

North American Newsletter

Spring, 2024

From Me to You — An Easter Contemplation

Rev. Anna Silber

I can look upon a garden and say, “This is a garden.” But what happens when I say, “This is *my* garden?” I could ask that same question about a child, a friend, or a brother. What a difference it makes to say *my* child, *my* friend, *my* brother. That step involves the heart—specifically my heart—and with this word feelings of belonging and care and responsibility begin to arise in it. Such a small word, *my*, but through it one heart is bound to another, and with it comes an actual relationship.

In John’s gospel (20: 24-29), we hear Thomas’ confession of faith when he proclaims to the Risen One, “You are my Lord and my God.” It calls to mind its companion event in the gospel according to Matthew (16:13-16) when Christ Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” And Peter responds, “You are the Messiah, the son of the living God.”

There is something significant to notice in the evolution from, “You are the son of the living God,” to “You are *my* Lord and *my* God.” Peter proclaims who Christ Jesus is; Thomas proclaims who he is *to him*, as the Risen One. One is a statement of truth, while the other brings this truth into a relationship with a specific human heart.

It is no small thing to come to know who God is, to be sure. But if we leave it there, a danger can arise. It can happen that God remains distant—powerful and glorious, yes, but potentially somewhere far away from me. And yet, the very reason for the life, death and resurrection of Christ was to heal the deep wound that we call *distance from God*.

God is not only a cosmic reality, but also a personal relationship. If we take this relationship seriously, it can seem impossibly daunting; we might feel ourselves completely unworthy.



It is, and we are.

We might think that entering into that relationship by making it personal could make God too small. "What could he want with me and my little, mixed up heart?" we might ask.

Everything.

He already made the relationship utterly personal to each human heart through his deed on the cross. His invitation to Thomas to truly know his wounds was a way of showing Thomas, and us, just how personal it was for him. If you have ever been graced by the vulnerability of someone who trusts you enough to reveal their wounds to you, you will know that it can hardly get more personal than that.

In Eastertide at the beginning of the Consecration of the Human Being, we hear the special Easter proclamation, which is not just "Christ is risen," but "Christ is risen *to you.*" It turns out that this mighty, cosmic reality we call God is also interested in intimate, personal relationships with actual human hearts.

To this end, he offers himself in manifold ways to build these relationships. We can turn to him as our teacher as we learn about the mind of God. We can pray to him as our guide when we are lost. We can seek him as our comforter when we are hurting. We can look to him as our source of healing when our hearts have failed to love. He is there in all these ways so that our relationship with him might become deeply personal, so personal that each one of us one day just might be able to proclaim him as Thomas did, as "*My Lord and my God.*"

But that's not all. The great surprise and the deep paradox is that the more personal we make that relationship, the more we will feel ourselves to be united with all of creation and everything and everyone in it. Through him, may we all be one. That was Christ's prayer to the Father (John 17: 21) on the night before his crucifixion. So the story does not end with me coming to know who he is, nor is a personal relationship between me and my God an end in itself. The promise is that through my personal relationship with Him, he will, eventually, lead me all the way to you.

News from The Light in Every Thing Podcast

As many of you know, the North American Seminary has a regular podcast, inaugurated by its co-directors Jonah Evans and Patrick Kennedy on Easter, 2020. Shockingly, this means The Light in Every Thing is now four years old! Their conversations over the years have sustained many during difficult times. We know from analytics that episodes are now regularly downloaded on every continent, using whatever free streaming platform listeners prefer. The next community surrounding the podcast can be found on Patreon. We currently have 563 patrons, 421 of whom contribute between \$3 and \$40 monthly to support the seminary's mission. These dedicated listeners and supporters are essential to fulfilling our intentions as a movement—religious renewal in our times. Please consider joining us! For information on where to listen to the podcast, how to become a patron, or for archived episodes, please use this link to our website page: <https://www.christiancommunityseminary.ca/podcast>

Nature is the Teacher of Art

Rev. Bastiaan Baan

Natura artis magistra, is an old saying. What art does nature teach us? Of old one knew the art of living and of dying: *ars vivendi* and *ars morendi*. But above all, nature teaches us the art of living IN dying.

What for us humans is often a battle of life and death is self-evident for nature. Unceasingly, she teaches us: no life is possible without death. Or, in the words of a well-known author: Death is the trick of nature, to have much life.

Notice how easily a tree brings forth its blossoms at this time of the year, and how obviously and effortlessly it drops its wealth of flowers in the wind, so that all the color and scent passes away in a few days. Would we humans ever succeed in dropping everything that has flourished in our lives with such ease and letting it pass away – in the realization that only that which dies can produce fruit? If there is one place where the secret of life and life out of death comes to appearance, it surely is nature.

That is what the altar prayer of Easter time wants to tell us: the earth itself has become luminous. Spirit-shining sun power streams through the earth.

By His death and resurrection, the germ was laid in the dying earth existence for a new earth. And we begin to share in His resurrection if we become pupils of the master of art, nature. She teaches us how in every tree, bush, and plant new life is born from death.

Thus Christ teaches us how from His death, if one day we die in Christ, resurrection is born.

Eclipse

Rev. Sanford Miller

A sun eclipse occurs when the moon passes between the sun and earth and the moon's shadow is cast upon the earth. It is brief but spectacular to witness in its fullness. Even with a partial eclipse, daylight is diminished and twilight prevails, it becomes palpably cooler, and birdsong is reduced if not stopped. Then, within minutes it is over and things return to normal.

We human beings have the moon and sun within us in so far that we are bearers of soul and spirit. Our human environment is always a manifestation of the sum total of light and shadow that radiates from us collectively. What blocks our Spirit Light of love and goodness from shining upon our fellow human beings is the state, the condition of our souls. It is what comes or stands between us and others; it is what obscures and eclipses our Christ bearing Spirit Light. The reasons for this may be momentary and short-lived like lack of sleep, illness, or pain; or maybe from a chronic, longstanding condition that stems from some earlier trauma. This is a universal human condition: substance of soul inhibiting Spirit Light.

Through the Event of Easter, Jesus Christ reveals His profound and immeasurable love for us through His selfless Deed of Sacrifice. Through this every human being now bears a seed of Christ Light, a seed of the Spirit Sun in their hearts. And it is just this seed that we strive to nurture in our souls, so that one day we will no longer allow our soul weaknesses to obscure and partially eclipse our true, sun-like, Christ nature... and His love will become our love.

Fire of the Heart... Then and Now

Rev. Jeana Lee

Last summer more than 50 people from around the Midwest and as far away as Washington, DC and Hillsdale, NY, gathered in Viroqua, WI for the Fire of the Heart conference. Together we delved into the questions that ignite us and our strivings towards renewal.

We began with a picture of the spiritual geography of North America, and the special task of the Midwest as the heartland: to integrate polarities and strengthen heart-forces. A highlight for many people was the clay workshop where, with the help of companions, we sculpted an expression of what hinders us and then transformed it towards a new form, informed by the material itself. Inner and outer transformation was evident. We worked with the words of the Johnstide liturgy, speaking of the error inherent in a human incarnation and encouraging us to form a new relationship with our misdeeds, to see our failings as opportunities for our moral development. We heard the call to take up the activity of Jacob, renamed Israel: one who wrestles with God. With consciousness we can engage in the renewal that comes from within, through our Christian Community sacraments, especially the Sacrament of Consultation. An overflowing bounty of artistic offerings, some created for and about the conference, moved and enriched us.

It was a beautiful opportunity to come together as a community, to share experiences, deepen friendships and form new connections. It was truly a community effort and community blessing. This year we will gather again from June 27-30, to explore the first of the four main parts of the Consecration of the Human Being, the Gospel, and to continue asking our burning questions for religious renewal. For more information and registration, please visit:

tinyurl.com/fireoftheheart2024



 THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY
MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS RENEWAL

Fire of the Heart: Gospel-Seed-Soil

June 27-30 in Viroqua, WI

Please register by **June 24**
Visit tinyurl.com/fireoftheheart2024
for more information and registration.

Let us gather together in the heartland of North America with our burning questions for religious renewal. Each year we will focus on one of the four main parts of our Eucharist service, the Consecration of the Human Being, beginning this year with the Gospel. Come build Christ community for humanity and the earth!

Email fireoftheheartconference@gmail.com for more information.

Windows into the Life of the Seminary

Rev. Patrick Kennedy

Since the move to Toronto in 2019, the North American Seminary has had to become extraordinarily flexible. With all that happened during the Covid years, and for many other reasons, our very institution of learning for our priests has had to learn to “go with the flow.” It has been no different for the seminary newsletter!

For years, our seminary in North America shared its life with the friends and members in North America through a printed newsletter sent out to all twice a year. We now only print one per year, published in the summer and delivered to congregations to be put out in the foyers.

But, you can now find an *ever flowing* “newsletter” on our website. Students from all our different programs – the distant learners, the interns, the first year priests, the on-site first and second year students – are writing and sharing from their work, their life and their path in and through the seminary. There are some really wonderful things to discover there and we encourage you all to check it out: <https://www.christiancommunityseminary.ca/blog>

With warm greetings from all of us up here in Toronto,
Patrick Kennedy

What is the Central Fund, and What Does it Have to Do with Me?

George Riley, Member of the Regional Board

As you may know, the Central Fund was established for the North American region of The Christian Community when the decision was made to share the retirement expenses of priests region-wide, rather than placing this responsibility on each individual congregation. The Central Fund also carries the expenses of the North American Coordinator (Lenker), some support for future initiatives and our region’s share of support for the world-wide Movement.

A Regional Board, elected by the congregations, is tasked with administering this fund.

So how is this working out? At present, each congregation is asked to contribute 22% of its previous year’s income toward regional expenses. But these contributions make up only 66% of the needs of our retired priests and their dependents, and only 39% of the total regional expenses.

So where is the remaining 61% of the funding for regional needs going to come from?

The Regional Board recognizes that each congregation’s shared contribution can’t be increased without unduly burdening them financially. So the only other source for supporting our retired priests and the work of the Lenker is from legacies – bequests made by members in their wills.

And yes, this is where you come in! Without you having a will and leaving a legacy to The Christian Community, the future of our North American Movement is in jeopardy. It’s as simple as that.

This may seem like a daunting task, but fortunately, there are lots of resources to help you get started with this. Your congregation has a Legacy Giving Liaison, who can give you literature

and advice, and our region also has a few experts who can answer your questions about your particular situation.

Don't leave your future wishes to chance. Contact your Liaison or the Regional Administrator, Trish Mooney, giving@thechristiancommunity.org for information and help.

The essential point is (as with every important initiative) to start now!



Camp Harmony Lake

The Christian Community's
East Coast Summer Sleepaway Camp



2 Weeks: Fri, July 26 – Fri, August 9, 2024
In northeastern Pennsylvania
For rising 4th – 8th graders

We create a world at camp and live in it together for 2 wonderful weeks. It's a place where children discover the simple joys of summer in a supportive and fun-loving environment. Creativity, community, and deep bonds of friendship are the signatures of Camp Harmony Lake.

For more info and to register visit...

www.campharmonylake.org

Eulogy for Rev. Werner Grimm

Offered by Rev. Erica MacLennan, November 9, 2023

Our dear Werner loved to explore this earth we live on. He traveled all over the world: Australia and New Zealand, Antarctica, Mexico, China, Japan, Europe, and of course Canada. He liked to explore this country where he spent most of his life – Canada, where mountains meet the ocean, the landscape that is akin to Werner himself.

Picture a steep rocky wall rising up before the ocean. It's a strong, solid, seemingly unchanging face looking upon sea and sky. Stars shining at night, sun during the day; standing through the rhythm of the seasons – rain, sleet, mist, wind, storms, sea waves crashing upon it, impenetrable. And then when the tide is out, and one can walk along the shore beside the cliff and see it more fully, the crevices where birds and small animals find shelter, beautiful fossils in its wall, tidal pools with anemone and starfish, and a cave where deep within a freshwater spring wells up and streams out into the ocean.

Werner was born in Kassel on February 8, 1928. His parents were involved with the Anthroposophical Movement in Germany. Werner's earliest memory was as a three-year-old chasing chickens around the coop until he managed to catch a tail feather. He was the oldest child, the only son with three younger sisters. They remember him as the Bossy Big Brother of the family. He started attending the Waldorf School at six years old, taking the streetcar by himself there and back. At this age he also went to an occasional Christian Community children's service.

Werner's childhood was interrupted by the war. The military took away all the Anthroposophical books from the family home and he was drafted. He was put into service as a boat flagger. At 15 years old he was stationed on a small island off the coast of France with an anti-aircraft battalion. The little sleep they had was often interrupted at night by calls about possible aircraft and bombings. This contributed to his sensitivity to loud sounds, such as phones ringing, throughout his life.

After the war he was able to complete Waldorf High School and was involved in the Christian Community Youth Group. At this time, he worked at distributing food to bombed out villages – all on foot as the roads were impassible to vehicles.



He began studies at the seminary in Stuttgart, then took a short break to work temporarily at a home for special needs people in Bingenheim, after which he returned to seminary studies and an internship in Cologne.

Werner became Reverend Grimm on March 12, 1955 – 68 years ago! He was the 229th priest ordained in The Christian Community. His first sending was to Dusseldorf. It was there that he met Dietmot and where a year later in 1956, he proposed to her under a very special Gingko tree. Soon afterward Werner traveled to Canada, becoming the priest for the Toronto congregation.

He spent a year getting settled and then Dietmot joined him in Toronto where they were married. In their first few years they lived in a very small apartment in the upstairs of a house. They didn't have much room, or privacy.

Dietmot was a big support to Werner. She was always there for him in so many ways. Werner's work had him traveling to Ottawa and Montreal regularly, as well as to synods. Once they had their own home, they hosted the priests and Lenker at their house, very welcoming and warm. There were also confirmations held in Toronto.

In general Werner kept his personal life separate; he was a very private person. Family life began when he was 34, the first of his children was born: a daughter Bettina, and then followed his sons Thomas and Arnold. In those early and middle childhood years Werner was a playful father, who liked to tell jokes. The family often went for walks at the Edward Gardens outside of Toronto and played hide and seek among the paths. They went tobogganing and skating in the winter. Every summer they went up to cottage country and stayed at a cabin. They would all go canoeing together, with Werner and Dietmot paddling and the three children in the middle. Sometimes they would paddle at night and Werner would tell the children about the stars and the planets. But even on holidays he always brought his work with him, writing sermons and studying books.

He was very interested in people and liked to speak with them. He would stop and visit people on his way to Montreal and Ottawa, talk about The Christian Community, and answer any questions they might have.

He took his studies in Anthroposophy very seriously, attending branch meetings, which his young daughter imagined taking place in actual tree branches! In later years he taught foundation courses in Anthroposophy in Vancouver.

Werner loved poetry, especially Novalis, music as well, especially opera.

In 1978 Werner was sent to Vancouver. He drove across Canada with his teenage daughter, tween boys, Dietmot, gear, and guinea pigs. His children remember this as a wonderful trip.

Werner and family lived a very frugal life to support the life of the church, with the aim of getting a properly zoned church building. Dietmot was again at the forefront of the support he needed for the church to grow. She kept the family together, typed the newsletter, handled difficult calls, did the church bookkeeping, and would serve for the service. She was his greatest support. After her death, he held the regret that he did not appreciate her enough.

He was a man of very high ideals with a special interest in language. He loved words, the sounds of them, their roots, and their history. He always had a lot to say about the translation of Christian Community rituals. The Act of Consecration was the centre of everything. A colleague remarked that Werner was deeply committed and serious, that The Christian Community lived in every fibre of his being. He was very structured and orderly: late comers to the service were told to arrive at the correct time or wait until the service was complete.

Raising teens was a struggle for him and things became somewhat easier once his children were adults. Grandchildren entered his life when he was 61. His granddaughter remembers Opa telling vivid stories, creating different voices for the characters, and bringing the stories alive. They remember his avid love of nature, birds, precious stones, and the joy of spring when the birds returned to nest.

His life was not always easy, it was lonely work in the far-off outpost of Vancouver Canada. He hoped for a colleague. Finally after 21 years, when he was 71, Reverend Michael Kintzler came to Vancouver for 7 years. Then after being on his own again for a year Reverend Susan Locey arrived in Vancouver and they found their way to work together. When Susan retired, Reverend Ann Burfeind came, and then me.

Up until that point of his retirement, Werner was taking care of Vancouver, and traveling to Kelowna, Edmonton, Smithers, Vancouver Island, Hawaii, Eugene, and Seattle. He also celebrated confirmations, even traveling for one in Mexico. He also wrote many letters, to his granddaughter, to newly ordained priests, to collegial friends in Europe, and the Church leadership sharing his thoughts and ideas with them. He would endeavor to remember friends and colleagues' birthdays, very thoughtfully sending a card or giving them a call. He celebrated at the altar until he was 90 years old!

After that life became more difficult. His youngest son died in 2019, and then his dear wife Dietmot died. This was so very painful: a friend from Germany, Roswitha, said that Werner described this feeling as if half of him had been torn away, an open wound. At this point also his body was not cooperating anymore; he tired easily, couldn't concentrate for long, and was wobbly on his legs.

The great rock that was Werner was crumbling. It was at this point in his life that I was no longer a congregant of his, but a new colleague. And I experienced strongly in this new relationship, the wellspring of life within the mountain. We would meet every week and study together, he reading in German, me out loud in English.

He listened to me openly and shared with me his true wellspring – Christ Jesus, the foundation of his life.