

2020  
Retreats Brochure  
inside!

January/  
February 2020

# Prairiewoods

A CATHOLIC, FRANCISCAN ECOSPIRITUALITY RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTER

## Mystics of the Ordinary

### The Changing Face of Spirituality

What does it mean to be “spiritual” in 2020? In the crucible of what Thomas Berry called the Ecozoic Era (the age of Earth), what does a “spiritual person” look like? Eminent Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) famously predicted that “The devout Christian of the future will either be a ‘mystic,’ one who has experienced ‘something,’ or he will cease to be anything at all” (“Christian Living Formerly and Today,” *Theological Investigations VII*, 1971). And what does it mean to be a “mystic” in today’s unraveling globe? A noted Rahner expositor explains it this way: “Rahner’s theology of the mysticism of everyday life challenges everyone to look more closely at *what is actually going on in the depths of their daily lives. What is implicit, hidden, anonymous, repressed, or bursting forth from the center of all we do?*” (Harvey D. Egan, *Karl Rahner: Mystic of Everyday Life*, 1998).

Undeniably, there is a phenomenon that captures our depth of experience today. It is an ever-growing awareness of ecology (study of home) and its centrality for global well-being and, thus, spirituality. *What is happening to our common home, and how should we care for the web of life that depends on its*



a rainy spiderweb photographed at Prairiewoods by Amy Starr

### *thriving?*

Spirituality is evolving to reflect our profound care for creation, especially as it deteriorates. The medieval St. Francis of Assisi, known as the patron of ecology, had praised “Brother Sun and Sister Moon,” and declared that Mother Earth and her creatures were worthy of protection and care. Today we hear his namesake Pope Francis’ call to tend to Earth’s cries with an “integral ecology,” one that finds Earth’s web of life as central, not peripheral, to our vocations as planetary pilgrims (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, 2015). We find ourselves steeped in the mysticism of the “ordinary” experience of creation, whether bathing in autumn’s forested majesty, or basking in the garden’s spring musk. It was just such a mystic of the ordinary who captured a brilliant sunrise consecrating Earth’s crust in the desert (Teilhard’s *Mass on the World*), and another who perceived Earth as a

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A recent guest told me that staying in a Hermitage here at Prairiewoods was an unexpected experience. “My first few hours I was thinking, ‘It’s so quiet here’ (said with a sneer) but by the next day I was like, ‘It’s so quiet here’ (said with arms spread wide and a sigh of contentment).” Another time, a contractor told me about his early-morning encounter with a doe and her newborn fawn. “I came around the side of the van and there they were, right in front of me. We made eye contact and just stood there, looking straight into each others’ eyes! I can’t even describe how that felt.” In recalling these stories, what seems clear to me is that both individuals experienced an invitation to move

more deeply into the mysticism of daily life (see “Mystics of the Ordinary: The Changing Face of Spirituality,” p. 1 and 3).

As we move together into a new decade—one we fully expect to be fraught with serious personal, communal and geopolitical challenges—we invite you to join Prairiewoods in exploring the unfolding future of spirituality in these times. In this newsletter we offer our annual New Year’s Examen of Consciousness (p. 3), based in Ignatian spiritual tradition, updated to reflect the deep conversion to integral ecology called for by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si’* and beckoning to us from the divine presence in all of Creation.

Also in this issue, you’ll find our annual Retreats Brochure (insert). Our team at Prairiewoods is focused on offering a richly varied and diverse menu of opportunities to nurture your relationships with Source of All Being, self, others and Creation. While the Retreats Brochure allows you to plan your engagement and schedule your retreat time, each issue of the newsletter also provides information on two months worth of program offerings (from one-time classes to prayer experiences to ongoing groups). Up-to-the-minute information is always available on our website, and newly scheduled offerings are shared on our Facebook page.

As always, we invite you to come to Prairiewoods just to *BE* as well. The prairies and woods are healing spaces in all seasons. And inside at the Center, there is always a welcome and a hot beverage available, too!

Peace and all good,

Jenifer Hanson, Director

“Every one of us is a mystic. We may or may not realize it, we may not even like it. But whether we know it or not, whether we accept it or not, mystical experience is always there, inviting us on a journey of ultimate discovery. We have been given the gift of life in this perplexing world to become who we ultimately are: creatures of boundless love, caring compassion, and wisdom.”

—Wayne Teasdale, *The Mystic Heart: Discovering a Universal Spirituality in the World's Religions*, 2010



Prairiewoods is a Catholic ecospirituality retreat and conference center in the Franciscan tradition. It is a nonprofit ministry sponsored by Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of La Crosse, Wisconsin.

**Mission:** Prairiewoods Franciscan Spirituality Center is a sacred space where people of all faiths and cultures are invited to explore and nurture their relationships with the Source of All Being, Earth, Self and Others with an increasing awareness of the story of the Universe.

The Prairiewoods staff collaborates to publish this newsletter bimonthly. Content, except where otherwise noted, is created by our staff in consultation and with care to offer a uniquely Prairiewoods perspective.

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“pale blue dot in a vast cosmic arena” (Carl Sagan). As ordinary mystics who perceive Earth’s fragile integrity and its breath-taking magnificence, we realize that we must “focus on the whole, on the unity and not the division” (Stephen Hawking). *Mystics of the ordinary seek grounding in creation and wholeness.*

Spirituality today celebrates, keens, reveres and protects creation and the inter-connection of all life. Following upon the cosmic mysticism of Teilhard de Chardin, we are evolving into a more complex, more unified mode of being. The idea of “inter-being” (Charles Eisenstein, *The More Beautiful World Our Hearts Know is Possible*, 2013)—which draws us beyond entrenched dualisms and a hierarchy of being—is taking hold. *We are all one.* Ecologist Thomas Berry admonished us to commence our Great Work in both caring for and renewing Earth. Many are devoting their life’s work to the good of the whole like eco-activists Bill McKibben (350.org) and Greta Thunberg (youth strike for climate). This is the Active Hope in the ecospirituality of Joanna Macy, who celebrates the work that reconnects us with the web of life. We are reclaiming the practice of learning Earth’s language, as eco-philosophers Wendell Berry and David Abram have urged. In the Age of the Anthropocene, branded as consumer-driven techno-sapiens, we have all but lost Earth language. Now we are relearning that ancient tongue. Poets of creation like Mary Oliver and Drew Dellinger have offered new psalmody for daily prayer and remind us of the deep wisdom of the ancient biblical verse, “Deep calls unto deep” (Psalm 42:7). We are all going deeper, deeper, returning to Earth, grounding

ourselves, enraptured by the “ordinary.”

Today, people of spiritual depth are contemplative activists, defenders of remnant wilderness, shamans of Earth’s language and dancers of its rhythms. We are caretakers of seed and harvesters of hope. We are called to protect terrestrial eco-systems, to defend forest cathedrals, threatened waterways, wetlands and reservoirs, precious soil and air. Thus, we are called to protect and defend all life on the planet, as intricately inter-connected as strands of a cosmic web of which we are all part. Our indigenous elders have shown us the way. Spirit-Creator is still weaving, still breathing across the still waters to birth new life. We need not be astounded by a global turn toward the “spiritual.” *Spirituality is a profound awareness of the sacred-in-all, an ever-deepening consciousness of all that is Holy, and a desire to respond with all our hearts, a love-offering of authentic humility, awe and gratitude.* We need only listen to those prophets who have heard Earth’s call, many who perceive the indwelling of the Divine especially in Earth’s unraveling. We are called to be both hospice ministers and midwives, accompanying what is dying with compassion and shared grief, and holding space open for new life. Spirituality today calls us to the radical edges, to the “dearest freshness deep down things” (Gerard Manley Hopkins, *God’s Grandeur*, 1877), and to the white-hot stars, seeking the light as wise ones do, even if we can only perceive the traces and remains. *As mystics of the ordinary, we are opening once again to the love of the Divine, and rediscovering the tensile web that connects and sustains all creation.*

## Eco-Examen for Mystics of the Ordinary

**W**e invite you to sink into a time of quiet contemplation, to come home to that place in your own soul where your dreams and desires and hopes rest. In this time of deep listening, use these questions to help you nurture your relationships with the Source of All Being, Creation, self and others:

- Where/how do I find the Holy?
- Where is the Holy evident/hiding in me?
- Where is the Holy hiding in those with whom I struggle?
- Where is the Holy in what is dying, as well as living and thriving?
- Where is a special place in creation that I connect with the Holy?
- What aspect of creation helps me celebrate? Mourn? Give praise? Calm myself? Go deeper? Breathe?
- What is actually going on in the depths of everyday life?
- What new thoughts visited me?
- Where could I have exposed myself to the risk of something different?
- How were my conversations?
- What reached me today? How deeply did it imprint?
- What is implicit? Hidden? Anonymous? Repressed? Bursting forth from the center?
- What found me hopeful? Lost? Wondering? Wanting more?

The following are programs that Prairiewoods is hosting in the next two months. For more information or to register, visit [www.Prairiewoods.org](http://www.Prairiewoods.org) or call 319-395-6700. For information on retreats, please see Retreat Brochure insert.

## Hatha Way Yoga

**Mondays & Thursdays; Jan. 2–Feb. 27; 9:30–10:30 a.m., 10:45–11:45 a.m. & 5:30–6:30 p.m.**  
**Facilitators:** Cindy Hathaway, Carla Brems & Cheryl Lindo

Join us as we link our movements with our breath and cultivate strength, flexibility and relaxation through regular yoga classes. Cindy Hathaway, Carla Brems and Cheryl Lindo offer multiple one-hour Gentle/Beginner's and Chair Yoga classes each Monday and Thursday. Please bring a mat if possible. People of all fitness levels are welcome. Let's see how our bodies and souls can benefit from yoga!

**Fee:** \$99 for eleven-punch card or \$60 for six-punch card, one punch per session

## Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton

**Thursdays; Jan. 2, Jan. 16, Feb. 6 & Feb. 20; 6:30–8 p.m.**  
**Facilitator:** Betty Daugherty, FSPA

Do you long for a more contemplative life? Do you want to respond to life's events with greater faith? Join us the first and third Thursday of each month to study the *Bridges to Contemplative Living* series, which includes musings of Thomas Merton and other spiritual writers. Feel free to enjoy this as a series or as individual sessions.

**Fee:** \$5 per session

**Seeing IS Believing: Visio Divina**  
**Tuesdays, Jan. 7–Feb. 25;**  
**10–11:30 a.m.**

**Facilitator:** Lois Ocenosak

We invite you into a circle of trust to integrate imagination, learning and prayer through the practice of *Visio Divina*, or holy seeing, on Tuesday mornings. A contemplative practice of praying the Scriptures while viewing art, *Visio Divina* involves listening to the word of God, viewing art, pondering God's message, letting our hearts speak and resting with God. Various works of art are used for the sessions, including pieces from *The Saint John's Bible*. Feel free to enjoy this as a series or as individual sessions.

**Fee:** \$5 per session

## Prayer Experience Series

**Tuesdays; Jan. 7, Jan. 21, Jan. 28, Feb. 4, Feb. 18 & Feb. 25;**  
**11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Angie Pierce Jennings, Emelia Sautter & Betty Daugherty, FSPA

We are blessed with many ways to pray, including songful prayer, contemplative prayer, silent



meditation and body prayers like walking the labyrinth. Join us for this ongoing prayer series and experience the joys of prayer and meditation together. Registration is appreciated but not required.

**Fee:** Free-will offering

## Wednesday Women

**Wednesdays, Jan. 8–15 & Jan. 29–Feb. 26, 10–11:30 a.m.**  
**Facilitator:** Ann Jackson, PBVM

Join women seeking spiritual enrichment, inspiration and motivation in the supportive setting of Prairiewoods each Wednesday. Topics arise from within the hearts and minds of those gathered. We view TED Talks, converse, reflect, support and challenge one another to personal growth, no matter what stage of life. Together we will foster deep reflection, learning, lively conversation, laughter, storytelling and inquiry to generate incredible energy and spiritual stimulation!

In January and February, we will be awakening our spiritual practices: living sustainably, always in discernment, honoring our body in movement, discovering mantras, remembering love, inviting relationship and creating abundance. Feel free to enjoy this as a series or as individual sessions. Please register for each session by the previous day. *This group will not meet Jan. 22.*

**Fee:** \$10 per session

## Men Exploring Faith

**Thursdays, Jan. 9, Jan. 23, Feb. 13 & Feb. 27, 7–8:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Bob Davis

As men mature, we undergo a major life transformation from goal driven-ness to receptivity, from ego to wisdom. The transition may seem quite disruptive while on the way to being life-enhancing. Join with a small group of reflective men in honest conversation about life's changes and faith's response.

**Fee:** Free-will offering

## Spirituality of Bread

**Sunday, Jan. 12, 1–5 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Tara King, Laurie Erlacher & Jenifer Hanson

Bread baker and author Donna Sinclair writes, "Bread offers connection—as Jesus connected with his friends; as we connect with our children; as Demeter, the goddess of grain, bound herself to her daughter. People of every culture are tied together by the breads they bake. Bread helps us remember who we are and whom we love." Join Prairiewoods for an afternoon of bread baking and exploration of the connections bread has made in our lives and spirits. We will return home with a fresh-baked loaf of bread we make ourselves.

No bread making experience is necessary.

**Fee:** \$30 includes all materials



## Drumming for Healing

**Mondays, Jan. 13, Jan. 27, Feb. 10 & Feb. 24, 6–7 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Sheri Mealhouse (Hawkwoman)

In the cosmic experience, drumming touches many people at a deep level and brings all creation together. Let's see how drumming—and feeling the Creator's rhythm inside us—resonates with our your inner spirit! No experience is necessary, and instruments are available.

**Fee:** Free-will offering to the facilitator

## Mindfulness for Families Sunday, Jan. 12, 3–4:30 p.m.; & Mondays; Feb. 10, March 23 & April 13; 6–7:30 p.m.

**Facilitators:** Kim Seward, BSN, RN, CMI, & Ann Jackson, PBVM

We continually look for creative ways to bring awareness, compassion, kindness, peace and tranquility into our homes. These monthly opportunities are for parents and children from kindergarten through grade 12 to attend together. We will focus on simple, mindful practices to create peaceful awareness in the parent, child and home. We will explore and engage fun mindfulness activities to do together as a family. Practicing foundational aspects of mindful awareness—noticing senses, emotions and thoughts in fun and practical ways—will cultivate awareness and a greater understanding of emotions, kindness and compassion in all relationships, especially the parent-child relationship. As parents and children attend these sessions together, we will build a comprehensive mindfulness toolkit to use for future family enjoyment. Monthly themes include:

- **Jan. 12:** New Beginnings & Intentions
- **Feb. 10:** Loving Kindness
- **March 23:** My Wonderful Calm Body
- **April 13:** Spring into Mindfulness

Some activities will occur outside, so please dress for the weather. Each session is limited to 30 total parents and children. Please register by the previous Monday with your children's ages. **Fee:** \$20 per family for each session, or \$60 for four-week series, if paid in advance (some financial assistance is available)



## Prairiewoods Knitters & Stitchers Tuesdays, Jan. 14 & Feb. 11, 9:30–11 a.m.; & Wednesdays, Jan. 22 & Feb. 26, 6:30–8:30 p.m.

**Facilitators:** participants

Practice knitting and stitching in the company of new friends! This group of crafters of various skill levels create handmade goods—such as hats, mittens, blankets and baby items—for charity twice a month. New participants (even those who don't knit or stitch yet!) are always welcome.

**Fee:** Free

## Celebration of Mass

**Tuesdays, Jan. 14 & Feb. 11,  
11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.**

Please join us for the celebration of Catholic Mass on the second Tuesday of each month. Father Mark Ressler is the celebrant, and registration is not necessary.

**Fee:** Free

## Evening Centering Prayer

**Tuesdays; Jan. 14, Jan. 28, Feb. 11 &  
Feb. 25; 5:30–7 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Judith Edwards

Centering prayer is a form of meditation focused on praying in silence. Join us as we relax, clear our minds and find God's presence within us during this time of silence and centering prayer. Feel free to enjoy this as a series or as individual sessions.

**Fee:** Free-will offering

## Y.O.L.O. (Your Other Lunch Option!)

**Wednesdays, Jan. 15 & Feb. 12,  
11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. (buffet line opens at 12 p.m.)**

**Facilitators:** Tara King, Laurie Erlacher & Rochell Potter

Tired of the same old lunch places? It's time that we renew our bodies and refresh our spirits in a beautiful setting! Join us for Y.O.L.O. (Your Other Lunch Option!)—a lunch choice celebrating wholesome, fresh food made from scratch by chefs Tara King, Laurie Erlacher and Rochell Potter in Prairiewoods' no-waste kitchen. We will dine in a community setting (at small-group or communal tables) with friends we bring with us or new friends we meet over a delicious themed lunch:

- **Jan. 15:** Animal Affinities—What animals are we drawn to? What qualities of these animals appeal to us? Do we emulate these qualities?

## • Feb. 12:

Celebrate Love with Hugs, Laughs & Smiles—Tara, Laurie and Rochell



want to be your Valentines this February! The special ingredient is always love—but even more so during this Y.O.L.O.!

Please register at least two days in advance. Each lunch is limited to 35 people, so register early!

**Fee:** \$12 per session

## Offered in Partnership with Unity Point Hospice

### Soul Care: Creative Arts Grief Support Group

**Wednesdays, Jan. 15 & Feb. 19, 5:30–7 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Jamie Siela, LISW, & Julie Wehner, LMSW, M.Div, BCC

Take time to be with others in grief and engage the creative spark! Jamie Siela and Julie Wehner from Unity Point Hospice facilitate this monthly grief group open to anyone grieving loss through death. On the third Wednesday of each month, we explore a different creative medium.

- **Jan. 15:** Mirror Mirror Activity—Sometimes we need a gentle reminder to be kind to ourselves. Using prompts, we will ask, What would we tell a friend who lost a loved one? We will encourage the same gentleness we provide others when we look at our own grief journeys.
- **Feb. 19:** Bright Spots—Sometimes in cold, winter months we need a little pick me up. We will use our time together to make positivity rocks to place throughout the community. Bring your creative ideas to help brighten the days of others.

Please register by the previous Friday.

**Fee:** Free, includes all art supplies

## Going Inward with Sounds & Vibrations

**Wednesdays; Jan. 15, Feb. 5 & Feb. 19;  
6–7 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Kathy Broghammer

Experience sound, stillness, gentle movement, playfulness and relaxation through the enigmatic vibrations of Himalayan and crystal singing bowls.

Kathy Broghammer will lead us in gentle movement through the song of bowls to connect with our inner selves. We will sit or lie on yoga mats to listen and just be. We will hear the sounds and feel the vibrations of the singing bowls going inward. Let's let our souls rest and allow ourselves to be recreated!

**Fee:** \$10 per session

**Sweat Lodge (Inipi) Ceremony**  
**Saturdays, Jan. 18 & Feb. 15,**  
**5–9 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Kerry Batteau

Participate in a sacred ceremony focused on prayer, purification and healing. The lodge is a small dome-shaped structure in which we sit on the earth around heated stones. The ceremony includes sacred songs and prayers and is followed by a communal meal. Please register and sign a release form.

**Fee:** Donation of \$10 to Prairiewoods for materials

**Spiritual Art Journaling**  
**Tuesdays, Jan. 28 & Feb. 18,**  
**1–2:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Angie Pierce Jennings

Read and reflect on passages from various spiritual writers including Annie Dillard, Christine Valters Paintner and Caitlin Mathews.

We will use the

process of art journaling as a creative way to further contemplate and explore our spirituality. We are invited to bring a journal or mixed media tablet, colored pencils and water color paints, and some art supplies will be available. Artists of all experience levels, including beginners, are welcome.

Please register by the previous day. Feel free to enjoy this as a series or as individual sessions.

**Fee:** \$10 per session

**Forest Bathing with the Seasons**  
**Friday, Jan. 31, 1–4 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Dr. Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, MD, FACOG, FABOIM

Spend the afternoon exploring the mindfulness practice of forest immersion

with Dr. Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, a practitioner of integrative medicine. We will learn about evidence supporting the healing benefits of forest bathing and then experience an extended gentle, contemplative, guided walk with the Prairiewoods land. We will use our senses to enhance well-being in the healing embrace of nature. Breathe, relax, wander, touch, smell, taste, see, listen, share and engage! Please register and pay by the previous day.

**Fee:** \$50 includes snacks

**Seasonal Tree Rock Painting**  
**Friday, Jan. 31, 6:30–8:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Andi Lewis

At different times in life and even various times within a year, we find ourselves in different seasons of the heart. In this contemplative and creative workshop, we will read from spiritual texts to discern which season of the heart we are in. Then we will use a paint brush and fine dotting tools to create a beautiful, one-of-a-kind seasonal tree. This is a fun, relaxing process that can be done by anyone but may be too contemplative for young children.

**Fee:** \$13 per person includes art supplies



**Rock Mandala Painting for the Whole Family**

**Saturday, Feb. 1, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Andi Lewis

Bring the whole family for our popular original rock painting class. We will learn the art of rock painting with mandalas, which are sacred circular works of art. This is a fun, relaxing process that can be done by anyone. No experience or artistic skill is necessary, but kids 12 and under must be accompanied by an adult. This class always sells out, so register today!

**Fee:** \$13 per person includes art supplies

**Day of Self Renewal**

**Monday, Feb. 10, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Angie Pierce Jennings

Find rest and relaxation for mind, body and spirit! This tranquil day features two 40-minute holistic services, group guided meditation, a private guest room,

access to walking trails and all that Prairiewoods has to offer, a fresh lunch and hours of free time. (Choose from massage, head and shoulder massage, reflexology, healing touch, spiritual direction, dream processing, guided ecospiritual experience, yoga or chair yoga.) Please register, pay a nonrefundable/nontransferable deposit of \$50 and list your top three services choices by Feb. 5.

**Singing Bowl Prayer**  
**Monday, Feb. 10, 12:45–1:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Kathy Broghammer

Throughout history, singing bowls have been used around the world to foster meditation, relaxation, prayer and mind-body-spirit wellness. In this session, we will let the resonant sounds of Himalayan and crystal singing bowls relax the entire body and create a pathway for clearer connection with the divine. We will just receive and breathe! Some yoga mats and pillows are available.

**Fee:** \$5 per session

**Guided Ecospiritual Experience: Winter Wisdom**

**Monday, Feb. 10, 2:30–3:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Emelia Sautter

Let's get our "vitamin N" fill and immerse ourselves in the natural world with our plant, animal and elemental kin! Our relatives have much wisdom to share. As St. Francis said, "Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water, so humble, precious and pure." Let's connect and make new friends! Please dress for the weather, as we will be outdoors.

**Fee:** \$5

**Tallgrass Conversations Book Reading & Discussion**

**Saturday, Feb. 15, 2–3:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Thomas Dean

Prairiewoods played a significant role in the inspiration for *Tallgrass Conversations: In Search of the Prairie Spirit*, a book of short writings and photographs, and much of its content—in both



word and image—reflects co-author Thomas Dean's Prairiewoods experience. Poetic, beautiful, meditative and informative, *Tallgrass Conversations* (co-authored with Cindy Crosby) encourages experiencing the prairie through the heart, mind and spirit, as well as sight, sound and other senses. With a special focus on Prairiewoods, Tom will discuss how the book came together, including how the idea of "conversations" with the living world informs the writing and photos. He will read selections from the book and share photos that accompany the short writings. After the reading, all are welcome to sow seeds in the prairie. Please register by the previous day.  
**Fee:** Free-will offering

## Women in Interfaith Dialogue

**Saturday, Feb. 29, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Angie Pierce Jennings, Virginia Melroy, Dr. Paula Sanchini & Mary Beth Siemann

Come together quarterly with women of various faith traditions for conversations about faith and spirituality. Our topic this session is: How does our spirituality inspire our care for all creation, including our non-human family and whole planet? We are invited to bring a reading or prayer to share with the group, and an object that represents our faith tradition or the topic in general. Please register with any dietary restrictions by Feb. 26.

**Fee:** \$15 includes lunch

## Save the Date!

**Mother/Daughter Retreat  
 Sunday, May 10, 1–5 p.m.**

Plan ahead this year for Mother's Day, have brunch with the whole family and then bring Mom out to Prairiewoods for a fun and meaningful afternoon together with activities that include Zentagles, connecting and honoring our lineage, dance and gratitude.

**Fee:** \$40

We appreciate all of the generous people who donate their time, money and other gifts to Prairiewoods! For a complete, up-to-date list between Newsletters, visit [www.Prairiewoods.org/Donate](http://www.Prairiewoods.org/Donate).

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 Mike Morman  
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Pat Myers  
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 Gian Luc Sison  
 Gina Sison  
 Lyndon Sison  
 Lucy Slinger, FSPA  
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 Georgia Stoeber  
 Tom Stoeber  
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You may send this by mail, email [ecospirit@prairiewoods.org](mailto:ecospirit@prairiewoods.org) or call **319-395-6700**. If mailed, please include this address label.

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"We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent and the divine is shining through it all the time ... God manifests Himself everywhere, in everything ... and we cannot be without Him."

—Thomas Merton

*May you sense the Divine  
shining through the darkness  
during this holy season!*

photo by Becky Brooker

March/April 2020

# Prairiewoods

A CATHOLIC, FRANCISCAN ECOSPIRITUALITY RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTER



*In loving memory of*

**Betty Daugherty, FSPA**

**Oct. 4, 1931–Dec. 20, 2019**

“Do not forget that the value and interest of life is not so much to do conspicuous things ... as to do ordinary things with the perception of their enormous value.”

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

**B**etty Daugherty, FSPA, grew up on a farm in eastern Iowa. Although she left the farm as a young woman, Sister Betty was a lifelong planter of seeds and tender of growing things. The literal seeds she planted included trees and prairie grasses and milkweed for the pollinators. Walk the beautiful grounds teeming with vibrant life here at Prairiewoods, and you'll see Sister Betty's touch everywhere.

*The very fact that there is a Prairiewoods to walk is testament to a different kind of seeding to which Sister Betty dedicated her life.* A voracious reader, Sister Betty fell in love with the work of Teilhard and Berry, with Beatrice Bruteau and Cynthia Bourgeault, with the new cosmology and Celtic traditions reimagined. Taking in all she was reading and absorbing, the idea of creating a spirituality center dedicated to deep ecology took shape as a seed Sister Betty planted among her Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration (FSPA) community and tenderly brought to life. With Sister Betty's visionary leadership and the committed care of all six foundresses, Prairiewoods flourished.

On October 4, 2019—Saint Francis Day and Sister Betty's birthday—we celebrated the decision by FSPA to place most of the 70 acres here at Prairiewoods into a conservation easement, protecting the land from further development. At that joyous celebration, Sister Betty recalled the founding of Prairiewoods, saying:

“We were called to create this center, to open these 70 acres in the midst of a city to people ... who wish to deepen their relationship with the Divine, who desire a space in which to listen in peaceful silence to what is in their hearts, who acknowledge the bonds that unite us with all peoples and who wish to connect with the mystery and wonder of creation as

essential to their spiritual journey. And, I might add, to those who know that land is not just a commodity to be fought over and divided up, who know that we can walk with God, present here in this woods and this prairie.”

If you knew Sister Betty, it is likely that at least once she handed you some reading material—a book, a poem, an article—saying, “You might like to read this.” It may have seemed a spontaneous impulse. More likely, it was Sister Betty planting another seed, this time to broaden your perspective, expose you to a new idea or aid your spiritual deepening.

Sister Betty's thoughtful attention and concern that each person feel seen, appreciated, even celebrated was at odds with her own desire to stay out of the spotlight, to avoid being singled out or credited in any special way. Everyone who misses her gentle presence and mischievous smile, her ability to make real our interconnected ongoing cosmic origin story, knows how extraordinary and worthy of acclaim Sister Betty was and is. *In planting her seeds and tending our growing edges, Sister Betty demonstrated a deep understanding of the enormous value of doing ordinary things.* (To read Sister Betty's complete obituary, please visit [www.Prairiewoods.org/Blog](http://www.Prairiewoods.org/Blog).)

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### *Dear friends of Prairiewoods:*

This March/April issue is the first newsletter we've published since the death of Betty Daugherty, FSPA, on Dec. 20, 2019. Despite the passage of several months, here at Prairiewoods we miss Sister Betty every day.

At the same time, we see her presence and feel her spirit in many, many ways. We take comfort and find joy in this truth daily.

I have the honor of expressing, on behalf of the entire staff at Prairiewoods, our deep gratitude for the outpouring of concern, expressions of love, and humbling offers of support from so many of you in the days and weeks immediately following our loss of Sister Betty.

Thank you for the lovely testaments to Sister Betty's impact on your lives. For the stories that made us laugh or cry and nod along, thinking, "Yes, that sounds like Betty!"

Thank you for the hugs, the plants, the drop-in visits just to ask how we were holding up.

Thank you for the many ways you've said, "Yes, this is a big loss for Prairiewoods. But you've got this." As a number of you reminded us, we learned from the best! Perhaps it goes without saying (but I sometimes think it is best to say these things anyway): we will continue our commitment to what Sister Betty started at Prairiewoods. We will endeavor to practice the Franciscan hospitality for which Sister Betty was known. We will keep striving to go deeper into the mission, which Sister Betty articulated so beautifully in written documents and reflective pieces. We will continue to hold space for transformation and spiritual deepening, for the exploration of relationships with self, others, Earth and God. And, perhaps most importantly, the Prairiewoods land will be protected and waiting to welcome you!

In other words, we will endeavor to carry forward the beautiful example of "living a life," put into words by poet Mary Oliver but deeply expressed by Sister Betty's life:

*Pay attention.  
Be astonished.  
Tell about it.*

Peace and all good,

Jenifer Hanson, Director



Prairiewoods is a Catholic ecospirituality retreat and conference center in the Franciscan tradition. It is a nonprofit ministry sponsored by Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of La Crosse, Wisconsin.

**Mission:** Prairiewoods Franciscan Spirituality Center is a sacred space where people of all faiths and cultures are invited to explore and nurture their relationships with the Source of All Being, Earth, Self and Others with an increasing awareness of the story of the Universe.

The Prairiewoods staff collaborates to publish this newsletter bimonthly. Content, except where otherwise noted, is created by our staff in consultation and with care to offer a uniquely Prairiewoods perspective.

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Friday, May 1 (7–9 p.m.), &  
Saturday, May 2 (9 a.m.–3 p.m.)  
at St. Ludmila's Catholic Church  
(211 21<sup>st</sup> Ave SW, Cedar Rapids)

**T**he old mythologies and philosophies of the West are rich and complex and beautiful. They offer up a world in which everything is not only alive, but has purpose and intentionality of its own. A world to which each incarnated soul chooses to come, for a reason, and to offer up a unique gift which can only be expressed through relationship with and participation in this beautiful animate Earth. During this weekend, we'll explore what it might be to court the *anima mundi*: the "world soul" of ancient tradition, and to uncover our own part in its unfolding.

**Registration for Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:** The cost of the two-day event is \$75 and includes

Saturday lunch. After April 1, the cost is \$80. Friday only is \$25, and Saturday only is \$60, including lunch. Lodging is full at Prairiewoods but may be available at Comfort Inn & Suites (2025 Werner Ave NE in Cedar Rapids, 319-378-8888) or Country Inn & Suites (4444 Czech Lane NE in Cedar Rapids, 319-294-8700). Please call early to inquire about a room.

Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
**Courting  
the  
World Soul**  
with  
Sharon Blackie  
and  
Sara Thomsen  
May 1–2

*Sadness of Gaia by Josephine Wall (used with permission)*

**Dr. Sharon Blackie** is an award-winning writer, teacher and speaker and is recognized internationally for her work on cultivating the mythic imagination. As well as writing four books of fiction and nonfiction, Sharon has had her work published in magazines and newspapers around the world, and she has been interviewed by major broadcasters and radio stations. She is a mythologist with a specialization in Celtic Studies and a psychologist who has specialized both in neuroscience and narrative. [www.SharonBlackie.net](http://www.SharonBlackie.net)



**Sara Thomsen** is an artist of the melody whose music touches the soul and invites us to respond for the good of the global community. Sara's gentle, soulful and uplifting acoustical renderings celebrate the beauty of the cosmos and call us into fuller communion with the global family. [www.SaraThomsen.com](http://www.SaraThomsen.com)



# THE UNIVERSE

*The Universe Story—the 14-billion-year history of the unfolding of the universe and all who abide in it—was foundational to Prairiewoods foundress Betty Daugherty, FSPA. On these two pages, you will find Sister Betty's own words describing this essential story of creation. To read, begin at number one in the center and spiral outward ...*

9

## *Dinosaurs, Flowers & First Mammals*

For about one hundred million years dinosaurs were the most prevalent vertebrate form. Birds are their direct descendants. The coming of the flowers, about two hundred thirty million years ago, provided a truly concentrated food source, which made possible the development of mammals. With flowers came the greatest increase of new species the planet had seen. Flowers brought not only nourishment to Earth but also decked it with beauty, color and fragrance. The first placental mammals developed about one hundred ten million years ago. By forty million years ago, the various orders of mammals were complete and inhabited the continents of Earth's body.

8

## *Life Goes on Land & Vertebrate Animals*

Four hundred million years ago, the first life forms left the oceans, having learned to develop a membrane within which they could carry their own water and through which they could withstand the pull of gravity. Vertebrates left their ocean home and went ashore. Amphibians were descendants of fish who had developed lungs. They made their way into the world of swamps and forests, reaching sizes of twenty feet in length. The land filled with reptiles and dinosaurs ... a great, green, slow-moving Earth.

1

## *The Great Flaring Forth*

This is the beginning of everything in existence, the emergence of the universe. Some time between 13 and 15 billion years ago, in a great burst of stupendous energy, the Universe billowed out in every direction, creating its own space in which to exist. All of creation unfolded from this originating event. All the protons that would ever be were created in this moment. The Universe was born.

7

## *Multi-Cellular Species*

About one billion years ago, life was mysteriously drawn toward union, and the first simple-celled organisms began to reproduce sexually. Different strands of genetic memory were combined in the new offspring. Seven hundred million years ago, the first multi-cellular life emerged within the sea. Five hundred million years ago the first fish with back bones developed, encasing Earth's first nervous system and developing sensory organs.

6

## *Life on Earth*

Four billion years ago, over time, more complex arrangements began to take shape within the oceans. Gradually, amino acids formed, and finally, proteins. These were the first simple cells, and in, by and through them, Earth awakened into life. These first simple cells learned how to catch the rays of the sun for food and how to reproduce by dividing. These ancient creatures prepared the way for every complex form of life that followed.

5

## *Earth*

A little more than four billion years ago, our own planet Earth formed ... It was just the right size and distance from the sun for life to develop. Torrential downpours washed the land for millions of years, carrying minerals into slowly forming seas, rich with minerals and possibilities. An atmosphere and land masses gradually formed.

# RSE STORY

10

## *Ice Age & First Humans*

A little more than

three million years ago, the current ice ages of Earth began, shaping the mountains, valleys, rivers, lakes and streams that form our present bio-regions. About two and a half million years ago, the earliest humanoid types evolved. These creatures, with brains and nervous systems, were complex enough that in and through them Earth awakened into self-conscious awareness of her existence.

11

## *Modern Homo Sapiens*

Forty thousand years

ago, modern Homo Sapiens arrived, occupying Africa and Australia. These new creatures looked about and marveled at all they saw. They learned the secrets in every leaf and rock and tree, and moved with the animals and seasons across the land. They fashioned language, tools, art, and cultures rich in ritual and celebration. Ages passed and humans changed, settling down to live in villages and then in cities. Empires and kingdoms grew and spread, characterized by monarchy and hierarchy, conquest and colonization. Into this period, just over two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ was born.

2

## *The Galaxies*

The original fireball

spread out and cooled, the first atoms were formed—hydrogen first and helium second. About a billion years after the Great Flaring Forth, the first stars appeared. They expanded and then collapsed, forming carbon, oxygen, sulfur and iron, some of the elements necessary for life. This process continued for billions of years, creating a trillion galaxies, each with billions of stars.

We know now that stars are *still* being born in these heavenly cauldrons.

12

## *Our Species Today*

The human species, driven

by myths of progress, power and security, is bringing to a close the Cenozoic Age, the last sixty-five-million-year geological era of Earth's greatest variety and abundance of life. Yet, even as we humans recognize the effects of our dangerous and destructive behavior, we are also gradually discovering the great Mystery contained in the story of the Universe. We are learning more about our expanding and unified Universe, seeing how we are part of a common origin story and participants in its continuing emergence. We are seeing ourselves as members in single Earth community in a single sacred Universe.

3

## *The Milky Way*

Among the

countless galaxies in this vast universe, our own Milky Way Galaxy was formed. It is a spiral galaxy, 100,000 light years across and 16,000 light years thick. Our mother star was just one star in one arm of this gigantic galaxy.

4

## *Our Sun & Planetary System*

About five billion years ago, our mother star in the Milky Way was coming to the end of her life. She expanded and swelled and then burst, exploding her stardust into space and birthing all the new elements such as calcium, nitrogen and oxygen. These elements would later appear on Earth as parts of our bodies. As the exploding stardust began to slow down and cool, it formed into our sun and our solar system.

13

## *Consciousness Changing*

The challenge facing humans at this time is to awaken to the realization that each of us is a participant in this moment of Earth's evolution. Like all other creatures, we carry within ourselves the wisdom and powers of the Universe. Unlike other creatures we must awaken our consciousness to the powers within us and choose how we will live.

The following are retreats and programs that Prairiewoods is hosting in the next two months. For more information or to register, visit [www.Prairiewoods.org](http://www.Prairiewoods.org) or call 319-395-6700.

**The Energy of Love Retreat**  
**Friday, March 6, 6:30 p.m.–Sunday, March 8, 1 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Catherine Quehl-Engel

There are beautiful wild forces within us, says St. Francis. This heart-focused mind-body-spirit-practices retreat taps East-West spiritual wisdom on indwelling life force. The Spirit coursing through life's veins fills and interconnects us, all creation and the Sacred as one. Harnessing the healing energy of love, we will practice shifting our awareness to the oneness we've had all along through radiant heart, breath and energy-centered meditation, yoga and prayerful sending of compassionate healing intention. We will also practice deep peace yoga nidra (or yogic sleep), vibrational sound healing, and the energy medicine of qigong and healing touch. This retreat enfolds insights from mysticism and HeartMath scientific research.

**Fee:** \$230 includes sessions, lodging and all meals

**Commuter Fee:** \$180 includes sessions, Saturday lunch and dinner, and Sunday lunch



**Saturday Soul-Stretch for Lovers of Embodied Spirituality**

**Saturdays, March 7 & April 4, 8 a.m.–1 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Laura Weber & Prairiewoods collaborators

*"We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."*

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ

Wake up! Wake up! The weekend is here. Saturday Soul-Stretch will get us out of bed and back into our full-spectrum humanity! We are invited to Prairiewoods once a month to de-stress, reconnect and sink deeply into the present moment. A hot breakfast starts the day, followed by gentle tai chi movement and a sitting meditation to foster deep relaxation. Once we're relaxed and engaged, we'll sip a cup of aromatic tea and enter into a whole new realm of exploration with a different spiritual modality each month, such as working with dreams, journaling, creating mandalas, walking the labyrinth, practicing breath-exercise, sounding, centering prayer, poetry for the soul, singing bowl meditation or drumming. To cap off the morning's spiritual work-out, we'll enjoy a mindfulness walk in the beauty of Prairiewoods' seventy acres of prairie grasses, trees, streams and gardens, with only the owls, squirrels, turkeys and deer as our companion-guides. Finally, we'll return to the Center for a scrumptious lunch and leave happy and refreshed.

**Commuter Fee:** \$50 includes breakfast and lunch (or add \$25 for an optional afternoon stay with dinner, or \$50 for an optional overnight stay with Sunday breakfast)

**Ignatius at 2020 Retreat**  
**Friday, April 3, 6:30 p.m.–Sunday, April 5, 1 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Dennis Hamm, SJ

Ignatius of Loyola was both a mystic with a powerful vision of the interconnectedness of humanity with all other creatures and also a practical man of his time and place. He was the inventor of the modern university and the visionary founder of the Jesuits. Because of his special interest in personal and social transformation, we have included him in our series of retreats featuring cosmic visionaries of the past and what they have to teach us about our pilgrimage on planet Earth today. With Father Dennis Hamm, SJ, we will work with forms of meditation, contemplation and discernment inspired by Ignatius' methods in the latter's Spiritual Exercises. Dennis will give special attention to the spirituality of Pope Francis as articulated in his eco-encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*, in response to the cry of Earth and the cry of the poor.

**Fee:** \$230 includes sessions, lodging and all meals

**Commuter Fee:** \$180 includes sessions, Saturday lunch and dinner, and Sunday lunch



**What I Stand for Is What I Stand On: A Retreat on Wendell Berry**

**Saturday, April 4, 8 a.m.–6 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Eric Anglada

The farmer-poet Wendell Berry (1934- ) is arguably one of today's most important, prophetic and interesting writers and critics on matters of land, health, community and spirituality. This contemplative retreat will be a celebration of Berry's life and words, delving into his importance for our precarious age. Our time together will include talks, discussion, silence and contemplative time outdoors.

**Commuter Fee:** \$150 includes sessions and all Saturday meals (or add \$55 for an optional night Saturday, including Sunday breakfast)



*Save the Date!*

for these upcoming retreats:

**Thomas Merton: Contemplative Wisdom for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Retreat** with Judith Valente, May 15–17

**In Fire & Bone: Teilhard at 2020 Retreat** with Laura Weber, May 16

## Metta Yoga (formerly Hatha Way Yoga)

**Mondays & Thursdays; March 2–April 30; 9:30–10:30 a.m., 10:45–11:45 a.m. & 5:30–6:30 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Carla Brems, Cheryl Lindo & Heather English

Join us as we link our movements with our breath and cultivate strength, flexibility and relaxation through regular yoga classes. Carla Brems, Cheryl Lindo and Heather English offer multiple one-hour Gentle/Beginner's and Chair Yoga classes each Monday and Thursday, now under the name *Metta Yoga*. Please bring a mat if possible. People of all fitness levels are welcome. Let's see how our bodies and souls can benefit from yoga!

**Fee:** \$99 for eleven-punch card or \$60 for six-punch card, one punch per session

## Prayer Experience Series

**Tuesdays; March 3, March 17, March 24, March 31, April 7, April 21 & April 28, 11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Angie Pierce Jennings & Emelia Sautter

We are blessed with many ways to pray, including songful prayer, contemplative prayer, silent meditation and body prayers like walking the labyrinth. Join us for this ongoing prayer series and experience the joys of prayer and meditation together. Registration is appreciated but not required.

**Fee:** Free-will offering

*Offered in Partnership with Cedar Memorial*

## Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction

**Information Sessions:** Tuesdays, March 3 & 10, 5:30–6:30 p.m.

**Eight-Week Series:** Tuesdays, March 24–May 12, 5:30–8 p.m.

**Combined Extended Class:** Saturday, April 25, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.

**Facilitator:** Chris Klug

Mindfulness is the power of mind to be deeply aware of what's happening—without judgement, commentary or interference. Research reveals numerous benefits to the nervous system, emotions and general sense of well-being. In this eight-week series, we will cultivate the skill of mindfulness through formal meditation practices and informal integrative practices. Chris Klug, a grief counselor, has been an instructor in the

mindfulness program at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics since 2001.

**Fee:** Free for information session, \$400 for eight-week series (partial scholarships are available through Cedar Memorial)

## Wednesday Women

**Wednesdays, March 4–April 22, 10–11:30 a.m.**

**Facilitator:** Ann Jackson, PBVM

Join women seeking spiritual enrichment, inspiration and motivation in the supportive setting of Prairiewoods each Wednesday. Topics arise from within the hearts and minds of those gathered. We view TED Talks, converse, reflect, support and challenge one another to personal growth, no matter what stage of life. Together we will foster deep reflection, learning, lively conversation, laughter, storytelling and inquiry to generate incredible energy and spiritual stimulation! In March and April, we will explore how to find wonder in everyday life through Prairiewoods' *Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* speaker Sharon Blackie's book, *The Enchanted Life: Unlocking the Magic of the Everyday*. An award-winning writer, visionary, teacher and speaker, Sharon is recognized for her wisdom in Celtic studies. Feel free to enjoy this as a series or as individual sessions. Please register for each session by the previous day. *This group will not meet April 29.*

**Fee:** \$10 per session

## Mid-Week Tree Speak: Spirituality & the Wood-Wide-Web

**Wednesdays, March 4–25, 1–2:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Laura Weber

Pause mid-week to explore and celebrate the recent glut of books and spiritual practices associated with trees. How do trees reach out to us and animate our spiritual journey? The poetess Mary Oliver writes, "When I am among the trees, especially the willows and the honey locusts, equally the beech, the oaks and the pines, they give off such hints of gladness. I would almost say that they save me, and daily." We will experience prayer-poetry, enter the woods to immerse ourselves in the healing energy of trees and read and discuss excerpts from recent books about the sacredness of trees:

- **March 4:** *Overstory* by Richard Powers
- **March 11:** *The Wild Trees* by Richard

Preston and *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate* by Peter Wohlleben

- **March 18:**

*Like a Tree:*

*How Trees,*

*Women, and Tree People Can Save the Planet* by Jean Shinoda Bolen

- **March 25:** *To Speak for the Trees: My Life's Journey From Ancient Celtic Wisdom to a Healing Vision of the Forest* by Diana Beresford-Kroeger

**Fee:** \$10 per session or \$35 for four-week series

## Healing Conversations with Plants

**Wednesdays, March 4 & April 1, 6–7:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Carolyn Herbst Lewis

For millennia, humans have relied upon herbs and other plants for nourishment and healing. They fuel and heal our bodies, providing for our growth and well-being. If we are willing to listen carefully, they offer us wisdom and companionship as well. This exchange is not one-sided. By tending plants, we tend to the planet, fostering healing and growth for ourselves and the world. On the first Wednesday of each month, this conversation and hands-on learning series will showcase the healing potential of a medicinal plant, including:

- **March 4:** Lavender

- **April 1:** Lemon Balm

We will explore the plant's historic and current uses and learn how to incorporate it into our own self-care regimen. We also will discuss the bigger lessons plants offer us, as well as the healing energy we might offer to the plants and the planet in exchange for the healing and wisdom they offer us.

Registration and payment are required by the previous day.

**Fee:** \$15 per class or \$120 for ten-month series



## Day of Self Renewal

**Monday, March 16 & April 20,  
8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Angie Pierce Jennings

Find rest and relaxation for mind, body and spirit! This tranquil day features two 40-minute holistic services, group guided meditation, a private guest room, access to walking trails and all that Prairiewoods has to offer, a fresh lunch and hours of free time. (Choose from massage, head and shoulder massage, reflexology, healing touch, spiritual direction, dream processing, yoga or chair yoga.) Please register, pay a nonrefundable/nontransferable deposit of \$50 and list your top three services choices at least five days in advance.

**Fee:** \$110 includes guided meditation, singing bowl prayer, two holistic services, private guest room and lunch (or \$95 without private guest room)

## Guided Ecospirituality Experience

**Monday, March 16, 2:30–3:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Emelia Sautter

Let's get our "vitamin N" fill and immerse ourselves in the natural world with our plant, animal and elemental kin! Our relatives have much wisdom to share. As St. Francis said, "Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water, so humble, precious and pure." Let's connect and make new friends in nature! Please dress for the weather, as we will be outdoors.

**Fee:** \$5

## Spring Break Day for Children & Families

**Tuesday, March 17, 10 a.m.–2 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Emelia Sautter, Angie Pierce Jennings, Andi Lewis & Ann Jackson, PBVM

Calling all kids and families! Spend one day of spring break enjoying nature and being creative at Prairiewoods. Bring the whole family for a fun-filled day that will help us connect with each other



and with the land. The day will include a creative art session, prayerful meditation, a delicious lunch, guided nature activities, learning about the labyrinth and more! All ages are welcome. Registration and payment are required by noon March 16. **Fee:** \$15 per person, includes lunch (or \$10 if you bring your own lunch)

## Y.O.L.O. (Your Other Lunch Option!)

**Wednesdays, March 18 & April 15,  
11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m. (buffet line opens at 12 p.m.)**

**Facilitators:** Tara King, Laurie Erlacher & Rochell Potter

Tired of the same old lunch places? It's time that we renew our bodies and refresh our spirits in a beautiful setting! Join us for Y.O.L.O. (*Your Other Lunch Option!*)—a lunch choice celebrating wholesome, fresh food made from scratch by chefs Tara King, Laurie Erlacher and Rochell Potter in Prairiewoods' no-waste kitchen. We will dine in a community setting (at small-group or communal tables) with friends we bring with us or new friends we meet over a delicious themed lunch:

- **March 18:** St. Patrick's Day—An annual celebration of all things Irish, with a Prairiewoods spin on traditional fare!
  - **April 15:** Tax Day—Take the sting out of the day by joining us for a celebration of abundance. Spring will be in the air, and we'll be surrounded by good friends and delicious food! Please register at least two days in advance. Each lunch is limited to 35 people, so register early!
- Fee:** \$12 per session

## Offered in Partnership with Unity Point Hospice

### Soul Care: Creative Arts Grief Support Group

**Wednesdays, March 18 & April 15,  
5:30–7 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Jamie Siela, LISW, & Julie Wehner, LMSW, M.Div, BCC

Take time to be with others in grief and engage the creative spark! Jamie Siela and Julie Wehner from Unity Point Hospice facilitate this monthly grief group open to anyone grieving loss through death. On the third Wednesday of each month, we explore a different creative medium.

- **March 18:** Kokedama—Work with the Japanese technique *Kokedama* to

create living balls for plants to live on. As winter winds down and we look for signs of spring, we'll let this be a reminder of the new life we have inside us, even in the midst of loss.

- **April 15:** Bright Spots—Sometimes in cold winter months we need a little pick me up. Let's make positivity rocks to place throughout the community. Bring your creative ideas to help brighten the days of others! Please register by the previous Friday. **Fee:** Free, includes all art supplies

## Shooting Star Rock Painting

**Saturday, March 21, 2–4 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Andi Lewis

We are all made of stardust! As Neil deGrasse Tyson writes, "The atoms of our bodies are



traceable to stars that manufactured them in their cores and exploded these enriched ingredients across our galaxy, billions of years ago." Let's celebrate our star-selves by painting beautiful shooting stars on rocks in this hands-on creative workshop. We will have time to paint two rocks to take home or give as gifts. This is a fun, relaxing process that can be done by anyone. No experience or artistic skill is necessary, but kids 12 and under must be accompanied by an adult. (It is ideal for ages 10 and over.)

**Fee:** \$13 per person includes art supplies

## Mindfulness for Families

**Mondays, March 23 & April 13,  
6–7:30 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Kim Seward, BSN, RN, CMI, & Ann Jackson, PBVM

We continually look for creative ways to bring awareness, compassion, kindness, peace and tranquility into our homes. These monthly opportunities are for parents and children from kindergarten through grade 12 to attend together. We focus on simple, mindful practices to create peaceful awareness in the parent, child and home. We explore and engage fun mindfulness activities to do together as a family. Practicing foundational aspects

of mindful awareness—noticing senses, emotions and thoughts in fun and practical ways—will cultivate awareness and a greater understanding of emotions, kindness and compassion in all relationships, especially the parent-child relationship. As parents and children attend these sessions together, we will build a comprehensive mindfulness toolkit to use for future family enjoyment. Monthly themes include:

- **March 23:** My Wonderful Calm Body
- **April 13:** Spring into Mindfulness

Some activities will occur outside, so please dress for the weather. Each session is limited to 30 total parents and children. Please register by the previous Monday with your children's ages.

**Fee:** \$20 per family per session (*some financial assistance is available*)

### **Spiritual Art Journaling** **Tuesdays, March 24, April 21,** **1–2:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Angie Pierce Jennings

We will use the process of art journaling as a creative way to contemplate and explore our spirituality.



Participants may wish to bring a journal or mixed media tablet, colored pencils, and water color paints. Prairiewoods has some art supplies available for use. Artists of all experience levels, including beginners, are welcome.

Please register by the previous day.

**Fee:** \$10 per session (can be enjoyed as a series or as individual sessions)

### **Introduction to Adoration** **Tuesday, April 14, 1–2 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Sarah Hennessy, FSPA

Eucharistic adoration is a door that we can walk through to a lifestyle of deeper awe, empathy and service. Sarah Hennessy, FSPA, joins us from St. Rose Convent in La Crosse, Wisconsin, where the tradition of 24/7 Eucharistic adoration was kept alive for over 140 years. With her, we'll survey a basic history and a contemporary view of adoration, consider tips for adoration and discuss ways adoration can change our lives.

**Fee:** Free-will offering

### **Guided Labyrinth Experience** **Monday, April 20, 2:30–3:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Angie Pierce Jennings

A labyrinth is a powerful ancient symbol of our journey through life. It has been a part of almost every culture and religious tradition in history. The labyrinth is not a maze; it is a single path that leads to the center of the circle and then back out. This winding path takes us on an inward pilgrimage to our own center and leads us toward the Divine. Walking the labyrinth is a spiritual, prayerful practice. Join us for a guided labyrinth meditation on our outdoor labyrinth. (In case of inclement weather, we will walk the indoor labyrinth.) Please register by April 19.

**Fee:** \$5

### **Co-Sponsored by Trees Forever** **Forest Bathing with the Seasons** **Friday, April 24, 1–4 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Dr. Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, MD, FACOG, FABOIM

Spend the afternoon exploring the mindfulness practice of forest immersion with Dr. Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, a practitioner of integrative medicine. We will learn about evidence supporting the healing benefits of forest bathing and then experience an extended gentle, contemplative, guided walk with the Prairiewoods land. We will use our senses to enhance well-being in the healing embrace of nature. Breathe, relax, wander, touch, smell, taste, see, listen, share and engage! Please register and pay by April 23.

**Fee:** \$50 includes snacks



### **Mother's Day: Mother/Daughter** **Retreat**

**Sunday, May 10, 1–5 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Helene Hirmes & Adina Joy Levitt

Spend Mother's Day at Prairiewoods in this afternoon for mothers and adult daughters to engage with each other in intentional, meaningful and creative ways. The afternoon will be facilitated by a mother/daughter pair, and each hour will have a different focus: art (Zentagles), honoring our ancestors, dance/movement and gratitude. No art or dance experience is necessary. (This retreat is for adult children only.) Registration and payment are required by May 7.

**Fee:** \$40 per person

*Find ongoing support in these programs that take place every month:*

- **Bridges to Contemplative Living with Thomas Merton** with Carole Butz (Thursdays; March 5, March 19, April 2 & April 16; 6:30–8 p.m.)
- **Celebration of Mass** with Father Mark Ressler (Tuesdays, March 10 & April 14, 11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.)
- **Drumming for Healing** with Sheri Mealhouse (Hawkwoman) (Mondays; March 9, March 23, April 13 & April 27; 6–7 p.m.)
- **Evening Centering Prayer** with Judith Edwards (Tuesdays; March 10, March 24, April 14 & April 28; 5:30–7 p.m.)
- **Going Inward with Sounds & Vibrations** with Kathy Broghammer (Wednesdays; March 4, March 18 & April 15; 6–7 p.m..)
- **Men Exploring Faith** with Bob Davis (Thursdays; March 12, March 26 & April 23; 7–8:30 p.m.)
- **Prairiewoods Knitters & Stitchers** (Tuesdays, March 10 & April 14, 9:30–11 a.m.; & Wednesdays, March 25 & April 22, 6:30–8:30 p.m.)
- **Seeing IS Believing: Visio Divina** with Lois Ocenosak (Tuesdays, March 3–April 28, 10–11:30 a.m.)
- **Singing Bowl Prayer** with Kathy Broghammer (Monday, March 16 & April 20, 12:45–1:30 p.m..)
- **Sweat Lodge** with Kerry Batteau (Saturdays, March 14 & April 18, 5–9 p.m.)

For more information or to register, visit [www.Prairiewoods.org](http://www.Prairiewoods.org).

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a blue spruce planted by  
Betty Daugherty, FSPA

“*This we need to know: how to participate creatively in the wildness of the world about us. For it is out of the wild depths of the universe and of our own being that the greater visions must come.*”

—Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*

# Prairiewoods

A CATHOLIC, FRANCISCAN ECOSPIRITUALITY RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTER

*Go Deeper*  
by Chris McCombs

Go deeper  
Past thought  
Into silence  
Past silence  
Into stillness

Deeper still  
Past stillness  
Into the Heart

Now  
Let the Love  
Consume  
Whatever is left of you

## Going Deeper

**P**rairiewoods has been inviting everyone to go deeper during this time of strife for our global family. What follows is a joint reflection from Jenifer Hanson and Laura Weber, our director and associate director, as they engage the topic of spiritual deepening in these troubling times. We invite your own reflections on spiritual deepening by posting comments on our blog (#PanDeepening) or joining our dialogue Go Deeper Thursdays each Thursday at 4 p.m.

**Jenifer:** Thursday, March 26, we held our first Go Deeper Thursday dialogue session via Zoom. Since we didn't seek registrations beforehand, we didn't know whether anyone would show, but we were truly pleased when 43 individuals joined us! What struck me about that conversation was the almost universal sense that this unprecedented world-wide phenomenon, scary as it is, may be offering us something. Each person present on that call seemed to be exploring exactly what that might be or mean for their own lives, hearts, spirit—AND also what it

might mean for the whole community of creation. No one suggested that it will be an easy process to discern what is on offer, but there was a willingness to try that I found truly life-affirming.

**Laura:** As a spiritual companion, I have often accompanied folks who long to go deeper. They are often, as theologian James Allison would put it, "undergoing God," experiencing a profound shift in their awareness and world-view, opening to Mystery. When first we meet, and maybe 2–3 times or more after that, some intricate circumlocutionary musings might offer a "getting to know you" period until the person really gets down to it. S/he goes deeper. It may be at a time of crisis, some profound loss or discernment of life commitment, a shifting of vocational horizons, but usually, if we wait long enough, these kinds of questions will erupt out of the depths: "Who am I in the midst of all this? What am I supposed to be/do?" Or, especially crucial to the process, there arise declarations of innermost fears, uncertainties and disillusionment: "I'm just afraid that ... I don't know any more if ... What if I'm wrong about ... How do I know if ... Where is God in all this?" When we get down to these kinds of questions, we can really begin. And it begins with deep stillness. Awareness of breath. Active listening. Vulnerability. Confusion can't lift, fog can't dissipate without deep stillness. "Stillness. One of the doors into the temple," as poetess Mary Oliver would say.

**Jenifer:** You are so right about the questions that come, Laura. Stillness is very difficult to appreciate until we are ready. In fact, I think many of us avoid stillness precisely because we know that it is only in stillness that we can—and will—hear what is deeply within ourselves. For many of us, there is fear in that. What if that which arises from within not only poses questions, but calls for change? Asks me to take some action outside my current comfort zone or carefully calendared days? What if I discover something within that shakes the foundations of this construction I call "self"?

*(continued on p. 3)*

a white deer at Prairiewoods, photographed in early April by Courtney Ball

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*“There are times when you need the extremity of rock, the hardness of an old, cold place against which you can measure yourself. There are times when you need to retreat to the wilderness. But there are times when you need the subtle flow of a river, the song of a waterfall and the deep, slow presence of trees. Times when you need to Return. There are times for holding on, and times for letting go.”*

—Sharon Blackie, *If Women Rose Rooted: A Journey to Authenticity and Belonging*

Beloved friends:

As I write these words, in late March, I am keenly aware that by the time you receive them in mid-April, things in our world may have changed even more dramatically than they have as of today. All I know is that our world, and each of us, is in the midst of a profound shared experience. It remains to be seen in what ways this shared experience will be transformational, whether constructive or destructive. The only guarantee is that not one of us will come through it untouched.

At Prairie Woods, we have been using the term *PanDeepening* as a way of shifting perspective from the fear and isolation of pandemic. In Greek, *pan* means all, and *demos* means people/population. What if we view this pandemic, which affects us all in ways great and small, as an opportunity for deepening? What would that mean in terms of what we hold on to and what we let go of? Each of us will answer these questions in our own hearts and lives.

Speaking for Prairie Woods, I'd like to share a few things we are holding on to. Our mission calls us to nurture relationships with self, others, Earth and the Source of All Being. We affirm the importance of these relationships and will continue to offer opportunities for their further exploration and care. We reverence the Divine Presence in all of creation and will continue to model Earth care and love of all our human and creature kin; we still seek ways to follow Pope Francis' call to an integral ecology. We are committed to offering sanctuary, rest, and holistic care—the woods and prairies on our 70 acres offer space and the healing presence of nature to those who can be here physically. To those who cannot, we invite participation in our online presence and programming.

While we must let go of some specific offerings, we remain together while separated. Our vision (below) is one of community. Each one of you is a precious part of our community. We hold you in our hearts and in our prayers.

*The vision of Prairie Woods is of people everywhere, awakened in consciousness and energized by the loving, creative Spirit of the Universe into a community, moving together into wisdom, compassion and the fullness of life.*

Peace and all good,

  
Jenifer Hanson, Director



Prairie Woods is a Catholic ecospirituality retreat and conference center in the Franciscan tradition. It is a nonprofit ministry sponsored by Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of La Crosse, Wisconsin.

**Mission:** Prairie Woods Franciscan Spirituality Center is a sacred space where people of all faiths and cultures are invited to explore and nurture their relationships with the Source of All Being, Earth, Self and Others with an increasing awareness of the story of the Universe.

The Prairie Woods staff collaborates to publish this newsletter bimonthly. Content, except where otherwise noted, is created by our staff in consultation and with care to offer a uniquely Prairie Woods perspective.

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(continued from p. 1)

And yet, our world has called us to a shared time of stillness as we have learned to practice social distancing, isolation and quarantine. This feels like an invitation to a profound transformation both individually and collectively. How do we make the most of this (perhaps unlooked for, unasked for) stillness?

**Laura:** Yes, we might tend to resist that sometimes terrifying word *questioning*, and that other bothersome word, *change*. Very challenging. I think of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* calling all of us to an "ecological conversion," to place the focus of our attention on the whole of creation, and the good of the whole of creation, and to change our view that we are at the center or above all creation. Shifting our egocentric focus, reevaluating our deeply held and perhaps unreflected assumptions, asking primordial questions all over again, admitting we don't really know and are questioning and changing and perhaps growing ... It hurts. It calls from us a deeper trust, a willingness to let go of certitude and exclusive circles, to let the power of love eclipse our fear of losing power. We must "ask the beasts," as theologian Liz Johnson says. Our creature-kin practice cooperation and interdependence with fluidity and poise, like starlings or gazelles suddenly shifting direction in a balletic flow. We must learn from the trees how to trust the deeper relationships beneath the surface, says forest ecologist Suzanne Simard. They know how to trust the network of tensile roots for surviving and thriving. It is in our shared vulnerability and connection that we are strong. But first, we have to go deeper.

**Jenifer:** Ok, Laura, I was with you all the way until your last sentence, "But first, we have to go deeper." How do we do that? Solitude can open us up, offer us a pathway in. But if, as Henri Nouwen says, "Solitude is the place where we can connect with profound bonds that are deeper than the emergency bonds of fear and anger;" what are the bonds that are deeper than fear and anger? And how do we explore, embrace and strengthen them? How do we get deep enough for the ecological conversion Francis calls us to and which you so eloquently describe? Put another way, how do we get to the point in McCombs' poem where we are ready and able to "let the love consume whatever is left of you"?

**Laura:** Good questions, Jen! What goes deeper than fear and anger? Love. If we want to go deeper, we can open to love. How do we do that? Practice opening. Embody it. Imitate creation in springtime. Work on softening the edges of the defensive ego.



photograph by Courtney Ball

Breathe into the pain of betrayal and loss. Anger, fear and deep mistrust cause blockages. It's our openness to love that offers an energetic aperture for transformation, healing and real union. It requires complete mutuality and trust. If one is above and another is below in a hierarchical relationship, mutuality is not possible. And this call to mutual openness isn't the cheap, phony facade of well-rehearsed platitudes, of feigning appearances of benevolence for whatever we deem less. It's the humility of seeking genuine forgiveness and reconciliation. It's sometimes admitting abject failure in relationship, or just acknowledging the crippling emptiness of superficiality and indifference. Shared suffering can create an opening for dialogue. This is the gritty, authentic agony

of struggling through the mire to mutual vulnerability. It's an honest, laid-bare approach that breaks through to something new, something that is trying to emerge from the compost of what has decayed. Such a transformative process has the capacity to ground us in something deeper, the rudimentary taproot from which all life springs: Love. If we can connect through our vulnerability and openness, we can go deeper. Then we can "let the love consume whatever is left of us."

**Jenifer:** As I read your description, I couldn't help thinking of Parker Palmer writing that "The alchemy that can transform suffering into new life is at the heart of every religious tradition." This process begins with the heart

being broken, not into a thousand shards but into openness, "into largeness of life, into greater capacity to hold one's own and the world's pain and joy." The transformative process you describe so beautifully is taking place, must take place, in each of our hearts. But it is not merely an individual process, not only healing our own hurt and brokenness. In this time of global uncertainty and instability what we are experiencing is also shared and can become a communal transformation. The wellspring of love we find when we go deeper in the ways you describe has an outward impetus, flowing from our hearts toward the suffering world around us, into all of creation. In the end, isn't this the alchemy we seek? The promise that makes the effort and energy investment of deepening worth it?

We would like to hear from YOU, our Prairiewoods family! How are you deepening spiritually in this time of crisis? Join us Thursdays at 4 p.m. online for Go Deeper Thursdays ([https://zoom.us/j/943001589?pwd=\\_fTU3ZYxOtQ](https://zoom.us/j/943001589?pwd=_fTU3ZYxOtQ)), or check out our #PanDeepening blog (<http://prairiewoods.org/blog/>) and post your comments. *We are diving deeper together!*



*Sadness of Gaia by Josephine Wall (used with permission)*

Friday, May 1 (7–9 p.m.), &  
Saturday, May 2 (9 a.m.–3 p.m.)  
This event will be held entirely online  
via Zoom video conferencing!

**T**he old mythologies and philosophies of the West are rich and complex and beautiful. They offer up a world in which everything is not only alive, but has purpose and intentionality of its own. A world to which each incarnated soul chooses to come, for a reason, and to offer up a unique gift which can only be expressed through relationship with and participation in this beautiful animate Earth. During this weekend, we'll explore what it might be to court the *anima mundi*: the "world soul" of ancient tradition, and to uncover our own part in its unfolding.

Because of the far-reaching effects of COVID-19, *Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* will convene online via Zoom video conferencing. Sharon Blackie will appear pre-recorded on Friday evening and live on Saturday. Sara Thomsen will appear live throughout the event. Those who have registered will receive instructions for how to use Zoom, a secure link and a chance to test the technology in advance. This event is so important to Prairiewoods and our guests that we are working diligently to co-create an online experience that will reflect and embody as much as possible the experiential wisdom that arises around the topic *Courting the World Soul*.

The cost of the two-day event is \$75. Friday only is \$25, and Saturday only is \$60. *Please join us as we explore the intersection of story, spirituality and ecology!*

**Dr. Sharon Blackie** is an award-winning writer, teacher and speaker and is recognized internationally for her work on cultivating the mythic imagination. As well as writing four books of fiction and nonfiction, Sharon has had her work published in magazines and newspapers around the world, and she has been interviewed by major broadcasters and radio stations. She is a mythologist with a specialization in Celtic Studies and a psychologist who has specialized both in neuroscience and narrative. [www.SharonBlackie.net](http://www.SharonBlackie.net)



**Sara Thomsen** is an artist of the melody whose music touches the soul and invites us to respond for the good of the global community. Sara's gentle, soulful and uplifting acoustical renderings celebrate the beauty of the cosmos and call us into fuller communion with the global family. [www.SaraThomsen.com](http://www.SaraThomsen.com)



Prairiewoods holds the deepest hope to offer the following programs and retreats in May and June, if gathering in groups and overnight stays are possible at that time due to COVID-19 concerns. In the meantime, if you are interested in any of these offerings, please mark your calendar and visit [www.Prairiewoods.org](http://www.Prairiewoods.org) for further information as it becomes available. *We can't wait to see you all again!*

**Healing Conversations with Plants** with Carolyn Herbst Lewis (Wednesdays, May 6 & June 3, 6–7:30 p.m.)

By tending plants, we tend the planet, fostering healing and growth for ourselves and the world. Each month, this conversation and hands-on learning series showcases the healing potential of a medicinal plant. In May, we'll study thyme and in June St. John's wort. We will explore its historic and current use and learn how to incorporate it into our own self-care regimen.

**Fee:** \$15 per session

**Nature Photography & the Soul's Slow Ripening** with Angie Pierce Jennings (Tuesdays, May 19, May 26 & June 16, 1–2:30 p.m.)

We will read and contemplate *The Soul's Slow Ripening: 12 Celtic Practices for Seeking the Sacred* by Christine Valters Painter and engage in photography explorations suggested in the book. Bring your camera or phone and enjoy noticing "moments that shimmer" while walking through Prairiewoods' beautiful 70 acres. All experience levels, including beginners, are welcome.

**Fee:** \$10 per session

**Community Singing** with Carol Tyx (Tuesday, June 2, 6–8 p.m.)

Come together with people of all ages and lift our voices with purpose, passion and joy! We will sing simple layer songs, rounds, spirituals and various songs taught in the oral tradition, with many of the songs written by members of the Community Sing movement. In addition to learning new songs, we'll also learn how singing can create community in various situations, such as moments of transition and celebration.

**Fee:** Free-will offering

**Prayer Experience Series** with Angie Pierce Jennings, Emelia Sautter (Tuesdays, May 5, May 19, May 26, June 2, June 16, June 23 & June 30, 11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.)

**Day of Self Renewal** with Angie Pierce Jennings (Mondays, May 11 & June 15, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.)

**Singing Bowl Prayer** with Kathy Broghammer (Mondays, May 11 & June 15, 12:45–1:30 p.m.)

**Outdoor Ecospiritual Experience** with Emelia Sautter (Mondays, May 11 & June 15, 2:30–3:30 p.m.)

**Tower Garden: Big Food, Little Space** with Mark Woldruff (Wednesday, May 13, 4–5 p.m.)

**Y.O.L.O. (Your Other Lunch Option!)** with Laurie Erlacher & Rochell Potter (Wednesdays, May 20 & June 17, 11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.)

**Soul Care: Creative Arts Grief Support Group** with Jamie Siela, LISW, and Julie Wehner, LMSW, M.Div, BCC (Wednesdays, May 20 & June 17, 5:30–7 p.m.)

**Sweat Lodge (Inipi) Ceremony** with Kerry Batteau (Saturdays, May 23 & June 20, 6–9:30 p.m.)

**Women in Interfaith Dialogue** with Angie Pierce Jennings, Virginia Melroy, Dr. Paula Sanchini & Mary Beth Siemann (Saturday, May 30, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.)

**Shooting Star Rock Painting** with Andi Lewis (Friday, June 19, 6–8 p.m.)

**Mindfulness for Families Summer Camp** with Kim Seward BSN, RN, CMI, & Prairiewoods staff (Wednesday, July 8, 12 p.m.–Friday, July 10, 12 p.m.)

**Mother's Day Mother/Daughter Retreat** with Adina Joy Levitt & Helene Hirmes (Sunday, May 10, 1–5 p.m.)

This will be a fun afternoon of exploration and sacredness for mothers and their adult daughters to engage with each other in an intentional, meaningful and creative way. Each hour we will have a different focus: Art (Zentangle), Honoring our Ancestors, Dance/Movement and Gratitude. No art or dance experience is necessary.

**Fee:** \$40 per person

**Earth Prayer Group** with Mary Kirkpatrick & Blair Frank (Wednesdays, May 20 & June 17, 4–5 p.m.)

Come together to create and send intentions and prayers for healing the Earth elements—earth, air, fire and water. We will focus our prayers and intentions on one element each month (May–August). The group will be patterned after the work of Lynne McTaggart who wrote *The Intention Experiment* and *The Power of Eight*. Join us in creating sacred space and nurturing our relationships with Source, Earth, Self and Others.

**Fee:** Free-will offering

**Holistic Healing for Educators & Classrooms** with Kim Seward, RN, BSN, CMI, & Ann Jackson, PBVM (Monday, June 29, 8 a.m.–Wednesday, July 1, 5 p.m.)

A better world (and classroom) starts with the best version of us; caring for ourselves is a radical act of love that increases our capacity for impact. A central focus of holistic mindfulness and self-compassion practices provides educators with specific experience and reflection as a model for transforming self, students and classroom. Highly participative and reflective, this course offers educators opportunity to learn concepts of neuroscience, build personal plans for positive well-being and develop professional toolkits to incorporate inner compassion and mindfulness strategies.

**Fee:** Costs begin at \$50, and CEUs are available

## **Thomas Merton: Contemplative Wisdom for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

**Friday, May 15, 6:30 p.m.–Sunday, May 17, 1 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Judith Valente

The voice of the great contemplative monk Thomas Merton reaches across time with clear-eyed guidance that speaks directly to many of the struggles we are facing today. We will explore Merton's thoughts on prayer; finding the true self; living a more contemplative life; and fostering peace, equality and non-violence in a fractured world. We will leave with a road map on how we can apply the wisdom of this significant spiritual teacher to our lives and the world today.

**Fee:** \$230 includes sessions, lodging and all meals

**Commuter Fee:** \$180 includes sessions, Saturday lunch and dinner, and Sunday lunch

## **In Fire & Bone: Teilhard at 2020**

**Saturday, May 16, 8 a.m.–6 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Laura Weber

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, was a noted paleontologist and mystic visionary of the twentieth century whose evolutionary cosmology set post-modern emphases on eco-spirituality in motion. This one-day retreat will invite reflection and immersion into Teilhard's notions of the "divine milieu," in which the Holy is imbedded in all creation, and "cosmogensis," as all creation is evolving toward greater complexity and union.

**Commuter Fee:** \$150 includes sessions and all Saturday meals

## **June Silent Directed**

**Sunday, June 7, 5 p.m.–Saturday, June 13, 1 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Rev. Rose Blank; Ann Jackson, PBVM (June only); Kim Seward, BSN, RN; & Lucille Winnike, FSPA

We invite you to a week of sacred space, silence, solitude, rest and prayer. We will deepen our awareness of life's gifts; restore balance; live in the moment; and nurture relationship with God, self, others and Earth. Each day affords opportunity for healthy meals, quiet personal reflection and an hour-long session with a spiritual director who assists in sensing and citing the movement of the Spirit in life.

**Fee:** \$425 includes spiritual direction, lodging and all meals

## **Abundant Growth, Ripening Rest: A Summertime Circle of Trust**

**Wednesday, June 24, 11 a.m.–Friday, June 26, 1 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Wint Boyd, Paula Pedersen & Sara Thomsen

Summer is a season of both heightened attention and much needed rest. Through song, poetry, individual work and deep listening, we will explore the season of summer in our own lives. The retreat will utilize the Circle of Trust approach to create a process of shared exploration where people can find safe space for greater awareness, to nurture personal and professional integrity, and to summon the courage to act on hard-earned wisdom.

**Fee:** \$375 includes sessions, lodging and all meals

**Commuter Fee:** \$250 includes sessions, Wednesday and Thursday lunch and dinner, and Friday lunch

## *Introducing New Development Coordinator*

Please join us in welcoming our new development coordinator, Jessica Lien! Increasing the organization's long-term sustainability is a key part of Prairiewoods' strategic plan. Jessica brings demonstrated success in fundraising, mission-focused event planning and nonprofit capacity building. Her mindset is one of service and loving stewardship. She brings an abiding respect and reverence for the spirit of the giver.

"Fundraising at its core isn't really about asking. It's about listening," Jessica says. "People want and need to give to the causes they feel passionate about, and when they're connected in that way, giving can be transformational. Prairiewoods is alive with such gifts—those gifts of our founders past and present. The contributions of volunteers, donors and staff working passionately to advance the mission every day. These are gifts of heart that live on in perpetuity.

"I seek to contribute by helping to connect people to Prairiewoods in ways they find most meaningful, whether that be through gifts of time, talent or treasure."

Thank you, Jessica, for your passion for Prairiewoods' mission. We're happy to welcome you to the team!



## *A Note to Our Generous Supporters*

As a sacred space to explore and nurture our relationships with the Source of All Being, Earth, self and others, Prairiewoods commits itself to the radical hospitality and holistic care of all our guests. In light of COVID-19, Prairiewoods has already had to cancel more than a month of programming. Because Prairiewoods is a not-for-profit organization, we rely on income from our programs, retreats and hosted groups as essential to sustaining our operations. During what will likely be a lengthy journey back to health and wholeness from this pandemic, we are hopeful that our patrons will support us with their characteristic generosity and magnanimity of spirit. If you would like to make a donation to help Prairiewoods move forward, please call us at 319-395-6700 or mail a check to Prairiewoods, 120 East Boyson Road, Hiawatha, IA 52233. Thank you as always for sharing the heart of our mission. Prairiewoods thrives because of you!

# Donors (January & February 2020)

We appreciate all of the generous people who donate their time, money and other gifts to Prairiewoods!  
For a complete, up-to-date list between Newsletters, visit [www.Prairiewoods.org/Donate](http://www.Prairiewoods.org/Donate).

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Thank you!



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# Prairiewoods 2020 Garden Party

The Prairiewoods Garden Party is our annual fundraising event that helps support programming at Prairiewoods throughout the year. We are currently re-envisioning the 2020 Garden Party in light of COVID-19. Please stay tuned to learn what fun is in store for this year's event!

[www.Prairiewoods.org](http://www.Prairiewoods.org)

# Prairiewoods

A CATHOLIC, FRANCISCAN ECOSPIRITUALITY RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTER

## a new Dream of Earth

Many are describing the spring and early summer of this global pandemic as “The Great Pause.” A number of people have written and spoken eloquently about this pause, and have also begun to wonder how what we are learning now about our cultures, our communities and our interconnections may impact and inform our common future. In his seminal work, *The Dream of the Earth*, Thomas Berry posited planetary well-being as the measure of all human activity. If we bring Berry’s concept into our present, given what we know and have learned since its publication in 1988 (and especially within this time of pandemic), what would we call forth as “A New Dream of Earth”? This is the question that we asked several friends of Prairiewoods to answer in this special newsletter feature (p. 1–4). Our sincere thanks to each of them for dreaming a new Earth with us and for saying yes: Bayo Akomolafe; Jen Kardos and Fred Meyer; Chuck Peters; Kathleen Rude; Lucy Slinger, FSPA; and Carol Tyx.

### *I, Coronavirus: Mother. Monster. Activist.* by Bayo Akomolafe

The staggering complexity of what is happening rattles our habitual modes of sense-making, our need to trace out logical origin stories and plots and characters. Such are the makings of a world (by way of speaking, of course) that exceeds humans and our claims to exceptionality. When we have fallen to our lowest point, we are probably closer than ever to the middle of a cosmos of other things where the answers to our questions, urgent though they may seem, are no longer helpful in resolving those questions—for there are perhaps only two ways of responding to a question: one, with an answer that offers closure within the same economy of meaning; and, two, with bewilderment, which releases the question from its self-incarceration within its own world ...

And yet I am mostly concerned that the apparatus of epidemiological authorities, nation-states and its citizens, and the modern hero narratives that inspire the pathologization of the radical “stranger,” has locked us into predictable modes of responsivity—and is cutting out other senses of the possible. Why is this important? It is important because the way we respond to the crisis is part of the crisis. You see, our responses and the troubles they are directed towards are co-constitutive aspects of each other. They are species of the same assembly of processes, feeding each other in mutually stabilizing loops (which is the reason I sometimes say “hope” can have insidious effects, getting in the way of transformation). We are scared that the world we know, the world that allowed us to extend our power into the “future,” to colonize the next, to marvel

at the hieroglyphics of our brilliance inscribed on titanic walls by which we have held at bay the uncertain, the wild dragons, the impossible antics of (what we have, with impunity, called) “nature,” is ending. And so, as creatures of this besieged valley, we will do all in our power to stop this invasion, this pandemic. And that motivation reasserts itself as a will to control, as a declaration of independence, as mutiny against the processes that are the condition of our becoming, as a clearing of wild places to make space for anthropocentric dreams of dominance, and as the insurgency of the invisible. As such, something stranger than a pandemic is afoot, something queerer than the world being in some epic argument against viruses, something not easily named or processed or met by performances of social distancing. Something that wants more than a resolution ...

It is a matter of slowing down, where slowing down is not about reducing one’s speed but about lingering in the places we are not used to. Seeking out new questions. Becoming accountable to more than what rests on the surface. Seeking roots. In a time when the air between us is not empty, where every available space is teeming with life, where touch involves making life-death calculations—invoking images of stealthy critters making evasive manoeuvres to flee predators—slowing down is about taking care of ghosts, hugging monsters, sharing silences, embracing the weird. Making sanctuary.

*Bayo Akomolafe is an author, a speaker and the force behind the Emergence Network. He facilitated Prairiewoods’ Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in 2019. This is an excerpt from his essay I, Coronavirus. Mother. Monster. Activist., which can be found at [www.BayoAkomolafe.net](http://www.BayoAkomolafe.net).*

*(continued on page 2)*

# A New Dream of Earth

## Earth Mother is Calling Us Back to Her by Jen Kardos & Fred Meyer

**O**ur Earth Mother is whispering ...  
Dear Child,  
Come snuggle in my lap like a purring cat. I feel grief deep within your bones. Bring it to me and let us sit with it for a while. You have been trying so hard to do enough and be enough in the crazy manmade world. You were exhausting yourself; now there is rest.

It is time to let go of all those “shoulds” and ways of being that always felt incongruent, but the momentum of your mind-constructed world carried forward. You know we cannot “return to normal” because “normal” never worked well for anyone.

We all suffer together. Your monarch and bee friends continue to decline reflecting the worldwide loss of biodiversity that has accelerated for centuries. As naturalist E.O. Wilson suggests, we are entering the Age of Loneliness where deserts of agriculture, concrete and housing are eliminating opportunities to play and interact with your buzzing, scampering and fluttering friends.

There is no way you can survive if I let you go on believing your mind-created structures reflect reality. I am a good mother trying to provide for all the desires of my children, but you are hurting yourself and other beings too much. This cannot go on.

Therefore, I am calling you back to your own health and sanity. Risk and difficulty are allies of the soul. This will be as uncomfortable as any birthing process. There will be a waiting. Your job is to wait in wonder with your family of flora and fauna.

When you feel lost, or when you want peace, come sit with me. Listen to the creek and notice the deep breaths you take instinctually. Watch the wild grasshoppers hop out of the way as your careen down the sidewalk on your bike.

Find joy in your newfound time to observe flowers bud, slowly open and then display their brilliance. Get to know them. Learn their names. Most importantly, just sit with them and get to know their being as you stroke them gently and smell their intoxicating fragrance. This will be good for both of you. Let them be your friends, tell them your stories, cry and laugh with them.

Bring a few flowers inside or harvest vegetables and herbs. Before snipping, sit with the plant first and ask her if you may be so blessed that she provide you this goodness. Harvest her mindfully and with gratitude. Notice the brilliance of the flowers as you pass them and mindfully savor each bite of food. Then ask yourself: is life not supposed to be more like this? You are grieving the loss of your old way of being and you are seeking a new way. This is your new way. Become re-enchanted with our world, feeling, honoring, savoring and nurturing our shared abundance from a heartfelt place of love.

*Jen Kardos and Fred Meyer work for Backyard Abundance (a nonprofit that helps people create beautiful, environmentally-beneficial landscapes) and facilitate programs at Prairiewoods on a variety of ecospirituality topics.*

## Covid-19 as Gift and Opportunity by Chuck Peters

**A**s David Abram, our speaker next year for *Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, has noted: “Right now, the earthly community of life—the more-than-human collective—is getting a chance to catch its breath without the weight of our incessant industry on its chest” (<https://bit.ly/2YFufSU>).

Yet a recurring narrative in our community, and with many of our global leaders, is that COVID-19, and the great global pause arising from it, is an enemy to be defeated, so that we can get back to our normal life.

Let’s take a breath and imagine what this time could be opening for us. As Sharon Blackie, this year’s speaker at *Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* reminded us, COVID-19 might be playing the role of the trickster, shaking up our habits and calling us to new ways of being.

Charles Eisenstein, last year’s speaker at *Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, in his widely discussed recent essay “The Coronation” (<https://bit.ly/2A8NutV>), encouraged us to step into our creativity: “For years, normality has been stretched nearly to its breaking point, a rope pulled tighter and tighter, waiting for a nip of the black swan’s beak to snap it in two. Now that the rope has snapped, do we tie its ends back together, or shall we undo its dangling braids still further, to see what we might weave from them? COVID-19 is showing us that when humanity is united in common cause, phenomenally rapid change is possible. None of the world’s problems are technically difficult to solve; they originate in human disagreement. In coherency, humanity’s creative powers are boundless.”

I have noticed, in the last month, a desire in several global networks to step into the possibilities of more life-affirming narratives in many aspects of our lives. One of the more promising is the GAIA Journey from the Presencing Institute at MIT, with GAIA in this case standing for Global Activation of Intention and Action (<https://www.presencing.org/gaia>).

GAIA is just one of many initiatives, in many spheres. I have outlined more of them, and how I came to appreciate the power of narratives both for the individual and the community, at <https://bit.ly/3aSdAhn>.

While this unprecedented global pause, with many of us connected globally virtually, gives us opportunity to explore global narratives, the real work is with each of us in our local communities. Can we do the work individually to bring ourselves into harmony with all of creation? Can we develop authentic inclusive relationships locally, connected globally? Can we move beyond sustainability to regenerative cultures? Can we develop learning environments that maintain the wholeness and agency of the learners?

I think we can. Our Prairiewoods community can be an effective focal point for our community as we do this work opened up by this opportunity.

*Chuck Peters is an innovative leader in regenerative development and an emeritus member of the Prairiewoods operating board.*

## My Take on Dream of Earth 2020 by Kathleen Rude

At the time Thomas Berry penned *Dream of the Earth* in 1988, around 5 billion people lived on the planet. He believed that, in order to avert the destruction of living systems from our obsession with unlimited growth and our disconnect from the natural world, we need to develop a particular sensitivity—“a sensitivity that is something more than romantic attachment to some of the more brilliant manifestations of the natural world, a sensitivity that comprehends the larger patterns of nature, its severe demands as well as its delightful aspects, and is willing to see the human diminish so that other life forms may flourish.”

Take a deep breath before you read this again. “... and is willing to see the human diminish so that other life forms may flourish.” What kind of dream is this, where what we hold most dear—life and the promise of new life—is seen as excessive and harmful? It’s painful, even angering, to read these words, especially because they are true.

Many environmentalists still hold on to the dream that changing our patterns of consumption and making technology more sustainable, renewable, reusable will be sufficient to create a livable world for all beings, without addressing the overpopulation of the human species. They act as though nature’s carrying capacity doesn’t apply to us. Today Earth is home to almost 8 billion people. And the number is climbing.

Thomas Berry knew that our dream for a viable world must have us face the reality of how many people can thrive on the Earth and still

have other lifeforms flourish. The number is much smaller than we dare to believe.

Studies show that the planet can sustainably support around 2 billion people, with every person enjoying a European standard of living (which is 60% of the average American consumption).

Take another deep breath. While the issue of human overpopulation is fraught with tough questions, we know that we are living well beyond the means of Earth. We humans use the equivalent of 1.75 planet Earths to provide the renewable resources we use and to absorb our waste. I share Berry’s dream that invites us to have a “willingness” to explore these questions: Are we willing to see our lives as no more important than the lives of other beings with whom we share this planet? Are we willing to change how we live and reproduce so that we can achieve our dream of a world that is sustainable for all life, not just humans?

The role of a dream is to hold the vision, to imagine what is yet to be. The dream doesn’t give us the roadmap on how we get there, but it does create the template for where we are going. I don’t have all the answers for how we equitably address human overpopulation. But I can hold a vision that we figure it out in time. In my *Dream of Earth*, I see us choosing to maintain a sustainable population size and adopting sustainable lifestyles; I see us accomplishing all this without coercion, catastrophe or corruption. I see humans returning to deep connection with and love for all life. I see Earth, with all her demands and delights, flourishing beyond my wildest imaginings.

*Kathleen Rude is a speaker and facilitator of “The Work That Reconnects,” based on Joanna Macy’s work. She is also a retreat facilitator at Prairiewoods and a 2021 Spirituality in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century facilitator.*

*(continued on page 4)*



# A New Dream of Earth

## A New Dream of Earth by Lucy Slinger, FSPA, Ph.D.

A “new” Earth of my dreams reflects the foundational goodness that is present in an unfolding universe. A universe that goes through chaotic times, but always selects and builds on “right relationships.” Relationships that are based on selfless, life-giving principles and provide all that is needed to call forth and sustain life in abundance. The only desired creature response is to live in gracious gratitude by not disrupting the primordial sustaining processes. I live on a planet that is unconditional love made manifest in tangible forms and ways that provide all that I and every other being need. It is miraculous!

Assessing Earth’s condition today makes it abundantly apparent that something is amiss. Resources are used in ways that hamper the continual system cycling of matter and energy. Biodiversity is diminished by a monoculture, non-local, chemical food production system, genetic engineering, deforestation, etc., and pollution’s impact on every habitat on Earth. Atmospheric changes, documented to have predominately happened since the industrial revolution, have disrupted the natural flow of energy from our star source. The effects are altered local weather, global climate, and even ocean currents, temperature and acidity.

I don’t need a new planet! I simply yearn for the one species gifted with intellect/rational abilities and free will to:

1. wake up,
2. grow up and
3. assume responsibly for life action choices that challenge living in right relationship with the rest of creation.

What would Earth be like if every human being understood and exhibited behaviors that demonstrated:

1. all is given to us freely as gift?
2. there is an abundance sufficient to meet all creatures’ needs if we truly would share and did not willfully choose to hoard?
3. that everything was made in go(o)dness for go(o)dness?

Thomas Berry eloquently presents this in *Evening Thought* as, “The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.” Dignity, respect, reverence, sharing and caring are foundational practices that all humans are capable of choosing to “do.” These are the critical ways that need to be re-learned for “right relationship” to be the harmonious, interconnectedness that existed before humans became a part of nature/creation.

Think about it. When did the only rational/thinking creatures that came into being decide they were:

1. above and better than all the rest of the creatures?
2. better or not as good as some of their own species members?
3. put here to use, conquer, manipulate to their advantage and even exploit nature?

When did greed, power, fear, scarcity and egocentrism gain the edge over living in communion with a worldview of love, abundance, caring, consideration, respect, gratitude and, yes, even reverence?

If each member of the one “rational” species learned across time to live in ways that challenge the right relationships found in the universe, then I believe, each can also intentionally make the choice to embrace their gift of rational abilities in new

ways that will positively alter Earth systems. It is a step-by-step, one action at a time restoring process that co-creates. Instinct and rational choices can rebuild right relationship governed by unconditional love of:

1. self,
2. the Divine Mystery that sustains and
3. all the rest of creation/nature including and especially other humans.

This defines my perception of the way to bring forth the “new heaven and Earth” that Jesus invites us to co-create. It is the base for a “new common shared home” I yearn for in the marrow of my bones and soul.

*Lucy Slinger, FSPA, has devoted her life to Earth care and ecopractices. She is a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration leadership team and a member of Prairiewoods’ operating board.*



## Dreaming Our Way by Carol Tyx

Listening to birdsong in the middle of the day.  
With no traffic in the streets, the joyful noise

of the universe breaks into our homes.  
Even as we separate ourselves, we cannot.

A grackle has built a nest in the bush  
by the window. She is sheltering-in-place,

waiting for what will emerge. What is becoming  
and what has been, two different things

even though we don’t know how or what,  
learning to make room for all this not-knowing

a deeper listening to who we might be,  
who we might become.

Incubating our eggs, whole new beings  
forming that could open their mouths and receive

all they need to grow, all of us perched on this planet  
spinning so fast we could fall off unless we learn

how to preserve our nest, this fragile, woven world, nested  
inside other worlds, all of us still radiating heat

from the fireball that birthed us, all beings  
bursting out of a common shell, bits of that beginning

still here to teach us what we need to learn  
to sing together. To hear each other’s song.

*Carol Tyx is an award-winning poet. Her new book, Remaking Achilles: Slicing into Angola’s History, was published this spring. She is also Prairiewoods’ Artist in Residence.*



Dear Friends:

Here at Prairie Woods, like everywhere else on this beautiful Earth we call our common home, we have been struggling to understand and to find ways to move forward in the face of the challenges presented by global pandemic. Like you, we have worried for our loved ones, grieved our many losses and watched as things we thought we understood about our lives and our world have been called into question.

From its founding, Prairie Woods has been concerned at a deep level about the world and the future we are co-creating. This has been evidenced by our care for the Earth and our concern for Earth justice; our partnership with Metro Catholic Outreach

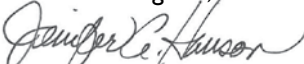
addressing food insecurity through the Green Prairie Garden; our ongoing educational focus on permaculture and edible landscapes; the development of retreats and programs that foster deepening relationships with Earth, God, self and others. The COVID-19 pandemic, and the many ways it has called us to a reckoning with what is just and right, as well as to a deeper understanding of the role of compassion and inclusion, has only strengthened our commitment to our mission.

Thomas Berry's *The Dream of the Earth* was instrumental in the formation of Prairie Woods' mission. "Our challenge," wrote Berry, "is to create a new language, even a new sense of what it is to be human. It is to transcend not only national limitations, but even our species isolation, to enter into the larger community of living species. This brings about a completely new sense of reality and value" (Thomas Berry, "The Ecological Age," in *The Dream of the Earth*, 42). Our challenge remains essentially the same in these times of global upheaval. However, what if the very thing that is causing such pain and travail worldwide is also offering each of us—and all of us—new opportunities to meet this challenge? This is the question animating our response and planning at Prairie Woods. It is the question that led us to invite guest authors for this issue to dream with us what might be newly possible in a world with newly opened eyes.

We are also celebrating five years since the publication of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical. Francis' clarion call for an ecological conversion, one which inspires integrating our care for Earth with our care for the poor, with deep commitment to justice, continues to inflame our hearts. Just as COVID-19 encourages us to imagine a different future, and we contemplate a new dream of Earth, *Laudato Si'* reminds us that the world we inhabit is both a gift and a sacred trust. Prairie Woods is gearing up to meet these new challenges as thoughtfully and creatively as we can. We invite you to dream along with us!

"Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift that we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us" (*Laudato Si'*, 159).

Peace and all good,

  
Jenifer Hanson, Director



Prairie Woods is a Catholic ecospirituality retreat and conference center in the Franciscan tradition. It is a nonprofit ministry sponsored by Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of La Crosse, Wisconsin.

**Mission:** Prairie Woods Franciscan Spirituality Center is a sacred space where people of all faiths and cultures are invited to explore and nurture their relationships with the Source of All Being, Earth, Self and Others with an increasing awareness of the story of the Universe.

The Prairie Woods staff collaborates to publish this newsletter bimonthly. Content, except where otherwise noted, is created by our staff in consultation and with care to offer a uniquely Prairie Woods perspective.

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# Programs & Retreats

Prairiewoods holds the deepest hope to offer the following programs and retreats in July and August, if gathering in groups is possible at that time due to COVID-19 concerns. If we are unable to meet in person, most of these programs and retreats will be offered via Zoom. In the meantime, if you are interested in any of these offerings or any of our regular monthly programming, please mark your calendar and visit [www.Prairiewoods.org](http://www.Prairiewoods.org) for further information.

## **Tuesdays with Thomas: Book/Article Discussion** with Laura Weber & Jenifer Hanson (Tuesdays, July 7–28, 6–7 p.m.)

July 7 and 14, we will discuss Thomas Berry's influential *The Dream of the Earth*, published in 1988. Berry "suggests that for planetary renewal we must break free of the 'technological trance' that drives a misguided dream of progress"—and that it is only in doing so that we can "foster mutually enhancing human-Earth relationships to heal our traumatized global biosystem" (Amazon.com). July 21 and 28, we will consider two recent articles (to be provided via email) comparing Berry's vision with evolving thoughts in a COVID-19 world of what our "new dream of Earth" could be. Our hope is to have you join us either in person or via Zoom.

**Fee:** \$30 for four-week series, plus cost of book

## **Earth Prayer Group** with Mary Kirkpatrick & Blair Frank (Wednesdays, July 15 & Aug. 19, 4–5 p.m.)

Come together to create and send intentions and prayers for healing the Earth elements—earth, air, fire and water. The group will be patterned after the work of Lynne McTaggart who wrote *The Intention Experiment* and *The Power of Eight: Harnessing the Miraculous Energies of a Small Group to Heal Others, Your Life and the World*. We will gather outdoors, so please dress for the weather. Registration is appreciated but not required. If we are unable to meet in person, this will be offered via Zoom.

**Fee:** Free-will offering

## **The Book of Longings Discussion Group** with Angie Pierce Jennings (Wednesdays, Aug. 5 & 12, 3–4:30 p.m.)

We will read and discuss Sue Monk Kidd's new novel, *The Book of Longings*. The story is told through the eyes of the main character, Ana, and is set in first-century Egypt and Palestine during the time of Jesus. Readers have described this book as life changing and find themselves falling in love with Jesus all over again. If we are unable to meet in person, this will be offered via Zoom.

**Fee:** \$10 per session, plus cost of book

## **Go Deeper Thursdays** with Laura Weber & Ellen Bruckner (Thursdays, July 2–Aug. 27, 4–5 p.m.)

### **Prayer Experience Series** with Angie Pierce Jennings (Tuesdays, July 7–Aug. 25, 11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.)

### **July Silent Directed Retreat Reimagined** with Rev. Rose Blank; Ann Jackson, PBVM; Kim Seward, BSN, RN; & Lucille Winnike, FSPA (Sunday, July 12, 5 p.m.–Saturday, July 18, 1 p.m.)

### **Soul Care: Creative Arts Grief Support Group** with Jamie Siela, LISW, & Julie Wehner, LMSW, M.Div, BCC (Wednesdays, July 15 & Aug. 19, 5:30–7 p.m.)

### **Day of Self Renewal Reimagined** with Angie Pierce Jennings (Mondays, July 20 & Aug. 17, 8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.)

### **Live Abundantly (& Sustainably) & Cultivate Paradise Retreat Reimagined** with Debra Landwehr Engle, Jen Kardos, Fred Meyer & August Stolba (Friday, July 24, 6:30 p.m.–Sunday, July 26, 1 p.m.)

### **Mindfulness for Families Summer Camp** with Kim Seward, BSN, RN, CMI, & Prairiewoods staff (Monday, July 27, & Tuesday, July 28, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.)

## **Nature Conversations: A Seasonal Creative Series** with Thomas Dean (Friday, July 10, 1–5 p.m.)

Take a journey of inspiration through conversations with nature! Conversation may be our greatest hope both to heal the rifts in human understanding and to reinspire our relationship with the natural world. These workshops (offered July 10, Oct. 9, Jan. 8 and April 9) encourage us to embrace our role in "the Great Conversation," as author Belden Lane would call it, through creative expression (writing, photography, drawing, songwriting—whatever you choose!) amidst the woods and prairies of Prairiewoods. This four-part series may be enjoyed as a series or as individual sessions. Registration and pre-payment are required. If we are unable to meet in person, this will be offered via Zoom.

**Fee:** \$25 per session

## **Forest Bathing with the Seasons** with Dr. Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, MD, FACOG, FABOIM (Friday, July 31, 1–4 p.m.)

Spend the afternoon exploring the mindfulness practice of *shinrin yoku*, or forest bathing, with Dr. Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, a practitioner of integrative medicine. Learn about evidence supporting the healing benefits of *shinrin yoku* and then experience an extended gentle, contemplative, guided walk with the Prairiewoods land. We will use our senses to enhance well-being in the healing embrace of nature. Registration and pre-payment are required. If we are unable to meet in person, this will be offered via Zoom.

**Fee:** \$50

## **Women in Interfaith Dialogue** with Angie Pierce Jennings, Virginia Melroy, Dr. Paula Sanchini & Mary Beth Siemann (Saturday, Aug. 29, 10 a.m.–3 p.m.)

Come together quarterly with women of various faith traditions for conversations about faith and spirituality. We will discuss the topic of the garden as a spiritual metaphor. How does your garden grow? You are invited to bring a reading or prayer as well as an object that represents the topic or your spirituality. Registration is required by the previous Wednesday. If we are unable to meet in person, this will be offered via Zoom.

**Fee:** \$15 includes lunch

# Donors (March & April 2020) & Memorial

We appreciate all of the generous people who donate their time, money and other gifts to Prairiewoods! For a complete, up-to-date list between Newsletters, visit [www.Prairiewoods.org/Donate](http://www.Prairiewoods.org/Donate).

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## In Memoriam, Tara King



As many of you know, our beloved Tara King—our kitchen manager, chef and aficionada of loving life—died suddenly in April, leaving us heartbroken and bewildered. Her culinary crew, Laurie Erlacher, Rochell Potter and also Anne Marie Brunko for large

events, were truly a cohesive unit of love and welcome in the Prairiewoods kitchen. Tara was a person who lived for and with others. She was authentic, kind, generous and full of fire. And though she had experienced great heartache in her life and moments of profound darkness, she loved to bring the Light: light-heartedness, light humor and remembering to light a candle. Her smile alone—and that infectious chuckle—could light up the whole room. Most importantly, she knew and practiced the tenets of Resurrection life: faith, hope, love, forgiveness and radical hospitality. She knew that living life fully is all about living our life for and with others, and is in fact our primary vocation. Always up for a hug and shenanigans, she could make us all laugh out loud with humorous anecdotes and her omnipresent love of Snapchat filters. We will never see those videos again without thinking of Tara.

Since Tara had a significant relationship with the Catherine McAuley Center in Cedar Rapids, she regularly offered her signature program there, “Tara Time,” in which she shared her love of the culinary arts with the women of the Center. Now that Tara has journeyed into Light, we think of “Tara Time” differently. It’s any time we gather together for a joy-filled occasion, offer help where there is perhaps an unspoken need, or reach out to those who are struggling to find a gentle, hospitable welcome in life’s turbulent waters. We will miss her every single day, especially those retreats and Y.O.L.O. lunches when Tara was in her creative, welcoming, fun-loving, happy place, grooving to the music and making everybody smile. You gave of yourself for so many, Tara. Now, it’s Tara Time for us all.



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- Please send your mailings electronically to \_\_\_\_\_.
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Are you on social media? Find "Prairiewoods FSC" on:



Are you feeling disconnected from people and things that help keep you centered and grounded? Prairie Woods is providing a number of **FREE** virtual offerings to help you stay connected with each other and with Prairie Woods during this time of social distancing!

- Every day we post a new **PanDeepening blog** post at [www.Prairiewoods.org/blog](http://www.Prairiewoods.org/blog) and at [www.Facebook.com/PrairiewoodsFSC](http://www.Facebook.com/PrairiewoodsFSC). These blog posts from staff and friends of Prairie Woods are aimed at helping you go deeper during this time of pandemic.
- Every Tuesday from 11:30 a.m.–12 p.m. we offer the **Prayer Experience Series** via Zoom. This is a chance to pray and meditate communally.
- The third Wednesday of each month from 4–5 p.m. we offer the **Earth Prayer Group** via Zoom. Join us as we pray together for the good of the whole Earth.
- Every Thursday from 4–5 p.m. we offer **Go Deeper Thursdays** via Zoom. This is a chance for honest conversation to help us go deeper into who we are.

**These offerings are all provided free of charge, but free-will donations are appreciated. All are welcome!**

September/October 2020

# Prairiewoods

A CATHOLIC, FRANCISCAN ECOSPIRITUALITY RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTER

## Who Are the WE We Are Becoming?

Early in the pandemic last spring, signs sprouted up overnight proclaiming world-wide, “WE are in this together!” In those early days, as we paused our usual routines and pulled back from social obligations to stay home, the words felt true. It was easy to see the interconnectedness of all human life on Earth. Then, with the world slowing to a near standstill, air and water pollution cleared, wildness began appearing in our city landscapes, and we could finally see how intimately all life—human and non-human, flora and fauna, air and earth and water—is bound together on our beautiful blue planet. In the midst of our fear, as we became familiar with a strange new “what is,” we were also gifted with a glimpse of a wonderful, possible, “what could be.”

Following a spring that felt almost balanced between fear and hope, we entered a summer of growing disparities, discords and divisions. The murder of George Floyd and the ensuing global protests of systemic racism, public health treated as partisan political theater, mounting economic fears, and the resumption of federal executions—all these and more—seemed to suck the air out of hope and point the way toward mass despair. And yet, regardless of the sense of separateness engendered by the tumult in which we find ourselves, we remain in this together. The hope we felt in the spring, our desire for the beauty of “what could be,” is not only still within us, it may be how we find our way through dark times. As Thomas Berry so presciently and beautifully put it more than twenty years ago:

*“Presently we are returning to the primordial community of the universe, the earth, and all living beings. Each has its own voice, its role, its power over the*

*whole. But, most important, each has its special symbolism. The excitement of life is in the numinous experience wherein we are given to each other in that larger celebration of existence in which all things attain their highest expression, for the universe, by definition, is a single gorgeous celebratory event.”*

—Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 1988

If we agree with the premise that we are in this together, that (as Berry claims) we are given to each other, it is important to parse out exactly who we mean when we use that “WE.” Who are the we we are talking about? And, importantly in this time of universal upheaval and change, who are the we we are becoming?

In a recent “Go Deeper Thursday” offering sponsored by Prairiewoods, participants were asked to think about who they mean when they say “we.” The homework instruction was to draw three concentric circles on a paper. In the center circle, describe who is included in your most intimate we. In the middle circle, share who is in the we you most typically mean when you say “we” in the course of your day. And in the largest circle, write who is in your largest, most expansive we. The activity is powerful first because it calls participants to think critically about what they intend when they say we. Second, it creates an important self-awareness as we think about the different levels of inclusion in our various uses of we. Most impactful of all, perhaps, are the profound realizations the activity encourages regarding who and what is regularly *excluded* from our we.

(continued on page 3)

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**Lucille Winnike, FSPA**  
Retreats, Spiritual Director



*"Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."*

—I Corinthians 4-8

Dear friends:

I am writing this Director's Corner on a rainy July morning. This week the news has been disheartening and depressing—I'm sure you can remember, as you read this a month or more in the future, without me enumerating the specifics. As a spirituality center, Prairiewoods' mission is to offer people the space to explore their relationships: with God, the Source of All Being, and with Earth, Self and Others. We continue to offer this invitation in as many ways as we are able while attending to issues of health and safety. We truly hope you are able to find something to sustain you here!

Our mission statement is further clarified by a vision statement and a list of nine actions our Franciscan heritage call us to at Prairiewoods. Many of you may not be familiar with these, but you can find the entire list at [www.Prairiewoods.org/Exploring-Our-Mission](http://www.Prairiewoods.org/Exploring-Our-Mission). I'd like to highlight three of the nine actions here. Our Franciscan heritage calls us to:

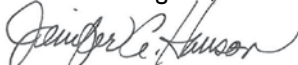
- Celebrate the privilege of being human.
- Provide sanctuary and rest, a place where each individual is welcomed with warm hospitality and respect. Encourage dialogue among various faith traditions to promote respect and cooperation.
- Continue involvement with the broader community around sacred values.

It is especially important in turbulent times to be clear about our commitments. We cannot celebrate the privilege of being human while ignoring that our privilege has led to harm and to destructive relationships with Earth and Others, ultimately harming relationships with self and God as well. In providing sanctuary and rest with radical hospitality, we must do more than passively welcome; we must reach out and seek engagement with a wider "We." Involvement with the broader community around sacred values means voicing and acting on the values of justice, non-violence, integral ecology—all grounded in the sacred value of love. The I Corinthians explication of love has been important to me since I first read it myself as a teenager. While it holds significance for many as a verse often used at weddings, it is really a clarion call for radically inclusive love. What an amazing guide to orient our stance toward the world, to ground our relationships with all of the beautiful Creation of which we are part! Love as a guiding principle never fails.

*"Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire."*

—Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Peace and all good,

  
Jenifer Hanson, Director



Prairiewoods is a Catholic ecospirituality retreat and conference center in the Franciscan tradition. It is a nonprofit ministry sponsored by Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration of La Crosse, Wisconsin.

**Mission:** Prairiewoods Franciscan Spirituality Center is a sacred space where people of all faiths and cultures are invited to explore and nurture their relationships with the Source of All Being, Earth, Self and Others with an increasing awareness of the story of the Universe.

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Please address all correspondence to:

Prairiewoods  
120 E Boyson Rd  
Hiawatha, IA 52233  
319-395-6700

[www.Prairiewoods.org](http://www.Prairiewoods.org)  
[Ecospirit@Prairiewoods.org](mailto:Ecospirit@Prairiewoods.org)

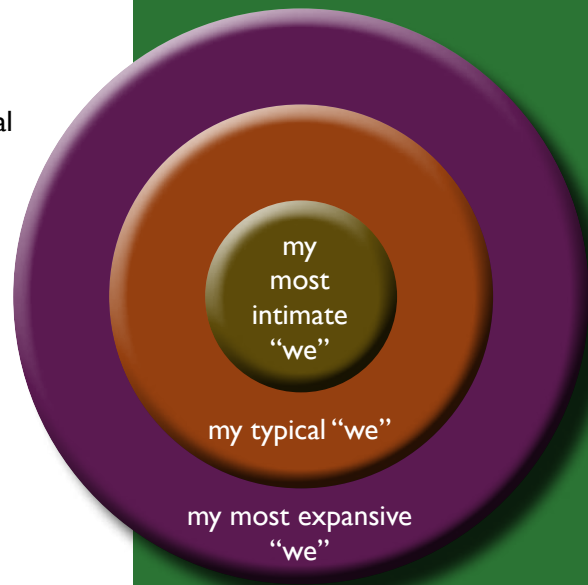


(continued from page 1)

Whether that exclusion encompasses people with different political views or people of other races or religions, or whether what is excluded is the whole natural world beyond our human-kin, finding out who/what we regularly exclude from our we can alter our entire view of the world and of our own place and relationships within it.

We are being called, in fact, to a profound, life-altering paradigm shift. One of the extraordinary facets of this moment is the shared nature of the call we are experiencing. Rather than the intensely personal call to spiritual deepening that most of us have felt at some point in our lives, the call our hearts are responding to now is communal. That WE are in this together is no longer truly in question. Our task is to find our way to the WE we are becoming, which looks to be a greatly expanded and inclusive WE. “Only now,” writes Thomas Berry, “have we begun to listen with some attention and with a willingness to respond to the earth’s demands ... that we renew our human participation in the grand liturgy of the universe.”

**Note:** This article is part of an ongoing conversation Prairiewoods has been having for a while, but with renewed vigor during the pandemic. This conversation exploring the “We” we are becoming, continues in several venues including our newsletter (see the July/August lead article), in our online programming and in our daily #PanDeepening blog. In particular, you may wish to read Laura Weber’s series of blog posts on this topic, which were published June 28 (including the questions for the communal examen at right), July 5 and July 12.



## Communal Examen of Consciousness

**B**efore engaging with the questions below, it may be helpful to do the concentric circles activity above, identifying your own we in three different dimensions. Who is included at each level of intimacy and who is excluded?

### What is our dream for the wider “We?”

- Our spirituality? What must we let go—identity? Safety? Security? Certitude?
- Our social, political, cultural and religious circles? Can we let go of the idea that “we” alone determine who is admitted to the social, cultural, political or religious circle, and who is not?
- Our languaging? Can we begin to listen deeply, stop talking only with those inside our exclusive circles, and adapt our languaging to allow for greater ambiguity, complexity and inclusivity?
- Our perception? Can we step outside the circles to which we are accustomed to broaden our vision? Can we invite “others,” including ALL creation, to give voice to their truth, their perspective, their being?
- Our depth of connection and our outreach of compassion? How might we challenge ourselves to be more authentic, to dive deeper, to allow ourselves to “suffer with” (*com* meaning “with” and *passio* “to suffer”) rather than observe and “fix” the suffering of others?



You're invited to **NOT** attend the

## *Prairiewoods* **Garden Party** *Non-Event Fundraiser*

**NO** tickets. **NO** three-course meal. **NO** auction.

Please join us in spirit for an event that will never take place in 2020! Instead, we invite you to consider how much you would normally spend to attend the Garden Party and make a donation for that amount.

*At a typical Garden Party, you might spend:*

**\$25** on a loaf of bread in our Dough for Dough game

**\$50** on a ticket, including a three-course meal and wine

**\$100** on a basket from our silent auction

**\$250** on a one-of-a-kind prize from our live auction

**\$500** on tickets for a table of eight and a silent auction basket

Please consider making a donation to directly support Prairiewoods' mission as a sacred space for peace and transformation.

**Times are urgent. So is the need for Prairiewoods.**

Your donation is tax deductible and will be **MATCHED** through the generosity of Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration to our endowment.

For more information or to donate by credit card, please visit [www.Prairiewoods.org/Garden-Party](http://www.Prairiewoods.org/Garden-Party) or call 319-395-6700.

*This is your last chance to support  
Prairiewoods through the 2020 Garden Party!*

## St. Francis Day Celebration: Outstretched Boughs Book Launch & Blessing of the Animals Sunday, Oct. 4, 2-4 p.m.

October 4 is a special day for Prairiewoods. It is the annual celebration of St. Francis Day and also the birthday of beloved Prairiewoods foundress Betty Daugherty, FSPA. Last year at this time we celebrated both St. Francis and Sister Betty, as well as signing the letter of intent to put the majority of Prairiewoods' land into a conservation easement. This year, we are planning another special and unique afternoon of celebration.

We will be launching *Outstretched Boughs*, a book of poetry and reflections on Prairiewoods' trees. This labor of love, which began as a creative project between longtime Prairiewoods friend Kathy Decker and Sister Betty, has been completed by a team of editors in loving memory of both women. This 40-page, self-published gem displays poems and photographs of the trees at Prairiewoods. It includes the original writings of 20 different poets, all friends of Prairiewoods.

Since the Sweetgrass Flute and Nature Festival has been cancelled for this year, we will hold our annual Blessing of the Animals as part of this celebration. All of your beloved animal companions are invited to be blessed on St. Francis Day!

Please visit [www.Prairiewoods.org](http://www.Prairiewoods.org) and our Facebook page for details as our planning unfolds and adjusts in this time of COVID-19. If we are able to hold an in-person gathering, the celebration will be held outdoors and will include the Blessing of the Animals, poetry readings, time with trees and safe connection with others. For all who wish and are able, we'll walk throughout the land to several trees that were the inspiration for poems in the book. If we are not able to meet in person, the celebration will be offered via Zoom. Save the date and plan to join us on Oct. 4 at 2 p.m. for our St. Francis Day Celebration!



Prairiewoods holds the deepest hope to offer the following programs and retreats in September and October, if gathering in groups is possible at that time due to COVID-19 concerns. If we are unable to meet in person, most of these programs and retreats will be offered via Zoom. In the meantime, if you are interested in any of these offerings or any of our regular monthly programming, please mark your calendar and visit [www.Prairiewoods.org](http://www.Prairiewoods.org) for further information.

## **Prayer Experience Series**

**Tuesdays, Sept. 1–Oct. 27,**

**11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Angie Pierce Jennings

We are blessed with many ways to pray ranging from songful prayer, contemplative prayer, *visio divina*, silent meditation, body prayers such as walking with the Earth, and many more. Join us for this ongoing prayer series and experience the joys of prayer and meditation together. *If we are unable to meet in person, this will be offered via Zoom.*

**Fee:** Free-will offering

## **Go Deeper Thursdays**

**Thursdays, Sept. 3–Oct. 29, 4–5 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Laura Weber & Ellen Bruckner

Join friends of Prairiewoods via Zoom for some healthy and necessary conversation in this time of spiritual deepening. This is an opportunity to relieve stress and connect at a deeper level. We have a brief check-in and talk about how our spiritual awareness and practice during this time of upheaval is shifting. Grab a beverage, relax and let's do this together!

**Fee:** Free-will offering

## **Saturday Soul Stretch for Lovers of Embodied Spirituality**

**Saturdays, Sept. 12 & Oct. 10, 8 a.m.–1 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Laura Weber

Wake up! Wake up! The weekend is here. Saturday Soul Stretch will get us out of bed and back into our full-spectrum humanity. Plan to de-stress, reconnect and sink deeply into the present moment. The day includes gentle tai chi movement, a sitting meditation, a mindfulness walk, and a different spiritual modality each month, such as dream work, journaling, mandalas, labyrinth, breath-exercise, sounding, centering prayer, poetry, singing bowl meditation or drumming. *If we are unable to meet in person, this will be offered via Zoom.*

**Fee:** \$25

## **Spiritual Exercises in Everyday Life (S.E.E.L.) 13 Retreat**

**Saturdays, monthly beginning Sept. 12, 9 a.m.–1 p.m.**

Gather monthly and enter into the

*Spiritual Exercises.* This nine-month retreat helps seekers who long to develop and explore a consistent prayer life and articulate the movement of God in daily life. Receive daily readings to spur prayer. Meet monthly with a spiritual director. Listen to insights that arise. Learn the art of discernment. *If we are unable to meet in person, this will be offered via Zoom.*

**Fee:** \$450 (payable in September 2020 or in monthly installments of \$50), plus monthly spiritual direction

## **Day of Self Renewal Reimagined**

**Mondays, Sept. 14 & Oct. 12,**

**8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Angie Pierce Jennings

Join us for a tranquil day from wherever you are! This day will include an opening meditation, yoga, an individual spiritual direction session, singing bowl prayer, a guided eco-spirituality experience and a closing session via Zoom. You'll also have free time to explore the Prairiewoods grounds (or your own local piece of nature). Find complete rest and relaxation for mind, body and spirit!

**Fee:** \$65

## **Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction**

**Information Sessions:** Tuesdays, Sept. 15 & 22, 5:30–6:30 p.m.

**Eight-Week Series:** Tuesdays, Sept. 29–Nov. 10, 5:30–8 p.m.

**Combined Extended Class:** Saturday, Nov. 7, 9 a.m.–3 p.m.

**Facilitator:** Chris Klug

Mindfulness is the power of mind to be deeply aware of what's happening—without judgement, commentary or interference. In this eight-week series, we will cultivate the skill of mindfulness through formal meditation practices and informal integrative practices.

**Fee:** Free for information session, \$400 for eight-week series (partial scholarships are available through Cedar Memorial)

## **Soul Care: Creative Arts Grief Support Group**

**Wednesdays, Sept. 16 & Oct. 21, 5:30–7 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Jamie Siela, LISW, Unity Point Hospice

Take time to be with others in grief

and engage the creative spark in this monthly group open to anyone grieving loss through death. Our September art project is a memory mandala and October is a birch tree painting. *If we are unable to meet in person, this will be offered via Zoom with a Group to Go kit available for pickup.*

**Fee:** Free includes all art supplies

## **Introduction to Adoration**

**Tuesday, Sept. 22, 1–2 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Sarah Hennessy, FSPA

Eucharistic adoration is a door that we can walk through to a lifestyle of deeper awe, empathy and service. Join us for a Zoom conversation in which we'll survey a basic history and a contemporary view of adoration and learn ways it can change our lives.

**Fee:** Free-will offering

## **Even in Pandemic: Wisdom & Wonder from the Book of Nature**

**Wednesday, Sept. 23, 10–11 a.m.**

**Facilitator:** Barbara Mahany

The natural world is bursting with wonder and wisdom. God gave us two books—the Book of Nature as well as Holy Scripture. Join us for a Zoom conversation featuring a brief overview of the Book of Nature; sharing a few particularly soulful passages, poems and prayers; and discussing the wonders of the natural world to evoke reflections and deeper contemplation.

**Fee:** \$20

## **Active Hope Renewed Retreat: Answering Earth's Call for Transformative Healing**

**Friday, Oct. 9, 6:30 p.m.–Sunday, Oct. 11, 3 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Kathleen Rude

We will move through the spiral of The Work That Reconnects with the understanding that we are all in this together! Through an exploration of our interdependence with all life, we will strengthen our resilience to engage with the climate crisis, upcoming elections, environmental and social injustice and turmoil. *If we are unable to meet in person, this may be offered via Zoom.*

**Fee:** \$230 includes sessions, lodging and all meals

We appreciate all of the generous people who donate their time, money and other gifts to Prairiewoods! For a complete, up-to-date list between Newsletters, visit [www.Prairiewoods.org/Donate](http://www.Prairiewoods.org/Donate).

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Jim & Dianne Brennehan  
Gary & Mary Carlson  
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*In honor of Mary Agnes Felser-Rios*  
Frank & Michelle Felser  
*In honor of Nancy Hoffman, FSPA, & Ann Jackson, PBVM*  
Anonymous  
*In honor of Andi Lewis*  
Anonymous  
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*In honor of Prairiewoods & Lucille Winnike, FSPA*  
JeanAnn Kern

## MEMORIALS

*In memory of Dale Bailey*  
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*In memory of Betty Daugherty, FSPA*  
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*In memory of Rev. Monsignor John McClean*  
Eugene & Sally Kopecky  
*In memory of Rose Ocken*  
Marj English, OSF  
Joann Gehling, FSPA, & JoAnn Gehling

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## *Delve Deeper with a Silent Directed Retreat*

**A**re you interested in making a Silent Directed Retreat at Prairiewoods or a Shelter in Place Retreat from the comfort of your home? We'd be happy to schedule a retreat and time with a spiritual director when it fits your schedule. For more information, contact Ann Jackson, PBVM, at 319-395-6700 or [ajackson@prairiewoods.org](mailto:ajackson@prairiewoods.org).

Thank you!



120 E Boyson Rd  
Hiawatha IA 52233

You may send this by mail, email [ecospirit@prairiewoods.org](mailto:ecospirit@prairiewoods.org) or call **319-395-6700**. If mailed, please include this address label.

- Please send your mailings electronically to \_\_\_\_\_.
- Please take us off your mailing list.
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Are you on social media? Find "Prairiewoods FSC" on:



announcing

## *Outstretched Boughs*

*Poems about Prairiewoods Trees*

Prairiewoods is pleased to announce the release of a new **book of poetry** that celebrates the spirituality of trees, especially those found on the 70 acres of land known as Prairiewoods. It was created in loving memory of Kathy Decker and Betty Daugherty, FSPA, and features original poetry and photography from more than 20 friends of Prairiewoods.

Secure your copy today by contacting Prairiewoods at [EcoSpirit@prairiewoods.org](mailto:EcoSpirit@prairiewoods.org) or 319-395-6700. **The cost is \$10.** Choose contactless pickup at Prairiewoods or pay \$2 more to have a copy mailed to you.

Please join us in celebrating  
our beautiful arbor-kin!



November/December 2020

# Prairiewoods

A CATHOLIC, FRANCISCAN ECOSPIRITUALITY RETREAT AND CONFERENCE CENTER

*Calling All Midwives*

a time to

*weep*

a time to

*heal*

In 2020, we are experiencing a time that blurs the edges of living and dying, when hospice care can sometimes feel a bit like a birthing chamber. The words at such times can be tender, comforting and even encouraging: "I'm here with you, holding you and breathing with you. I'll stay with you. Breathe. The love of God is within you. Breathe. The goodness of God surrounds you. Your life is so very precious and your legacy lives on through all of us. Thank you for all the gifts you've given, for the many ways your presence has been a healing balm and a blessing. Know that you are loved, fully, exquisitely, completely. You are not alone. Let go. Breathe. Breathe. Breathe. You are so loved."

Several months have elapsed since the hurricane-

*"There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to uproot. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build. A time to weep and a time to laugh. A time to mourn and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones and a time to gather them. A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing. A time to search and a time to give up. A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be silent and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace."*

—Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, NIV

harbor and playground for squirrels and rabbits, and a hiding place for chittering chipmunks. He soared sixty feet into the sky, as gentle and comforting as he was imposing and mischievous, inviting every creature's presence, however fleeting, into his embrace. A steady stream of mourners and displaced refuge-seekers often find me keeping vigil near his exposed roots.

force winds decimated our trees, and these were some of the words I whispered through stunned tears as I accompanied a magnificent Ponderosa Pine, uprooted in the Aug. 10 derecho, through his initial stages of dying. This majestic, animated and gnarly arbor-elder was a roosting hub for barred owls, a nesting place for spring robins, a safe

*(continued on page 3)*

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*"People gain so much hope when they know they are not experiencing something alone."*

—Joyce Rupp

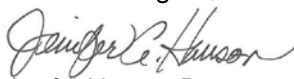
When we tell ourselves the story of 2020, it sounds like a wildly plotted suspense or science fiction novel. No reputable author would have included so many plot twists, so many characters dealing with such layers of loss and anxiety and fear. 200,000 Americans dead in a pandemic? An inland hurricane? Protests and a presidential election and toilet paper hoarding? No matter the truth of it, it is all a bit much for the story of a single year.

If this is the only story we tell one another and ourselves about 2020, it becomes harder to face each day. Depression and despair grow in our own hearts and in our larger communities.

However, there is another story happening concurrently, one that is about hope and gratitude. It may feel like a subplot, but that is partly due to where we place the focus of our storytelling. Here, in this "corner" of our Prairiewoods newsletter, I'd like to share a few items that are transforming our narrative about 2020 from despair to hope. First, in a time of quarantines, COVID closures and cancellations, we have had incredible emotional and financial support from Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and from our friends and donors. Our Garden Party Non-Event Fundraiser in July and August was our most successful Garden Party fundraiser to date! Second, since the Aug. 10 derecho, we have been overwhelmed by the numbers of volunteers who have offered their time, muscles, and heavy equipment to assist us in clean-up and restoring the safety of our sacred space. While there is much work still to be done, we have been able to safely open our prairies to visitors, offering the healing of the natural world to those so hungry for its embrace. Engagement with Prairiewoods via our online events and publications continues to be high, and we are so grateful for the opportunity to continue actively serving you and our mission in these ways.

In Prairiewoods' version of the 2020 story, we find ourselves talking a lot about the "wider WE." Working with our staff, our Board and each of you—our incredible Prairiewoods "we"—to expand our wider WE to be inclusive of all our human and non-human kin, our whole Earth community, is a big part of the plotline, this and every year. And while our 2020 story may still mention the murder hornets and random appliance shortages, when we put gratitude, giftedness and grace at the center, the overall tone of the story becomes one of hope shared. Thank you all for being part of THAT storyline!

Peace and all good,

  
Jenifer Hanson, Director



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Ecospirit@Prairiewoods.org



(continued from page 1)

His life is a perennial legacy to all our creature-kin who live beneath the surface, and in many significant ways, new life is already emerging from his remains. Still, the tears come for the loss that is palpable and irrevocable, each moment of sorrow connecting us to the vacant hollows left by previous losses, and each a reminder and an invitation to grieve anew and to lean into the dynamism of the present moment. Prairiewoods is no exception. We feel the aching loss, even as hundreds of volunteers—and all the healing energy from Earth and her inhabitants—have rushed to salve the wounds.

Many have lamented the devastation of our trees and noticed how the jagged, twisted and mangled landscape that surrounds us in Cedar Rapids reflects much to us about our communal interior landscape. Emotionally and spiritually, we are in the midst of a storm. Political, socio-cultural and economic upheaval surround us as we enter the wintering months. For many, gnawing uncertainty—sometimes fearful anxiety—might threaten to overwhelm us as we await relief from a pandemic or the results of an election. Hurricanes, massive wildfires, earthquakes, flooding and general eco-instability remind us that we can no longer deny nor escape the effects of an Earth in peril. It feels to many like Earth is in hospice.

Deep wisdom tells us that like the complementary, enfolded and symbiotic energy of Yin and Yang, our grief reflects the other, intertwined component, Love. “Grief and love are sisters, woven together from the beginning. Their kinship reminds us that there is no love that does not contain loss and no loss that is not a reminder of the love we carry for what we once held close” (Francis Weller, *The Wild Edge of Sorrow: Rituals and the Sacred Work of Grief*).

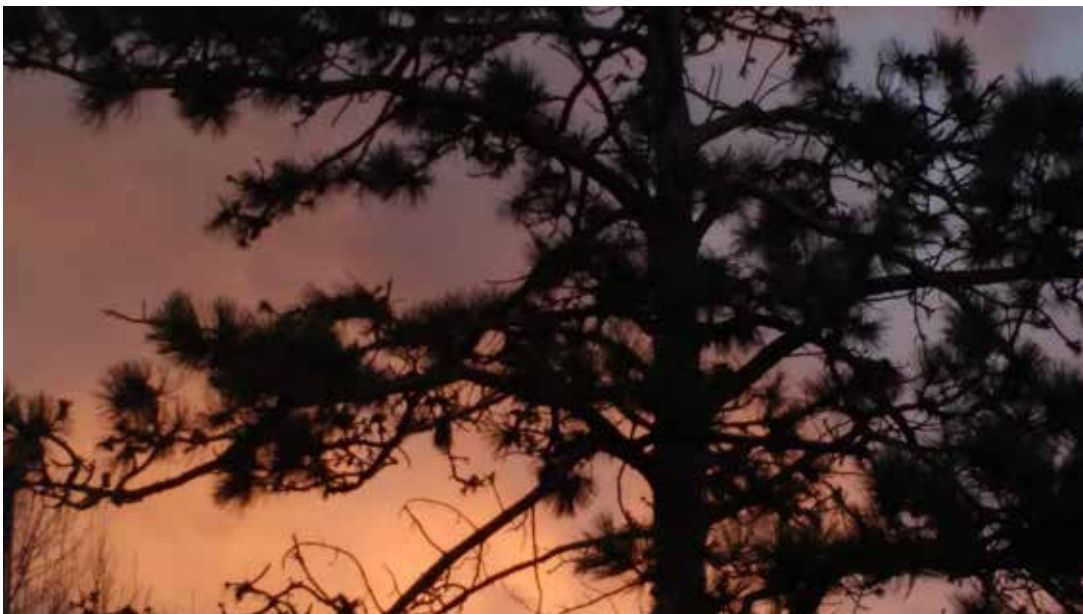
Whatever wisdom we may learn from the dying process, the birthing process is similarly disposed to reveal this enfolded relationship.

The real work of grief is learning to breathe into the pain of loss, fall back into the expansive Mystery of Love, and then trust and let go. Energetically, this works as a self-

healing system, a complete loop, in which the dynamic interplay of love and loss grows stronger and more resilient with each repetition. The active, creative energy of Love yields to the intentional trust of letting go, and the resulting freedom gives birth to something new. Dying in some respect means actively emerging into new life, and into a fuller, more inclusive, more complex Love. This entire process of dying to the myopic self that resists annihilation yields a mysterious harvest of trust in the wider “We”—so intensely creative that new life may emerge. “There is a time to be born, and a time to die.” The time to be born and to die are one liminal time, and the time is now. We hear the echoes of ancient Sophia-wisdom as the midwife, who knows a bit about the complementary relationship of birthing and dying.

While a soon-to-be mother cries out in pain as her infant is emerging, she reaches out for the midwife who will coax her into breathing, into letting go, into pushing and releasing and breathing again. Until the baby comes, this is the process, fraught with pain, laced with sorrow. Many know that child-birth can end in death for the mother, and still-birth for the baby. The midwife knows this as well. The midwife also knows that the pain can give way to boundless joy. What we need now are spiritual midwives, those with courageous hearts who will rush into the din of the birthing chamber while Mother Earth is in labor. We need the calm groundedness that recognizes the Yin and Yang of grief and Love. We need gentle hospice ministers and fierce midwives. We especially need spiritual midwives who can see that amidst the pain and suffering is an opening at once miraculous and mysterious. We need “active hope,” as eco-philosopher Joanna Macy says, “the work that reconnects.” Once we reconnect with the work of our deep joy and begin the process of healing Earth’s wounds, of tending her suffering and planting for the good

of the whole, we will discover a profound aperture for new life. Yes, we are all hospice ministers in a sense, and we are also midwives. Our time is now. How will we tend this new birth?



## Midwife to the Woods

—Nancy Hoffman, FSPA

Never a mother, but midwife to hundreds of pine, cedar, spruce, oak, maple, birch, ironwood. Always marveling at other midwives—like the squirrels and woodchucks who specialize in walnut, hickory and oaks.

Over the years this midwife birthing them from their pot wombs—placing little rooted feet into Prairiewoods soil and marveling over the miracle of life.

Fiercely protective—erecting fencing and providing a nice bed of chips for these little rooted feet.

Each week offering them water to provide loving care.

All summer watching nightly over their fragile lives. Getting to know each of their individual charms.

As winter approaches, putting them to bed with plenty of water and checking their fences while giving them an extra pat of love.

Come springtime, this midwife shrieked with delight as she witnessed the new buds of growth. Her heart cried when a little one showed it could not thrive. Always thanking it for blessing us with its short life.

Some of our babies grew quickly—some more slowly but all reaching upward to the glorious sun. Making friends with birds and squirrels and other trees, I'm told. Even as young trees, their little bodies at work as they learned the art of producing O<sub>2</sub> and absorbing CO<sub>2</sub>. Not to mention always giving delight to the beholder of their beauty.

As a proud midwife, I often wondered if these young trees have any idea of how they would be when fully grown. Could they comprehend the potential of the magnificence they contained?

In some twenty-three-odd years, many of the early-birthing trees have far surpassed their midwife. Now she walks among them asking them to share their wisdom, their strength, their honor and their love. She and they have grown together in an inseparable bond forever.

Just before the derecho, Prairiewoods released *Outstretched Boughs*, a book of poetry about the trees at Prairiewoods. It features the poem at left, "Midwife to the Woods," written by Prairiewoods foundress Nancy Hoffman, FSPA. What follows is an interview with Sister Nancy about her poem and storm recovery.

### What was your process in writing "Midwife to the Woods"?

One day walking amidst the trees a sense of kinship and familiarity brought forth a nurturing feeling. Just like my mother used to tell me about my childhood and her love for me, I wanted to share this love with the trees I had planted and cared for. So I just sat down and wrote the poem.

### What are you learning from the land and trees during this time of pandemic and storm recovery?

I am witnessing resilience in the land and all its creation. I am learning not to be sad. I don't feel sadness coming from the downed trees. I feel admiration, strength and inspiration. As our native friends have told us, as the trees broke open they released positive and wise energy to share with a world sorely needing their gifts. The trees are not exhibiting great fear. Life in the woods is not totally debilitated. Life continues. New life is growing. I am being taught to trust, keep going, see that the power of new life and goodness will overcome all adversity.

Many of today's scientists and authors tell us that all the trees' root systems are connected across the land. The healthy surviving trees offer support and compassion to the downed and damaged trees. They will send healing to the damaged trees. They teach me to give compassion and love to all others in creation. We have to help heal others.

When I witness a bowed over tree gradually straighten, I become aware that we too have great resiliency. It inspires me to use this gift of resiliency God has given us.

Our volunteers have been so reverent in their caring. Two of our serviceberry trees were flat but still connected with roots that were viable. They took great pains to brace and tie these trees to give them a chance. Does this not teach me the importance of my rootedness in God during these challenging times?

Even in death the trees keep feeding us. The deer relish the green leaves they can now access, and woodworkers and carvers treasure the newly available wood. Many homes will be warmed this winter. And as they deteriorate, their bodies enrich the soil. Is there anything greater than a tree to teach us the cycle of life?

### How is the land doing in general?

I think well. The generous garden caretakers have reaped wonderful produce. The population of bees and butterflies seems healthy. The recent rain greened up everything almost magically. More deer have returned and our twin deer and mother once again give us joy. The birdsongs give witness to a returned population.

### How are the little trees doing?

Very well. We didn't lose any of them. Some were covered with debris but as we carefully dug through we discovered they were whole. We yipped with joy! I keep finding new little saplings. They seem to say, "Over here, see me?" I get excited and run for a fence to protect them. When I find them on the grounds I put them in our nursery.

### How is Grandmother Oak?

Grandmother Oak is still nobly standing! I do have a theory. I think she knows she is still of great witness and influence and is needed here for now. So during the past year or two she has dropped a number of major limbs. Has this perhaps helped her to survive the storm? She did have fewer leaves to catch the wind. Is she showing us a great lesson regarding letting go and simplifying?

Maybe this is a real stretch of imagination but I think another poem could be written about all the wonderful volunteers who—like the people in scripture—loved, prepared and anointed the bodies of loved one for burial. I wish I could adequately share how I witness the reverence of these volunteers as they in their own way anoint and bury the trees. Their commitment and generosity speaks volumes of their awareness that we are all connected. They give witness to so many who are now keenly aware of how they valued and loved their downed and damaged trees. May we all carry this new awareness into the future. As Francis of Assisi might say, "Brother and Sister Tree, your face is now more visible in our circle of life."

Prairiewoods holds the deepest hope to offer the following programs and retreats in November and December, if gathering in groups is possible at that time due to COVID-19 concerns. If we are unable to meet in person, most of these programs and retreats will be offered via Zoom. In the meantime, if you are interested in any of these offerings or any of our regular monthly programming, please mark your calendar and visit [www.Prairiewoods.org](http://www.Prairiewoods.org) for further information.

## Forest Therapy

**Saturday, Oct. 17, 1–4 p.m.;**

**Friday, Oct. 23, 1–4 p.m.;**

**Sunday, Nov. 8, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.;**

**Friday, Dec. 4, 1–4 p.m. (via Zoom)**

**Facilitator:** Emelia Sautter

Engage both your senses and your spirit when you commune with the natural world for nurturing and healing!

Emelia Sautter

(who is completing her Forest Therapy Guide certification from the Association of Nature and Forest

Therapy) will host these sessions, which can be enjoyed individually or as a series. The first three sessions will be held in person at Prairiewoods. They will be entirely outdoors, regardless of weather (please dress accordingly), and are limited to 6 people per class. The final session will be held via Zoom and is open to all who wish to register.

**Fee:** Free-will offering



## Prayer Experience Series Online

**Tuesdays, Nov. 3–Dec. 22,**

**11:30 a.m.–12 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Angie Pierce Jennings

We are blessed with many ways to pray and reflect, including songful prayer, contemplative prayer, visio divina, embodied prayer, silent prayer and guided meditation. Join us for this ongoing prayer series and experience the joys of prayer and meditation together. Registration is appreciated but not required. We will meet online via Zoom.

**Fee:** Free-will offering

## Go Deeper Thursdays Online

**Thursdays, Nov. 5–Dec. 17, 4–5 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Laura Weber & Ellen Bruckner

Join friends of Prairiewoods via Zoom for some healthy and necessary conversation in this time of spiritual deepening. This is an opportunity to relieve stress and connect at a deeper level. We have a brief check-in and talk about how our spiritual awareness and practice during this time of upheaval is shifting. Grab a beverage, relax and let's do this together!

**Fee:** Free-will offering

## Spiritual Renewal Day Online

**Mondays, Nov. 9 & Dec. 7,**

**8:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Angie Pierce Jennings

Join us for a tranquil day of spiritual renewal from wherever you are. The day will include an opening meditation session, morning yoga, an individual spiritual direction session, singing bowl prayer, a guided eco-spirituality experience and a closing reflection session via Zoom. You'll also have free time to rest or explore the seasons outdoors. In preparation for the day, you will receive gentle instruction about mindfully creating your own sacred space. Find renewal and care for your mind, body and spirit on this special day! Registration and a deposit of \$50 are required five days in advance.

**Fee:** \$65

## Silent Mindfulness Meditation Online Retreat

**Friday, Nov. 13, 6:30 p.m.–Sunday, Nov. 15, 1 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Chris Klug

Mindfulness is an open, kind, non-judging attention to what is happening in the present moment as it is happening. It shapes a wise and compassionate relationship with and response to experience as it unfolds moment by moment. Via Zoom, we will cultivate mindfulness in silence amid instruction, questioning, sitting meditation, walking meditation, mindful movement and mindful eating.

**Fee:** \$150

## Saturday Soul Stretch for Lovers of Embodied Spirituality Online

**Saturdays, Nov. 14 & Dec. 5,**

**8 a.m.–1 p.m.**

**Facilitator:** Laura Weber

Wake up! Wake up! The weekend is here. Saturday Soul Stretch will get us out of bed and back into our full-spectrum humanity. Plan to de-stress, reconnect and sink deeply into the present moment. This day via Zoom includes gentle tai chi movement, a sitting meditation, a mindfulness walk, and a different spiritual modality each month, such as dream work, journaling, mandalas, labyrinth, breath-exercise, sounding, centering prayer, poetry, singing bowl meditation or drumming. Plan to join us via Zoom from the comfort of your home!

**Fee:** \$25

*Offered in Partnership with Unity Point Hospice*

## Soul Care: Creative Arts Grief Support Group Online

**Wednesdays, Nov. 18 & Dec 16,**

**5:30–7 p.m.**

**Facilitators:** Jamie Siela, LISW, and

Christine Wagner-Hecht, MDiv

Take time to be with others in grief and engage the creative spark in this monthly group open to anyone grieving loss through death. In November, we will make dream catchers to help us hold good thoughts and dreams close. In December, we will make memory ornaments to remember our times together at the holidays. This group will meet online via Zoom. Registration is required 8 days in advance so a to go art kit can be mailed to you.

**Fee:** Free, includes all art supplies

## Virtual Holiday Mini-Bazaar

**Friday, Nov. 20–Friday, Dec. 18**

See back page for details.

## Listening for the Light Within Online Retreat

**Friday, Dec. 4–Saturday, Dec. 5**

**Facilitator:** Mary Cohen

Join us via Zoom for a retreat in three parts that celebrates our connection through song with fellow music lovers. This is an opportunity to listen to the Divine spark in others and in ourselves! Choose one session or join us for all three.

**Friday, Dec. 4, 12–1 p.m.** Listening Exchange with the Oakdale Prison Community Choir (*free*). We will listen

to recordings of original songs created and performed by members of the Oakdale Choir and listen to one another's responses in small group breakouts.

**Saturday, Dec. 5, 10–11:30 a.m.** Song sharing and listening. We are invited to bring a song or poem that is meaningful to us. We will listen and share reflections with one another in small breakout rooms.

**Saturday, Dec. 5, 2–3:30 p.m.** Yoga nidra, journal and listen. Yoga nidra is a guided resting practice. Our intention is to release and soften the body in order for us to feel and notice the Divine spark inside each of us. Opportunities to journal and reflect either individually or with another participant.

Come, be filled with Light in the depths of your wintering!

**Fee:** \$50 per Saturday session (free for Friday session)

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Hiawatha IA 52233

You may send this by mail, email [ecospirit@prairiewoods.org](mailto:ecospirit@prairiewoods.org) or call **319-395-6700**. If mailed, please include this address label.

- Please send your mailings electronically to \_\_\_\_\_.
- Please take us off your mailing list.
- Please note the address change.
- We receive duplicate mailings; please send only one to this address.

Are you on social media? Find "Prairiewoods FSC" on:



## Join Us for a Virtual Holiday Mini-Bazaar

This year, rather than gathering in person, we will host a *Virtual Holiday Mini-Bazaar* with some special Prairiewoods items available for order via phone (319-395-6700) or email ([ecospirit@prairiewoods.org](mailto:ecospirit@prairiewoods.org)) from *Nov. 20–Dec. 18*, with touch-free pick-up.

- Tree-shirts with our gorgeous tree top and roots image, now in classic black! (\$16 for short-sleeve, \$22 for long-sleeve)
  - Reusable Prairiewoods shopping bags in black or brown (\$6)
  - Wood-grain journals (\$17)
  - *Outstretched Boughs*, our popular, recently released book of tree poetry (\$10)
  - Wooden disc ornament kits for creating at home (includes 8 discs cut from Prairiewoods trees lost in the derecho, instructions for painting both a mandala and a dotted Christmas tree, ribbons for hanging, 1 set of dotting tools and 5 full-size acrylic paints)—this is a great activity for the whole family! (\$20)
  - Gift certificates (any dollar amount)
- Gift certificates and tree poetry books can be mailed. All other items will be available for touch-free pick-up at Prairiewoods at your convenience.

