

Simple Gifts

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The All Souls Journal

Spiritual but *Not* Religious?

-by Rev. Marlin Lavanhar, Senior Minister



Spirituality and religion are different. Religion is communal and is rooted in traditions, values and practices of a community. Spirituality, on the other hand, is personal and involves an individual's own cultivation of his or her connection

to something larger than himself or herself. One can have spirituality outside of religion (many people do). There can also be religion without spirituality. Thousands have fled certain churches and synagogues because they have found the community or tradition unable to nurture their spirit. The ideal, from a minister's perspective, is to offer a religious community that nurtures people's spirits and helps them to feel profoundly connected to that which gives their life meaning and purpose and strength.

At All Souls, one of our missions is helping cultivate and support spiritually mature people. In our tradition, spiritual maturity is seen in a person's ability to love well and with a willingness to serve others and to freely seek truth in ways that unify rather than divide the human family. Spiritually

mature people are competent in what the ancient Greeks called "logos" and "mythos." *Logos* is practical knowledge informed by reason and logic. *Mythos* is knowledge that is informed by symbols, stories, mythology, poetry and metaphor. We need both of these ways of knowing in order to be wise and to live whole and balanced lives. A doctor using *logos* can tell us how and why a loved one has died, but *mythos* is the kind of knowledge that helps us heal a broken heart and find meaning in the aftermath of loss.



Having a balanced life is like building a table with four legs. The legs are our physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual nature. Each of the four needs nurturing and development in order for a person to remain stable and balanced. Some people confuse the emotional and the spiritual, but they are distinct. For example, depression is a state

of emotional brokenness and is different from despair which is a state of spiritual brokenness. A person can be depressed and still be spiritually whole because he or she is fundamentally hopeful and loving.

Prayer & Spiritual Practice:

*Learning
by Heart*



*Way
Finding*



*Practicing
for Life*

How are you tending to each of these parts of yourself? Are you exercising and eating well? Are you taking opportunities to expand your intellectual mind? Are you tending to your life's stresses, grief, anger, or depression and making room for gladness as well as the emotions of others in your life? And, do you have practices that serve to nurture your spirit?

In this issue of *Simple Gifts* there are examples of how several members of All Souls have discovered ways to nurture their spirituality. They range from ancient practices like meditation, yoga, and weekly worship to common, everyday practices like journaling, exercise, and knitting. On Wednesday nights at All Souls there is a chapel service where we sing and pray together, and then we have weekly classes in meditation, yoga, Tai Chi, and other ways of nurturing the spirit. We are "One Church with Many Expressions" in worship, action, and spiritual practice.

My personal spiritual practices include daily prayer, meditation, and reflecting on poetry and scripture. My family practices include holding hands and saying a prayer of thanks before meals. My communal practices include a small group I take part in weekly (much like All Souls Branches program) and weekly

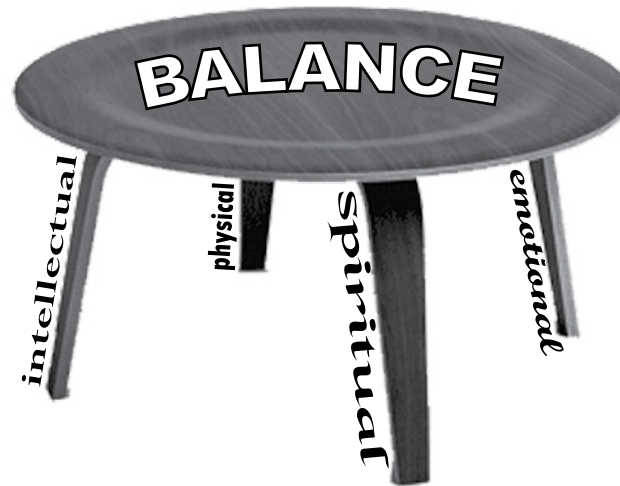
worship (that I am not leading). Each of these activities reminds me of my highest values, slows me down, and helps me overcome the tendency to become self-focused.

It is interesting that keeping the Sabbath (setting aside a special day or time to nurture one's connection to the sacred) is one of the Ten Commandments. In the Bible, these 10 are considered the most important imperatives to living an ethical and purposeful life. In other words, according to the Bible, setting aside time each week to nurture our relationship

with what we consider sacred is as important to living an ethical life as not stealing and not murdering.

In our contemporary world of cell phones and 24-hour news networks, it requires discipline to set aside time for spiritual practice. How stable is your table? Are you caring for all four legs – physical, intellectual,

emotional and spiritual? I hope when asked, you can honestly say, "I am both spiritual and religious!" †



Our church program-year (September-May) is fashioned around nine theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church's offerings each month are by no means limited to the themes. However, these topics provide an axis around which many elements of church life gain more meaning and depth. They provide us with a set of common stories and ideas that become elements of an ongoing community conversation. Be warned: Seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

September - Vocation & Calling

October - Unity

November - Gratitude

December - Peace

January - Grace

February - Prayer & Spiritual Practice

March - Letting Go

April - Salvation

May - Truth

Learning by Heart



I have been reading a biography on Fred Craddock, a well-known and well-respected preacher among preachers. In it, he reminisces about what he learned in Sunday school. Among the things he was asked to memorize was an alphabetized list of scripture.

A - *A soft answer turns away wrath.* B - *Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other.* C - *Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest...* He said even though he wouldn't necessarily agree today with the scriptures chosen by his teacher, they have become more valuable to him having learned them by heart. They became something he could lean on, sit with, practice when no one or nothing else was around.

My mentor, Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman, Minister Emeritis at First Unitarian Dallas, wrote a curriculum based on her experience with memorization as a spiritual practice. Memorization is a way to go deeper in our relationship with poetry, scripture, and wise words – as a way to go deeper in connecting to ourselves. For Dr. Hallman, the words of poets accompany her in times of contemplation and meditation. They join her on a walk or when she is seeking clarity. And when she needs them, there are just the right words from Rumi or Thoreau.

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister

What we memorize is written on our hearts. The words are available for our use and are accessible to us. Many of us have memorized things from necessity or responsibility. When I ask what others remember they often cite passages from texts in high school or historical documents, things that were memorized to make a grade. Many of you have memorized our invocation and the two different benedictions that Marlin and I use. When we memorize something meaningful to us, it becomes like a prayer, words available to us when no other words will come.

I encourage you this month, with our theme of Prayer and Spiritual Practice, to find something meaningful to you, and memorize it. I have been inspired this month to recreate Dr. Craddock's scriptural ABCs as a more UU-friendly list. (See page 4.) Having a list of biblical passages that we find helpful in living out our daily lives seems like something I would like written on my heart.

May you be infinitely blessed by what you select

to accompany you in the dictionary of your soul. †

Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman will be here in March as our John B. Wolf lecturer. I hope that you will make time to join her in a workshop and for worship.



TAMARA'S SCRIPTURAL ABCs

- A** All we, like sheep, have gone astray. Isaiah 53:6
- B** Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Matt 5:7
- C** Come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Matt 11:28
- D** Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8
- E** Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Psalm 23:3-5
- F** Faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. I Corinthians 13:13
- G** God is love. John 4:8
- H** Help one another. All Souls Covenant
- I** Incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding. Proverbs 2:2
- J** Jesus said, "Are you asleep?... Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." Mark 14:37-38
- K** Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Psalms 34:13
- L** Love one another. John 13:34
- M** Make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Psalm 100:1
- N** Neglect not the gift that is in thee. 1 Timothy 4:14
- O** Open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness. Isaiah 42:6-8
- P** Pray without ceasing. 1 Thes 5:17
- Q** Quicken me after thy loving-kindness. Psalm 119:88
- R** Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Exodus 20:8
- S** Speak the truth in love. Ephesians 3:15
- T** Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105
- U** Use hospitality one to another without grudging. 1 Peter 4:9
- V** It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear. Exodus 32:18
- W** Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. John 18:20
- X** (The Mystery) Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great. 1 Timothy 3:16
- Y** You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Matt 22:37-40
- Z** It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way. Prov. 19:1-3

Live in the Moment, Momma

-by Kate Starr, Youth Director



One Saturday morning before my daughter's 9th birthday, she snuggled up to review plans for our first slumber party. Her legs entwined in mine, head on my shoulder, we discussed cakes, crafts, games, and movies.

We took notes, made to-do and grocery lists. When all of a sudden, the thread connecting the little girl I have known up until now to the 'tween she is becoming was so visible that tears welled up in my eyes.

"Why are you crying?" she asked.

"Because these days are so numbered," I answered. "It won't be too long before you won't snuggle with me anymore."

"Yes I will," she assured. "I will still sit on your lap when you're 60."

"How about when you're 13?" I asked.

"Oh. No, probably not," she conceded. "But come on. Live in the moment, Momma. You're crying about something that is (she quickly did the math) 1,467 days away. Live in the moment."

But living in the moment is difficult. I often tend to live in a past I remember or a future I imagine rather than in the present. And it's not my fault. Research has shown that the same characteristics that have been our key evolutionary assets are the source of my angst. It is our ability to continuously analyze, compare, predict, and plan that is also the cause of my suffering.

One theory I return to again and again to counteract my overactive analytical brain is called Acceptance Commitment Therapy, or ACT. In one of my favorite workbooks, *Get Out of Your Mind & Into Your Life*, Steven C. Hayes, Ph.D., says ACT is not a set of idiomatic phrases or wise sayings that will lead me to personal revelation. Instead he offers experiential techniques that fall into three broad categories: acceptance, commitment to values-based living, and mindfulness.

When we encounter a problem, our tendency is to fix it. Historically, that was effective when dealing with predators, pestilence, and natural disasters. It

was an essential skill in establishing the human race as the dominant species. But when we try to use the same techniques on our internal, emotional processes, they only tend to amplify the problem and enmesh us further. Rather than fixing it, the goal of **acceptance**, in this context, is to be aware and acknowledge, then to make a decision of what to do to move forward.

That's where **commitment to values-based living** comes in. Rather than being defined by our problems and engaging in useless mental management, when we are caught in a struggle, the answer is to turn again and again to our values – our chosen life directions – and what steps will take us there – now, not in the future, but in the present moment. Every step we take in the direction of our values – whether they are relationships, career, education, recreation, spirituality or health – is an anchor in the present moment of the life we want to live. The process is the outcome.

Finally, **mindfulness** has been practiced in the East through various forms of meditation for centuries. ACT adds to this ancient set of practices a new model for today's busy world. Not only do we learn to detach from our thoughts, but to view our thoughts in a new way. Thoughts are the lenses through which we look at the world. We have a tendency to cling to a particular lens can outlive its usefulness, especially a lens of suffering. This form of mindfulness helps us become aware of the lenses we are attached to and to learn how to undermine these attachments in favor of ones that move us in the direction of our values.

Unfortunately, I don't think my practice will ever be perfect. But I'm learning to enjoy the journey, not just the destination. And I have 1,467 days to get there. †

Way Finding

-by Debra Garfinkel, Pastoral Care Minister



Charlotte was 13 years old. Her heart was breaking. She and her mother weren't getting along very well. They barely spoke. Just what was necessary. Just daily stuff. Had it always been this way? She wondered. Charlotte just couldn't think that far back.

Not any further back than a year ago. One year ago next week, on Charlotte's birthday, on Valentine's Day, Charlotte's world fell apart. That's when Charlotte's father died.

Oh, everyone had been very nice. Her friends tried to console her. They cried with her. They did things to make her laugh. They went to movies and ate loads of ice cream. They walked around the mall. But nothing was helping. Charlotte felt as if she were just going through the motions. At times she felt angry and then she felt guilty. Charlotte was so confused. What was wrong with her? Was God punishing her?

Charlotte attended church with her mother. She'd even visited with the minister a few times. No one could answer her questions. Why did God take her daddy away? Charlotte had never believed in ghosts or angels. Now, she looked for her daddy everywhere. Finally, a chaplain from a hospital came to talk to the youth group at Charlotte's church. Charlotte wasn't paying much attention until she heard the chaplain's voice say something about talking to God and being angry.

"I don't think there is a God," Charlotte heard herself say quietly. It was as if only Charlotte and the chaplain existed in the room together. Slowly, without really knowing how it happened, Charlotte talked and the chaplain listened. After that, Charlotte was able to pay attention during the rest of the group time.

Charlotte felt a bit lighter, a bit better. She decided to see if she could speak to the chaplain some more.

Charlotte spoke with her mother about what happened at the church and about the chaplain. Her mother contacted the church youth director and then phoned the chaplain. Then, she and Charlotte went to the hospital where the chaplain worked. Everything changed, little bits at a time. By the end of the school year, Charlotte began to remember what things had been like for her before her father died.

Charlotte remembered how it felt when she used to sing and sort of talk out loud to no one in particular every day, sometimes several times a day. When she remembered that, she remembered how she and her daddy used to talk about nature and science and God. Charlotte mentioned this to the chaplain. That's when the chaplain asked, "Charlotte, what is prayer for you?" As they talked, Charlotte realized that all the walks she took around the cemetery, all the running and crying and screaming she did in the woods, all the poems she wrote, and all the internet searches and sites she visited looking for answers - all of her efforts to communicate with Something or Someone that could help fill the hole in her heart - those things could be forms of prayer.

As the chaplain and Charlotte explored what prayer and spiritual practices have been for many people, Charlotte began to remember that she'd heard this before - in church! Before her father died, Charlotte never really felt that prayer or spiritual practices were that important. Now, she felt very differently. Charlotte still missed her father terribly. She was still hurt and angry that he died and left her. And she was afraid of what would happen to her.

Charlotte felt the same as when she began visiting the chaplain and at the same time she felt different. So, what should she do next?

Charlotte remembered how the youth group had gone to a nearby park that had a labyrinth. Charlotte went online and read about labyrinths. She read (and remembered) that religious pilgrims who wanted to travel to Jerusalem but couldn't, would go to a cathedral, such as Chartres in

France, and walk the labyrinth. People walked the labyrinth as a form of prayer. They walked to help themselves figure things out. Charlotte decided to return to the park labyrinth. No one else was there. Charlotte took a deep breath and then took her first step.

Now, it is impossible to put into a few words what such an experience is like. Charlotte could not explain it to anyone for a long time. When she was ready to try, she said, "It felt like my mind slowed down. My heart quit hurting. I felt like my daddy was with me. Maybe it was God. Anyway, I felt more peaceful. If walking the labyrinth is prayer, then I want to pray more."

Charlotte continued to explore her feelings about life and God and what it means to love and be a family. Charlotte's life is very different from the way she thought it would be. She found a new way to celebrate her birthday; Valentine's Day now has a special meaning for



Labyrinth Girl by Jaime Zollars

her. If you were to ask Charlotte how to pray or what spiritual practice is best, Charlotte would say, "You really have to find your own way. It's different for everybody."

A labyrinth is not a maze. Walking a labyrinth can be a profound and amazing experience. A maze is meant to confuse and sometimes to scare you. A labyrinth leads you to its center by means of a well-marked path and then you return the way you came. But don't take my word for it. Check it out for yourself. Just as Charlotte did.

However you pray, however you walk your spiritual path, may you find the direction that you seek. And may we all compassionately support each other as we find our way together. †

Dear God

-by Laurel Williamson, Managing Editor



“Dear God.” I nearly always begin prayers just like that. “Dear God,” like Celie, in *The Color Purple*, or a first-grader about to go to sleep. And I probably say it anywhere from 10 to 100 times a day. Not kidding. Sometimes “Dear God” is

followed by a collection of things I feel grateful for. Other times, I spew forth all the things I’m struggling with. There are times when my prayers are short, because I am focused on my to-do list, as if I am just using this spare nanosecond to check in: *Dear God, my African violet survived and is blooming brilliantly – your works are so beautiful! Talk to you later. Or Dear GOD did you just see that truck almost crash into me? Of course you did, wow, thanks for that.*

Long or short, I know no other way but to “pray without ceasing.” And I don’t fancy myself any devoted disciple of the Divine; I’d be more inclined to say I’m co-dependent on my Creator. I’ll start with something like “Dear God, I simply don’t know how to do any better than this, and I very well may be cracking up, so can you send me a miracle like a million dollars or inner peace or instant emotional maturity please please please?” But once the process begins, it’s like an old friend is there – one who knows me better than I know myself. And I sort of meander into a place of “So I guess what I really need is a little more patience (or compassion or perspective or acceptance, or all of the above). Okay then, (deep breath) I’ll work on that. Thanks and Amen.”

Webster defines prayer as, “the act of addressing supplication to a divinity, especially to the true God; the offering of adoration, confession, supplication, and thanksgiving to the Supreme Being.” Well, okay. And Wiki says, “Prayer is a form of religious practice that seeks to activate a volitional connection to some greater power in the universe.” Fine. But to me, the importance of praying has more to do with the many different ways and the many differ-

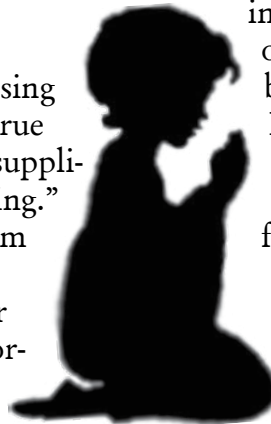
ent reasons we do it.

I find that my concept of to whom or to what I pray is nebulous at best, fluctuating with the circumstances of life. Sometimes I seek guidance from a wise grandfatherly sage who knows everything. Sometimes I need an all-powerful earth mother who can pour power into me and remind me that I, too, have strength. Sometimes I need a protective parent to hold me and keep me safe while I bawl my eyes out. Sometimes I want a loyal pal who will just listen. Regardless of the image I assign, or the factors that cause me to do so, the point of every one of them is *love*.

The God of my understanding *loves me* – when I can’t even tell if I love myself. So it doesn’t matter to me if the aforementioned are actually facets of my own psyche, or if I’m truly tapping into the Source of All. (Frankly, I think that’s a tomato / to-mah-to debate, depending on your area of discipline.) The God of my understanding is always there – when I’m too frantic inside to feel supported by people or music or self-help books. And the God of my understanding is also there when I’m so moved by a rainbow or a child or a bird or this life that I can’t even express it and just have to cry out of wonder and joy. The God of my understanding is more infinite and glorious than the Universe, and yet *part* of me – tiny *me*.

Dear God is how I stay aware. It’s how I feel my connection to all that is. It’s how I plug in to the grand mysteries and miracles of my own existence, the world, and beyond.

It’s how I remember my faith. And though I may not actually write it on my to-do list, it is always a built-in feature.



*Dear God,
It’s good talking to you.
Thanks and Amen. †*

Spiritual Practices at All Souls

-by Kathy Keith, Executive Director



Hundreds of souls look out each week through the arched window in our sanctuary in the practice of corporate worship here at All Souls. Whether it's in the calm dignity of the traditional service or with the beat of the con-

temporary service, Sunday morning is a regular opportunity to take in some soul food, as are the intimate Wednesday Night worship, and monthly Soulful Sunday and Evening of Praise Services.

Even our kids in Children's Chapel worship in a space centered by an arched window, encouraging our youngsters to look, clear-eyed, out into the world as they learn to sit (still) in communion with the infinite.

While we celebrate what we have in common in these worship services, Wednesday Connections has evolved into a centerpiece of individual spiritual practices for our community.

For those who practice meditation, Victor Parachin leads a growing group of folks who sit faithfully each week. For those who prefer more action in their embodied practice, Stacie Wheeler's yoga class, Adam Greene's

Tai Chi, or Rev. Tamara Lebak's Qi Gong, stretch and discipline bodies and spirits simultaneously. Arts and sewing classes also provide outlets for spiritual expression.

Branches, our small groups ministry, provides another structured practice of reading and shared reflection.

Others in our community practice service – showing up to be a lunch buddy at Jackson or Hamilton schools, to fold Parish Notes, to repair homes, to carry a cell phone that serves as a lifeline for our entire congregation, to share their faith with our children and youth, to prepare musically to enrich our worship, to knit Prayer Shawls, to build community through men's and women's groups, and much more.

Even the staff devotes time for spiritual practice together, meeting every Tuesday morning to worship.

Rabbi Marc Fitzerman said, "God speaks to us each in the language we best can hear." At All Souls, with six different worship services, multiple

classes and other offerings, we have opportunities to learn which language is best for us, and to become fluent in it. †



One Church, Many Expressions

DAILY THOUGHTS ON

FEBRUARY 1

When you utter a word before God, then enter into that word with every one of your limbs.

~ Martin Buber, *Tales of the Hasidim*

FEBRUARY 2

We need to pray in such a way that a longing should be aroused in all our members and powers, and all our senses, eyes, ears, mouth and heart, that they should all be directed towards this same end.

~ Meister Eckhart, *Sermons and Discussions*

FEBRUARY 3

When I marched with Martin Luther King in Selma, I felt my legs were praying.

~ Abraham Joshua Heschel

FEBRUARY 4

Prayer is the art of presence. Where there is no wonder there is little depth of presence.

~ John O'Donohue, *Eternal Echoes*

FEBRUARY 5

What is the use of praying if at the very moment of prayer, we have so little confidence in God that we are busy planning our own kind of answer to our prayer?

~ Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude*

FEBRUARY 6

As my prayer became more attentive and inward I had less and less to say. I finally became completely silent.

~ Soren Kierkegaard

FEBRUARY 7

Prayer is a concrete, measurable, and directive force in creation. Prayer is real. To pray is to "do something!"

~ Gregg Braden, *The Isaiah Effect*

FEBRUARY 8

Prayer is not sending in an order and expecting it to be fulfilled. Prayer is attuning yourself to the life of the world, to love, the force that moves the sun and the moon and the stars.

~ David Steindl-Rast

FEBRUARY 9

Prayer, crystallized in words, assigns a permanent wave length on which the dialogue has to be continued, even when our mind is occupied with other matters.

~ Dag Hammaskjold

FEBRUARY 10

Contemplative prayer is a process of interior transformation, a relationship initiated by God and leading, if we consent, to divine union.

~ Thomas Keating

FEBRUARY 11

There is a way of beholding which is a form of prayer.

~ Diane Ackerman, *An Alchemy of Mind*

FEBRUARY 12

Prayer is a practice in choice. Every day I must choose to follow this ritual or ignore it.

~ Christina Baldwin

FEBRUARY 13

Prayer is either a sheer illusion, or a personal contact between embryonic, incomplete persons (ourselves) and the utterly concrete Person.

~ C.S. Lewis

PRAYER & SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

FEBRUARY 14

The discipline of prayer is to keep oneself open to God and be ready to respond. The answer comes when there is an inner quickening. ~ Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart*

FEBRUARY 15

What's prayer? It's shooting shafts into the dark. What mark they strike, if any, who's to say? ~ Frederick Buechner

FEBRUARY 16

He prayed as he breathed, forming no words and making no specific requests, only holding in his heart, like broken birds in cupped hands, all those people who were in stress or grief. ~ Ellis Peters

FEBRUARY 17

I believe that God prays in us and through us, whether we are praying or not (and whether we believe in God or not). So, any prayer on my part is a conscious response to what God is already doing in my life. ~ Malcolm Boyd

FEBRUARY 18

Prayer is a means of perfect protection, perfect ordering of your lives in every moment. ~ John D. Rea

FEBRUARY 19

Dreamer-of-the-Sun told me that I may pray with my mouth and prayer will be heard, but if I sing the prayer it will be heard sooner. ~ Kenneth Lincoln, *Native American Renaissance*

FEBRUARY 20

Prayer makes the soul one with God. ~ Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*

FEBRUARY 21

Teach your mouth to say that which you have in your heart. ~ Poeman, *The Sayings*

FEBRUARY 22

The soul may ask God for anything and never fail. You may ask God for his presence, or for wisdom, and receive each. Or, like the Israelites in the Sinai wilderness, we ask God to go away. ~ Annie Dillard

FEBRUARY 23

For Pueblo people, pottery is a prayer realized in physical form. Pottery holds life because pottery is the vessel created from the sacred earth. ~ Marie Battiste

FEBRUARY 24

Prayer is like lying awake at night, afraid, with your head under the cover, hearing only the beating of your own heart. It is like a bird that has blundered down the flue and is caught indoors and flutters at the window panes... But sometimes a prayer comes that you have not thought to pray, yet suddenly there it is and you pray it... Sometimes the bird finds that what looks like an opening is an opening, and it flies away. ~ Wendell Berry

FEBRUARY 25

Know that through prayer remembering comes, then recognition, then acceptance, then at-oneness, then final liberation. ~ *Tibetan Book of the Dead*

FEBRUARY 26

Agnostic's Prayer: Oh God, if there is a God, save my soul, if I have a soul. ~ Ernest Renan

FEBRUARY 27

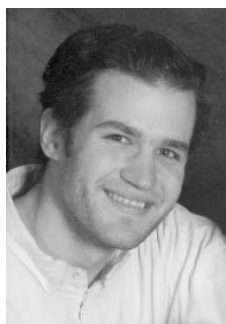
Lord, help me to keep my hands off things that don't belong to me, such as other people's lives. ~ Colleen Townsend Evans

FEBRUARY 28

May my body be a prayerstick for the world. ~ Joan Halifax, *The Fruitful Darkness*

Practicing for Life

-by Tyler Keith



For the past couple of years I've been practicing piano. Every day I sit down and play the few songs I know over and over. And every time I mess up (which is just about every time), I say "okay" and start over or just continue. But every

day I get a little better; I mess up a little less. And so one might guess that I practice to get better, but that's not quite right. Ultimately I practice because I love practicing. I love playing those songs over and over, and the more I practice the more I enjoy practicing. What does it mean to practice?

I first came to spiritual practice out of desperation. My life was in pieces, and every route to lasting happiness and freedom I'd taken was a dead end. I came across a book on Zen meditation and it struck a chord with something deep within me. Practice at first meant meditating 20 minutes every day. It was difficult, but pretty soon those 20 minutes began to transform my life in ways I couldn't imagine. Colors were brighter, sounds clearer, joy more joyous. I started being kind to people again. And in flashes I caught glimpses of something I couldn't understand but it felt like coming home.

At some point a friend mentioned that our practice doesn't end when we get off the meditation cushion. "My God!" I thought, "I'm practicing all the time! Everything I do, I get better at doing. If I act with kindness, I get better at it. If I cultivate healthy habits, I inherit the momentum of those habits."

Since then I've spent about eight months total in semi-monastic retreat at Buddhist retreat centers in California and Massachusetts. Retreats are opportunities to dig deep into our lives and devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the questions that used to keep us up at night.

Like, "Who is it that looks out of my eyes?" or "Why is there something rather than nothing?" Slowly every minute has become practice: constantly cultivating vast awareness; openheartedness; learning new, healthier habits; and, of course, messing up again and again. But every time I mess up, I say "okay" and start over or just continue.

Part of practice is doing something – meditation, prayer, yoga, whatever – every day, whether we feel like it or not. Doing this allows us to refine our lives: to deepen into the rhythm of each day and transform menial tasks into genuinely gratifying experiences in the same way that consistent, committed practice can turn a fumbling search for melody into an exquisite piece of music.

Ultimately practice is much more than that, as it reveals depths of life we never imagined. Is time spent practicing selfish? Not if we stay engaged. If practice becomes the foundation for a greater contribution to Life, then the ripening of our lives transforms our relationships, communities, and careers into gifts for a world gone slightly mad.

I've only begun this process, but I can say, "It works, and it takes time." Here are a few powerful resources I've found for spiritual practice:

Genpo Roshi's Big Mind Process – A non-threatening and intensely liberating way to access our own transcendent depths. <http://bigmind.org>

Holosync – Pricey but powerful supplement to meditation. <http://www.centerpointe.com>

Integral Life Practice – Carefully researched comprehensive guide. <http://www.integral-life-practice.com> †

Tyler Keith is a senior at Brown University, majoring in religious studies. He is also a graduate of the All Souls Children's Religious Education and Youth programs and son of Kathy and Scott Keith.

Shawl Ministry as a Spiritual Practice

-by Claudia Arthrell



On the third Monday each month, knitters (and crocheters) of All Souls can be seen working earnestly on shawls for those in need. The words “hope, healing, and health” underscore each stitch or chain. Some knit with the thought of

wrapping a pink shawl around a woman going through chemotherapy or surgery for breast cancer. Others think of those with pneumonia, recovering from surgery, or in a rehab center. All find themselves moved beyond their daily routine to spend part of a day creating something for someone they may never have met, but someone who is part of their community.

Regularly, past recipients of shawls join the ranks of those knitting for others. “Receiving the shawl changed me. I felt the love of a community that was so profound. I want to share that with another.” Those in this ministry find the benefits go far beyond the shawls they give to others; they discover the gift of a spiritual practice for themselves.

Knitting once a month is not frequent enough for many of the All Souls Shawl Ministry knitters. They report using knitting as an opportunity to quiet their minds, mentally clear away the clutter of life, and become fully present to the moment. They are able to find a special stillness in which they can become aware of their own spirituality in action. Some knitters pick a special time and place, and some even add music to this practice. Many see this as a time of personal prayer. Others visualize the person who will receive the gift. When a shawl is finished, the creator may write a note letting the recipient know of the love and intention with which it was made. The shawls carry the gift

of the maker taking the time to think of another healing with the hopes and prayers put into each stitch. All agree that the sense of well-being that comes from this practice is the biggest gift of all.

For those of you knitters who prefer staying at home but still being part of the ministry and donating your shawls to the church, (and we already know there are a lot of you – THANK YOU!) the enclosed blessing is a great way to start each time you knit:

Prayer of Blessing

by Cathleen Murtha

A blessing to my mind (pause)

to be free to enter this time of contemplative activity.

A blessing to my hands (pause)
to be the source of creating something
of beauty & love.

A blessing to my soul (pause)
to be open to the promptings of
prayer and reflection

A blessing to my yarn (pause)
to be shaped into patterns
of love and caring

A blessing to my needles (pause)
to be the holders of stitches

as they become a whole garment

A blessing to my knitting (pause)
to be a work of heart and hands, body and spirit

A blessing on the one (pause)
who passed this ancient art to me

A blessing on the one (pause)
who will receive the fruit of my prayer and my knitting

May this shawl be welcomed
in the spirit in which it was knit.



Additional Resources:

Knitting into the Mystery: A Guide to the Shawl Knitting Ministry by Susan S. Jorgensen & Susan S. IZARD

Zen and the Art of Knitting by Bernadette Murphy

The Knitting Sutra by Susan G. Lydon

The Knitting Goddess by Deborah Bergman



Spiritual Practice: Walking in Mind and Body

-by Rev. Debra Garfinkel, Pastoral Care Minister



There is a very long tradition of walking with the intention of listening for the Holy. In Buddhism it is known as walking mindfully and it is one way to practice mindful meditation. For the indigenous people of Australia, it

is following song lines. For medieval Christians, it was making a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Of course, a pilgrimage to Mecca is one of the five pillars of Islam. When you think about it, throughout human history and across all cultures and religions (and no religion, for that matter,) there are many, many ways to walk upon this earth with respect and appreciation for that which we did not create.

It is in the spirit of honoring the wisdom of the ages that I offer walking as a spiritual practice this month. In particular, I invite you to consider walking a labyrinth by yourself and/or with a group. Although the rediscovery and renewal of labyrinth walking refers from the medieval Christian tradition, there are labyrinths right here in Tulsa that are not connected with churches. To satisfy your curiosity, I refer you to the Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, website at www.gracecathedral.org/community/labyrinths where you can read about labyrinth history; the Native American, Irish, and Jewish versions; and where you can find links to labyrinth retreats – and more.

Labyrinths come in many sizes and patterns – some are more convoluted than others. (There is an interesting correlation to, for instance, the classic Chartres pattern and the design of the human brain.) Labyrinths are being used for personal spiritual practice and for retreats; this practice is possible even if you aren't able, for whatever reason, to walk.

Local Christian book stores carry different designs of finger labyrinths (I have one if you'd care to see it.) There are also labyrinths that have been specifically built to accommodate wheelchairs.

So, what's the attraction to walking a labyrinth? What do you do? How does it work? There are artifacts that show that people have found value in this practice for at least 4,000 years. There is no one way to walk it; there are no specific results to expect. I've walked the labyrinth many times and in different places; the experience was different each time. There have been reports of people's heart rate slowing and people usually say they feel calmer and more peaceful. Even people who walk the labyrinth at a pretty fast pace claim that they feel a bit more relaxed. Some people walk in order to clear the mind and gain clarity regarding an issue or relationship.



Again, each person brings his or her unique self and circumstance to the process. Walking alone, walking the path with others who happen to also be there, or walking as a group – each contributes to the experience.

Whether you choose to use a finger labyrinth, go online to an interactive labyrinth, or wheel, dance, skip, or walk a labyrinth, keep these things in mind:

1) Prepare. Approach the labyrinth with the intention to be as fully present as possible.

2) Step/wheel/place your finger/stylus into the opening, or entrance. Take a few deep breaths.

3) Enter the labyrinth. Release all your worries, your to-do list, anything that is on your mind and keeping you from being present.

4) Continue along the path. Pause or stop as you wish. Notice thoughts you have. Acknowledge them. Move on. Keep breathing.

5) When you reach the center, stop. If there is an issue with which you want clarity, form a question. Ask your question – aloud or not, as you wish. Remain in the center until you wish to move.

6) Return to the beginning, following the same path. Continue to pay attention. And breathe.

7) When you reach the end/beginning, you might want to pause and express gratitude, offer a prayer, or in some way, acknowledge the connection with the Sacred.

8) As a follow-up, you may feel moved to journal, write a poem, call a friend, or other-

wise process the experience.

Where does one find a labyrinth? Grace Cathedral's website features a worldwide labyrinth locator. Go to <http://labyrinthlocator.com/> and select the criteria for type of labyrinth and location. I typed in "Tulsa" and "Oklahoma" and "50 miles" and selected every type of labyrinth. That search listed eight Tulsa labyrinths; some outdoors, some on private property but open to the public, and several at churches. There is a labyrinth at Phillips Theological Seminary at 901 N. Mingo; call



first. The labyrinth at Hunter Park on South 91st Street between Yale and Sheridan is open during park hours. All Souls labyrinth is downstairs in the President's Room; please call first – the room may be in use for a meetings or class.

If you've yet to experience walking/tracing a labyrinth, I invite you to explore the possibilities this practice offers. However, whenever, and whatever your spiritual practice may be this month, may it serve to deepen your connection with the Divine and your truest self. †

Writing as a Spiritual Practice

-by Kathleen Garrison



When I was 12, I received the best present of my life. My mother bought me a powder-blue diary with a lock and key. It was a special place to put my thoughts and feelings. It made them seem important. My diary became a place to vent and a

friend to talk to about everything mundane and profound. Writing was a friend who would listen night and day. I imagined a kind, loving person or God who read what I wrote and understood me completely without judgment.

When I got to college, I scribbled in cheap, spiral notebooks to figure things out. I wrote to understand family dysfunctions. I wrote to get clear on whether I believed in God or not. In my 20s, I wrote as part of the 12-step program to heal resentments against myself and others. I wrote letters to my inner child. I wrote letters to people when it felt too difficult to verbally confront them. During times in my life that I didn't write, like when my boys were babies, I didn't feel as in touch with myself. I guess the friend I found in my writing was me.



Writing is one of my spiritual practices. When my mind is shooting around from one idea to the next like a pinball, it helps to just scribble down all of the junk in my brain. I have boxes of notebooks filled with angst and obsessions, vows to start jogging, and repetitive to-do lists. Writing centers me. It clarifies things, it helps me prioritize, and it gets a bunch of stuff out of my brain, so it feels easier to be in the now. It helps me recognize patterns in my thoughts and behavior. It is a tool to work out whether I am acting appropriately in my relationships, taking responsibility for myself, and giving and receiving in a balanced way. Writing assists me in my goal of acting with integrity.

This fall my writing took a new twist. I've begun writing about All Souls' themes every month. In September, I felt a surge of energy and passion flow through me as I wrote a poem about vocation. I felt playful creating a short story for October's theme of diversity and unity. November's theme of gratitude was a hard one, because it brought up a lot of anger from thinking that I "should" be grateful for everything. It felt calming to focus on peace as the theme during the holidays. Attempting to understand grace in January helped me to recognize it, and feel totally grateful, when I miraculously met my father and sister that month, for the very first time. Writing about the themes is helping me to be more aware of them in my life. I am beginning to understand how valuable and rich they are. This practice is helping me feel in tune with our church's core values, and enabling me to see how my endlessly changing beliefs relate to them. Writing about the themes every month is a spiritual practice that is helping me to grow intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. It is bringing me even more into alignment with a whole community of loving souls. †

A Daily Sabbath

-by Phil Haney



My family didn't believe in prayer. They did not pray for themselves or others. For me, growing up, prayer was neither taught nor encouraged. It was something we didn't discuss. It would have seemed odd

to pray as a spiritual practice. Since my parents were Unitarians – members at All Souls – I assumed prayer was not part of our religion. If we were spiritual in any sense, it was in fellowship, attendance, and possibly in religious education. It was a quiet spirit, not to be displayed in worship or prayer, certainly never in public. My parents had some of what I call secular spirit, a certain energy for circumstances calling for it, including compassion for those less fortunate and recognition of the beauty of nature. I sensed the importance of the value system my parents lived by, but I never considered these passions spiritual. On matters of prayer and spiritual practice, I was left to fend for myself.

It has taken a lifetime to discover how off-the-mark I was to think that responsible UU membership forecloses spiritual practice. Peeling this onion, reaching *tabula rasa*, although at times a painful effort, has allowed me to come to grips with my spiritual needs and develop spiritual habits.

What I missed along my journey as a Unitarian family member was what I now see clearly: our church fosters individual spiritual development; our covenant relationship with each other encourages a wide range of spirit-finding. Spirituality is neither a condition of Unitarian membership nor an objective of it; instead, we are taught that reaching our full potential is our gift to others. Asking each other to do this in love

and support, in religious community, is what UU is all about. The journey I'm describing is spiritual, and for each of us to reach this level requires finding our spirit, whatever it might be. Together we achieve communal spirit.



What appeals to me about this all-inclusive spirit-finding is that it recognizes how persons are fed differently in spirit. Individually, we all confront the inexplicable – the method we choose to make sense of what we can't explain is our spirituality. Mental health would seem to compel at least a basic regimen of uncluttered concentration on the mysteries of our existence. This is where spiritual practice benefits us.



I've found a practice that's a pleasure – so much so I never considered it spiritual. But under the spiritual looking-glass it is the essence of spiritual.

My spiritual Sabbath is the daily exercise – old-fashioned, endorphin-releasing, heart-pumping, full-body-engaging workouts – that connect my body with myself, enable me to eliminate all distractions and deal with the inexplicable, and free me to focus on the mysteries that the day ahead will not solve. I don't consider my daily Sabbath religious; it is, however, spiritual. It puts me in touch with myself, prepares me to be in touch with others, and connects me to the sacred. It meets my spiritual litmus test.



I devote this time to gratitude, forgiveness, prayer, and meditation. The practice strengthens connections and adds value to relationships. The daily Sabbath brings completeness, an amazing comfort or *gemütlich*. I am better for it, and better able to give of myself to others because of it. †

Spiritual Practice – Personified

-by Rev. Tamara Lebak, Associate Minister & Kate Starr, Youth Director

Monday

- 4:59 am Woke up before alarm. Journalled for 30 minutes. Insight about work that made me feel connected and grounded.
- 5:30 am *Lectio Divina*: a chapter from Luke and a page from *Courage to Change*.
- 5:45 am Sitting meditation ended with an amazing sunrise.
- 6:00 am Exercise: treadmill and pilates. The run felt good. Weigh-in: down 2 lbs and feeling strong.
- 7:00 am Breakfast: Soy shake and a piece of fruit.
- 7:20 am Shower and get dressed (into clothes laid out the night before).
- 8:00 am Feed dogs, make lunch.
- 9:00 am Arrive an hour before my first meeting to check email and prepare for the day.
- 10:00 am First meeting: grounded, curious, offer solutions, hopeful.
- 11:30 am Healthy lunch with co-workers (laughed so hard it hurt).
- 12:30 pm Qigong outside on the lawn.
- 1:00 pm Second meeting: intense, holy, witnessed the collective mind.
- 2:30 pm Writing article for newsletter. Turns out my morning reading was relevant to my article; will use it as a jumping off point.
- 3:30 pm Third meeting: fun, brainstorming resulted in out-of-the-box solution none of us could have dreamed of on our own.
- 4:30 pm Working in my office. Song from this morning on the treadmill in my head makes me happy.
- 5:30 pm Lovely dinner with my spouse at our favorite restaurant.
- 7:30 pm Watch the sunset with a glass of wine and enjoying spouse's company
- 8:00 pm Watch a movie.
- 9:45 pm Read a chapter of a novel before falling asleep. An ideal day. Aaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhh.

Tuesday

The day was completely derailed. I slept through the alarm and never got back on track. Spouse drove off with my car keys so unable to drive myself to work. Had to rely on a co-worker to come get me on their schedule. Ate ice cream straight from the carton. Forgot my wallet and my lunch. Ate a burger and fries. No exercise, unless you count the scurrying around trying to catch up all day. Everyone was on edge. Maybe it's me. Feeling like a failure. Why does this happen? AAAAAAARRRRRRRRGGGGGG!

Wednesday

- 6:00 am Woke up to the alarm, sleepy but willing. Journalled for 30 minutes. Made me feel better. Today is another day to begin anew.
- 5:30 am *Lectio Divina*: a story from Rachel Naomi Remen and a page from Thich Nhat Hanh
- 6:00 am Exercise: Walking meditation with a friend.
- 7:00 am Breakfast: muffin on the way to work.
- 10:00 am First meeting: self-critical, task-focused, still curious, helpful.
- 12:00 pm Alone time at lunch allows me to breathe and refocus.
- 1:00 pm Second meeting: grounded, creative, gentler, more hopeful.
- 2:30 pm Supposed to be working on a deadline but grab coffee with a colleague who's having a difficult time.
- 3:40 pm Third meeting: late, slow to get present, one redeeming contribution that saves the day.
- 4:30 pm Working in my office. Check emails, write thank you cards, anything but working on that deadline.
- 5:30 pm Dinner in front of the TV. That's OK every now and then. Right?
- 6:30 pm Spouse and I work side by side at the kitchen table on unfinished work.
- 8:00 pm Settle into the couch to catch up on tivo'd reality TV minus commercials.
- 9:30 pm Throw in a load of laundry; buy a new meditation pillow on Ebay.
- The Middle Path. Ommmmmm.....

Something about Mary



Meet Mary Bain, our new Adult Religious Education Coordinator. Mary joined our staff in November, succeeding Brian Cross who left us for a full-time teaching position at Tulsa Community College. Mary came to All Souls back in the 80s – brought by her youngest son who started coming when Rocky Stegman was working in the Youth Department. “Dustin really thought All Souls was a thought-provoking environment with intelligent and honest people. He told me that I had been a Unitarian all my life but I just didn’t know it. He encouraged me to visit. I didn’t think I knew a soul that came here but I came and sat by myself in the pews in utter joy. Dustin was right, I had been a Unitarian all my life and had now found my home,” says Mary.

She works as an insurance broker, and has served on the Adult Religious Education Board, helped organize the Boar’s Head Feast for Village Banking, and has varied experience as a community volunteer and non-profit board member.

According to Mary, “I like serving on the Staff because of the STAFF. They are the nicest group of people I have ever been involved with AND they are all focused and dedicated to serving you, the members and guests who come to All Souls. I am lucky to be included in this staff and you are lucky to have them.” You can reach Mary with ideas for classes and other events at 743-2805, ext. 503 or mbain@AllSoulsChurch.org.

Resources for Further Reading

Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice by Lauren Artress. NY: Riverhead Books, 1995, 2006. For spiritual seekers of all kinds. Artress helped start the worldwide labyrinth movement.

A Song to Sing, A Life to Live: Reflections on Music as Spiritual Practice by Don Saliers and Emily Saliers. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005. Focuses on music as a spiritual practice from sacred music to hip-hop and rap.

Journaling: A Spiritual Journey by Anne Broyles. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1999. From a Christian perspective, chapters include journaling from daily life, scripture, meditations, dreams, readings, and more. Blank pages included.

Exploring the Labyrinth: A Guide for Healing and Spiritual Growth by Melissa Gayle West. NY: Broadway Books, 2000. Includes making your own labyrinth, complete with drawings and measurements.

Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life by Marjorie J. Thompson. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995. Thoughtful reference offers chapters on prayer, worship, fasting, and more. Adaptable for non-Christians.

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When submitting articles for church publications:

- 1) Submit your text electronically via email. Plain text is best.
- 2) Include your name and daytime number.
- 3) Not all submissions will be published. Submissions may be edited.

Questions? Call Laurel Williamson at 743-2805, ext 305.

February Highlights

- Feb. 5 Soulful Sundown - *Like A Prayer*
- Feb. 6 MUMS Sweetheart Ball
- Feb. 7 All Souls 303 - *Joining the Church*
- Feb. 11 Day Alliance
- Feb. 13 Supper Club
- Feb. 14 HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY
Quarter Souls Lock-Out
ROOTS (Feb 14, 21 & 28)
- Feb. 18 Diversity Art Exhibit Opening
- Feb. 19 Parents' Night Out
Evening of Praise
- Feb. 21 BGLT Potluck
- Feb. 23 Evening Alliance
- Feb. 27 Children's Choir Garage Sale
- Feb. 28 YOUTH SUNDAY

All Souls
Alternative
Worship

SOULFUL
SUNDOWN

LIKE
a
PRAYER

with
Buddhist chanting

FEB. 5 at
7:00pm

Childcare available:
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