

A PUBLICATION FROM THE CENTER FOR ACTION AND CONTEMPLATION



LIVING SCHOOL ALUMNI
QUARTERLY

RHYTHM OF LIFE

BEGIN
READING

WINTER 2020
ISSUE 4

A NOTE ON FORMATING

We set out to create a digital publication that felt like it was in print. We heard from many of you that the experience of sitting down with a cup of coffee and reading about your beloved Alumni community was preferred. So, we created this format to resist distraction and invite attention. If you're reading on a desktop or laptop, expand the "landscape" version to full screen and turn off your notifications; or if an iPad or tablet is handy, enjoy this most book-like of reading experiences in either the "landscape" or "portrait" versions. The Table of Contents is clickable, allowing easy navigation to every section of the quarterly. We've also included a link to return to the TOC on every page, so it's easy to find your way back. Hyperlinks are in red type and underlined; click these to open webpages in your browser. We hope you enjoy this new format. If you have any questions, please email us at support@cac.org and we will help as soon as we can. Peace, CAC Design Team

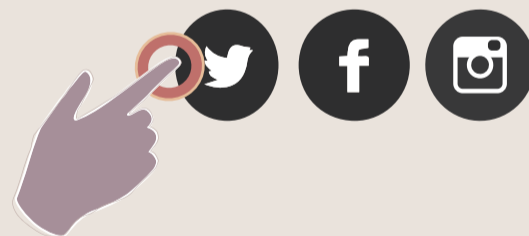
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Dear Living School Alumni,

We are all, in our diverse ways, living a rhythm of life. If you're anything like me, though, the contemplative rhythm of life I intend to live is often not the rhythm of life I actually live. I need intentional rhythm so that I do not fall prey, yet again, to the traps of busyness, burnout, consumerism, and self-importance. What's more, when I'm not conscious of my life's rhythm, my unacknowledged participation in systems of oppression grows. Such rhythms are a sure-fire way to miss the spiritual depth at the heart of life.

The Living School has given me—has given *us*—tools for conversion. The Living School's Rhythm of Life, emphasizing Contemplative Practice, Study, Community, and Solidarity, when truly lived and adapted to our own lives and contexts, changes us. I'm lost without my Centering Prayer sits and slow reading of mystical texts, but I'm also not living my full humanity when I'm not in relationship with, for example, undocumented immigrants in my county.

The August 2019 Living School Symposium included many opportunities for students to envision a contemplative rhythm of life. Faculty member Cynthia Bourgeault taught on Gurdjieff-inspired "identification," which is a radically liberating framework to undergird one's rhythm of life. Identification is, she says in

her Symposium handout, "a form of spiritual attachment . . . to one's own sense of identity or self-image. When you're 'identified' with what you're doing, you're doing it in such a way that its primary (if not exclusive) motivation is to *establish or assert a sense of who you are.*" Seemingly healthy and unhealthy rhythms of life alike can be used to serve my ego-self's needs, when the true goal of contemplative living is to open up to a wider field of wholeness, compassion, mercy, and aliveness.

The Symposium included many opportunities for contemplative practice, study, and community. From Cynthia teaching the Welcoming Prayer, to "Uncle" James Finley exploring the deepening possibilities of *lectio divina*, to Jonathon Stalls ('17) leading morning contemplative walks, the Symposium served as an initiation into the many forms of contemplative practice. One such practice session of chant and silence, led by Cynthia, is available to you in this Quarterly (see [Contemplative Practice](#)). Remarkable teaching, of course, suffused the days: Fr. Richard taught on the Trinity and Universal Christ, Cynthia unpacked the Law of Three, and all three faculty dialogued about what "contemplative epistemology" might mean.

The School's emphasis on learning contemplative solidarity, in particular, awakened my own personal growth and passion. A shift in pedagogy and

content was apparent throughout: Instead of contemplative *service*, which can leave relationships of privilege and oppression untouched and unexamined, the School stressed contemplative *solidarity* with the most marginalized as a key factor in an integrated rhythm of life.

An entire morning was dedicated, for example, to learning embodied practices of solidarity with Theater of the Oppressed practitioner Sarah Giffin. In this issue, she writes about instructing a ballroom full of contemplatives in play-like exercises that reveal the dynamics of power in relationships. An entire evening was dedicated to a communal practice called Centering the Margins, inspired by the Smithsonian's Long Conversation format. In this ritual, Living School students of color told personal stories of what it is like to show up as themselves in their bodies while the entire school witnessed and received their gift.

To highlight this evolutionary shift of the Living School's Rhythm of Life—from contemplative service to contemplative solidarity—this issue features an interview with Fr. Richard, who teaches about Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Fr. Richard speaks about the “five conversions” of solidarity from Freire's classic work *The Pedagogy*

of the Oppressed. I also interview Oregon Court of Appeals Judge Darleen Ortega ('19), who has long worked on issues of diversity, equity, and belonging, and who helped shape the Centering the Margins ritual.

There are further Rhythm of Life touchstones throughout the issue: an invitation to *visio divina* with Julie Ann Stevens' paintings, a report from the contemplative Northern California alumni community, and a remarkable Bible-translation project that Andrew Breitenberg ('17) and friends are undertaking.

I pray that this Quarterly inspires you in your rhythm of life—and that all our rhythms may bend toward divine grace.



—Mark Longhurst ('15)

Monk in Midlife

Ali Kirkpatrick ('16)

The year before I entered the Living School, I intuitively but accidentally committed to finding a sustainable rhythm of life. In my early 40s, I had reached a breaking point. My husband and I were busy running our own business and raising three kids, but, honestly, it was the *hustle for worthiness* that was wearing me out. As the daughter of a basketball coach and a Performer on the Enneagram, *hustling* was what I knew best, from school to sports to spirituality. I deeply believed that if I could do more and be more, know and serve more, and all of it more perfectly, then God would love me more; in fact, God might even be “well pleased.” But I could never live up to the standards of the idol I called God, who was unconditionally loving, of course, but also perfectionistic and judgmental. There was no *gelassenheit*, as Meister Eckhart might put it, in this god of mine.

But, one day, I encountered the antidote to my busy sickness, a quote attributed to Howard Thurman:

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

I wept that day when I recognized the fact that in my search for eternal life, I had lost the quality of my own aliveness. I had been so busy being good, I forgot I was good already. In my journal at the time, I asked, “What makes me come alive?” This is how I responded:

Loving God, my husband, my kids, my family, my friends; **praying; reading** and **studying** about humanity, our struggle and spirit, where we’ve been and where we’re going. **Writing** and **talking** about the things that fill my heart and mind. **Sharing** what I know, what I have, and who I am. **Taking time** to be well: spiritually, physically, emotionally, intellectually, and **helping others** be well too. **Encouraging, listening, journeying** with people who are ahead of and aside and behind me on the way.

From that day on, I committed to being *alive* above all else. I made time for each and every one of those things I valued on a regular basis—daily if I could, weekly without fail. Inevitably, it slowed me down; it created boundaries that allowed me to live with greater integrity and authenticity. I gradually learned to trust in a God who loved me “as is” and I was freer than I had ever been.

Two years later, when the Living School faculty invited us to create a rhythm of life, I knew what mine would include, because the essentials were already in place. I had taken the first step away from the god of productivity and perfection and toward the God of peace.



Divine Opening, *Julie Ann Stevens* ('15), used by permission, <https://julieannstevens.com>.

Editor's Note: Julie Ann Stevens ('15) is a painter whose art emerges from the depth of her contemplative commitment. You are invited to dwell with her images throughout the issue as moments of pause and prayer. Her artist's statement is below.

The theme Rhythm of Life has landed with me as something more like Rhythm of Life within a Season of Transition.

That is what I have experienced in an acute way since my Living School sending in 2015.

By way of background, since my sending, I have bought and sold two homes, rented two apartments, and had my mail sent to three temporary residences in an effort to adapt to income limitations following the end of a long-term contract in my 30-year profession as a marketing consultant.

The moves took me from urban Minneapolis and Chicago to a remote little house on the Western Minnesota Prairie in Watson, population 200. Along the way, I continued to seek work for which my previous experience qualified me, but without success. The inability to change my conditions using relied-upon experience pushed me into a state of agonizing uncertainty. I found stability in my Centering Prayer and painting practices.

I can't help associating these pieces, which have deeper significance for me today than when they flowed out of my creative process, with the center that holds under all conditions and never changes, never leaves us. This is a center that I noticed during my season of transition, became familiar with, and now am beginning to know as home and beloved.

I've come to realize that while the experience of transition is a constant on a micro level in the rhythm of life, sometimes the bottom drops out, our container is shattered, and we are free-falling with no end in sight or destination in mind but union with God. By the grace of God, our consent leads us to teachers and practices that become our stability during remarkable seasons of transformation.

Many of these paintings came before the season of suffering that was my furnace of transformation. I realize now that this suffering showed me the changeless nature of my identity in Christ in ways that defending my old container and keeping pain at bay never could.

Artist Julie Ann Stevens ('15) writes and paints about life to death to new life. A student of the Christian Contemplative tradition, her works of art and guided experiences are valuable companions to others on their paths to healing and wholeness. Her website is <https://julieannstevens.com>.

Cynthia Bourgeault Morning Practice Living School Symposium August 2019



[Listen to audio](#)



From Service to Solidarity

Interview with Richard Rohr

Editor’s Note: In this conversation, Fr. Richard Rohr teaches on Paulo Freire’s “five conversions” to solidarity with people on the margins, and how contemplative solidarity differs from contemplative service.



[Watch full video](#)



[View full transcript](#)



Earthly Trinity, by Julie Ann Stevens ('15), used by permission, <https://julieannstevens.com>.

The Pilgrim Bible: Translating the Living Word

Andrew Breitenberg ('17)

Every pilgrim comes to understand—whether from the outset, or upon experiencing the subtle sleeve of disappointment that wraps the joy of arriving at the destination—that the journey is the goal. The Pilgrim Bible project is about building a bridge so that we can invite fellow pilgrims to come on the adventure with us. It's about unveiling an altogether new Bible, written in the language we speak right now. When the Bible is given to us in our voice, it speaks action to the heart—the kind of action that sparks forgiveness and grace, radical hospitality and love, and extends the table of indiscriminate inclusion.

The first volume (the Book of Acts), translated directly from the original Koiné Greek, is the flower of a weekly contemplative group which

met for nine months in 2017. The seed was planted one morning during our gathering, when someone boldly suggested the idea that we might include some Bible in the mix. It had been a long time since most of us had read the Bible and, as we approached it each week, it became evident that we were discovering it anew—with fresh perspective and renewed enthusiasm, as if from the outside, rather than from within the system. We brought no ready-made answers or presuppositions and were ready to challenge any assumption. All of us had left the traditional church system, and no one was interested in reading anything into these scriptures that wasn't right there, offering itself.

But, as we looked, we soon began stumbling across terms that didn't make any sense at all without that Sunday School education. If we were serious about not bringing preconceived ideas to the text, it became clear that terms like “repent” or “sin” were nearly useless. And, as we started unpacking the original Greek, we were continually surprised—mystified even—by what we found. The disconnect between the source words and their English equivalents was stunning and often prompted the question: Why would anyone who has been disillusioned by (or outright fled) the Christian system still read a Bible jammed with the language that had been used to burn them in the first place? And was that language rooted in authentic meaning in the first place, or had it been betrayed by centuries of so-called added value?

And so I started translating our weekly readings in my own twenty-first-century, post-Christian voice. And from that real, felt need of our community, this Pilgrim Bible translation journey began.

Translation Examples

1. *metanoia* – From *meta* (to change or move beyond) and *nous* (mind, thought, current awareness). Literally this word means “a change of mind” or “to move beyond one’s current way of thinking and being.” *Metanoia* is an invitation to radically renew one’s life, values, and actions, addressing one’s being at its inmost core. Traditionally, *metanoia* is translated as “repent.” In this translation, I often use something like “radically transform your inner being” or “reboot your thinking and action.”

2. *hamartia* – Literally, “apart from” or “to miss the mark,” as when an arrow misses the target and is then apart or “separated from” its intended goal. This division or separation describes a state of inner being. I generally use “self-separation” in our translation (or, in one case, “ruinously self-hating loneliness built on the lie that you are hopelessly cut off from the flow of our Endless Holy Creator God”), in the hopes of coming a bit closer than what we are traditionally saddled with: “sin.”

How (Not) To Read the Bible

When I was young and first encountered the Bible, adults were always telling me how I should understand what I found. I remember not just being offered “correct interpretations” but even being prompted on how it might make me feel. But when we homogenize Biblical interpretation, we cease to actively participate in the pilgrimage. I call this pre-experience-answer-making a “spiritual deformation.” If I open the Bible already knowing what to find and how to feel about it, nothing different will ever emerge. The text dies, objectified and used, robbed of its dynamic power.

Can you imagine an artist insisting that you perceive and feel their art according to their predetermined system? Does a poet footnote each poem with instructions on what to learn from it and the right way to be impacted by it? Of course not. Each simply points to Life, to Beauty, to Pain and Dignity—rummaging in the mystery and inviting you to have a look too. It’s the very diversity of approach, interpretation, feeling, and “actioning” of the Bible which makes it a “living word,” and the countless, unique voices with which we read and speak the Bible create the music that it’s always been meant to make.

Read, Listen, Speak, Become

The Bible is a signal flare, pointing to the Good, the Beautiful, and the True, and this translation hopes against hope to unveil its extraordinary power to a new generation, as if for the first time. We are explorers of epic old-school proportions, tunneling in the root systems of these ancient languages and holding up our findings to the Fire—watching to find out what burns away, and leaning in toward that which the Light unfailingly deepens.

Andrew Breitenberg ('17) has two kids, Wills (7) and Isobel Grace (5), and is a Principal at Straight Path Management, a consulting group based in Virginia Beach, VA, which helps nonprofit organizations with strategic planning and brand design. In addition to the Pilgrim Bible, his ongoing Bible translation project, he is also a co-founder of Parallel Service, a 501(c)(3) fostering spiritual mentoring for young post-Christian men (www.wisdommen.com).



Update from the Northern California Contemplative Community

It is difficult to recall the early days of the Northern California Living School Contemplative Community, which first met in the fall of 2014. Though most of us were virtual strangers, we were kindred spirits to one another, bonded in ways difficult to describe to those who did not share our mystical yearnings, speak our common tongue, or experience transformative time together in the liminality of New Mexico's big sky country. Together, we had climbed ladders, roamed mansions, and floated on clouds of unknowing, exquisitely led by our holy trinity of spiritual teachers. We shared a sense that, with one another,

we were no longer spiritual misfits in our mystically barren home churches. We had at last found our spiritual sisters and brothers with whom to share our cosmic journey.

What has evolved for us over time has been both organic and intentional: After trial and error, discernment and prayer, we have come to a stated purpose, set of beliefs and defined process.

Our purpose is threefold: to energize and support one another, to manifest spiritual Oneness, and to bear witness to the birth of God in and through one another.

We believe: 1) in a journey that involves playfulness, creativity, dynamism, and embodiment; 2) that all events,

experiences, and people we encounter are invitations to open our hearts; 3) in the unspeakable, unknowable, ineffable action of transformation and flow that occurs when we intentionally listen and speak from the heart; 4) in the power of holding one another—our pain, our tension, our joy, our discomfort, our revelation—in love, as a tool of wholeness; 5) in the importance of a safe container for shared listening and receiving; and 6) we are not here to fix, judge, or compare ourselves with one another.

Our process is the Way of Council: to speak from the heart; to be spontaneous; to listen from the heart; to be lean of expression. We employ a talking stick during our share time.

We meet for three hours on the first Saturday of every month, and have gathered at different locations over the years, as our members live across a 350-mile expanse that extends north from the coastal region of San Luis Obispo to the San Francisco Bay, wends north through the golden hills of wine country, and ascends to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Currently, we meet at the San Francisco home church of one of our community members.

Our format is loosely structured with two critical constants: meditation and check-ins. One or two of us facilitate each gathering, developing a contemplative theme around which our morning evolves. Some facilitators employ ceremonial beauty in service of the ineffable, planning richly

detailed liturgies that may include music, poetry, readings, art, sacred objects, fire, water; others employ simplicity as a way into our shared contemplative experience.

We are Christ-centered, but not limited to Christian symbols or traditions. We celebrate liturgical seasons and holy days—and recently paid tribute to our dead on *el Dia de los Muertos*. We've honored the four directions and the cyclic turning of the earth. Facilitators have led us in song, chant, dance, drumming, walking meditation, chi gong, labyrinth walking, *lectio*, and *visio divina*. We have included native prayer, Celtic Christian worship, Hindu chant, and Buddhist mindfulness practice. We have worked with the Law of Three in role-playing political discourse. We often refer to themes in the books authored by our teachers.



We are being transformed through the gift of our community and time spent together. We are different individually and collectively than we were when we first gathered. We have borne witness to one another's life transitions, supporting one another through both joys and sorrows. We do not take for granted our shared understanding that it is through sorrow and descent that we often experience our deepest spiritual growth. We look not to fix problems, to psychoanalyze, or to cheer one another through pain. Rather, as a contemplative community, we witness, we hold, and we strive to open emotional space so that the light of God's teachings and grace may enter in.

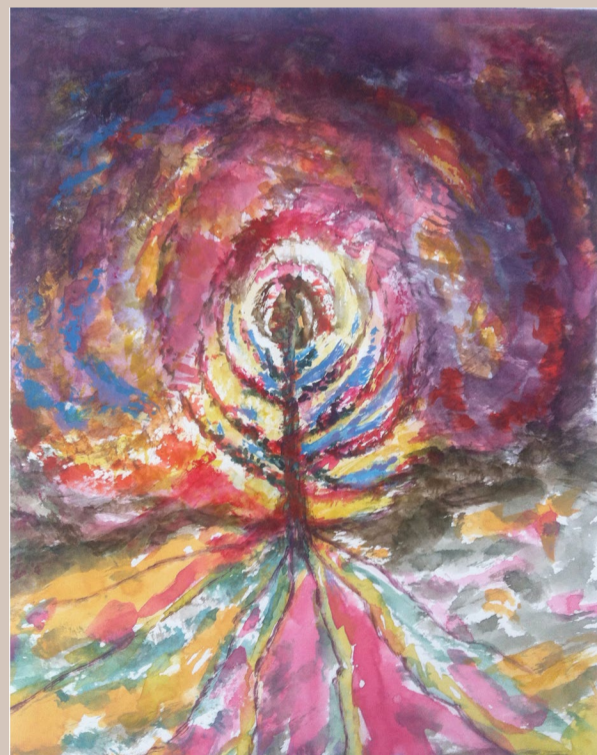
We experienced particular meaning in the years we met in San Francisco's impoverished Tenderloin district (with walking meditations around "needling" addicts, housing-insecure homeless, and Tenderloin children on their way to school) and in Oakland's Fruitvale district, rich in Latinx culture. Both districts border areas of rapid gentrification, shedding harsh light on the inequalities, racism, and disenfranchisement that demand systemic, rectifying, and healing action. They are vivid reminders that without such action, without commitment to bringing Christ into our broken world, our contemplative practices have little meaning beyond ourselves.

This is the context in which our contemplative community lives. We gather to meditate, to ground ourselves in the expansiveness and peace needed as God's beloved agents of change.

Our group has not met everyone's needs. Some sendees have participated for a while, then left for various reasons. Some are very active with CAC, but have chosen not to participate in the group. The influx of recent sendees has blessed us with energy and youthfulness; it has also challenged us to look inward and discern any inflexibility in practice or purpose. We recognize that we are not the definitive Northern California Living School contemplative community; rather, we are one among several emerging.

Faithfulness to our monthly gatherings has granted us a closeness and spiritual intimacy with one another that has been a gift to our individual practices. This is our treasure, our contemplative community's rhythm of life.

—*Linda Williams ('16) and Colette Lafia ('19)*



Perpetual Notion, Julie Ann Stevens ('15), used by permission, <https://julieannstevens.com>.

Centering the Margins

Interview with Darleen Ortega ('19)

Editor's Note: Darleen Ortega is a judge for the Oregon Court of Appeals and has a longstanding commitment to issues of race, equity, and belonging. In this interview, she speaks about the work of contemplative solidarity and her role in helping shape a new ritual at the 2019 Living School Symposium called Centering the Margins.



[Listen to full interview](#)



[View full transcript](#)



Enough, by Julie Ann Stevens ('15), used by permission, <https://julierannstevens.com>.

Power in Play

Sarah Giffin

At the 2019 Living School Symposium, a room of 175 contemplatives was up to something strange. People shuffled aimlessly around the giant meeting hall and nervous chatter rippled through an uncertain silence. Suddenly, I began to call out numbers at random. People started dropping to the floor as shouts of laughter took over the room.

The game was this. Everybody was assigned a number and asked to mill about. When their number was called, they were to pretend to faint while soliciting others to help them keep from falling to the ground. At first, I called one number at a time, but soon I was calling out several at once. Helpers had to quickly faint, and fainters had to rush to another's aid, as more and more people were "fainting." As frenzy ensued, communication between helpers and helped became confused.

Despite the laughter, this was more than an icebreaker. Inspired by William McNamara's

“long, loving look at the real,”¹ I asked them to reflect on what behaviors emerged from the chaos of the game, and if they recognized these in their real-world work. Together we observed that we don’t all receive help, ask for help, or offer help in the same way. Our diversity—in body, ability, trauma, language, identity—affected how we related to the scenario and communicated with one another about it. We made assumptions about others’ needs based on our own, and asked for assistance according to how much we were willing to give. Insights emerged throughout the room about how we had made rapid decisions based on our complex histories of trust, safety, and identity.

Embracing the utter silliness of this game allowed us to pursue a more serious goal. Acting authentically in the context of play, we could witness how we have internalized systems of social power and consider how to intervene. Laughing and connecting throughout the process could strengthen our resilience as we faced this broader goal.

I was asked to join this year’s Symposium in order to explore what stories our bodies can tell us about the politics of our world. *What are the automatic impulses built into our actions, our go-to strategies for achieving protection or empowerment, and the unnoticed ways we physically navigate our identity while interacting with others? How do these recapitulate the countless “ism”s of our world, and inflict the very harms (to*

other and to self) that we seek to undo in our service work and solidarity practice?

To address these intimately challenging questions, I relied on play—our language of social learning. I adopted a framework of play from Theater of the Oppressed, a nonproprietary arsenal of tools for investigating and transforming systems of power, privilege, and oppression. Here, “Theater” refers to the various artistic tools it uses, but also to a metaphor whereby we are all actors on the stage of everyday politics, with the capacity to change our script and transform the scene. The practice builds on Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and offers interactive techniques for community organizing, education, and activism. The pedagogical framework calls for communities to engage in experiential learning activities, investigate their experience, and return to the experiential activities to test new strategies for cultivating equity and justice.

In this process, the physical and interpersonal experience is key. Practitioners do not rely solely on concepts, but look at how these directly manifest in their everyday behavior. When we intentionally put ourselves into a novel, even uncomfortable, scenario, the impulses and reactions that arise in us tell their own story. By relying on a shared experience for discussion, not only does our understanding of systems of

¹ William McNamara, as quoted by Walter J. Burghardt, “Contemplation: A Long, Loving Look at the Real,” *Church*, No. 5 (Winter 1989), 14-17.

oppression become more personal, but so does the means for social change.

Theater of the Oppressed is deeply effective, but by no means easy. When the subject is oppression, it can be unsettling to witness the patterns that emerge, even in innocent play. The sense of safety a community builds on common values can get shaken when we dive deeper into the implicit and harmful ways we leverage power in our interactions.

However, because these insights are realized through our body—our experiences and choices—so too are the possibilities for change.

At the Symposium, this was palpable in our game of Colombian Hypnosis. Here, two participants create an imaginary magnetic relationship between one partner's hand and the other's face. The rules are to maintain the distance between hand and face, resist talking, and take care of yourself. The game is simple, but we humans are not. It begins as a sometimes-fun and sometimes-wrought negotiation between partners about what to do, how to move, how to follow all three rules, or which ones to break. A stark picture emerges—a room full of hands in faces, moving them up, down, and all around, while a few pairs remain still, neither person moving at all.

We first discussed “leadership” in the game—whether any partner emerged as the leader, if they liked this role, if they felt responsible for their partner, what choices they made, and, of course,

how this relates to their real-world work. Next, we discussed “power”—whether any partner emerged as having the power in the relationship. We asked the same questions about “power” as we did about “leadership,” and the parallel between them quickly emerged. The energy in the room shifted as we reflected on the fine line we walk as leaders and the consequences that even well-meaning decisions can have on those with less agency.

It can be shocking for the fun of play to shift toward somber insight. However, for some in the room, the game had, from its beginning, been a somber reminder of an existing culture of power. The game does not create new social dynamics, but reveals those that already exist. We get to see them evidenced in ourselves and to communicate transparently about them.

This embodied approach to the “long, loving look at the real” invites us to practice compassion for ourselves and accountability to others. It allows us to have a community of witness in the process of personal transformation. And, if we can meet this challenge together, our bodies will learn and remember this new capacity, this new way of being in humility with one another, so that next time, we just might play a little differently.

Sarah Giffin is an experiential learning designer, Theater of the Oppressed practitioner, and community facilitator committed to the insightful power of play.

Christopher Robin: What's More Important than a Briefcase?

Debonee Morgan ('15)

As a child, our protagonist is asked by his friend, a “bear of very little brain,” Winnie the Pooh, “Where are we going, Christopher Robin?” This film is an answer to that question, set in Christopher’s adult life, as he begins to wonder if he’s ended up in the right spiritual location.

Christopher is in the business of baggage—that is, he is professionally in charge of a team that manufactures luggage. Times are hard, and cuts need to be made, so Christopher foregoes his trip to the country with his wife, Eve, and young daughter, Madeline, in order to work. He explains, “Dreams don’t come for free. You have to work for them. Nothing comes from nothing.” Eve reminds him, “This is life. This weekend is your life. Your life is happening now, right in front of you.”

Plot devices interrupt Christopher’s weekend of hard work and whisk him back into the magical world of his childhood, where he encounters his wisdom teachers in the form of stuffed animals, most notably Winnie the Pooh. As Christopher rants about his deadline, and the impossibility of a solution, Pooh quips, “They say nothing is impossible, but I do nothing every day.” Boarding a train, they lose Pooh’s red balloon while

maneuvering Christopher’s briefcase. Pooh asks, “Is the briefcase more important than a balloon?” Later, Pooh wonders why Madeline is not with Christopher and asks, “Does she have a briefcase too?”

We observe Christopher struggle with the value of “important papers” and the pace of productivity, while Pooh puts words to the things he observes and lets them go by. Pooh shares, “Sometimes, when I’m going somewhere, and I wait, a somewhere comes to me.”

Predictably, ultimately, Christopher’s important papers are taken by the wind and he is left empty-handed. All the work on the work doesn’t work. He is forced to let go. In the emptiness, a simple idea comes to him, and it is better than all the striving could have created.

Inviting Eve and Madeline to join him in a new rhythm, he affirms, “Doing nothing leads to the very best something!” Aligned again with the contemplative and whimsical world of intentional stillness and play, we end with Christopher sitting cross-legged and quiet under a single tree, remembering he has arrived at his destination. He and Pooh celebrate, “It’s today.” “My favorite day.”

Debonee Morgan ('15) is a psychotherapist, spiritual director, and film-lover living in Atlanta, Georgia.

ALUMNI AT “MR. GURDJIEFF, MEET MR. TEILHARD!” WISDOM SCHOOL

A baker’s dozen of spiritual wayfarers representing several Living School cohorts joined some sixty-plus students of Cynthia Bourgeault’s from across the continent over the autumn Triduum for a Wisdom School in West Virginia. Claymont, the estate of J. G. Bennett, was a most fitting setting to gather and practice centered presence and awakened “self-remembering” while co-creating an imaginal conversation between the ternary revelations of the twentieth-century visionaries G. I. Gurdjieff and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.



Pictured, back, left to right: Martha Kirkpatrick ('17), Angela Grace Radford ('18), David Andrews ('18), Karla Oakley ('15), Andrew Breitenberg ('17), Endel Kallas ('15); front, left to right: Scott Brubaker-Zehr ('18), Beth Wigen ('18), Holly Roach-Knight ('15), Ann Eller ('17), Martha Eskew ('21), Heather Vesey ('17).

HOLLY ROACH-KNIGHT ('15)

Holly received an MA in Contemplative Education at Naropa University in July 2019 and graduated with an MA in Social Justice and Community Organizing from Prescott College in December 2019.

READING RECOMMENDATION

from **Mark Longhurst ('15)** and **CAC staff member Vanessa Guerin:**

Mary Evelyn Tucker, Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at Yale University, has co-authored a book on Thomas Berry, titled *Thomas Berry: A Biography*. From the book’s website:

Thomas Berry (1914–2009) was one of the twentieth century’s most prescient and profound thinkers. As a cultural historian, he sought a broader perspective on humanity’s relationship to the Earth in order to respond to the ecological and social challenges of our time. The first biography of Berry, this book illuminates his remarkable vision and its continuing relevance for achieving transformative social change and environmental renewal.

MINNESOTA POLICE IN LIGHTS ON PROGRAM GIVE OUT REPAIR VOUCHERS INSTEAD OF TICKETS

The Lights On program, under leadership from alums **Don Samuels ('18)** and **Mike McCloskey ('17)**, was inspired by the shooting death of Philando Castile, who had been pulled over for a broken headlight. He was a black young man who had been stopped by police 49 times in 13 years. “We wanted to help heal the distrust, tension, anger, and anxiety and give relief to low-income drivers who drive older cars. So now, when a driver is pulled over by a cop in any of over 60 participating Minnesota cities or by state troopers, instead of a ticket, they are given a voucher to get the headlight fixed for free at any of 50 participating auto repair shops in the state.” Cops are pleased to finally be bearers of good news, especially to low-income drivers. They get handshakes, hugs, and requests for selfies. It’s a new, peaceful tool for their weapon-skewed tool belt. Drivers are thrilled to be helped instead of frightened or punished. Auto shops are admired for participating in such a positive program and they get new, repeat customers. It is a restorative encounter, at an emotional moment,

with lingering transformative effects. Lights On received the 2019 Minnesota Council of Nonprofits Mission Award for Innovation. At the ceremony, a leader in the city of Rochester, which had implemented Lights On, excitedly explained how Lights On had inspired the city to not tow away disabled cars belonging to low-income people. Instead, local mechanics now offer repairs at a significant discount. “We hope the spirit of restoration will invade many areas of violation and tame our punitive instincts.”

ALUMNI GATHERING AND CONSPIRE 2020

May 14-17, 2020

We're looking forward to being with our entire Living School faculty—Cynthia Bourgeault, James Finley, Barbara Holmes, Brian McLaren, and Richard Rohr—and many Living School alumni this spring. Learn more about Thursday's event and the capstone CONSPIRE conference at cac.org/conspire-2020/living-school-alumni-gathering-2020/.

RACE AND THE COSMOS

Join us in celebrating a new edition of Living School faculty member Barbara Holmes' book *Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently!* CAC is honored to bring this out-of-print book back into publication. Barbara's message is even more important today, as she offers a unifying and healing vision for our lives together based on ethics, physics, and cosmology. Coming January 28 to store.cac.org.

ONLINE COURSES

Learn more about CAC's courses and register at cac.org/online-ed. (No application required; financial assistance is available.)

The Franciscan Way: Beyond the Bird Bath

with Richard Rohr

February 5–March 24, 2020

(Registration closes January 29.)

Immortal Diamond: A Study in Search of the True Self

with Richard Rohr

February 19–April 28, 2020

(Registration closes February 12.)

Introductory Wisdom School

with Cynthia Bourgeault

March 4–June 9, 2020

(Registration closes February 26.)

Breathing Under Water: A Spiritual Study of the Twelve Steps

with Richard Rohr

March 25–May 19, 2020

(Registration opens January 15.)

Mary Magdalene: Apostle to Our Own Times

with Cynthia Bourgeault

April 8–June 2, 2020

(Registration opens January 15.)

Interior Castle

with James Finley and Mirabai Starr

April 22–June 16, 2020

(Registration opens February 3.)

No Spring Alumni Quarterly

As Mark described in the opening email, there won't be an Alumni Quarterly this spring. The hiatus will allow us to prepare for the Alumni Gathering and CONSPIRE 2020. This will be a special opportunity to not only reconnect with faculty and each other, but to reflect on contemplative life beyond the Living School experience. We hope you can make it! If you can't be with us in person, we invite you to join the CONSPIRE 2020 webcast, May 15-17 (or watch later).

A Special Thanks

To artist **Julie Ann Stevens ('15)** for sharing her paintings with the alumni community, to **Fr. Richard Rohr** for his teaching on contemplative solidarity, to **Darleen Ortega ('19)** for helping alumni glimpse what it means to center the margins, to **Paul Thompson** for technical support, to **Sarah Giffin** for teaching alumni about embodied solidarity, to **Shirin McArthur** for her keen editing, and to the **CAC Team** that works on the Quarterly: Joelle Chase, Nicholas Kramer, and Izzy Spitz.

Stay Connected

