

SOUNDINGS

Winter 2018

Silence, Stillness, Simplicity:
Contemplative practice
as a path toward
wholeness

Saint
Christopher's
Episcopal
Church



Living Fully Alive



The Rev. Brian W.
McGurk
Rector

Long ago, bishop and theologian Irenaeus (d. 202 CE), wrote this insightful and beautiful line: "The glory of God is a person fully alive."

Recently, I experienced what Irenaeus had in mind. It went something like this:

"O My God!"

"Look!"

"LOOK!"

"Look at that!"

"Do you see THAT?"

"Wow!"

"Bri! "BRI!" "BRI-I-I!"

"Its beautiful!....

"Awesome!"

"O MY GOD!"

Only St. Paul's "soul shaking" encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus Road rivals the excitement, enthusiasm, inspiration, and wonder generated by this "enlivening" experience!!

In a chance encounter on a sun-drenched winter morning, along the Outer Beach of Nauset, the Holy

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Living Fully Alive, continued

Spirit descended! Not in the form of a dove, like at Jesus' baptism on the River Jordan, but instead, in the form of a majestic and mysterious snowy owl. Actually, not one, but two snowy owls.

Personally, I am not a "bird-nerd" like the person with whom I witnessed this event. Meaning, I don't take my eyes off the road while at the wheel, because there is a hawk, heron or osprey flying overhead! Nor do I peruse *Sibley's Backyard Birds* flashcards while I am waiting for my food at the Sunbird Restaurant in Orleans. Nor do bird sightings generate the same level of enthusiasm, inspiration and awe as the day I met Desmond Tutu at Orange Farm Township in South Africa.

Yet, the God who "knows our thoughts from afar" finds a way deep into our hearts to enlarge and enliven them. For some of us it's through birds, and for others it is through bishops!

This beach encounter was an epiphany (a manifestation of Christ's living and loving presence) given in and through sand and sky, water and wave, owl and air. Nature radiated the glory of God. And so did an inspired human soul full of wonder and joy.

Gerard Manley Hopkins describes this beautifully in his poem, *God's Grandeur*:

The world is charged with the grandeur of God...

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God and so, too, is the human soul. The winged grandeur of God the Holy Spirit floated down from the Nauset sky, like those snowy owls, charging my companion's soul, animating her spirit, and inspiring her imagination. "Enthusiasm" literally means "God within." And "Inspiration" literally means to "breathe in the spirit." In my fellow beach walker's reaction of sheer excitement, enthusiasm, joy, wonder, gratitude, fascination, and awe, I witnessed a person fully alive with the grandeur of God! This was my epiphany—graciously given and gratefully received.

There is so much in the world today that deadens our spirits, closes us off to the beauty and the goodness of life, and dams the flow of Grace—all of which is a slippery slope to negativity, pessimism, and, ultimately, to despair—to a deadening life.

This raises an important question well worth our consideration and reflection: Am I fully ALIVE? To God? To life? To joy? To love? To relationship?

I recently read an opinion piece in the *New York Times*, written by Harvard philosopher Sean D. Kelly, entitled, "Waking Up to the Gift of Aliveness."

The author states, "The goal of life, for Pascal [a reference to the 17th-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal], is not happiness, peace, or fulfillment, but aliveness."

As is often the case, we all know when "aliveness" is missing in our lives. Mr. Kelly describes this well:

Think of the way that life really can become lifeless. You know what it's like: rise, commute, work, lunch, work some more, maybe have a beer or go to the gym, watch TV. For a while the routine is nurturing and stabilizing; it is comfortable in its predictability. But soon the days seem to stretch out in an infinite line behind and before you. And eventually you are withering away inside them. They are not just devoid of meaning but ruthless in their insistence that they are that way. The life you are living announces it is no longer alive.

At one time or another, we have all been here! He adds:

There are at least two natural, but equally flawed, responses to this announcement: constantly seek out newness or looking for a stable, deeper meaning to your existing routine.

In other words, the incessant pursuit of spontaneity, novelty, and our hearts' desires, most often lead to disappointment, exhaustion and unsatisfied desires. Equally so, the search for rational understanding, knowledge, and the meaning behind the events and experiences of life only lead us to more and more questions—most of them unanswerable. Answers to deep questions are always elusive and evasive! For example, do you understand and can you explain love, suffering or death? These are great mysteries to be lived, pondered and experienced, but never fully answered or understood. Try as we might!

While both approaches are helpful, we can't *move* or

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Living Fully Alive, continued

think our way into a state of aliveness.

Our Christian faith assures us that we are fully alive when our bodies, minds, hearts, souls, and spirits are animated, inspired and possessed by the living presence of Jesus Christ. Franciscan priest Richard Rohr refers to this as God's "divine possession" of us. Hence, to be alive means, among other things, that God "lives, dwells and has His being deep inside of us"—as St. Paul wrote. God is not found out there; instead, God is found in here.

The late English Benedictine monk, John Main, said that we develop and strengthen our connection with God in the encounter and experience of prayer. He writes:

The experience of prayer is the experience of coming into full union with the energy that created the universe. What Christianity has to proclaim to the world is that that energy is alive and it is the wellspring that gives each one of us the creative power to be the person we are called to be—a person rooted and founded in love. A person fully [ALIVE!].

The experience of prayer deepens our consciousness of life, love and God. In his short story, *The Aleph*, author Jorge Luis Borges, wrote that an "Aleph" is a point in space that contains all other points. Anyone who gazes into it can see everything in the universe from every angle simultaneously, without distortion, overlapping, or confusion. This gaze led him to exclaim, "I felt infinite wonder, infinite pity." With a new perspective on life and a deeper consciousness of it, Borges felt alive to all of life.

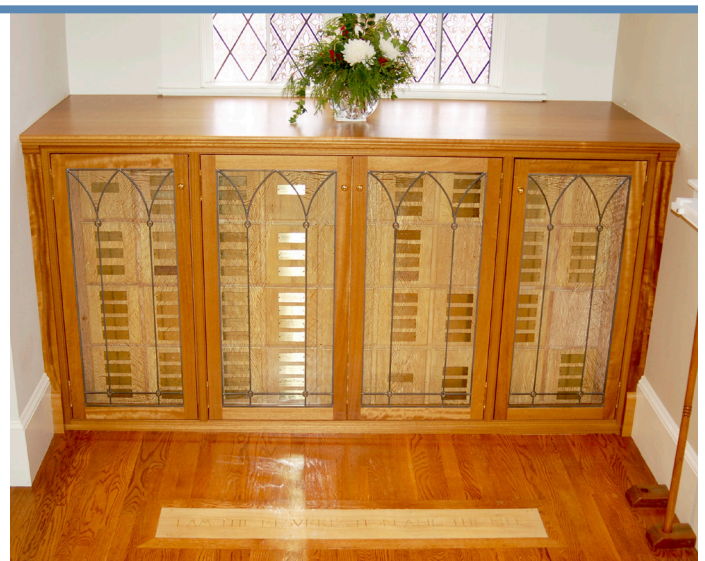
Prayer is an Aleph. It gives us a spiritual point-of-view, a soul's perspective, enabling us to see and experience God's glory and wonder in and around us. Whenever we pray; meditate; worship; spend time in silence and serenity; enjoy and encounter nature; "read, mark, learn and inwardly digest" the Holy Scriptures; contribute to the greater good of the community; engage in acts of compassion and justice; develop and nurture deep relationships; love our neighbors, especially our marginalized neighbors—then we are able to see and experience the grandeur of God, the Glory of God, the infinite wonder of life. This is what gives life its aliveness.

For this winter edition of *Soundings*, I have asked three members and friends of our congregation to share with you their own experience of aliveness, as nurtured through contemplative spiritual practice. On pages four and five, Anne D. LeClaire, Cherrill C. Lewis, and David Parker open up about their spiritual journey, and the meaning they derive from prayer, silence, and inner stillness. I hope that you receive as much from their words as I did.

This new year is our opportunity to deepen our engagement and experience of Christ through these practices. Maybe we will become fully charged with the grandeur of God. And maybe we will begin to experience aliveness in those dead parts of our lives. And maybe, just maybe, we will experience the Holy Spirit descending into our hearts, like a snowy owl floating down into the dunes of Nauset, filling our hearts with wonder! And life!

A New Columbarium

The Thomas R. Holmes family has bestowed St. Christopher's with an exceedingly generous gift. A beautiful, new Columbarium now graces the chancel area of the church, replacing the former. Kochman Reidt and Haigh Cabinetmakers of Greater Boston designed, constructed, and installed new doors, a face frame and a countertop. Door panels of leaded, transparent glass allow name plates to be viewed without opening the doors as was formerly the case. The interior cabinet has not changed. This gift was graciously given in memory of Christina Holmes. We are most grateful for the generosity of the Holmes family.



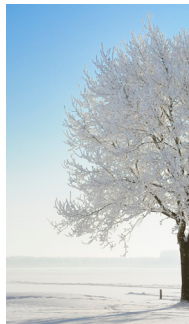
Cherrill C. Lewis



Contemplative prayer at St. Christopher's is the highlight of my week. We are very fortunate to have a spiritual leader as knowledgeable and sincere as Brian.

I have practiced meditation and contemplative prayer all of my life and it is the time where I shut off the noise from our broken world, close my eyes, breathe, and try to let go. It is a time where I open my heart and soul to God in hopes that I may receive the flow of His unconditional love. I hope to let go of trying to control the outcome of everything that happens in my life. I resign myself to God's will even if only for twenty minutes. What does He want for me and for the world? If you think about it, we never get away from technology and the frantic pace of daily life.

The letters that make the word SILENT can be re-arranged to spell LISTEN. Contemplative prayer and meditation offers me a desperately needed respite. It is a time to simply sit in silence and to hear God and the universe.



David Parker

Mind-stilling or "apophatic" contemplative prayer is essential for anyone seeking to have an inner life. It involves once a day, for 20 to 25 minutes, while fully awake, sitting in silence in a quiet place, to empty one's mind of all preoccupations—thoughts, fears and desires. The goal is to experience, undisturbed within oneself, the stilled, peaceful inner world Christ referred to as "the Kingdom of Heaven."

This world exists beyond our capacity for rational understanding: It cannot be defined by time or space, or, strictly speaking, by any symbols or metaphors. It represents the natural, transcendent, divine order from which the un-stilled perceptions of our mind separate us. Psychologically, this inner world exists deep within our unconscious. While our conscious mind stresses opposites and differences it perceives in the external, temporal world, our unconscious mind embraces our inner realm's capacity for compassion and love transcending all pairs of opposites—rich vs. poor, white vs. black, male vs. female, etc.

As one becomes grounded in this inner Kingdom through contemplative prayer, one re-enters the temporal world, moving with words and actions informed by one's experience of the realm within. The perceived separation between the external, temporal world and one's inner world disappears, and one becomes whole.





Anne D. LeClaire

There are many levels of deliberate silence. Each holds the opportunity to lead us, like intricately carved steps of a spiral staircase, into room after room of discovery and connection—to others, to our true selves and to spirit.

A beginning step is the choice to mute our exterior world, to turn off our radios and televisions and telephones and other intrusive devices. To take a period of time, whether minutes, hours, a single day or longer, and to draw back from the assaultive noise of daily lives is remarkably restorative and restful, a breathing space, if you will. (Studies have shown that quieting our environment even reduces blood pressure.)

Then there is the silencing of ourselves, of choosing not to speak, to withdraw even further from the ordinary pattern of our days. This is a choice I made twenty-five years ago and continue to the present. It was another way of quieting the noise of the world and the chatter my own voice adds to it. This brought its own riches and rewards and lessons. But as I continued to experience silent Mondays, I became more and more aware of my interior chatter, often painfully so. *Monkey mind*, the Buddhists call it. The noisiest place of all.

Gradually, over the years, the inner dialogue quieted. I found myself on another step and experiencing a more meditative practice of silence. And it is in this space of stillness, no longer deafened by the noise and business of the world and the inane and tiresome nattering of my psyche, I begin to really hear.

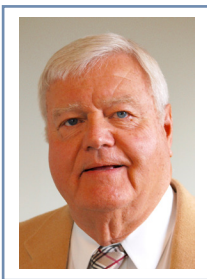
But there are always deeper levels, other rooms to discover.

This year I encountered such a space when I began attending the Wednesday morning Contemplative Service at St. Christopher's, led by Brian McGurk. Contemplative silence invites us to further quiet the voices of the ego, to enter a more sacred room.

This silence in community was a different experience for me. Being together with others who had chosen to explore and investigate the deliberate emptying of self and inviting spirit to enter was richer than I could have imagined. I find that communal silence, shared with others seeking the same thing, magnifies and resonates until it is like a single note that has morphed into a chord, swelling and powerful, swirling around us. In the hour and a half of each service, incorporating a period of silence followed by poetry, conversation, and readings, we begin to touch something deeper.

The enigma and paradox is that by becoming empty, beyond words and thought, we are welcoming the presence of the great mystery of God.

In Celebration of Volunteers



John M. Sargent
Outgoing Senior
Warden

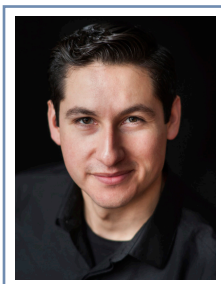
I am sitting in front of my computer trying to think of something profound and important to say as my term of Senior Warden comes to a close. I'm drawing a blank, and also feeling the pressure of Maury's already extended deadline! Finally, the subject hits me: Volunteers!!

St. Christopher's could simply not function without our volunteers. The reason it is not so obvious is because of the smooth and

seamless way they do their jobs. We have a wonderful, but very small staff that handles the ministries, music, and administrative duties, but one must think of everything else: Buildings and Grounds, Food Pantry, Flower Guild, Vergers, Finance Committee, Altar Guild, Ushers, Vestry, Greeters, Fellowship, Gift Shop, Outreach, Choir, Special Events, etc., etc., etc.

So next time you go to a service, I hope you will take a moment to give thanks for all the time many volunteers have given to make it such an enjoyable experience and St. Christopher's such a vibrant, stable church. Thank You, volunteers.

4'33"



Maury A. Castro
Organist &
Choirmaster

The classical composer John Cage is perhaps best known for his 1952 composition entitled 4'33". In case you're not familiar with this work, it is actually a piece wherein the performers make no sound at all, and four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence are kept. This controversial "work" challenged a multitude of assumptions and notions deeply held in the musical world. Among a number of points that Cage meant to explore was the recognition of the world of sounds constantly buzzing around us in our environment, which become apparent when one sits in "silence" for 4'33".

As you may know, I hold a Master of Divinity from the Seminary at Andrews University, in Berrien Springs, Michigan. While studying there, I took what seemed to be countless courses in reading Greek & Hebrew, homiletics, church history, theology, etc. Of all of that coursework 15 years ago, none of the assignments stick out in my memory except one: I was taking a world religions course, and in our section on Buddhism, I was asked to find a place in nature and sit in silence for 60 minutes, and record on paper what I saw. My initial impression of the assignment was one of superiority and contempt—"What a waste of my time! I'll be done in five minutes and then be bored for fifty-five!" But, being a dutiful student, I marched off into the (plentiful) woods near the campus, sat on a log, and started writing. To my surprise, I could not write fast enough to describe the simplest woodland scene, with all of its colors, sounds, shapes, varieties, movement, and life. The hour was up before I knew it, and I was a different person.

That day my eyes were very much opened to the world around me in a new way. I discovered that when we give the world around us our awareness—our presence—we discover more than we thought imaginable—outside, and within.

Parish Statistics

Baptisms

Amelia Reagan Kiely
October 29, 2017

Camila Grace Ricci
November 15, 2017

Deaths

Melissa Hampton
December, 2017

Carl Olson
December 31, 2017

Transfer In

Kathleen Davin
November 2017

Church e-mail list: If you are not on the church e-mail list and would like to be, please subscribe yourself at the bottom of the homepage of the church website, www.stchristopherschatham.org, or e-mail Maury A. Castro at mcastro@stchristopherschatham.org. By adding your address to the list, you will receive the weekly mid-week e-mail and periodic messages from the Rector.

Digital Soundings: All who are on the e-mail list receive *Soundings* electronically via the mid-week e-mail, and it is available on the website. If you would like to be taken off the print list, please contact Maury.

Saint
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Episcopal Church

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The Rev. Brian W. McGurk
Rector

The Rev. Dr. John Martin
Priest Associate

Maury A. Castro
Organist & Choirmaster;
Communications Director

Haskell Thomson
Musician-in-Residence

Jamie Chalker
Parish Administrator

Barbara Bush
Administrative Assistant

Ali Crockett
Facilities Manager

David Smith
Treasurer

Bridgette Renaud
Assistant Treasurer

Lou Augustin
Sexton

Priscilla Chick, R.N.
Parish Nurse

Ted and Martha Miller
Interim Managers,
Gift Shop

Sandra Bowden
Curator, The Gallery

Ted and Martha Miller
Managers, Food Pantry

Lynn Van Dine
and **Tim Weller**,
Soundings copy editors.

Capital Campaign & Building Update



David Smith
Treasurer

Overall 2017 was a banner year for building and facilities maintenance and upgrades for St. Christopher's. Thanks to Facilities Manager Ali Crockett and Sexton Lou Augustin for keeping the place running well and very energy efficient. Ali has done a great job keeping all of the contractors and projects moving

smoothly. In addition to planned work, we had to deal with one major flooding event and several smaller flooding issues. Remediation and recovery was quite expensive and exterior and interior work is underway to address those problems.

Here are some of the upgrades and changes made:

Sibley Chapel:

- Walls and ceiling painted
- Installed air conditioning
- Fire suppression system installed to give 100 percent coverage
- Hallway painted

Parish Hall:

- Fire suppression system installed to give 100 percent coverage
- Installed air conditioning
- Replaced Parish Hall floor
- New banner on south end wall
- Walls painted
- Created new storage spaces and closet
- Flower Guild space with shelving
- Upgraded wiring

Energy Efficiency:

- New energy efficient boilers installed to replace original heating system
- French doors/glass partition to offices to reduce heat loss
- New ductwork to bring heat to offices and reduce dependence on old systems
- Choir track lighting
- Energy efficient lighting throughout building

Kitchen:

- Updated with new stove, refrigerator, freezer
- Upgraded kitchen fire protection

Exterior:

- New church sign on Main St. with new lighting
- Multiple repairs to flat roof
- Repaired and painted Main Street fence
- Lighting for front walkway to improve safety
- Gutter and downspout for west side of building
- Drain coverage to prevent leaves in drains
- Railroad ties installed to prevent flooding
- Tree trimming on Main St. side

Most of this much needed work has been paid for by the very successful 2014 Capital Campaign. We should see real benefits from increased usage of our refurbished facilities and reduced energy costs. In 2018, we've already seen the installation of automatic exterior door openers to improve handicap accessibility. In addition, new damp proof baseboards in the lower levels have been installed to deter mold growth due to flooding issues. Thank you to all the volunteers, Building and Grounds Committee members, and the parish family.

Stewardship 2018: Closing in on Our Goal!



Peter Hughes
Stewardship
Committee Chair

Thanks to the diligent efforts of your stewardship team we are closing in on our goal for the 2018 stewardship campaign. 202 pledge families have committed \$512,383 to support the 2018 church operating budget. We are currently \$13,617 short of our goal.

There remains a handful of pledge families from 2017

who have yet to make their pledge for 2018. If you find yourself in this category please take a moment to consider all that St. Christopher's means to you and your family and make your pledge.

Every pledge is important and confidential. Any shortfall from our goal of \$526,000 will have a dollar for dollar impact of the 2018 budget.

We sincerely thank those who have supported the stewardship campaign and look forward to a successful conclusion in the near future.



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Winter 2018

Non-Profit Organization

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Holy Week and Easter Services

Sunday, March 25 (Palm Sunday)

8 am Holy Eucharist

10 am Choral Eucharist with Procession of Palms

Thursday, March 29 (Maundy Thursday)

5 pm Foot Washing and Stripping of the Altar

Friday, March 30 (Good Friday)

5 pm Liturgy for Good Friday

Saturday, March 31

5 pm Celtic Great Vigil of Easter

Sunday, April 1 (Easter Sunday)

9 am Festal Choral Eucharist

10:30 am Easter Egg Hunt

11 am Festal Choral Eucharist

