

# North American Newsletter

Advent, 2021

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## Blue, Red and White

Rev. Gisela Wielki

We are familiar with images of Mary in the blue mantle and red dress and with the annunciation angel with a white lily. We think of angels as dressed in white. In a Matthias Grunewald crucifixion painting, Mary wears a white dress as she stands beside the cross. In the Book of Revelation, those who have come through the great trial, those who have overcome, are dressed in a white garment. What we see in the Grunewald painting it is not the virgin Mary. It is Mary on her way to Sophia-hood.

When in the Renaissance the gold background gave way to the blue, it was still seen as heaven and finally heaven came even closer to earth and became sky. Blue is divinity on the way to incarnation in humanity, in becoming human. The red roses on the cross are a symbol of love and sacrifice, a symbol of life wrought from death. Red is humanness on the way to divinity.

Blue is the best of heaven. Red is the best of earth. In the baptism in The Christian Community we see a table with a blue cloth and on top of it a red cloth, and on top of the red cloth the pure, translucent crystal vessels, which represent light, the symbol of which is white. They hold in the spiritual essence of water, salt, and ash — the building blocks of the new human being, born of the union of heaven and earth.



## The First Week of Advent — the Mineral Kingdom

Rev. Carol Kelly

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We are the only Spiritual Beings who are allowed to experience stone, the hardening of earthly matter, the mineral kingdom. We may not always realize that this is a privilege. The mineral kingdom gives us our foundation, the ground we walk upon, and the bones with which we walk. We find strength and security in this. We stand firmly in our individuality, firmly in our convictions. We find the grounds for our points of view. We build foundations, walls, bridges and towers.

But this hardening of the earth and also of the human heart, is the reason for Christ's appearance on the earthly stage. We human beings went too far. We were hardening faster than we were able to manage. The Risen One reprimanded the Disciples for one thing: their "hardness of heart" (Mark 16:14). Where are we today? Have we gotten any better?

We hear in Luke 21 that the heavens and the earth will be shaken. That which we have stood upon for so long shall be no more! It will happen when we least expect it. We are meant to be shaken! We are meant to awaken! The call of Advent is one of holy unrest.

We have not been given so many gifts so that we could sit back and bask in our own good fortune; to delight in our own cleverness. We who are not yet. We who are not yet spirit-filled, in whom the Spirit does not yet fully dwell, have hardened to the point where we do not remember the true meaning of earth existence! We are here to learn to love!

Once we begin to awaken, then stone turns inside out and gives us another mission. Think of the birds, and how they eat small bits of stone and transform it into a shell to protect what is growing there, or how teachers and parents provide a firm structure and foundation so that the child can emerge and thrive. See how water crystalizes to become snow in order to provide a protective mantle for the plants below.

What is it now that we need to protect? What is it that wants to be born? We need to protect our faith. We need to protect our integrity, our ideals, our sense of what is right so that we do not become cynical or despairing. We need to protect our children. We need to protect those who are more vulnerable, marginalized, forgotten, persecuted. We need to protect the earth and her creatures. We need to protect the holy name of God and the living Christ who walks among us. There is a reversal!

We who are always asking for things, for blessing and grace and all manner of favors, can become the ones who bestow them. Or else what does it mean to "walk with Christ" or to have "Christ in you"?

We are the bearers of all that happens spiritually on the earth. This is our assignment: to read the signs of nature and to respond to them, to bear witness to the spiritual world weaving and working through the world, and to be the carriers of God's becoming.

This requires a quiet, unhurried mood during Advent.

## Reflections on the Delegates' Meeting in Hillsdale, NY

Gail Ritscher, Delegate from the Chestnut Ridge, NY Congregation

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Each year, The Christian Community of North America region holds an Annual General Meeting (AGM) in combination with a conference, to which delegates from all the rest of the congregations are invited. The hope is that each congregation is represented by at least one a delegate, who will give a brief report on the current state of affairs in their congregation. A second delegate is also welcome. The AGM serves the very practical purpose of reviewing the region's finances for the past year and the budget for the following year. The conference, meanwhile, has an inspirational and community-building purpose, providing a rare opportunity for members of the individual congregations to feel the reality of being part of a worldwide movement.

This year, the theme of the conference was: *Christ's Light in Our Daylight: Spirit-led boards, Spirit-led communication; bringing sacramental qualities to the more secular aspects of The Christian Community*. The gathered delegates were treated to an evening talk — also open to the public — on the theme “Cultivating Spirit-Led Boards” by Rev. Jonah Evans from the Toronto Christian Community. Regional board members Kate Kristensen and George Riley also each gave talks on more practical aspects of Christian Community board work and life.

If I had to come up with a short descriptive title for the Christian Community Delegates' Meeting that just took place from November 11 – 13 in Hillsdale, NY, I would have to say “group hug.” There is something about coming together with a group of people who are all working out of the same spirit that fills you with warmth, well-being, and just general happiness. There were some 24 of us from 8 different congregations, and despite the packed program and one *very* long day, we all walked around with big smiles on our faces. Every last drop of extrovert in me was wrung out in connecting with people I had never met or reconnecting with those I had mostly met via Zoom. It was invigorating! I also suspect that the loving care of our own Andrea Pennington had something to do with our general good mood, as she plied us with homemade food and drink from beginning to end and managed to make us feel spoiled rotten. What a gift to move between feeding our soul and spirit to feeding our faces!

On the soul- and spirit-feeding front, we sang our hearts out under the expert direction of Rev. Carol Kelly. I find there is no better way for a group to coalesce than through singing. We even had a group of about a dozen men singing tenor and bass. I can't remember the last time I sang with so many male voices. What a treat!

Another highlight for me was Rev. Jonah Evans' elaboration on Rudolf Steiner's “Stars Verse,” which goes as follows:

A star is above my head – Christ speaks from the star:  
“Let your soul be borne by my strong force –  
I am with you; I am in you; I am for you; I am your I.”

Jonah equated the four “I am” statements with the four-fold human being:  
I am with you – Christ, too, has a physical body and is walking with us  
I am in you – Christ lives in us as the creative life body  
I am for you – on the soul or astral level, Christ extends the hand of friendship  
I am your I – our true I resides in Christ

I subsequently also heard the Trinity Epistle of the Act of Consecration echoed in this verse:  
I am with you – our substance is His substance  
I am in you – our life is His creating life  
I am for you – He moves in us through all the ways of the human soul

The upbeat mood of the meeting was also reflected in the overwhelmingly positive news shared by the congregational representatives, despite restrictions imposed by the pandemic. I, of course, reported on all the varied and wonderful activity and life burgeoning in Chestnut Ridge. I feel very fortunate to have been able to attend this meeting this year.

## **A Letter from our Regional Coordinator (Lenker)**

*Rev. Craig Wiggins*

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Dear Christian Communities in North America,

The Joy that emanated from the ordinations celebrated during Ascension weekend of 2021 spreads and grows throughout our region, even reaching as far as New Zealand, thanks to the efforts of Rev. Lesley Waite to join the North American ordination group. Lesley is back in her home town of Wellington, working together with the priests in Auckland to care for their beautiful and challenging country. The congregations in Denver, Chicago, Devon, Spring Valley, Taconic-Berkshire region and Toronto along with the many affiliates have received their newly ordained priests with warm hearts and active hands. My ongoing and fervent prayer is that members, friends, and priests will continue to develop and strengthen our work and reach out to new and uncharted territory.

From November 11 – 13 we gathered in the Taconic-Berkshire congregation for our annual Delegates' Meeting, this time live and in person. The days were enlivened by singing led by Rev. Carol Kelly and enriched by talks given by Regional Board members Rev. Jonah Evans, George Riley, and Kate Kristensen. On Friday afternoon the Annual General Meeting gathered for a 'State of the Region' by the Lenker and a financial summary by our treasurer Allen Logue. The members approved the financial statement for 2020. The next AGM will be in March 2022 on Zoom, the next in person Delegates' Meeting with AGM will take place in the spring of 2023, location to be announced.

On the first Sunday in Advent, Rev. Nora Minassian was introduced in her new congregation in Sacramento/Fair Oaks, California. With musical contributions as well as humorous and serious addresses the congregation welcomed their new priest with elan. We wish priests and congregation lots of good and creative energy for the new constellation.

My daily prayers and thoughts accompany all of you in our large and vibrant region!

*Rev. Craig Wiggins*



## How the Advent Spiral Came to Be

A story for the young and young at heart by Rev. Kate Kennedy

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Long, long ago, in the first years that Christmas was celebrated, the angels in heaven noticed something different about the earth. They are always looking down to the earth, but they started to notice that when they looked down during the time before Christmas every year, there was something new there. There were lights!

Now, you might think that the lights the angels saw in the weeks leading up to Christmas were the festive lights that people like to string up on their houses. But those lights were not around back then. And besides, angels cannot see with their eyes like you and me. Angels can only see with their hearts. What were these lights that the angels saw with their hearts, then?

The lights were there, because every Advent season human beings on earth began to grow kinder and more patient with each other. The angels saw simple deeds of kindness — a woman bringing her sick father some soup in bed, a child sharing their sweet with their sister, a man offering a stranger a helping hand. Any time a deed like this took place, a light would shine out from the earth that the angels could see in heaven. And while these did take place from time to time all year, the angels noticed that in the weeks leading up to Christmas, these lights grew more and more and brighter and brighter. It was as if the coming of the Christ child was already casting its light and living in the hearts of those who looked towards his coming. The angels thought this was the most beautiful time of year for that very reason.

Then one day, not so very long ago, one of the angels asked another angel whether the people on the earth could also see these lights.

“No,” came the reply. “Some human beings can see with their hearts like we do. But the outer world that they see with their eyes is so powerful that most people can only see that.” The angel who had asked the question was deeply saddened by this answer. But then an idea came.

The angel decided to come down close to earth and whisper to certain people the idea of the Advent spiral — to someone in a church here and a school there, and soon people began taking up the picture that the angel had given them. And now we, too, can see the beautiful lights that the angels see in the time leading up to Christmas.

And what’s more, now children all over the world can see how they bring their light out into the darkness because of the one light they receive from the inmost, His light. And in them can grow the longing to bring this light ever more out into the world.



## Growth in Winter

A Seminary Report from Rev. Patrick Kennedy, Director

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In the summer of 2019 the seminary underwent a massive transition: we crossed an international border into Canada, set up everything for a fully operating seminary in the greater Toronto area and, after completing our six months of studies with a first and second year group of students, the world shut down. It was the last day of the trimester.

Since that time we have had to become extraordinarily flexible, working with students and staff to keep the path of becoming, the process of transformative learning in Christ, open and available to those who have come to us.

Amazingly enough, our life at — and in — the seminary has never been fuller. After an amazing year last year that included the ordinations of eight new priests and spreading out over three different campuses, it is a joy to be gathered up together again as a staff here at the site of the congregation in Toronto.

This fall we had the following students participating in programs at the seminary, some of whom are beginning from a distance but arriving to begin on-site training in January:

- 7 students in the first year program, “Knowing Christ”
- 4 students in internships — in Germany, Great Britain, the United States, and Canada
- 5 students who were recommended for ordinations, four of whom will come to us in January and one who has begun his ordination preparations in Hamburg:
  - Andreas van Breda, South Africa (preparing in Hamburg)
  - Robert Bower, Hillsdale, NY
  - Damien Gilroy, Adelaide, Australia
  - Nigel Lumsden, London, England
  - Erica MacLennan, Nelson, British Columbia, Canada
- 14 students in the first year of the Distance Learning Program (DLP)
- 14 students in the second year of the DLP
- 9 students in the new year that we have added to the DLP — applied discipleship DLP

The international character of the student body continues to increase as well, with participants in the distance programs coming from as far away as the Philippines and Slovenia, South Africa and Mexico. For the first time ever, not one member of the first year “Knowing Christ” program is from the United States.

The one continuing challenge remains the limitations on travel and national border crossings imposed by health departments around the world. Travel is a big part of our mission as seminary directors, going to communities and regions of the world that do not have a seminary or do not yet know us personally. Some of our students, as well, have had to make hard choices because of the requirements imposed. For this reason, only five of the original seven from the first year will join us in January, making the in-person student body a ‘round’ nine. Nevertheless, we have the distinct experience that we continue to grow. This includes our staff!

In addition to the directors, Revs. Jonah Evans and Patrick Kennedy, long-time board member and volunteer outreach coordinator, **Camilla Lake** (Flagstaff, AZ), has stepped into an official role in the administration, carrying the outreach work for the seminary, the work with our circle of friends and donors, as well as the admissions office for new full-time and distance learning students. In Toronto, **Eunice Reynolds** has stepped into the important work of the business office, director support, and student life administration for the on-site students.

Since Janice Morgante stepped down from the administrative position in June of 2020, various people have provided crucial help to us to keep the seminary-ship going. **Gail Ritscher and Elaine Swaebe**, in particular, provided invaluable assistance in the administration and communication departments. Gail, a long-time gifted and devoted part of the seminary team has now settled back in NJ/NY and turned her gifts to the publishing wing of our work at the seminary. In addition to the two booklets and e-books we have published in our 'Fruits of the Seminary' series there are 3-4 newly translated lectures by Rudolf Steiner on topics connected to the renewal of religion, biographies on the founders, and the last book written by Friedrich Rittelmeyer, *Christus*, that we hope will be published by the anniversary of the founding of our movement for religious renewal in 2022. This will be possible, in part, by the presence and leadership of our new 'senior editor', **Matthias Giles**, priest in the Washington D.C. area.

At the seminary, we thrive, in great part, due to the interest and support of our members and friends around North America and the world. We are particularly glad for the new ways we can stay connected through our "Patreon" page - [www.patreon.com/ccseminary](https://www.patreon.com/ccseminary) - and our website: [www.christiancommunityseminary.ca](http://www.christiancommunityseminary.ca)

## Upcoming Money and Biography Workshops

Faith DiVecchio, Legacy Giving Coordinator

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*In the days preceding the event of Golgotha, Mary of Bethany anointed Christ with costly ointment from an alabaster jar. Some were angered by this use of prized perfume, but Christ commended her for pouring her valuables onto him, thus anointing him for what was ahead. We, too, can choose to honor Christ with our valuables.*

In one of the gospel accounts of this event, the oil was in an alabaster box, and had to be thrown onto the ground and broken open to release the oil. What is it that has to break down in us in order to be able to give?

This is one of the questions we will explore in the Money and Biography workshop, which will lead into biographical considerations for participants. Other questions may include: How do fear and insecurity around money play into how we steward our resources? What conditions do we want to place on our generosity? What is it that motivates us to give?

Bernard Murphy CFP®, who has a Camphill background and is now a Certified Financial Planner™, is a presenter in the workshop with me. He will offer some general thoughts on estate planning, philanthropic giving, and investing, specific to the role of money and wealth in the context of our life's journey.

This workshop is beginning to be scheduled around the region. Please contact me if you would like it to come to your congregation. I am also available any time for support with legacy giving: [giving@thechristiancommunity.org](mailto:giving@thechristiancommunity.org) 413-717-5249.

Warm Advent wishes! Faith DiVecchio, Legacy Giving Coordinator

## Adventure Camps

Rev. Ann Burfiend

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The third summer of the Adventure Camps are currently being planned. These camps are smaller and more regional offerings in order to help families have more choices when they want to send their children to Christian Community camp.

Adventure Camps is organized, led, and run by a team of young adults, experienced backpackers, Waldorf teachers, Christian Community priests, and previous camp counselors, all dedicated to the work of creating camp together for children. The team meets regularly throughout the year to plan, organize and structure, the camps, coming together in the summer to make these adventure camps possible.

One of our ongoing intentions is to make camp possible for any child who wants it. We have always offered spots regardless of ability to pay. To continue to do this, we need to build up our scholarship fund each year. This year we have had a donation of \$3,000 with the intention of having it be matched. If you would like to help families send their child to camp we would gratefully accept your donation sent to The Christian Community in Chicago attn: Camps/Scholarship Fund, 2135 West Wilson Ave. Chicago, IL 60625.

There are six camps in the works for this summer. There will be more information and registration on the new website which will be launched soon. Watch for the link on the Christian Community in North American website.

### Summer 2022 Programs:

#### Hiking Camp I

- East Coast
- Rising 6th-8th graders
- June 13-18, 2022

#### Hiking Camp II

- East Coast
- High Schoolers
- June 23-30, 2022

#### Kite Camp

- East Coast
- Rising 6th-8th graders
- July 6-13, 2022

#### Young Adults Conference

- Midwest
- 19-28-year-olds
- July 16-19, 2022

#### Canoe Camp

- Namekagon River
- High Schoolers
- July 21-31, 2022



#### Camp Greenwood Lake (returned!)

- Governor Dodge State Park, WI
- Rising 3rd-8th graders
- August 5-12, 2022



# How Wonder Opens a Door

Rev. Bastiaan Baan; Translated by Philip Mees

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**Wonder:** *“A condition of suspension between understanding and incomprehension that can occur to us when the normal turns out to be abnormal.” This philosophical description from a work by Dutch philosopher Dr. Cornelis Verhoeven (1928-2001) expresses that everything that exists in the world can bring us into a condition of wonder. After all, in reality we continually live in a condition between understanding and incomprehension. True, we often act as if we understand the world around us, but all we see is the tip of the iceberg.*

## Wonder in Philosophy

In order to penetrate to a deeper layer of reality we need “learned ignorance.” The 15<sup>th</sup> century philosopher Nicolaus Cusanus wrote a whole book about it with the title *De docta ignorantia*. All the authors who preceded him understood this concept of learned ignorance exclusively in a religious sense: with our rational knowledge we are not able to know the divine. In an everlasting realization of ignorance and wonder the soul is step by step led to divine insight (Bonaventura).

We are all familiar with the naïve wonder in the face of a child when he sees something for the first time. “What could that be?” is the wondering expression of a toddler when he sees something he has never seen before. But in fact, we could ask that question countless times for everything that happens to us and surrounds us. Only when we can lead the phenomena around us back to their “mystery condition” (an expression of the poet Novalis) do they begin to speak to us.

Philosophy has its origin in this quality. For Plato, wonder was the beginning of philosophy, the leading principle from beginning to end. We might also describe wonder as an awareness of the miracle that comes to meet us in everything and everyone.

It is actually a wonder that the concept of wonder only appeared in the history of mankind around the time when philosophy started developing. In an earlier state of development human beings were still so strongly connected with the spiritual world through natural clairvoyance that they did not need to ask themselves any questions. The world around them was literally self-evident. In the Old Testament the word *wonder* occurs only six times; in the New Testament 44 times!

## The Forehead of Christ

More than any other human being, Christ wondered during his life on earth. Humanly we can picture this when we realize that He entered our world not only from another world, but from the highest world, that of the Trinity. There is no greater imaginable contrast than that between the Trinity and the creation that has fallen out of divine order.

When Friedrich Rittelmeyer asked Rudolf Steiner what Christ looked like during His life on earth he received the following answer: “A brow unlike that of a modern thinker, but one upon which reverence for the deep mysteries of existence was written.” Rudolf Steiner followed his answer with a description of the eyes and mouth of Christ as physical expressions of the qualities of empathy and conscience.<sup>1</sup> This personal conversation between Rittelmeyer and Steiner was made complete by a lecture in which Steiner spoke of the three qualities of wonder,

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<sup>1</sup> Friedrich Rittelmeyer, *Rudolf Steiner Enters My Life*.

compassion, and conscience as the means to connect with Christ and to give Him the opportunity to continue His work on earth.<sup>2</sup>

Shortly after this conversation Rittelmeyer had the opportunity to see in Steiner's atelier the wooden sculpture of the *Representative of Man*, which brings something of these three qualities to expression in its face. In my view the very first design for this sculpture is the most eloquent expression of wonder I am familiar with.

### Form and Content

The quality of wonder is something we can practice in all circumstances of our daily life. I will limit myself here to some wonderful examples of persons who have developed the art of wonder to great heights.

A priest in The Christian Community, when asked about the way he celebrated the Act of Consecration of Man, once answered: "I celebrate every time as if it is the first *and* the last time." For me that is the best way to be optimally present at the Act of Consecration as celebrant or as participant. In that way you get a feeling for the unique gift of every altar service. The words and the acts are each time the same; the true substance of the service always differs.

The mystic Gabrielle Bossis (1874-1950) experienced this one day when she heard Christ say: "This communion has blessings for you which it did not have yesterday and will not have tomorrow."<sup>3</sup> You could compare the eucharist with the "golden buckets" described by Goethe in his *Faust* as pictures of the gifts of the spiritual world. The angels unceasingly hand each other the gifts of the heavenly and earthly world. The form (the ritual) is always the same, the content is always different.

I have also come across the religious quality of wonder a few times in the work of some scientists. For instance, it made a deep impression on me how my former Waldorf School teacher, Dick van Romunde, with whom I remained connected to the end of his life, looked at plants. Far into old age he practiced learned ignorance – always looking as a blank slate at seemingly familiar phenomena.

In 1998 he described in an interview his lifelong search for the world of plants: "Phenomenology is: observing without judgment. When you judge too soon, you judge on the level of the intellect. Real judgment takes place at the level of consciousness if we do it in meditative pictures." He gave the example of an unsightly, smelly little plant which, in the form of its leaves, was a riddle for him for years. "In every vacation that smelly plant stood like a hedge around the cabin we had rented, as if it said to me: 'You haven't got me yet...'"



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<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Steiner, *Earthly and Cosmic Man*, CW 133, lecture of May 14, 1912.

<sup>3</sup> Gabrielle Bossis, *He and I*.

After years of intensive observation and meditation Dick van Romunde was able to say: “Now we have come together.” He explained the method of his consistently practiced phenomenology in several publications.<sup>4</sup>

### Wonder Opens

A person who in our time, through the phenomenological method in color experiments, came to an intense religious experience is long-time physics teacher Kees Veenman. In his book *Color Meditation* he describes countless experiments with colors, culminating in a chapter with the title *Christ in Color*. Wonder at the qualities of colors, created by a prism, spontaneously led to a spiritual awareness:

During an experiment in the fall of 1990 a red-hot admiration arose in me for the gesture of radiant, pure yellow. My heart was on fire. Never before and never after have I felt such admiration. And this opened the door to a spiritual experience. I beheld all color beings assembled together in a circle. The word *circle*, of course, refers to a form in space. This experience, however, was not spatial. I experienced the color beings there as “moral giants” – these were the words that spontaneously came up in me – as beings who in their moral power are exalted far above the human being. The intention of these beings is to work out of color in a healing way. They long to be recognized and acknowledged in this intention and activity. For color has a strong effect on human beings, and can also be misused. Christ was present in the midst of the colors, connected with all the colors, as their pivot, their center.

Thus wonder opens a door to phenomena, to their revelation, to their essence – and ultimately to Him through Whom everything on earth and in heaven has become.

*A monk asked: Is there anything more wonderful than the wonders of nature?  
The master answered: Yes, your awareness of the wonders of nature.  
– Angelus Silesius*

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<sup>4</sup> Dick van Romunde, *About Formative Forces in the Plant World*.