MESSAGE FROM THE MYSTICS



Oscar Arnulfo Romero was born August 15, 1917 in El Salvador. On March 24, 1980, while celebrating Mass in the chapel of the Hospital of Divine

Providence, he was assassinated during the consecration. He was 62. In 2010, it was discovered during a trial in the United States, Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, the leader of the Nationalist Republican Alliance party, ordered his death because Romero was a vocal champion of human rights. Oscar Arnulfo Romero was canonized by Pope Francis on October 14, 2018. His feast day is March 24th.

Romero was one of eight children. He attended a government-funded school through third grade, then was home-schooled until his early teens. During this time, his father taught him basic carpentry. At thirteen he joined a divinity school to pursue a theology degree, eventually transferring to Gregorian University in Rome. In 1942, he was ordained. Soon after, the bishop of El Salvador asked him to return home. It was an arduous trip during war time. He was detained in Spain by Cuban officials because he was suspected of being associated with Mussolini.

During his time as a parish priest, Romero found God in others so wanted to make a meaningful difference in society. He formed an Alcoholics Anonymous group and assisted in the construction of the cathedral in San Miguel. He was appointed rector of a seminary in San Salvador. In 1966 he was appointed Director of the archdiocesan weekly newspaper, the *Orientacion*. The paper published stories about torture and repression. When he was made an assistant to the archbishop, conservative Romero was not a popular choice with radical priests.

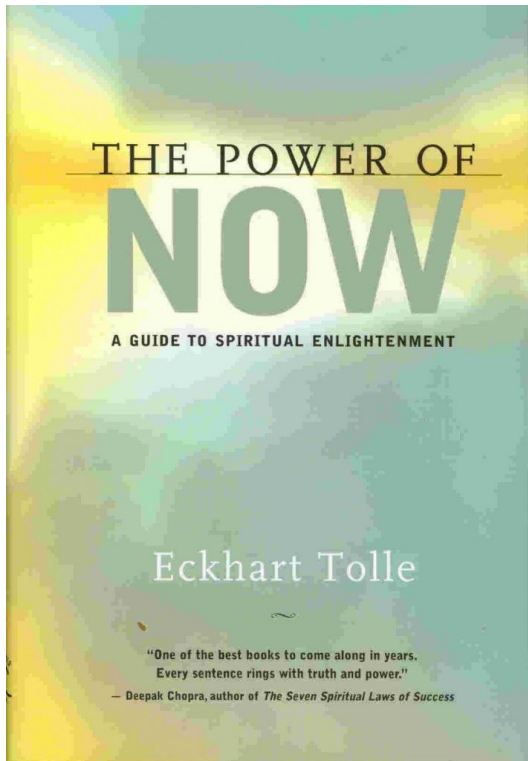
As archbishop, he used his weekly radio broadcasts to educate his listeners about violations of basic human rights. Witnessing social injustice, torture and assassinations, Romero's spiritual life took an inward turn. He developed "mysticism of the open eyes." He began to see God in the poor, the marginalized, the exploited. He wrote numerous books and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by 119 British statesmen and 26 United States diplomats.

"I don't want to be an anti, against anybody.

*I simply want to be the builder of a great affirmation:
the affirmation of God, who loves us and who wants to save us."*

St. Oscar Romero

A Recommended Read

**TITLE:**

*The Power of Now:
A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*

AUTHOR:

Eckhart Tolle

PUBLISHER:

New World Library

REVIEWED BY:

Carolyn St Pe

When asked if there was a book I had read that really made a difference in my life, I immediately thought of *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* by Eckhart Tolle. It has been many years since I read it, but I continue to focus on the power of now whenever I feel anxious. I close my eyes, breathe deeply, ask for silence from anyone I am with, and think, “Right now, this moment, I am safe. I am okay.” It works.

This phrase has gotten me through many painful medical treatments and other unbearable life situations. When my adult child was in intensive care, I changed the words to, “Right now, this second, she is okay. Breathe.” It’s all I had to get me through a most terrifying week. Over and over, “Right now, this moment, she is okay.”

Tolle tells us all we have is the power of now and describes how to use it. Nothing more is promised. His book goes through every kind of life experience one could think of. Using a simple question and answer format, he explains how everything changes and emphasizes nothing stays the same, no matter how we wish it to be so.

I knew most of this logically. I just didn’t understand deep down how “the power

of now” was the answer. I didn’t understand how to use it to find inner peace. The ego always kicked in. People brought me their challenges because I was known for being able to come up with solutions to intricate problems. My analytical brain was always on. I would even dream of solutions, wake up, and work it out on paper so the tools could be used in the morning.

My mind never turns off. I didn’t know how to turn it off. I still want to solve everyone’s problems. Peace comes knowing everything changes. Forget the logic. There’s no fixing everything. All we really have is this instant, right now.

From Science to Soul

By Deborah Klesel, RN, MSN, PhD.



Hang on, Healthy Holidays ahead...

As we approach the end of the year, our focus turns to the Thanksgiving, Hannukah and the Christmas holidays.

Thanksgiving Day began in the United States and Canada based on the 1621 celebration shared by the English colonists and the

Wampanoag people. That year in November, Governor William Bradford organized a celebratory feast and invited the colony of Native American allies to honor the bountiful harvest with a shared meal, which became known as the first Thanksgiving.

But thanksgiving is much more than turkey, dressing, and death by dessert. Being grateful or “thankful” and being generous or “giving” is a lifestyle with lifesaving benefits. Practicing gratitude contributes to an overall sense of well-being and strengthens your immune system by lowering the stress response. Research also suggests practicing gratitude can reduce the risks associated with heart failure as it reduces anxiety and depression.

The expression “it is better to give than receive” is also backed by research. Not only does “giving” reap the benefits of being thankful, it adds the paybacks of improved self-esteem and increased life-expectancy.

Christmas, the annual holiday of Christ’s birth, can be traced back to 336 AD when first observed in churches on December 25. It is a Christian celebration, and along with Hannukah, the Jewish Festival of Lights, they are cultural commemorations that include family gatherings filled with tidings of comfort and joy.

The soothing effects of “comfort” have many health benefits including a reduction in anxiety and stress, the ability to fall asleep faster, and the stimulation of the body’s natural ability to heal. We feel “joy” in our bodies because of the release of dopamine and serotonin, both of which are associated with happiness, and happiness is known to protect your heart, strengthen your immune system, decrease pain, and increase life expectancy.

As the holidays draw near and you dive into cooking, decorating and planning gatherings, remember the phrases of the holidays are more than sentiments. They inspire and promote good health, peace, rest, and longevity. From the Contemplative Network to you, we wish you a Thanksgiving filled with the grace of gratitude and the gift of giving. We also send tidings of comfort and joy as you embrace the meaning and the seasons of Christmas and Hannukah.

*"It is not the things we get, but the hearts we touch
that will measure our success in life."*

Mahatma Gandhi

An Interesting Journey Godward

By Alex Torres



It is safe to say many in society, and some in prison, harbor a negative sentiment regarding jailhouse religion. There are people who think when an incarcerated person embraces faith, it is insincere. Dispelling this negative opinion, many incarcerated people actively nurture faith on a daily basis. Does this mean the offender is instantly cured of criminality? Certainly not.

Everyone --- incarcerated or not --- remains imperfect until the end.

The Texas Department of Criminal Justice's definition of A Faith Based Program: "Wherein a group of individuals of varying spiritual traditions and beliefs join together in community, residence, work and study. The program is overseen by volunteer facilitators appointed by the unit Chaplain and is administered through inmate coordinators selected by the facilitators and the Chaplain. A resident joins this program for a period of 18 months. During this time, he will attend classes presenting material designed to help him grow in knowledge, skill and wisdom for his spiritual life and to facilitate his successful return to society." (Inter-Office Communication)

At the Polunsky Unit, there are 4 unique Faith Based pods (48 residents) and dorms (60 residents): Faith Mountain (dorm), Faith Valley (pod), Exodus (pod), the New Kids on the Block and Life Row, formally Death Row. (These men will not return to society or be released to the general population unless their cases are overturned.) There are similarities, but each community has its particular culture. The men who join desire to change; sadly, a few join with ulterior intentions, but do not remain for long. Typically, they are removed for violations of the rules and guidelines.

The TDOC also "...extends to all offenders of all faiths...reasonable and equitable opportunities to pursue religious beliefs and participate in religious activities..." (Administrative Directive 7.30) All programs are categorized by one of the following tracks: I Specialized Programs; II Mentor Programs; III Family

Programs; IV Rehabilitation Programs; V Reentry Programs; VI Spiritual Growth Groups; VII Non-Religious Programs. The Seven Tracks comprise the *Life Changes Academy*, which is the structure "... for maintaining a balanced religious program." It is by no means balanced, but the Chaplains do try to make religious programming equitable.

This is simple a glimpse into the programs available. The Polunsky Unit Chaplains, Joaquin Guy and Russell Martin, with the help of civilian and offender volunteers, provide daily pastoral care for hundreds of the 3000 offenders. It is amazing to witness and be a part of the pastoral work. It is evidence of sincere faith actively nurtured on a daily basis.

*"Faith goes beyond reason;
it is a passion for what reason can't see."*

Bishop Robert Barron

POETRY CORNER

Be Still

By Mary Davis

From *Everyday Spirit: A Daybook of Wisdom, Joy and Peace*

Be still.

Be still and know that all wisdom lies within.

Be still and be vigilant for promptings of the soul.

Be still and remember your magnificence.

Be still and trust in infinite support.

Be still and see the dawn of a new idea.

Be still and sense the next step to take.

Be still and feel the growing courage to follow your dreams.

Be still and believe the perfect plan is unfolding for you.

Be still and ask clearly for your heart's desire.

Be still and offer your services to Divine will.

Be still and feel oneness with all things.

Be still and know.

MUSINGS FROM THE EDITOR



Until recently, I attributed flashes of sudden understanding, random thoughts and finding the right words to feminine intuition or the universe or a combination. I have gradually realized it is the power and love of the Holy Spirit speaking to me, offering a needed insight or gently nudging me to take action. Now that I am aware of the source, I am also aware of the responsibilities.

In my stumbling, mumbling way, I do, say and write what I believe the Holy Spirit is asking of me. In unpredictable or unfamiliar situations, I do the best I can and assure myself God understands my human ineptness. As for the recipient, I hope he or she accepts my attempts knowing they are offered with love. In face-to-face interactions, I know my message is not always appreciated. When that happens, I stop digging myself into a deeper hole. I change the subject and give the person a hug or mercifully end the conversation. I console myself knowing I did my best; everyone goofs, even the most skilled communicator.

Another aspect of my new knowledge: Since God is with me always, I need to pay better attention to the quiet inner voice; listen with my heart, not just my mind. I need to say thank you. I need to ask for help. I need to give credit to the Holy Spirit when "I" have an idea or insight. I need to graciously accept criticism when my attempts go awry. Do I always follow my own advice? Nope, sure don't. Mess up every day, but as an old Texas saying expresses so well: I keep

on keeping on and don't give up. Is it easy? Of course it isn't; very little worthwhile in this life is.

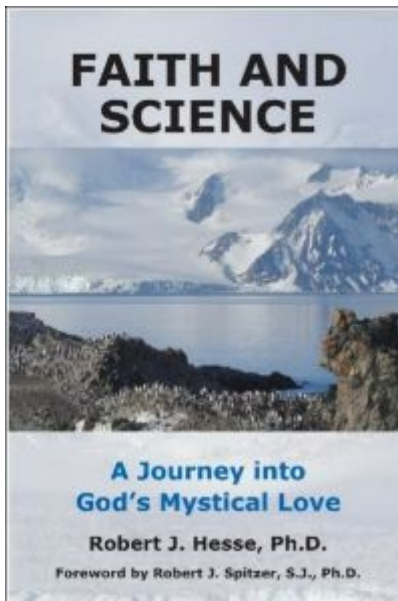
Practicing Centering Prayer is a gentle way to train my brain to listen, to tune into the Indwelling Spirit. I struggle, a lot, during a sit, but keeping at the practice has started to rewire my conscious brain to feel and "hear" God as I go about my daily activities. It has improved my relationships and increased the positive in my life. It will gradually do the same for you, if you open your heart and keep on keeping on.

Stay healthy. Stay positive. Stay loving.

Jan

*"Divine light and Divine Love are flowing
through me and radiating to everything around me."*

Shakti Gawain



Available on [Amazon](#) and [Crossroad Publishing](#).

100% of the author's royalties are being donated to the interfaith, non-profit, 501(c)(3), Contemplative Network to promote Oneness, Contemplative

Prayer, scientific research into the healing effects of prayer and to establish ministries based on that research.

How to Do Centering Prayer

- Set aside 20 minutes, twice a day if possible. One time is better than none.
- Sit comfortably on a chair with your back straight.
- Close your eyes. Settle into the deepest center of your being.
- Silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
- As thoughts and feelings rush in, silently and gently repeat your sacred word until they go by. Thoughts are normal. Let them come, accept them, let them go. Do this every time thoughts grab your attention. It will get easier with practice.

[Brief Introduction to Centering Prayer \(pdf\).](#)

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

This is your newsletter. We encourage you to be an active part of its pages. We welcome comments, questions and suggestions. Send all correspondence to editor@contemplative.net with *newsletter* in the memo line. Your full name, country and email address *must* be included. If you do not want your full name used, we will honor that request.

To submit a book review, essay or poetry for possible publication, it must be attached as a Word document in Times New Roman, 12-point font. Accepted length is 350 to 400 words for original book reviews and essays and no more than 20 lines of poetry. Submissions are subject to editing. Be sure to keep a copy; submissions will not be returned. If your submission is selected, you will be notified prior to publication.

*"The pen of the tongue should be dipped
in the ink of the heart."*

Chinese Proverb

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