



**THE CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITY**
MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

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North American Newsletter

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Sacred Fire



Holy Week is a celebration of Christ's passion. We celebrate Christ Jesus entering Jerusalem, entering the crucible — the crucible of Holy Fire that will burn away everything not essential. Even Christ's closest disciples had to fall away, even His own body; His own life had to burn away on the cross.

As human souls who would follow Him, *we too are called to burn*, to burn in a sacred fire. This is why we hear in our Holy Week epistle, “Oh Man, Burning is the place of your heart.” This purifying fire allows us to follow Him. We are called to burn away our blame towards others, our self-centeredness, to burn away our worldly fears, our self-doubts. We are called to burn away everything that keeps us separated from Christ.

When everything is burned away, what will remain in us? What is the only thing that cannot be burned? *Only flame cannot be burned away by flame*. This is why we pray in our offering, in our souls “be born the fire of love...” for our hearts are meant to become a flame. We were born to be on fire — to flame with enthusiasm when all around us there is indifference; to flame with love for God when all around us there are only empty strip malls; to flame with love for human beings when hate and fear abound; to carry the flame out into the world, into politics and activism, into each and every thing we encounter — work, home and grocery store. For the fire of God’s love is the only reality. Everything else is shadow.

May the flame of love burn away what is not needed in our souls. May the flame of love be the only thing left in our hearts.

Rev. Jonah Evans

The Paasiaiskokko (Finnish for “Easter Fire”). Image from Wikimedia Commons.

How Do We Pray?

The question arises: how does one go about praying? When asked by His disciples, Christ gave us what we call the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6: 9–13). This prayer is daily nourishment for our souls and spirits. Christ is an eternal being, and whatever He did on earth resounds eternally. So, in praying the Lord's Prayer, one is praying His words along with Him. We are praying along with His eternally resounding prayer to the Heavenly Father of us all, He who carries us all and brings the chaos of world karma into some degree of order.

Basically, prayer is a conversation with divine beings. In our day and age, the way we are constituted, this means that we do so mainly by offering them our heart-warmed thoughts. Conversation implies that we also need to be inwardly quiet, to listen and to hear what the beings of the divine world may want to inspire us with. This inspiration may come to us as a specific thought, or as a feeling of encouragement, or a stimulus about a direction in which to act or go. These inspirations come as grace; we may not always hear them right away. Sometimes they come after a few days, often when we have just awakened from sleep. They arrive as “whispers” because the divine has great respect for our free will, for our freedom of choice. Therefore, they do not overwhelm or “shout” at us.

With regard to our everyday, minute-by-minute needs, we can learn to maintain a prayerful conversation with our own guardian angel. We each have a guardian angel who never sleeps and never leaves us. Those who see angels claim that our angel is always with us, looking at us with infinite love and compassion, encouraging us toward hope and helpfulness, making suggestions.* At night, we are in active conversation with our angel when we are asleep. During the day, whether we converse with our angel is up to us. Angels, especially our guardian angels, don't want to be worshipped; they want to collaborate with us. Hence the appropriateness of the more conversational style with them over the course of the day.

One author, Anne Lamott,** says that prayers can be characterized as three types: Help, Thanks, or Wow.

Wow is, of course, open-hearted reverence, noticing and willing to be awed by the everyday amazing miracles with which we are surrounded (and mostly don't notice). It requires us to open and broaden our attention, to soften our hearts, and to begin to notice what our angel is trying to point out to us.

Thanks can be for inspirations, for miracles noticed, for beauty, for help received. There are infinite things for which to be grateful!

Help means asking for strength, clarity, patience, that is, for inner qualities for ourselves or for others. It is best to avoid asking for a specific thing. The divine world is not a cosmic vending machine! It is also best not to ask for a specific outcome; leave outcomes up to God and the angels, who know better than we do what we (and world karma) really need. We can legitimately ask for “peace of heart, hopeful thinking, patient strength of will; for health of body, harmony of soul, clarity of spirit.”***

Counterintuitively, if one is feeling overwhelmed, depressed or anxious, perhaps it is best to start with cultivating thoughts of thanks and offering them to the angels, to God, even gratitude to the elemental beings (who know where you mislaid your keys!). The mystic Meister Eckhart said, “If the only prayer you ever said was ‘Thank you,’ it would suffice.” With sufficient practice of thanks, one may come to notice that one is neither alone nor isolated, nor helpless. One recognizes that one doesn’t have to do everything all by oneself. The angels are happy to help infuse us with strength if we ask, and in fact, have been trying to do so all along. I am stressing working with the angels here since this is the level on which our ordinary thoughts of the moment can be cultivated toward prayer and in conversation with them.

In contrast to the angels, with whom we can collaborate, God and His Son we can rightfully worship. We can, of course, cultivate the same kinds of prayers toward God and His Son. But with them, one needs to be prepared first to bring an offering — the love of one’s heart, purity of thought, worshipful devotion of will. In cultivating the Lord’s Prayer in one’s daily practice, one looks to the past, offering gratitude for past destiny guidance, and toward the future with trust in their benevolent powers. In this mood of gratitude and trust, one can pray the Lord’s Prayer, with Him, contemplatively.

The Act of Consecration is the pattern for this. After bringing the offerings of devoted will, feeling at one with Christ’s love, and with healthy thoughts, we pray the Lord’s Prayer with Him. In praying the Lord’s Prayer at home as a daily practice, one tries to think and mean every word, coming from the heart. The danger, of course, is that the words becomes rote. So one needs to do a self-check from time to time, to avoid just babbling the words. The Lord’s Prayer is daily nourishment, food for the soul and spirit, and food for the angels, in the spirit of “Thy will be done.”

Rev. Cynthia Hindes

*See *Angels in My Hair*, and other books by Lorna Byrne

** *Help Thanks Wow*, Anne Lamott

****Meditative Prayers for Today*, Adam Bittleston



Fresco of Jesus Christ praying in the Garden of Gethsemane; Saint Michael Church in Veringedorf ,Germany.
Image from Wikimedia Commons.

At the Rising of the Sun

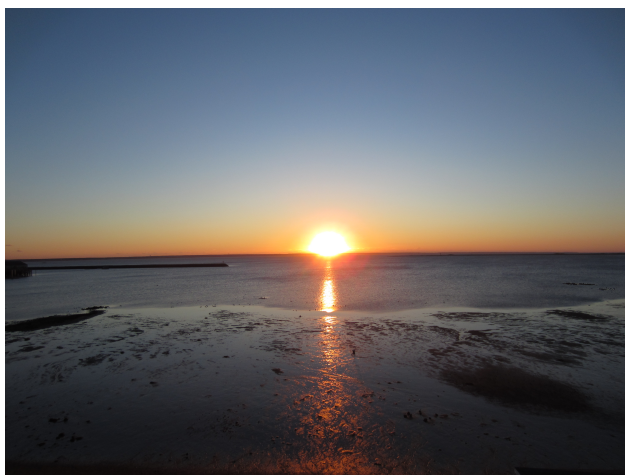
What a jubilation arises with the morning Sun! From the North to the South, in nearly all places of the world, the song of joy, the song of life arises with the sound of the waking birds – proclaiming the coming of the new day.

This joyful outpouring moves ahead of the first rays of the rising Sun ever further from the East to the West, around the entire planet. Thus the Earth herself sings the elated hymn of gratitude to the emerging new day, transforming the darkness and silence of the night.

Early in the morning of the First day of the week, the women, filled with sadness and confusion, went to the tomb and found it empty. “See, there where you laid him there is only an empty space,” says the young man in white robes, an angel, who as the first one proclaims the Gospel – the *Evangel* – the Message of the Angels – to human beings of the Earth. For on this Sunday, on the first day of the New Creation, the Spiritual Sun rises from the grave of the Earth and goes ahead of His creation. From the darkness of the limitations of the physical world, He goes ahead of us to Galilee – to the land of Life, where we will see Him – as he has promised His disciples.

And just as it is the task of the birds to proclaim the glory of the rising Sun, so now we human beings receive a task which we are to fulfill on our way to Galilee: “Go in all the world and proclaim the Word, which sounds from the Sphere of the Angels to the Earth with all her creatures.”

What is this Word, which shall *spirit-wakened issue from our mouth*, in the darkness of the world?



It says that we, that the entire creation *have future*, even if we are not able to see it with our eyes, which originate in the light of the physical Sun. The Risen One goes in the Spirit before us, permeating the darkness of the physical world. It is out of the substance of His Warmth, of His Love, that we can grow new eyes, with which we will be able to see Him in Galilee – in the sphere of the germinating Life forces.

After all, “It is only with the **heart** that **one can see** rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.” *

Rev. Rafal Nowack

* From *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

A Letter to Parents Describing the Meaning of the Sunday Service for Children

Dear Parents,

Children are like grapevines. The roots of grapevines go deeper into the earth in relation to its height than any other plant. Regularly 60 to 75 feet, some have been found as deep as 150 feet. A child's roots in a spiritual sense are the karmic roots that extend back in time over thousands and thousands of years. In this sense, these little ones are just like us only we are 20 to 60 years ahead of them in this life time. These roots guarantee that the children have gifts that have yet to unfold, have friends and others who have yet to meet them. They all have a rich, unique destiny awaiting them.

Like all plants, grapevines need sunlight in to have the energy to transform that part of the earth in which they grow, in order eventually to become fruitful. The fruit of the vine is very special, containing as it does so much iron, which is so necessary for human presence of mind and energy. Anemia can keep a person from fulfilling his or her destiny. One is just too tired to face it. A similar fate is caused by a lack of "spiritual iron." Then we are in danger of "being lived" instead of living our own life. "Spiritual anemia" is an ongoing illness of our time.

As adults, we are free to lift ourselves up to the spirit at any time, and in many ways: prayer and meditation, both personal and in communion with others, nourishes us in this deep way strengthening us for life. But children do not have this freedom; they are dependent upon their parents.

Without the support of wooden stakes the grapevine lies on the ground; so also its fruit. Grape stakes expose the vine's leaves to the sun light. Children also need to be exposed to the light, spiritual light. Religious instruction and the Sunday Service for Children lift children up into the realm of the spirit on a regular basis giving them an orientation and grounding for life's big questions: Work, Love, Responsibility, Sacrifice, Meaning itself. Especially between 6 and 14 children can receive something that is later metamorphosed into a kind of "spiritual spine" that will support them especially during life's most difficult times. Whether or not they choose as adults to practice their religion in a church with others they will have been equipped with a deep abiding faith that we are all here on earth for a reason.

Dear parents, think of your children's lives in 15, 20, 30, 40, or even 50 years from now. Imagine their marriages, their work careers; their children, the political and social world they will be living in when they are grown and their destinies have unfolded. The most important gift we can give our children now is to share our own faith with them. When they see what we do, how we pray, how we worship God we are giving them the gift of faith.

Sincerely,

Rev. Jim Hinds

Reflections on the Sacrament of Confirmation

Parents who are farmers, poets, artists, teachers, and technology experts... parents from a variety of backgrounds, religions, and world views — all come, bringing their children, who are becoming young adults, to be confirmed in The Christian Community.

The Confirmation is always a deeply touching sacrament to witness. These young people come with questions:

“Why is there evil?”

“What was here before the earth was created?”

“Where do you go when you die?”

They have been invited to explore and live with their questions and have not been served “ready made” answers. They have been blessed and consecrated to continue their life’s journey.

On May 7th in Washington DC, the Youth Group came to sing for the Confirmation, lending their support and beautiful music to the festive occasion. Rev. Gisela Wielki spoke of heart forces, and how the heart radiates far beyond where it is in your chest to where it sends its love.

Later, the children were presented with clown noses in memory of Richard Dancey, who always recommended that the young people remember their sense of humor! There was poetry and violin music and a feeling of accomplishment in the group of Confirmands.

I am deeply grateful to have been able to celebrate a Confirmation in Hillsdale, NY and to lead a group here in Washington DC. The young people bring their delicate, burgeoning life to the altar for blessing and for a firm foundation. No one knows where their lives will lead them but wherever they go, they will always find kindred spirits and a feeling of “home” in The Christian Community worldwide. We send them out into life with loving support.

Rev. Carol Kelly



Rev. Carol Kelly and Rev. Gisela Wielki with Confirmands in Washington DC

The Disciples and their Struggle with Fear

Inspired by John 18: 12-27

A recurring theme in the gospel narratives of the events around holy week and Easter is the presence of fear, implicit or explicit. It arises to the surface as soon as Jesus sets himself against the established powers, first with his discourses as he enters Jerusalem, then with his deeds and words of defiance of the existing temple culture on Monday and Tuesday of Holy Week. We can have a sense of the small inner circle of the disciples gathered closely about him as the Passover festival approached, and we can see how they scattered at the moment of the crisis. Even afterwards, when they gathered together, they did so behind locked doors, as it is said, for fear of the Jews. Likewise, we hear of Joseph of Arimathea, that he was a disciple in secret out of the same fear. And of the disciples who scattered at the arrest of Jesus, we know best the story of Peter, who followed at a distance but then found that he had fulfilled the prophecy laid upon him: that before the cock crowed, he would deny Jesus three times.

In the midst of this, we may ask ourselves — was there no one among the disciples who could during that time say: yes, I am one of his disciples? The answer is not written in the gospels, but is clear for anyone who will take the time to ponder the situation. The one who said yes was Judas Iscariot, who had to confess his discipleship in order to betray him. And we must say of him that at least from his own point of view he was speaking the truth. Every mention of Judas in the gospels emphasizes that he was one of the twelve, that is, one of the inner circle of the disciples. The kiss of Judas has become proverbial as the ultimate gesture of treachery; perhaps one day we will recognize how even in that moment of betrayal, Judas loved Jesus.

But a central event following the arrest in the garden is the story of Simon Peter. It is one of the few events which all four of the gospel writers considered important enough to include as part of the glad tidings that they were proclaiming. And this brings us to contemplate the one who was convinced that he could and would follow Jesus to the end, only to fall away in a manner more noteworthy than all the others.

Peter, or Simon the son of John, had been with his brother Andrew a disciple of John the Baptist. They were among those who left the circle to follow Jesus. There was a period during which they returned to their work as fishermen, and then the second calling. Twice Jesus gave him the name Peter, which means a rock — not just a stone, but the bedrock which we imagine as immutable. But from what we hear of him — and that is more than of anyone else in the Gospels but Jesus himself — we would be hard put to see that quality in him. He is the one who again and again strives for the highest, only to fall. The most characteristic event is his confession: You are the Christ, which is followed directly by his refusal to accept the world destiny which the Christ then announced to the circle of the twelve. And of course, he is also the last to be rebuked by the Christ for offering resistance to those who came to arrest him. In the stories about him we would perhaps to begin with think of something much less stable than a rock.

What he does have is a developing self-knowledge — there as a potential from early on and brought to a new level in the events around the death and the resurrection. And so it is that in his denials we may begin to hear something other than only fear.

In our service we hear reference to “all true Christians who are born.” Who are they? The moment I say of myself that I am a true Christian, I and anyone listening to me can with

justification say that I am a liar. So we can imagine Peter at that moment, beginning to realize that the task and the being of the Christ was something totally different from his imagination, faced with the question: am I one of his disciples? And then truthfully, based on his awakening self-knowledge, he must answer: I am not — words used by his former leader, John the Baptist. Three times he answers, and then hears the cock crowing. In fairy tales the cock crowing is often a picture for the awaking ego.

It is not possible to think of Peter without thinking of his enthusiasm. The initial enthusiasm is like a flame which can shine brightly, but will burn out all too easily if it does not get from the kindling wood into the logs on the fireplace. Out of the moment of self-knowledge in the courtyard of the high priest, we may see how the lasting enthusiasm is finally kindled, such that Peter can finally hear and accept from the Risen Christ the words: Follow me.

Rev. J. Michael Brewer

Ascension as the Marriage of Heaven and Earth

In a good partnership between two human beings, such as a marriage, each brings who they are as a gift to the other. What each one has, flows to the other, changing them, lifting them. And the union of the two creates something more than just the sum of one and one.

One can also experience Ascension in this way. Ascension can be seen as the marriage of Heaven and Earth.

The highest of Heavenly beings came down to Earth and incarnated in the being of Jesus of Nazareth. He lived and loved, and felt the joy and sorrow of being human. This Heavenly being penetrated all the way down into the physical, even unto death.

Then came the resurrection, and Christ began the process of raising the physical, the process of transfiguring the Earthly into the Heavenly. He appeared as the Risen One. He taught his disciples for 40 days, helping them to transform into true leaders of humanity. Then at Ascension, Christ rose into the clouds before them, lifting all that was physical towards the spiritual — lifting the Earthly up to the Heavenly.

We can have an experience of these uplifting forces at this time of year whenever we walk outside. All of nature turns upward towards the warmth of the sun. Everything seems to call to you: Look out, look up! The blue sky, the leaves unfurling on the trees, the blossoms... they are irresistible. One cannot feel down, or inward. One steps lightly, stands taller, and feels the joy of life.

At Ascension, our souls are lifted. Our souls are opened. We prepare, like the disciples, for the gift of the holy spirit that comes at Pentecost. Heaven and Earth are united again, and we find that both are our true homes. And what is created is more than just the sum of one and one.

Rev. Lisa Hildreth

Remembering Rev. Franziska Steinrueck

February 15, 1930 - April 29, 2017

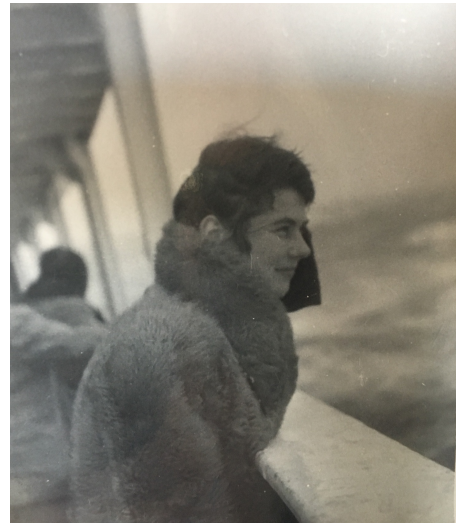
Franziska Steinrueck was born on February 15, 1930 near Stuttgart, Germany. She received her priest ordination on March 1, 1985. After an initial assignment in Essen, Germany, she served our Christian Community congregation in Devon, PA along with Richard Dancey. Though Franziska retired in 2004, she continued to be active in celebrating the Sacraments until shortly before her stroke in 2013. She moved to her daughter Sophia's house in Wisconsin on St. John's Day, June 24, 2013, and lived there until her passing on April 29, 2017.

After high school Franziska began her study in Chemistry. But after three months she found it too dry and switched to law with a rather unusual topic: Medieval church law. After receiving her law degree she never practiced it. But maybe the subject matter was not at all so strange when one considers that she felt a deep affinity to the Romanesque period, with its flourishing of the monastic life. Franziska loved to visit the medieval monasteries of Europe. Such monk cells at the time were sparsely furnished, with belongings neatly ordered and emotions that didn't spill beyond its walls.

After the loss of her husband to cancer, and having completed the raising of four children alone, Franziska chose to pursue the training towards priesthood in 1980 at age 50. On March 1, 1985 she was ordained. These five years in between were a time of study and practical experience, punctured by periods of self-doubt.

Modest and always true to herself and her capacities, she carried out the task. There was no display of outer self-certainty. On the contrary, in the early years after her ordination she went about her work very cautiously. The people in the congregation appreciated her honest and sincere growing into the task. In her modest and ordered dwelling, in her soul care, the monk came into the fore. She could stand alone. Her strength was her quiet, noble earnestness underneath which lay hidden a wonderful sense of humor and playfulness. Sensitive and quietly self-assured, she took an interest, made room and created a space for the other person, and was a balancing force in group-settings. If the strong will, which she already displayed as a child, could be insisting at times, as a priest Franziska proved very able to submit her own strong will to a higher power.

She was not necessarily the original, creative thinker or proclaimer. At our synods, where she rarely spoke, she was this listening ear, like a will turned inward, into the activity of listening. But when she did speak, it had a gentle strength. And when she said to a distressed colleague once:



“everything will be alright,” the few words of her calm assurance were so powerful that the colleague to her own astonishment felt deeply reassured.

After retirement Franziska continued to help out in the congregation as much as her strength allowed. March 15, 2013, 83 years old, she had a stroke, which brought her to the threshold and from which she turned back with medical assistance. She could push against her physical boundaries, something she had practiced when mountaineering with her father in the Swiss Alps.

A few weeks before her death she said to one of her children: “Meine Arbeit ist ganz fertig” (My work is all done now). Little did she or anyone else know what astonishing work lay still ahead. After no longer eating Franziska also took no more water for sixteen days. What her human spirit still wrestled from the body in those last days became perhaps immediate sustenance for a new life in the world of spirit as the seed does for the new growth here on earth.

Rev. Gisela Wielki

Photos of Franziska: As a young woman arriving here on the boat; As a priest and grandma.

Another Way You can Help By Bruce Chamberlin on Behalf of the Regional Board

There are some needs that require one-time funding: a leaky roof, a youth trip to Europe, purchasing a new altar painting. And then there are those needs that recur year after year, for which awareness continually needs to be raised. One such need is the financial support for priests who want to send their children to Waldorf or other private schools.

We on the Regional Board feel that it is simply not viable to expect individual congregations to shoulder this burden alone. We are therefore asking individuals in all congregations to donate money for this purpose, because, above all, it creates the palpable feeling among young priest families that it is possible to give one’s life to the priesthood and raise a family *at the same time*. We feel this could over time be a great help towards calming fears in other young people who may be considering the priesthood, but who shy away because of “practical” realities.

We are happy to announce that last year \$9000 was generously given towards this fund. We are grateful to the congregations and individuals who contributed. These funds have helped three priests to send their young children to Waldorf schools, and they also send their deep gratitude.

Please contribute to this fund, so that we can offer this opportunity to children next year, as well. You can do so by sending a check made out to The Christian Community Central Fund (with “Priest child education” in the memo line) to:

Melissa Kay
906 Divisadero Street
San Francisco, CA 94115

Thank you!

Remembering Rev. Richard Dancey: an Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost Imagination

December 28, 1945 — February 14, 2017

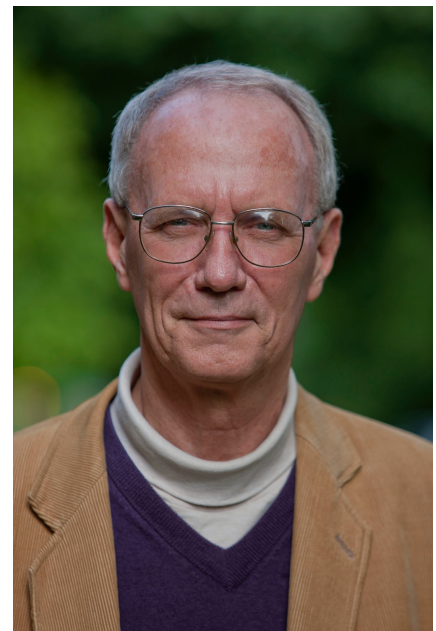
On Easter morning, the youth at the tomb says to the women: “He is not here... He goes before you into Galilee.” On some deep level, youth know where they have to go to find and serve the future, but unless what they know is raised into their full consciousness and unless they are helped to understand what they know deep down, this knowledge cannot mature and find expression in deeds. Richard was a master in helping the young to understand what on a deeper level they already knew. He spoke to their moral intuition, and they loved him for it.

Ascension. The Risen Christ ascends with arms spread wide, looking back at the earth with an all assuring, all-embracing love. The love that people felt in Richard’s pastoral care had something of this gesture: “I will always be with you.” While someone may say with an affirmative gesture to someone in need: “I will stand by you,” Richard’s gesture was: “I will walk with you.”

What a *Pentecostal* being he was in his very walking, always as if leaning into the wind, moving headlong into the future. One who had risen to “confess unto” like the disciples did, when the flame of the spirit came to rest on their heads — like one who wished for a baptism with fire. He also had something of a John the Baptist: A real preacher who had it in him to go out into the wilderness, filled with a concern for the signs of the times, a proclaimer of the original word. He was an activist.

“I have come to cast a fire on the earth. How much I wish it were already burning. I long to be baptized with a fire.” It is the baptism into death. Richard had something of this fire burning within him.

Rev. Gisela Wielki



New Developments at and Around the Seminary

As we write this, we are preparing to travel with a group of 13 seminary students and teachers to the international Whitsun conference of The Christian Community in the Netherlands. This experience gives us a unique opportunity to meet students and teachers of the seminaries in Hamburg and Stuttgart, to connect with hundreds of members of The Christian Community from all over the world, and to witness at the same time an international youth conference that will partly join with the adult conference. In fact, these international conferences (that take place every five years) are the only opportunities where one can experience The Christian Community as a world movement. When we count five years further, we come to the year 2022, the 100 year anniversary of The Christian Community. It will be an important milestone in our relatively young history.

After the Whitsun conference, our students and teachers will travel in all different directions for a Summer break. Five of our students will prepare themselves for a third year of priest training that takes place in the form of a practicum in congregations. Zoe Scoulos will work in Washington DC; Luis Gonzales will begin in Toronto and later in the year work in Los Angeles; Matthias Giles begins in Denver and will continue in January in a congregation in Germany; Olive Wells, who oriented herself last year in The Christian Community in Europe, will work in a congregation in Germany. For the fifth student, Joan van Holsteijn, we are still searching for a congregation overseas. Some of the first-year students will continue their study in the second year in September, and we are now receiving applications and having conversations with potential new students for the Fall of 2017. Applications can be sent to the seminary until August 15.

Our latest Seminary newsletter was mailed in early May. If you have not received a copy and would like one, contact the Seminary via email at info@christiancommunityseminary.org or call us at 845-356-0972. We can add you to our mailing list or email you a copy of the newsletter.

A new development, that will affect the future of the seminary, is the work of three younger priests who will eventually take over the tasks that are carried now by the directors, Bastiaan Baan and Patrick Kennedy. Patrick has regular and ongoing conversations with Julia Polter and Jonah Evans to prepare a seminary for the future. This future will begin in earnest when Bastiaan Baan's Visa expires and he returns to the Netherlands. Although applying for Visas is complicated nowadays, we hope that Bastiaan can continue his tasks for a few more years, so that renewal *and* continuity can work in an organic, harmonious way together. To date, we have been able to realize this co-operation in an ideal way; so we look with trust and hope to future developments. Please keep us — and the work of the seminary — in your hearts and prayers for the future of our movement.

Revs. Bastiaan Baan and Patrick Kennedy

How the Death of a Young Homeless Man Integrated the New York City Congregation into the Neighborhood

Stephen, the young homeless man who passed away in Riverside Park back on March 9th, was given a proper and loving memorial on Sunday afternoon, April 30, at The Christian Community Church, just a short walk from the bench where he sat at 75th Street in Riverside Park.

The nondenominational church at 309 West 74th Street, which had posted the event several weeks ago on Stephen's bench, opened its doors to all who wanted to find solace and share their stories. The Christian Community's priest, Rev. Gisela Wielki, presided over the service. She offered a touching eulogy and sermon on her encounters with Stephen and the possible meaning of the sudden death of this quiet young man along with his relationship to the community at large in a more spiritual dimension. Rev. Wielki spoke of Stephen as "a silent presence in the park" sitting almost "Buddha-like" in his maroon hoodie. She also added that his name comes from the Greek Stephanos, meaning wreath or crown – fitting inasmuch as we are all bound together in his memory.

In addition to the sermon, there were musical offerings and poetry. There were two piano pieces – Prelude in F, by J.S. Bach, from the Well-Tempered Clavier, and Erik Satie's "A Prayer for the Salvation of my Soul" from the Mass for the Poor (Messe des Pauvres) played by David Ralph. Also during the service, poems were read, including "The Creed" by John Masefield, read by Rev. Wielki. The lines near the end of the poem read:

So shall I fight, so shall I tread,
In this long war beneath the stars;
So shall a glory wreath my head,
So shall I faint and show the scars,

The poem alludes to the wreath revealed in Stephen's name. Others included an original poem named "Reunion," read by its author. It spoke of her encounters with Stephen and his great wish to be reunited with his parents, who are believed to have passed away.

After the formal portion of the service concluded, the audience – numbering 35 to 40 people, plus children, babies and two dogs – then formed a circle and talked informally about their experiences with Stephen over the four years he inhabited Riverside Park. Stories were shared, some people cried, and all were shocked at his untimely death. Billy the Birdman added that a new baby hawk has been named Stephen in his honor. Everyone was indeed grateful for this lovely community gathering and the comfort it provided.

Flowers and other *memento mori* still continue to be placed upon his bench in the park and there is hope that this bench will be named in his remembrance, if the necessary funds can be raised.

From an article from the WEST SIDE RAG — a local paper for the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Article by Gretchen Berger. <http://www.westsiderag.com/2017/05/02/a-proper-memorial-service-for-an-anonymous-but-beloved-homeless-man>

An Open Letter of Condolence from Rev. James Hindes to Richard Dancey's Widow, Margaret

Dear Margaret,

As I write this in the morning I can only imagine how unreal your mornings must be. I know I am only very slowly getting used to the idea that my friend Richard is no longer on the earth. Many colleagues speak of him as their brother, and in a sense, he was, because he was everyone's brother; but for me he was above all an "old friend" with whom I shared a destiny that meant we could share very little time together. We never worked in the same congregation as much as I would have loved to work with him. I am grateful for the time we did spend together doing youth conferences in NYC and elsewhere.

I remember when we first met, you, me and Richard in 1977 when he began studying at the priest seminary in Stuttgart and you began a new life in a foreign country with small children and all of you had to learn a new language. I was working in Esslingen when I visited you at your apartment. I remember giving advice on how to learn German and was amazed to hear years later from him that it had actually helped. Your husband was beginning a new chapter in his and your lives together. Your respect, admiration and love for him was especially evident through that move; above all your trust in his sense of his own destiny. From the time you first met him, before he had a master's degree in theology, before his first congregation in Harlem, you knew: this is a good man. His bone deep goodness has always been apparent to everyone who met him. (But I suspect that it took some time for you to learn how to work with his phlegmatic temperament.)

I remember when he first came to NYC to meet with Gisela and me after his appointment to Devon. I had never really known him before the long conversations we had at that time. That's when I realized that he was not a new friend but an "old friend" with whom I had the privilege of knowing again, but now in this life time. I always loved talking with him. Not only was he very intelligent but he always spoke from the heart as well, and looked for the best in everyone in the world. He was one of the most religious Christian Community priests I ever met. I was deeply impressed by the reading materials he always seemed to take with him to conferences, synods and meetings of every kind. It wasn't just the usual anthroposophical fare but books by religious leaders from many different religious traditions, books on prayer and understanding the Bible many of which he shared with me. He lived his life with deep feeling and wide ranging interests which were always genuine.

We priests are taught that we are to dedicate ourselves to three tasks: celebrating sacraments, teaching and pastoral care. Of course, we are not all equally gifted at all three; but Richard was! Furthermore, he was a genius at what I would call our fourth task, for which he had a special gift: consoling people; and not just people who are obviously suffering in the moment because of some great loss. We all need to be consoled and reassured at times if only because of our great loss of heaven; life is hard for most of us most of the time. People often suffer quietly in the depths of their souls and it gives them courage when someone notices. Regardless of what words he used, Richard's presence, the tone and timbre of his voice reached out to people and said, "It's

ok, it's going to be alright, God sees you, he knows you, he loves you and you will always be surrounded by his presence carried by that love even when you do not feel it." It was God's compassion emanating through Richard to those he tried to help.

In this regard, he revealed a lot about himself when he gave a talk on Vincent van Gogh and his brother Theo at a youth conference in the early '80s. Richard was so deeply moved by the devotion and love between the two brothers that his own love for both of them streamed through; it moved us all. Altogether, van Gogh was for Richard a saint of the same magnitude as St. Francis. Van Gogh's devotion and compassion for the suffering peasants of his time was equaled, I think, by Richard's compassion and concern for today's "working poor."

His wonderful soul-life simply radiated to others, sometimes under remarkable circumstances. At a youth conference once we were taking our group of 15 or so teenagers from 309 W. 74th up to Broadway for ice-cream at a local Baskin Robins. The teens walked a little ahead of us. A group of 4-5 African-American urban teens coming from the other direction decided to physically hassle and intimidate our young group of white suburbanite teenagers. Sanford, Richard and I quickly caught up to the interaction between the two groups and quieted things down. But the most remarkable thing was that everywhere Richard was physically present, emotions were calmed like magic; peace, as it were, was established. Many noticed this and we were able to proceed without any real fist fight breaking out.



At youth camps, where the teens would talk too late and sneak through the woods at night, Richard was usually the one to take the last and latest watch, say from midnight until one a.m. He offered to do this, for which I was very grateful, because he seemed to be able to get by on less sleep than the rest of us. After his watch, he would then sit in bed and read, maybe something by Thomas Merton or another inspirational writer. We would then find him at 7 a.m., still sitting up, book fallen from his hands sound asleep. He managed the transition from (needed) deep sleep to supervisory wakefulness with aplomb! Some of my happiest memories of my time as a priest were with Richard along with Erk Ludwig and Sanford Miller conducting those youth conferences and camps. There were certain times of the day when, out of sight of the kids, we would all share a smoke together, discuss the teens and plan for the future. During those days of the conference, in various combinations, the four of us would discuss all manner of things, eat many doughnuts, drink much coffee and slip away for a smoke at the end of day. That experience of Priest Community was among the strongest I have known: we were a team, each respecting the others' work and perspective. Richard was an integral, indeed an essential member of that team. We trusted completely each other's judgement and knew that we could always count on the others for support. In retrospect, it felt a little bit like the four Christian Community Musketeers each of us wielding our words a little differently in the service of the Lord.

Richard and I shared a love of Black Blues music going back to the 1920s and even some R & B. I was surprised and grateful to have someone in our priest circle at that time who appreciated B.B. King and friends as much as I.

And humor! Again, at a youth conference, doing improvisation he showed talent that had everyone in stitches again and again. With his intelligence, wit and other abilities in so many areas of life: teaching, public speaking, singing, performing, even acting, he could have done anything with his life. But he wanted tell the world about how God came to earth to help us and he couldn't help but comfort those with any kind of suffering. Of course, it is also true that his profound aversion to conflict might have interfered more in other professions. But you know all about that. A good man, even a great man in my mind; but not a perfect man. But, O what a lovable man!

Although Richard and I did not spend much time together in the last decades, we were always together in spirit and understanding. He encouraged me many times, most recently last year when he read a little essay I had written on the Trinity and was apparently moved enough to send me an appreciative letter. It meant a lot to me. He noticed the efforts of his colleagues and his presence was a blessing to the priest circle. At our synods, when 20+ priests sit in a circle, he demonstrated the perfect balance between speaking too much and speaking too little. When he announced his intention to contribute, the circle grew very quiet and waited for him to begin, expecting him to say something helpful, knowing it would in some way be very wise and often even surprising.

In a letter to me last summer, he praised my joke-telling competence compared to his and asked to borrow my file of "religious humor." His own self-deprecatory humor shone through in his sign off: "... your somber brother in Christ, Richard." Somber is hardly a word I would use to describe Richard; smiling, yes, solemn at times even, but when he laughed he could laugh with his whole body and soul. Even his laugh could reassure people.

I could say that I will miss him, but you can say the same words and mean so much more. So, I will just say how very grateful I am that he played a small part in my life and that I was honored to have worked with him for the God whom we served together, though usually at different places on the earth. I loved him (as did, I think, everyone); and I still look forward to working with him on the other side of the threshold. I just can't phone him, or see him in person, which saddens me more than I can express. However, I can still feel how he reaches out to me every now and then with his encouragement and comforting presence.

Now, once again, you must find your trust in his destiny and also in your own, and somehow live with this separation from the one who loved you for so many years on earth; you know he loves you still. It is my prayer and hope that you are able to feel his love and comforting presence in this strange new world in which you now live. My love and that of countless others go out to you now and in the future. We have lost Richard but we are so very grateful for your continuing presence in our community of Christians.

Bless you,

Jim

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Rev. Julia Polter is a Christian Community priest in Boston, MA and a trained hospital chaplain and spiritual director. She has led a summer Mystery series at the Alcyon Center since 2009.

Cheryl McDevitt is Associate Supervisor and staff chaplain at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. She uses the transformative learning model to explore one's inner wisdom.

Elizabeth Trocki an artist, tapestry weaver, and gardener who explores light, color and movement in her work.