

North American Newsletter

Autumn, 2019

The Christian Community Seminary in North America Opens in Toronto

Student Perspectives

From Diana Haynes - The opening ceremony of the Seminary in Toronto was held on Michaelmas Sunday, September 29, and began with the Act of Consecration to a church filled to the brim. There were seven priests attending and people had come from far afield to give their well wishes to this new endeavor. A large choir in the rear of the chapel sang some of the most beautiful, Michaelic, slightly-dissonant harmonies that swelled to fill the high geometric rafters while beams of sunlight flooded through the pastel tinted windows.



Seminary Directors Rev. Jonah Evans and Rev. Patrick Kennedy

After the service everyone gathered in the large community room to share a lunch of dragon bread, vegetarian soups and stews and we concluded the meal with a huge, celebratory cake. We literally spilled out onto the patio and back yard and conversations were animated as the food rapidly disappeared. Then we gathered again in the chapel for the main program. Rev. Patrick Kennedy hosted the ceremonies and began by explaining that this wasn't a new birth, because the Seminary was actually 16 years old, but it was nevertheless a time when fairy godmothers came from afar to give their blessings.

Patrick talked about Rev. Gisela Wielki, who had birthed the first Seminary in Chicago, and then he invoked the spirit of Rev. Richard Dancy who had been co-director in the early life of the Seminary. He quipped that Rev. Dancy had the shortest commute because, since he crossed the threshold in 2017, he isn't limited by time and space anymore. He mentioned other people who helped nurture the rebirth of this Seminary in Toronto who were unable to be present.

There were tender and inspiring written greetings and artwork sent from former seminary directors Revs. Bastiaan Baan and Gisela Wielki. An uplifting speech was given by Rev. Ute



Revs. Peter Skaller and Susan Locey, who once worked together in the Toronto congregation

Koenig, and the Seminary staff, teachers and students were all introduced. The event was beautifully concluded with a musical piece by Susan Richard. I was definitely floating by the time the program ended. There was another break and then festivities continued as people walked to neighboring Hesperus Village — a community for the elderly, where another meal of dragon bread and soups had been prepared. All in all, a day filled with promise, joy and warm feelings.

From Jeana Lee - As a seminary student, everything to do with the seminary, especially its location, has a profound impact on my life. It was beautiful to see at the celebration of the opening of the seminary in Toronto, how many other people are taking an interest and caring about the life of the seminary. The church was packed. It was more full than Christmas Eve or Easter Sunday. The mood was joyful and celebratory as special guests, like Revs. Ute Koenig and Jim Hindes, spoke to the gathered audience, or read letters from past directors of the seminary.

Unlike Spring Valley, Toronto does not have a student dorm where seminary students can live. Instead, members of the congregation have opened their doors and welcomed us, all 14 of us, into their lives. I met my hosts last spring during my internship in Toronto, and was very happy to return to their home this fall. When I arrived they eagerly told me about the special tour of the remodeled and redecorated manse that the directors gave the local congregation. As they shared how beautiful it was and their enthusiasm, I could tell that they really wanted me there, living with them. It was not because of anything I offered, but just because they care about me. I was, and still am, a little amazed at this. Instead of the usual transactional, ‘what’s in it for me,’ culture that is so prevalent, they open-heartedly opened their doors to me. Experiencing their warmth and welcome fills me with an answering warmth. This warmth of welcome, not born out of need but out of genuine interest and care describes the whole Toronto congregation. It is truly a gift to be here.



Rev. Ute Konig

A Michaelmas Day Sermon — Given at the Opening of the Seminary in Toronto Rev. Peter Skaller

For Matthew 22:1-14

We've seen many pictures of the archangel holding a balance. This is a depiction of something going on in us. We start using such a scale the moment we awaken in the morning. *Can I indulge in a few more minutes of sleep?* Pros in one pan, cons in the other. *Oatmeal or toast for breakfast?* Pros and cons. Or more seriously, *Should I tell my friend the truth?* Or, *Shall I attend the Christian Community seminary?* Or we may try to determine if something is true, or if something is good, or right, or not. The “evidence is weighed,” to use a courtroom phrase. And we have a universally recognized bodily gesture that depicts this process... (gesture with hands).

We gather evidence from our sense perceptions of the world and the thoughts we attach to them. We weigh these all day long, whether for seemingly trivial or important matters. This is the essence of developing inner freedom. And Michael's task has been to implant this weighing process in the evolutionary stream of humanity. It all began when we ate from that Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (Bad?) in the Garden.

But here's the rub. We can't gather enough information to be *sure* we have all that's relevant. Sometimes we aren't even sure on which pan to place some information. Sometimes a pro in one context becomes a con in another. Perhaps, without reflecting we just do the usual. Perhaps we do nothing and just wait for more information. Perhaps we make a wrong choice, perhaps a right one. It's always a bit, or even very risky, this freedom business! And so, we “gnash our teeth” in uncertainty.

Scientists have even devised nifty statistical methods to estimate the probability that their findings are in error, and we, in our own ways, perform similar inner calculations constantly. Today computer scientists are developing Artificial Intelligence to try to alleviate us from this teeth-gnashing. Well, they do so while gnashing their own teeth in trepidation of unforeseen consequences. I wouldn't hold my breath that the gnashing will stop anytime soon...

This life of gnashing with anxiousness is the price we pay for the possibility of becoming courageous, free-choosing and free-acting individuals. But as a consequence, the glorious life and soul garments we wore when we still lived



Workshop of Lucas Cranach the Elder. Archangel Michael. Wikimedia Commons

in marital communion with the world, began to fray and discolor.

What is the point of all this freedom and teeth-gnashing? Today we see how so many souls cannot stand it and relinquish the process in favor of countless ‘isms’ and numbing distractions to provide relief from the uncertainty.

But for those who sense that there must be a human purpose underlying this continual weighing of things, another problem may arise, and that is the blitz-fast comprehension that the use of logical weighing is ultimately a circular process that cannot break free to explore real guidance, or truth about the vastness of the world beyond the senses and cannot lead to a true knowledge of who we are or what the world is. It is a road towards truth that, while opening freedom, ultimately comes to an end without resolution because in the sense-perceptible world everything depends upon everything else.

Thus comes another choice, a huge life-altering choice. One can either continue indefinitely in this circular teeth-gnashing that cannot bring peace, or in faith hear how there is, *yes*, a call to a renewed marriage, to a renewed communion with the world. There comes the call, *O human being, know yourself and the world!*

And so, as we attain enough inner freedom through using our sense-based thinking, the archangel now seeks to awaken *a freedom from freedom*. He points away from the brain, and to our deep inner heart that yearns to wed itself to the flaming heart of the One who, through what was accomplished on the Cross will send the Holy Spirit to open the doors to the Truth of who we are and what the world is — who will guide us, now as free human beings, to a love festival with God, and with healed, brightly-shining garments.



Russian Icon, Anonymous

What does all this have to do with opening a Christian Community seminary? Well, welcome to those whose roadways have come to an end and who hear the call to the marriage and feel drawn to help resound the call to others who also seek entrance to the marriage festival.

What is Peace?

Rev. Cindy Hindes

Dear Prayer Warriors,

One member has asked that we explore the question: What is peace? This seems particularly relevant, given our group's intention – praying for world peace!

Perhaps we could look first at what (in my opinion) inner peace is not. It is not being so happily blissed out that one is no longer in touch with the world, and therefore unconcerned. Nor is it a lack of reaction through not caring.

Peace seems to have to do with a state of calm; it has to do with equilibrium, with serenity; it is undisturbed, tranquil. Beyond not being 'at war,' peace also seems to have to do with harmony, accord, goodwill, acceptance.

I would suggest that generating world peace begins with our own inner state. It is that inner state that can (and does) then spread out into the world, from us to others. We can offer this substance of peace to the angels, who can carry it to others.

Peace is an active, and proactively generated state, along the lines of the Serenity Prayer:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference. ~ Reinhold Niebuhr

A humorous version of this is:

Grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change,
the courage to change the one I can,
and the wisdom to know it's me...

This serenity, this state of active balance, is one of our first contributions to peace at large, perhaps the most important. For most of us it may indeed be the only sphere of influencing world peace that we are in a position to activate.

In The Christian Community's communion service, Christ says that he stands filled with peace toward the world – an amazing thing if you think about it. How could He be at peace with all the evil going on? I think one of the key words here is 'stand.' He is upright in relationship to the world. He stands facing it; he stands by it; he *stands* it, doesn't turn away from it. He radiates goodwill toward all of us. Always. That takes a deep capacity of endurance, which Christ Jesus earned the hard way.

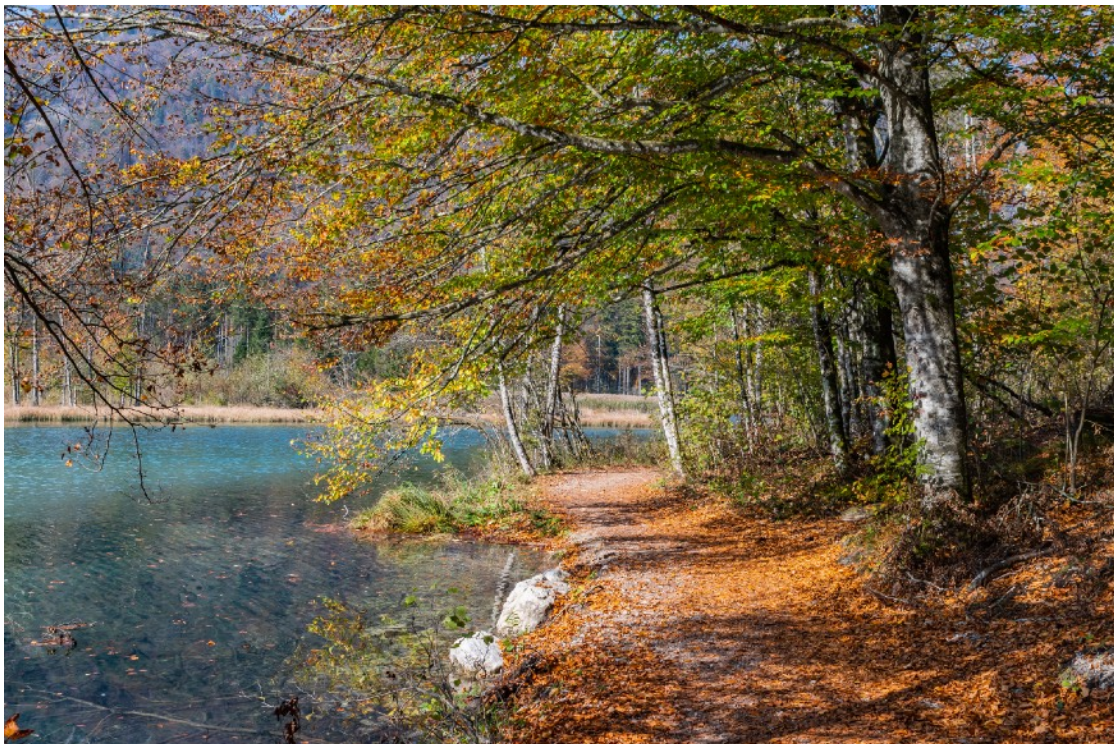
There is a spiritual law which says that anything that anyone accomplishes while in a body on earth is deposited in the spiritual treasure chest of humanity and is available to all. Having inhabited Jesus' body with all that He experienced there, Christ's love has already conquered that which leads to a lack of peace. He has conquered the human being's natural egotism, aggression, "against-ness," the anger and fear and opposition that destroy our inner peace. He countered

them with the peace that He generated through acceptance and primarily through a deep love for humanity. Because Christ did so within the frame of a human body, there is a peace-seed that has been planted deep within every human soul. No matter how rough the inner human terrain, how stormy the life, how full of the ‘weeds’ of worry, fear or anger, we can choose to cultivate this seed of peace in us, to nurture it, grow it in the warm light of His love. For as He says further in the service, He gives us *His* peace.

Think of what he went through — misunderstood, betrayed by his community, abandoned by his friends, persecuted, and though innocent, tortured and executed in a shameful manner. He nevertheless forgave, rose and continues to pour out the warmth of love, His tranquility, His harmonious and harmonizing interaction with the world *as it is*. But He doesn’t stop there. He asks us what we, together with Him, can do to bring the world forward.

Christ’s peace is dynamic. It both calmly accepts things as they are and works to create healing solutions. Christ’s peace and love creates unity; not sameness, but harmonizing the differences, like a chord of notes in music. We are all sundered, separated from the work of angels, from each other, even from Him. He waits for us to turn to Him, to ask for *His* peace. Praying the Lord’s Prayer is one way of asking.

If this sounds hard, it is because it is. The embodied Christ achieved what he did for humankind’s future. It will take us a while to catch up to Him. But meanwhile, He offers us His abiding love and support, His peace.



The Los Angeles River

Rev. Rafal Nowak

A Sermon for Luke 7:11-17

Everyone living in Southern California is acutely aware of the long and devastating drought that our region has suffered for many years, and it is somehow hard to imagine Los Angeles as overflowing with water. But this has not always been the case. Before it was coated with the heavy bedding of concrete, the Los Angeles River was known to cause frequent and devastating flooding. The last in the series of such uncontrolled flooding, triggered by two major Pacific storms in 1938, caused, among other things, the destruction of over 5600 houses; dozens of bridges were destroyed, either by the sheer erosive force of floodwaters or by the collision of floating buildings; some communities were buried as much as six feet deep in sand and sediment, requiring a massive clean-up effort afterward — a truly apocalyptic disaster that cost the then mayor of Los Angeles his political career.

In response to the flood of 1938, the city began an ambitious project of completely encasing the river's bed and banks in concrete. Today, the once-powerful elemental being ruling over this region, the Los Angeles River, has been reduced to a tiny trickle of water flowing down the concrete casement — tamed, insignificant, and polluted. It took years of devastating droughts, volumes of research, and decades of observation to realize that what was once considered the most advanced technological and environmental wonder of engineering, the idea to build a concrete casement under the river, has in fact significantly contributed to recent droughts. For ever since the river has been laid down in the tomb of concrete, it is not able to permeate through the barrier and to connect with the groundwater foundation.



Yes, we have caused our current crisis by trying to fix the one in the past — by manipulating Nature and her inherent rhythms and cycles, using our limited means of understanding.

But the Earth is a living, cosmic mystery! An organism where every element, every being — the rivers, the icecaps, the air, the woods, flooding, even destructive fires — have legitimate functions with their own time, place and lifespan. And to understand the causes of the current global climate crisis, we have to make a huge leap and see the Earth, not as a lifeless conglomerate of matter governed by laws of physics and causality, subject to calculations and statistical predictions, but as a living being with its own unique biography and destiny — an organism consisting of body, soul, and spirit; a friend, a mother, destined to carry and to give birth to a child, to our own future Self.

To find solutions for what we perceive as ailments, as emergencies and inflammations in this organism, something more than our own human ideals and capacities is needed. To understand and help the Earth, we need to think like the gods who created her and not like temporal human beings only – victims of our own fallen thinking. We need to think and act out of the wisdom of *God in us*.

This capacity, which died together with the emergence of our matter-oriented, intellectual thinking is given back to the soul – to the mother, the widow – in the picture of the raising of the young man of Nain.

It is Christ Himself who calls our spiritual abilities to truly know, and to act in this world, back to life. And it is only through Him, out of His Healing Spirit, out of His wisdom rooted in the Mystery of Golgotha — the Mystery of Dying and Resurrecting — that we will be able to understand who we truly are and find solutions to the questions that fill our souls with existential fears. When we learn to look into ourselves through His eyes, when we learn to act in this world through his compassion, when we learn to respect and consider all the phenomena of this world through his Wisdom, and through His love — *that leads the living into death that it may live anew; that leads what is dead into life, that it may become aware of itself*.



Images of the Los Angeles River from Wikimedia Commons

Camp Reflections - 2019

Rev. Carol Kelly

“There is a sense of comfort about him that we haven’t seen in quite a while.” This is what one parent wrote about his son after he had returned from summer camp. Another parent wrote: “This experience has really impacted my children’s lives in so many positive ways.”

We create The Christian Community Children’s camp every year to bring children into an environment where they can truly shine. We make a space for the highest in every one. This feels like a “bubble” sometimes because it is so joyful and so simple. It gives everyone a chance to breathe the clean air, to laugh, to be silly, to sing, to create and to be sad and homesick too.

Camp becomes more important every year as the world seems to diminish the true light of the human being. The oldest girls did not want to have their phones back at the end of camp! They said “please, no.”

Our days were full of singing and playing. The theme was “doorways” so each group came up with a name like “The Golden Keys” or “The Wishing Portals” or “The Other Side.” The second oldest girls created a threshold into our dining hall, made of saplings and pieces of cloth, like peace flags, suggesting various kinds of doorways.

The children were able to do exceptional handwork with Miranda Prenger. They made jewelry, lip balm, notebooks, professional looking tie-dye and many other wonderful things. They also did basket-weaving with Gail Kuderko. The boys and girls alike experienced the peaceful calm that enters the soul when weaving a basket. And they really loved the results!

There was hiking, blueberry picking, and cooking (meat patties for ‘middle ages’ dinner, chocolate chip cookies, and sushi). There were many dishes to be washed and pots to clean and floors to be swept and mopped too!

The counselors were able to hold our 72 campers with joy and humor. They worked hard from sun up until way after sun down and almost all of them were there for morning singing at 7:00 am! They were able to bring a sense of “mission” to the campers, which, if put into words, would be something like, “This is LIFE ON EARTH! Take hold of it! Enjoy it, appreciate everything! Love it! Learn to love it!”

I am so proud of our incredible team of counselors and juniors and our CIT group who worked in the kitchen mostly but also did some night watch. We are blessed with an opportunity to create a new culture. We have to carry the light of camp into all of our relationships and meetings throughout the year. I know that this is Christ working in and through each one of us and I hold this lantern high.

With tremendous gratitude,

Rev. Carol Kelly

Camp Harmony Lake: East Coast Christian Community Camp

Soul Hygiene

Rev. Cindy Hindes

Just as we practice bodily hygiene to create and maintain our physical health, it is a good idea to practice what I call soul hygiene to preserve the health of our thought life, our feeling life, and the kinds of things we do. Here are some suggestions.

In our thought life: As a practice, try creating and directing your own thoughts, thinking what you choose to think about, for a few minutes a day. Mostly our thoughts just flit through our heads. Or unwelcome thoughts may assail us. When they do, we can treat them as strangers (however familiar) who knock at the door. We may open the first door, but not the screen, until we see who it is. We are not responsible for their visit, but for how we react to them. Do we invite them in, entertain them? Let them take up residence and start dictating what happens? Or do we say, as we would to an unwanted salesman, ‘Thanks, not today’ and close the mind’s door, perhaps concentrating on another thought. Certain kinds of thoughts are best not welcomed, mostly because they do not represent the truth

- Absolutism - black and white, either/or, always/never. The truth is more nuanced.
- Destructive, hopeless, despairing thoughts about the future – again, not the whole truth. We really don’t know for sure what is going to happen.
- Allowing emotion to distort thoughts through blaming, labeling, catastrophizing. Again, not the whole truth, neither about oneself, nor others, nor the future, which is still in process.

In our feeling life: We can cultivate ‘ascending moods’ — gratitude, reverence and awe, devotion to and trust in the divine will, love. These attract and nourish progressive spiritual beings, just as dark and negative feelings attract the opposite. Rudolf Steiner said,

Wherever the opportunity is given for definite beings, then they are always there. If a person sends out wrong, evil feelings, these live around him and attract beings which are there waiting, just as some physical being waits for food. I once compared this with the fact that there are no flies in a clean room; if there are all sorts of food-remains in the room, then there are flies. So it is with the supersensible beings: one need only provide them with the means of nourishment. Source: Rudolf Steiner – GA 102 – *The Influence of Spiritual Beings on Man*: Lecture IX – Berlin, 1st June 1908

In our will life, our activities: For starters we can practice proper diet and exercise and getting enough sleep – I know, I know, we hear that all the time, and sometimes we think that our soul’s health is separate from our body, but they are integrated. The ancient Greeks followed the motto of developing a sound mind in a sound body. The Russians fairytales say, Morning is wiser than the evening. Some decisions about what to do are best postponed until our thinking is clearer, and our feelings have more equilibrium.

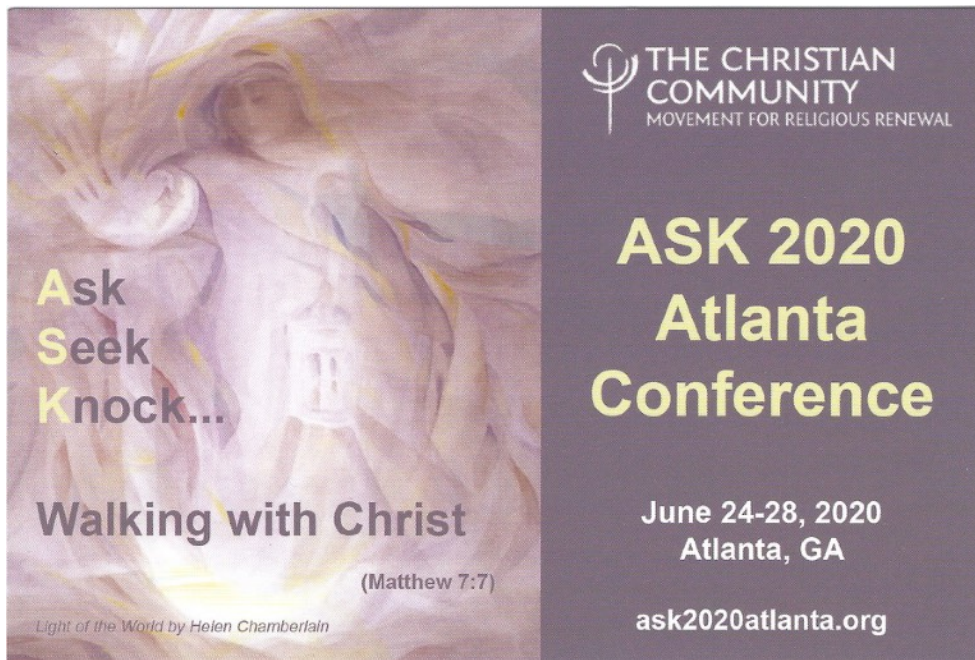
Be careful about what you ‘ingest.’ It is not only food that determines our health. Everything we take in, on all sensory levels, nourishes or depletes both our mind/body health. Be mindful and discerning on all levels of ingestion; otherwise, over months and years what we take in on the

soul level can become death by a thousand cuts. Yes, we are to remain engaged with the world. And at the same time, we have the right and the necessity to protect ourselves from ‘junk food for the soul.’ Listening to the same (bad) news broadcast over and over again injures us. For myself, if I have already heard the news story once that day, I turn it off. Immediately. Perhaps the next day also, if nothing has changed. Headlines are often enough to inform me, or sometimes a long-form piece if I want to go deeper.

At the same time, we human beings have a responsibility to try to do, think, feel something positive about everything we encounter. Rudolf Steiner was reported to have said that he read the morning paper as early as he could, so that he could put the correct thoughts, the truth, out into the ether before others read it. For myself, I try not to take in any more than I can pray for. Which creates a kind of natural limit to what I take in, both in quantity and quality.

The same idea of soul hygiene applies to other things we take in: entertainment, reading material, screen time, people we spend time with, either in real time or virtually. Some of these are just plain toxic. And some are dangerous because they are addictive. They take the soul’s time prisoner.

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Please join us in Atlanta!

Keynote Speakers and Cultural Presenters include: Rev. Carol Kelly, Rev. Patrick Kennedy, Rev. Julia Polter, Rev. Oliver Steinrueck, Glen Williamson, Dorit Winter. Moderator: Rev. Craig Wiggins.

For more information about the conference, visit our website ask2020atlanta.org or email us at ask2020atlanta@gmail.com