

# THE MENDICANT

## CONSPIRE 2021

A GRATEFUL LOOK BACK:

REFLECTIONS ON  
SACRED TIME, SACRED SPACE

Greetings, CAC Community!

As a trusted partner of the Center for Action and Contemplation, you have made a personal and/or financial contribution to support this *community of shared values*. You see the deep need for integrating both action and contemplation to build a more loving, just, and connected world, and we are grateful that you have joined us in this expanding community.

One of our primary goals for *the Mendicant* in 2022 is to share CAC's inner workings and intentions. With this transparency, we hope to give you an insider view into how we envision manifesting our collective mission in the world.

Last year, *the Mendicant* focused primarily on the development of CAC's comprehensive financial philosophy.

This year, we are expanding the scope to include other areas where your support is making key programmatic and creative enhancements possible. We begin in this issue with some behind-the-scenes perspectives on one of the most ambitious projects CAC has yet undertaken—our CONSPIRE 2021 conference.

We hope many of you had the opportunity to join the virtual conference. If you were unable to do so, this issue of *the Mendicant* will give you some insight into the dynamic, interactive event, as an example of what lies ahead.

Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership.

In gratitude,

Ben Keeseey

*Director of Development and Partnerships*



## A RETREAT-STYLE ONLINE EXPERIENCE

**W**e all swallowed deeply when the event team announced that CONSPIRE 2021 would be a virtual event. But we quickly realized that it might be an opportunity to break a tension we've always felt: How do we create an intimate experience for our teachers and community that feels like a small desert retreat, but do so at scale for thousands of people? We decided to stop worrying about the perceived downsides of not gathering in person, and instead turned our minds (and our hearts) toward the possibilities of breathing together from all corners of the globe.

If you've visited the courtyard on the CAC grounds and stood under the gnarled branches of the old cottonwood tree, you know it's a sacred space, somehow both separate from and connected to the river valley in which it sits. For CONSPIRE 2021, we were able to share this sacred space with over 5,000 of you. Our presenters shared their own sacred spaces, teaching from their gardens and offices across the country. Many of you submitted videos of your own sacred spaces that we edited together with music, like a moving map of the portals to our shared experience—our connection to each other and to the divine.

I hope all participants left CONSPIRE 2021 feeling as full and rested as if we were all on retreat together,



without ever having to worry about whether we'd get a good view of Richard from the back row.

I'm honored to have been a part of it.

NICHOLAS KRAMER is the Creative and Multimedia Director at the CAC. He is passionate about helping artists and creators discover life rhythms and practices that support health, productivity, and more meaningful work. He's grateful to work alongside such a talented, thoughtful, and big-hearted team.

### **the Mendicant**

A publication of the Center for Action  
and Contemplation

**Managing Editor:** Vanessa Guerin  
**Development Editor:** Ben Keesey

**Associate Editor:** Shirin McArthur  
**Designer:** Nelson Kane  
**Landscape Photography:** Jenna Keiper

# SISTER MOON AND OTHER IMAGES



To provide CONSPIRE 2021 with thoughtful, grounded imagery, the creative team and I decided to start from scratch. Working with video as our primary medium, we focused on the grounds of the CAC and the surrounding Albuquerque area. We integrated the conference byline “me, us, the world” into our choice of lenses and shots, representing “me” with close-up shots and macro lenses, “us” with medium shots and 50mm lenses, and “the world” with wide shots and wide lenses. Bringing the concept of contemplation into our work, we often secured our cameras on tripods and recorded for a still and silent minute. Many of these clips became the bases of our imagery for the CONSPIRE conference and surrounding communications.

Waiting for the sunrise (and best light for filming) one predawn morning, we realized the moon was also rising: a perfect crescent, sharp against the dark sky. We hurried out of our car so we could capture Sister Moon before she disappeared into the coming sun. Fumbling with tripods, 300mm lenses, and adaptors, we found focus and then settled into silence. We watched the moon’s orbit through the rectangle of our camera sensor. From left to right she floated by, serene, inviting us to breathe. (This clip, and other sunrise material, appeared in the welcome video for day two

of the CONSPIRE conference.) What a joy to gather and share these images!

JENNA KEIPER is an interdisciplinary artist and storyteller who creates from the intersection of live performance, digital media, and visual anthropology. After a first career in professional dance and earning a master’s degree in Anthropology and Media Studies, Jenna now finds herself creating full-time for the Center for Action and Contemplation.



On my first day working at CAC, Executive Director Michael Poffenberger took me aside and shared, with great care and focus, the importance of the upcoming CONSPIRE 2020 conference—the capstone of a series of CONSPIRE events. He emphasized the attention he wanted me to bring to its planning efforts, which were well underway at the time of my arrival.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CONSPIRE was postponed until the Fall of 2021. When we determined that the conference would be virtual, the level of intensity grew exponentially. Questions arose: “Can we create a virtual CONSPIRE experience worthy of all the live events that preceded it?” As the executive sponsor for this event, it was a daunting task, but one I was excited to take on for the organization.

During production week, CAC’s campus was peppered with staff, together with long-time production partners and their crew members, whom I hired to bring this virtual experience to life. It was the first time in over a year of planning that I felt we could achieve the level of experience Michael envisioned for this final CONSPIRE event the first time we spoke.

During all the hustle and bustle of that week, the most memorable moment for me was when Fr. Richard and I sat

observing this production organism that inhabited our typically quiet and serene campus. I hoped beyond anything else that, through this event, he felt the love and care for his work demonstrated by all of us who are impacted by his teaching legacy.

TISHA FORD is a dancer who supports the creation of pathways for personal transformation as Managing Director of Production and Outreach at the CAC. She has danced the lead in multiple ballets, led a diversity of procurement initiative for the Super Bowl, overseen the Art of Dying Institute, and is a certified yoga instructor and life coach.



## AN EVENT, A LEGACY



# The Future of Our Contemplative Movement

As readers of *the Mendicant* know, we are drawing close to the time when our founder, Fr. Richard, will fully release his role at the center of our mission here at CAC. During the 2021 CONSPIRE conference, we started a direct conversation with our broader community about this transition—what that change might look like, and what it will ask from each of us.

In a series of videos, Fr. Richard shared the core of his hopes for CAC: that we will continue to be faithful to the task of sharing contemplative wisdom and be animators and multipliers for a broader movement. He emphasized that the fruits of our work won't be in anything we say or do as an organization, but in the "whole humans" we help form and support, who have further impact in our world. He reflected on the freedom that comes when we learn to truly see and accept ourselves and each other through the contemplative path.

In our concluding CONSPIRE session, core faculty member Brian McLaren and I talked together about how CAC is building on Fr. Richard's vision and hopes. Over the past five years, with Fr. Richard's guidance and support, we

documented his theology, developed a strategy for serving our mission and contemplative movement, and built new partnerships with successor teachers on the CAC faculty. Now, as we walk with Fr. Richard in this phase of letting go, there are two things we need from our community:

- ♦ Your prayers and continued support as Fr. Richard steps back from being an active presence at CAC, and we continue to diversify our teachers and programs.
- ♦ Your participation in building this contemplative movement. Fr. Richard has often shared that the gift he appreciates most is when others join him in living the message.

MICHAEL POFFENBERGER has served as the CAC's executive director since 2014. He sees the Center as uniquely positioned to support inner work for those seeking to build a more just and humane world, and guides CAC's mission with vulnerability and humility—another tension to hold in a world often preoccupied with hoarding power.

## REFLECTIONS ON CONSPIRE

What a gift! It was so refreshing to attend an event that clearly echoed CAC's values, and I was struck by the authenticity and vulnerability of the speakers and participants. From the opening meditation to the final summary, I felt stretched, challenged, awakened, loved, and enriched.

Hard personal stories, ranging from abusive upbringings to a destroyed church building, were shared as pathways to healing, and they opened my heart to hear. Pain was not ignored but was shown to be a pathway to transformation, challenging me to allow for the same.

Many axial moments occurred during the conference, and many have occurred since. As I ponder God presencing Godself in infinite love in me, I am filled with a sense of being enough, and I feel less need to strive. My heart is learning to not skip over the deep and often painful places where God is at work, but rather to allow my hurt to be dissolved by love.

The humility displayed in the outtakes and in Michael Poffenberger's open sharing of the evolving future of CAC in a post-Fr. Richard world was refreshing in its vulnerability, and it beautifully reflected the vision of CAC. The scholarship



program and the funding of meals for the local homeless community were living expressions of CAC's commitment to loving action.

I walk on with a heart that is enlarged and searching, becoming more comfortable with not striving, but with living into the person that God created me to be.

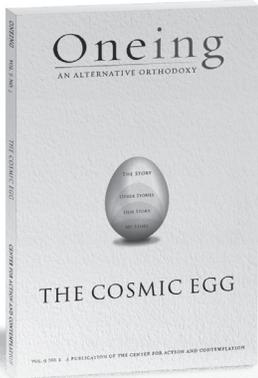
TONY BARTEL is the co-founder of TLOT Foundation, where he serves with his wife to bring healing to the hurting in North Texas. He is the former Chief Operating Officer of GameStop corporation.



Center for  
Action and  
Contemplation

PO Box 12464 • Albuquerque, NM 87195  
cac.org

NON-PROFIT  
ORGANIZATION  
U.S. POSTAGE **PAID**  
ALBUQUERQUE, NM  
PERMIT NO. 568



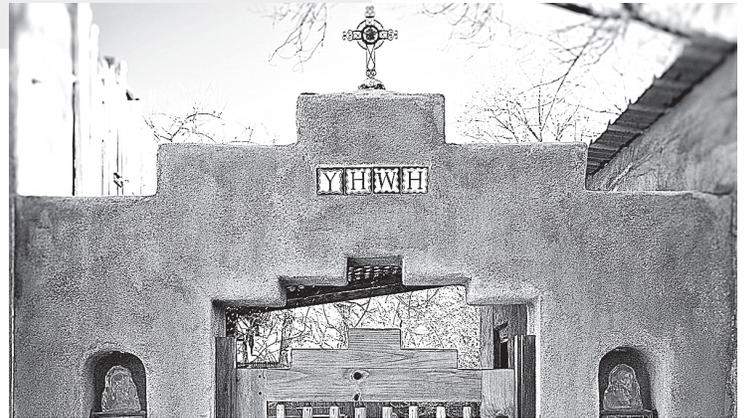
***Now available!***

Featuring contributions  
by gifted CAC Living  
School participants.

To order, visit <https://store.cac.org/>

## SUPPORT THE WORK

The Center for Action and Contemplation is a nonprofit educational organization. Please consider supporting our work by donating securely online at [cac.org/support-cac](https://cac.org/support-cac) or by sending a check, payable to CAC, to PO Box 12464, Albuquerque, NM 87195. We also invite you to remember CAC in your estate plan. For more information about making a charitable contribution, including stock transfers and bequests, please email [development@cac.org](mailto:development@cac.org).



## CONNECT WITH CAC

- Visit us online at [cac.org](https://cac.org) to learn more about CAC's educational programs and resources
- Sign up to receive monthly news and daily or weekly meditations by email: [cac.org/sign-up](https://cac.org/sign-up)
- Follow @CACRadicalGrace on Twitter and Instagram and "Like" Center for Action and Contemplation on Facebook
- Write to us at [support@cac.org](mailto:support@cac.org) or CAC, PO Box 12464, Albuquerque, NM 87195