



COMMON LIFE

NEWSLETTER

Accountability

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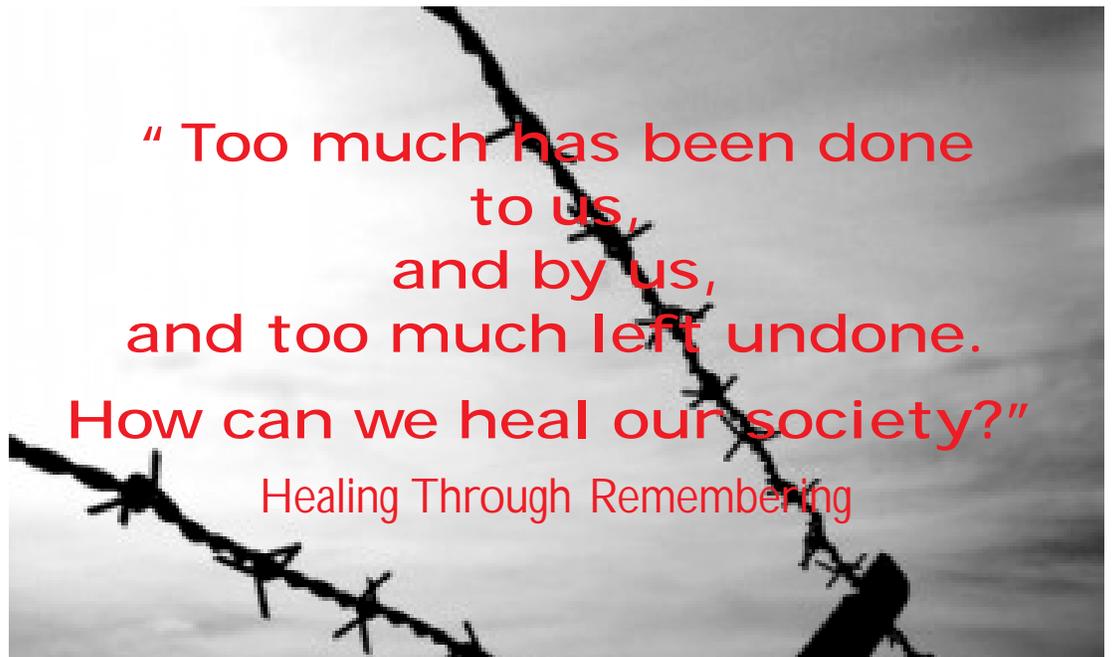
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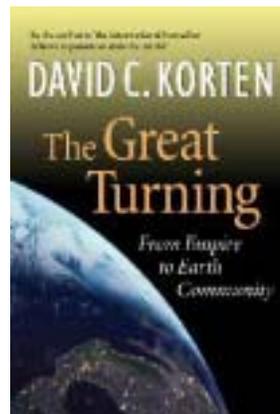
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Common Words

Communities of accountability - an intriguing concept. Our minister referred to such communities in a recent sermon and had several people tell her afterwards that they longed to be part of one. That's what our CLC groups are supposed to be. It says so in one of our background documents. "The overarching function of CLC groups is to provide both support and

accountability in relation to all five practices." Some of us might long for accountability but once we become part of a group, we wonder what it means.

The theme for this issue was derived from a section of that document describing the *Commitment to Community* practice - "Accountability for God-given resources with which to do God's healing work. We make personal commitments, for instance, about what percentage of money and our time we will dedicate to just causes; how we will take care of our bodies and the planet." It is important to care for creation, for the beauty and culture of our cities, for our bodies, time, money and talent. A lot could be said about this but the one word, accountability, kept coming to the fore.

We heard a lot about transparency and accountability from our federal Conservative party before they came into power. Less since. Their definition appears to be a punitive one which is applied more strictly to others than to themselves. How human! Internet articles on accountability were mostly about financial, legal and medical issues. And the predominantly conservative biblical and theological material was about behaving according to a literal interpretation of the Bible or there will be hell to pay. This judgmental understanding may make us tentative about using the word, accountability, and motivate us to find our own meaning. The South Eastern New Brunswick group is going to do just that at their next meeting. The Naramata group refers to the practice as discerning the use of our resources. Tim Scorer, however, offers an Examen of Consciousness that is a wonderful tool of accountability.

Scriptural judgment stories and images offer some comfort though. Judgment comes from God, we are told. We don't have to accept condemnation from others nor mete it out to them. Knowing that the parts of ourselves, our families, our communities, our nation that damage us and others can be

removed like burning chaff from wheat or dross from metal in a refiner's fire can be a release that frees us to use our remaining capacities to fulfill God's purposes.

The image of the disciples gathering in community to give an account of how they used their God-given power to heal the world and invite others to follow the Way provides another view of accountability. (Mark 6:7-13;30-32). The disciples celebrated when the Spirit worked through them but they also told their stories of betrayal and stupidity - probably because they knew they were unconditionally loved (not condemned) even when they screwed up.

This might sound like cheap grace- just own up to who you are and what you have done and everything will be OK. Not so. Just recently, I visited the Healing through Remembering Project in Belfast, Ireland. The organization's goal is to make peace with the past in order to live into the future. In their storytelling subgroup, members of the IRA, Protestant paramilitaries, police force, churches, local communities try to tell honestly the stories of what was done to them and what they did to others during the 30 years of conflict. A very painful task - giving a truthful accounting of oneself and one's community while looking into the eyes of someone whose wife or child you or yours may have shot and vice versa. What courage it takes to give one another the opportunity to make a new beginning whether it is deserved or not. Honest accounts and respectful listening are creating a new community.

In our Common Life "communities of accountability," we gather like the disciples to tell our stories of what we are doing to participate in God's healing work in the world. - or not doing. We do this because like Margaret Wheatley we want to be accountable to future generations for speaking out or taking action that is faithful to God's peace and justice and counter to the powers and principalities of our day - because we love them and God's world so much. Each time we meet and give an honest accounting, we are polishing "the mirror of awareness" (Rumi). We are learning the truth about ourselves and our world and in our own modest way allowing the Spirit to create a new community and a new future.

Thank you for your faithful reports and personal contributions to this issue. Blessings to the members of the disbanded Tilted to the Centre Group and to Don Robinson as he leaves the Five Oaks Co-ordinating Group.

The theme for the next issue will relate to the practice of "retreat." Contributions on this subject or any other would be most welcome. This is your newsletter!

Then Jesus went about among the villages teaching. He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

Mark 6:6b, 7...

The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught.

Mark 6:30

Word from the Common Life Groups



Tatamagouche

Halifax Group

Group members: Margot Metcalfe, Patricia De Meo, Gail Golding, Curtis MacDonald (sabbatical), Linda Scherzinger, Sheila Zurbrigg, Jennifer Watts.

It has been a period of exciting (and sad) change for the Halifax Common Life Group.

The exciting bits are:

1. Jennifer Watts has been elected to Halifax Municipal Council. Jennifer is a person of amazing integrity and perception. It gives us all hope for the future of municipal politics. (Many of the group worked on her campaign.)
2. Long-long-time member Curtis MacDonald has embarked on a period of sabbatical and discernment. We are grateful that Curtis has been able to find this time for his life.

Letters to the Editor

Thank you for a great newsletter! We appreciated the articles, updates and especially your editorial "Common Words." We printed it out and will refer to it often, as it offers insight into the practices.

~ Bob & Shirley Childs

Congratulations on the very fine Newsletter which appeared on my screen yesterday. From the striking cover page portraying the "hands of Justice" to your thought-provoking article on "Common Words", the stimulating reflections from other Common Life Groups, and so many other worthwhile contributions, the reading of the newsletter was a meaningful experience, one which made me feel grateful and also humble to be a part of this special community.

Thanks !!!!!

~ Lilojean Frid

3. Linda Scherzinger has moved to Halifax, and is bringing a new interesting perspective to our group. Welcome Linda!
4. We are delighted to note that Nan Corrigan has been chosen to be the new Maritime Coordinator for Common Life.

The sad news is: We have lost Blair Lewis from the group. Blair volunteers in many capacities and his busy volunteer life now precludes involvement in Common Life. We wish him all the best in his new endeavours.

We have decided that we will alternate the agendas for our "gift of content" part of each evening gathering. One night we will have someone prepare a presentation on a book or experience that excited them - and respond to this. Gail Golding provided a very thoughtful exploration of Philip Newell's *Christ of the Celts: the Healing of Creation* at our last gathering.

The next time we meet we will devote our time to spiritual companionship. (Several members of our group have done or are doing the Jubilee Program in Spiritual Guidance.)

South-Eastern New Brunswick Group

Group members: Bob & Shirley Childs, Mary & Brett Annington, Linda Burns, Marilyn Burrell, Linda Fox, Lawrence McGillvary, Janice McLean.

The South-Eastern New Brunswick Common Life Group has expanded since May. We welcomed Lawrence McGillvary and Mary and Brett Annington. Shawn Redden has decided to take a break because of a heavy schedule and so we are now a group of 9. Since we are too large for "house" meetings we are meeting in church parlours. We had thought of dividing into two groups but in a few meetings have come to feel a bond with each other and so are adjusting our meetings so that we can remain one group. In the last couple of meetings, we have been introduced by one member to "Godly Play" for our scripture. Another meeting focused on accountability of our finances. We are looking forward to our November meeting focusing on AWE with our science teacher member. Our focus for the next few months is on Accountability in all areas of our lives. Greetings from our group to all Common Life groups.



Word from the Common Life Groups



Free Spirits

Group members: Yvonne Stewart, Mary Joan Bradley, Michele Braniff, Lilojean Frid, Nancy Hardy, Marion Kirkwood, BJ Klassen, John Klassen, Des McCalmont, Joan McCalmont

Michele Braniff, one of our creative and spontaneous members, suggested we do something fun and somewhat out of character for our Free Spirits meeting the afternoon before the Annual Gathering of CLC groups in June. So—we dressed up for afternoon tea. The eating part is typical of our group but the dressing up not so much. Here are the results.....



High Tea! being enjoyed by Michele Braniff, Lilojean Frid, Mary Joan Bradley, Yvonne Stewart, Nancy Hardy, BJ Klassen, Marion Kirkwood (top picture) and Yvonne Stewart, Nancy Hardy, BJ Klassen (lower picture). Michele Braniff and Lilojean Frid are pictured on the front cover.

Our Ethical Struggles around Travel was the engaging focus of our September meeting. We began by reporting the results of our filling out the draft Green House Gas Emissions form developed by the Carbon Sabbath Initiative of KAIROS. We had researched ahead of time our emissions for travel by air, bus, train, and car. (Some even calculated for heat and electricity.) Although the calculations form needs some clarification, we still were able to recognize our contribution to the pollution of our environment. We were invited to reflect on how this knowledge might change our travelling behavior. We will continue to discuss this but already, some members have given up their car, travel by public transit, bus or train as much as possible, and have reduced the amount of long distance air travel. Others aren't sure whether their travel patterns will change.

Other ethical issues raised in articles we had read or identified in our discussion were:

- What about travel to developing countries where our gracious hosts have no possible means of travelling to our country? How might we enable folks from such nations visit ours?
- Is travel to developing countries a form of colonialism, of “consuming” countries we visit, or are we helping the economy of the country by spending money there?
- What does responsible travel look like? How can we engage with the lives of the citizens of the country we visit? Can we ensure that we stay in places that keep money in the country, eat local food, buy local crafts and don't damage the environment, etc.?
- Can deep love for the planet, for other peoples and for the next generation motivate us to make some travel sacrifices?

The theme for our November meeting will be **Reflection on Elections**. The subtext is how to live in the midst of empire?

New Group

Group members: Stephen Mabee, Allan Baker, Barbara Fullerton, Marilyn Myhre, Wayne Myhre, Betty Jean Page, Maggie Plant, Rafael Vallejo.

“Only a demanding common task builds community” according to the Rev. George MacLeod, late founder of the Iona Community. When we met with Nancy Cocks at Five Oaks in June, 2008, the New Group was attempting to discern what the “demanding common task” might be. Only on reflection did we realize that, like the Realm of God, the demanding common task was something we were seeking, yet already present.

It all began with a suggestion that, as a group, we read a book by David Korten (pictured right) called, *The Great Turning: from Empire to Earth Community*.”



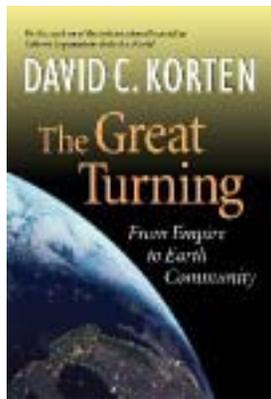
Word from the Common Life Groups

Achieving consensus on a commitment to this project, and purchasing the books, was the easy part. Then things began to get difficult.

For some in The New Group, “reading Korten” was analogous to taking liquid cod liver oil. The ideas tasted like sour milk. Reading another chapter could always be delayed until another time. Discussion could always be deferred when The New Group met or, Korten’s ideas could be refuted by reference to other authorities. Korten’s website, www.davidkorten.org was frequently accessed as members of The New Group learned more about his ideas, and the challenge of telling an alternative story.

For other members of The New Group, “reading Korten”, as it came to be referred to in our regular meetings, was an inspiration. One person said that, “This is the way I work.” These folk couldn’t wait to explore the ideas with others. There was frustration with the delays in getting through the book, and finding a practical outcome. Indeed, in our treadmill-type, agenda-driven lives, finding time to read and reflect was one of the challenges that made this the demanding, common task. What have we learned from this experience? How will other tasks be mastered if we cannot let go of the 24/7 demands of the society that holds the old story as its gospel?

We have concluded that the dynamics around commitment to this common task have forced The New Group to struggle with the question of what it means to be a community. On our journey, we have passed through the tollgates of toleration and acceptance. Each one of us has tested our commitment to community. The common task turned out to be more demanding than anticipated, and the end result of engaging the task meant that our waters of community, as MacLeod predicted, have become a deeper well.



For the benefit of our sisters and brothers in Common Life, we offer two perspectives on *The Great Turning*.

One perspective is that the sub-title is an excellent summary of what this book is about: how we are called to move from a hierarchical system of Empire to an egalitarian life in Earth Community. The power to change is in “the story” we tell, and live. “*The choices we make determine whether the mark we leave enhances or*

diminishes the human contribution to Creation’s great quest to actualize its possibilities.”¹ “*Our time has come to trade the sorrows of Empire for the joys of Earth Community.*”²

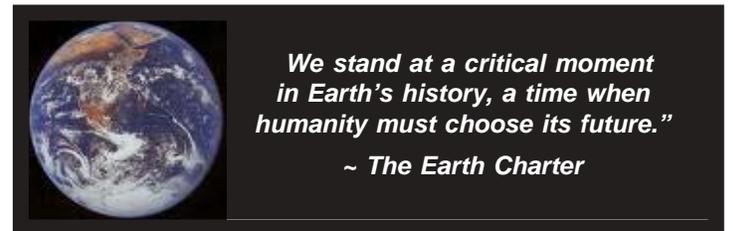
At this time when the Empire’s financial systems are demanding corporate socialism in order to prevent a systemic collapse, it has been an inspiration to read a proposal for an alternative AND sustainable way to organize life as communities of living beings. This book contains a cogent history of how the elites have used power, over the course of 5000 years, for their own purposes. “*The owning classes have long recognized that their imperial*

class privilege is placed at risk by unification of the oppressed. The claims of identity politics based on race, gender, and occupational specialization are tolerable to Empire because they perpetuate division. Discussion of class, however, is forbidden, because it exposes common interests and deeper structural issues with a potential to lead to a unified resistance.”³

This is also a book that is aware of our spiritual nature, and it promotes an activist spirituality. “*Engaging in the work of the Great Turning is a form of spiritual practice.*”⁴ “*A spiritually grounded politics, devoted to respectful discourse, the peaceful resolution of conflict, justice for all people, and the stewardship of life is a timely idea.*”⁵ How many of us have experienced too many “attack ads” in the recent federal election? Korten has a chapter titled, *Building a political majority*, that responds to the “how” question of practical-minded people.

God’s world needs transformation. Korten has written about the reasons why, and he proposes a practical proposition to make God’s world a sustainable community. “Reading Korten” has been an inspiration for us to live with respect in creation.

¹ page 271 ² page 359 ³ page 216 ⁴ page 310 ⁵ page 326



Shekinah Seekers

Group members: Pam Byers, Barbara Bitzer, Jane Entiknap, Lloyd Smith

This fall, while Mardi Tindal was on sabbatical from Five Oaks, the Shekinah Seekers were asked to facilitate a discernment day for folks considering becoming part of Common Life. Registrations came in very slowly so we weren’t sure there would be enough interest but in the end four women attended and easily decided they wanted to become Group # 12. It was a good experience for our own small group of four as we reviewed the purpose of Common Life and the five spiritual practices with those keen women. Group 12 will be having their official “launch” event in January but we know they are already a support to each other.

The Five Oaks leadership team will be offering future support and growth opportunities for Group 12 as they and we discern the need. It seems our Common Life groups are experiencing the program in many different ways so we want to be flexible in what help and guidance we offer. As Mardi likes to say, “We are making this path by walking it.”

Word from the Common Life Groups

Sloe Jam

Group members: Janet Saunders, Thom Davies, Margaret Fisher, Lynn Godfrey, Deborah Hart, Jennie Jones, Louise Sims and one other.

Sloe Jam has been looking at Greta Vosper's book, *With or Without God*, hoping to finish with it at our last meeting. We didn't because one of the missing members was the most interested. This book generated more discussion than any other book we have tackled because we have more than two opinions among us. We have also been discussing the issue of food, *The One Hundred Mile Diet*, Fair Trade, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, the unknown possible harm of microwaves and additives. Sloe Jam does not have anything conclusive to say about these issues. Except for two members, the group is "P" on Myers-Briggs. Perhaps that's why we have difficulty ending stuff!

Tent Dwellers

Group members: Eleanor Brent, Henk Dykman, Lorraine Dykman, Joan Graham, Ione Grover, Ellice Oliver, Celia Orth, Doug Ross, Peg Simmons

Our group is sharpening the focus of our spirituality practice to the spirituality of elderhood. Ione Grosvenor, our new member, has some public involvements on this topic. Her commitment blends with the growing interest in our group as well as with some of the reading Doug Ross has been inviting us to undertake. Our involvement with the Francis Sandy Centre continues to grow.

Joan Gugeler will be leaving the group because there are just too many things needing doing at this time of her life but she wishes to continue to be on our CLC list and a recipient of this newsletter.

Tilted to the Centre

Remembering with Thanksgiving ~ written by Ted Black
June 7, 2002 - September 17, 2008

Group members (pictured below L to R): Barb Buttars, Ted Black, Jan Aylward, Ruth Ferguson, Don Robinson.



On Wednesday September 17, 2008, the Common Life Group "Tilted to the Centre" met for the last time. It was a day of celebration and a day of sadness as each member recalled the blessings of the journey we had walked together.

The "Centre Group" was one of the original Common Life Groups formed at Five Oaks in 2002. Over the six years we met together approximately 30 times - mostly at 5 Oaks. Our meetings, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., almost always followed the pattern of opening worship, check-in, learning time, a brief planning time, and closing worship - with a lunch break at 12:30. In the early years, our learning focused on the Common Life disciplines. In the later years we studied, chapter by chapter, short works such as Ched Meyers book on Sabbath Economics, and the United Church's Song of Faith.

At various points in our journey, nearly all of us experienced significant life transitions of one sort or another; and the group became a valuable resource for reflection. Always our sharing was rich. We cared deeply for one another. We valued the days we were able to spend together.

Last spring, when we realized that life changes were going to mean changes in our group's membership, we made the decision to bring the group to an end. Our desire was to end at a time when we could "end well." Our September meeting was indeed a good ending.

In his book *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says that no one can be in community who cannot also be alone; and no one can be alone unless she or he is also in community. At the end of our Common Life experience, each of us feels that we have been blessed with a greater freedom to be alone, and a greater freedom to enter into new communities - as God provides the opportunity.

We give thanks for all the blessings that have come to us on this journey. And we give thanks to all who prayed for us, guided us, and rejoiced with us along the way. Our parting word is the benediction with which we ended our final gathering:

*Depart in peace, to do God's work,
walk ever in the light.*

*For Christ is with you evermore,
to guide you day and night.*

*The love of God, with peace and joy,
with each of us attend.*

*And guide our ways through coming days,
until we meet again.*



Prairie Spirit

The members of Prairie Spirit are having a discernment day next week.

Word from the Common Life Groups



Naramata

Living Common Life Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day ~ Tim Scorer



Macrina Wiederkehr has written another wonderful resource for those of us who have a concern for spiritual practice, the contemplative life and justice making. Her latest resource is called *seven sacred pauses: Living Mindfully through the Hours of the Day*.

I discovered in the last two weekend events of the Naramata Common Life program what a remarkable gift *seven sacred pauses* is to the Common Life enterprise: it's a fit in

terms of both intent and practice. Macrina follows the seven traditional hours of prayer of the day, providing the practitioner with rich descriptions of each of the seven hours, and a wealth of scripture, poetry, reflections, stories and quotes from a diversity of great spiritual teachers. Here are the hours and a line of thematic words to give you a sense of the spirit of that hour which is not so much a 60-minute hour, but a specific time in the day which might be celebrated for as much as two hours:

The Night Watch – *until dawn*

Themes: vigilance and deep listening, mystery and silence, surrender and trust

The Awakening Hour – *dawn*

Themes: praise and resurrection, joy and delight, the coming of the light

The Blessing Hour – *mid-morning*

Themes: the coming of the Spirit, wind and flame, breath and blessing, strength and courage, the sacredness of work

The Hour of Illumination – *midday*

Themes: commitment and passion, courage and faithfulness, healing, truth and peace

The Wisdom Hour – *mid-afternoon*

Themes: steadfastness, surrender, forgiveness and wisdom, impermanence, aging, maturing, death and transition

The Twilight Hour – *evening*

Themes: gratitude, praise, serenity, mystery, the lighting of the lamps

The Great Silence – *night*

Themes: silence, rest, and sleep; darkness, trust, and protection; personal sorrow, completion, intimacy

Applications to Common Life

At the June weekend we actually did set our alarms and rise at 2am on Saturday morning for an hour of the **Night Watch**. The words which we used for the vigil are adapted from Macrina's book and will give you a sense of the accessibility and richness of her writing:

Let us keep vigil

- with our hearts' eternal questions and deep longings
- with those places in our beings where the light has grown dim
- with those whose tired hearts have lost hope
- with those who sleep and those who cannot sleep
- with those who have fearful hearts
- with those whose courage is waning
- with those who have lost vision of what could be
- with mystery

Let our prayers

- be simply prayers of waiting in silence
- be listening with love
- be for trust
- be for healing
- be prayers of surrender
- be prayers without words
- be prayers of intent

Questions for this hour:

- We know there are stars so far away that their light has not yet reached the earth. Could the same be said about the bright ideas, virtues, creativity, and dreams of our own lives?
- For what are you waiting?
- What does the darkness of the night mean to you?
- What have been the vigils of your life?
- When have you kept vigil with your anxious heart?

At the other end of the day we lived into what Macrina calls **The Great Silence**. Her book offered us an examen in preparation for walking the labyrinth by candlelight:

Let us be watchful and vigilant because the enemies of the soul prowl about looking for opportune moments to discourage us. Remember then, with confidence, the powerful and strong spiritual searchlight of faith and the magic light within. Let us place ourselves in the protective care of the angels and into the cupped hands of the Divine.

Take a moment to let these images embrace you. Use the following Examen of Consciousness as a careful reflection of your day, or create your own:

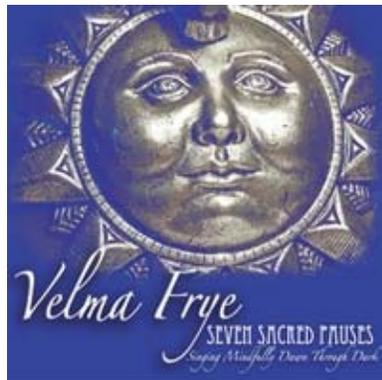
Examen of Consciousness

- Have I been a good memory in anyone's life today?
- Have the ears of my heart opened to the voice of God?
- Have the ears of my heart opened to the needs of my sisters and brothers?
- Have the eyes of my heart beheld the Divine face in all created things?
- What do I know, but live as though I do not know?
- Have I been a good student of the hours today?
- How have I affected the quality of this day?
- Have I been blind or deaf to the blessings of the day?
- Is there anyone, including myself, whom I need to forgive?
- When did I experience my heart opening wide today?
- Have I worked with joy or drudgery?
- Have I waited with grace or with impatience?
- What is the one thing in my life that is standing on tiptoe crying, "May I have your attention please?" What needs my attention?



Not all our applications of Macrina's work were lived out in a contemplative style. In both June and October we combined our Saturday lunch break with our practice at **The Hour of Illumination**. Noting the themes of that hour: *commitment and passion, courage and faithfulness, healing, truth and peace*, each member of the community chose one piece of recorded music which for them represents one or more of those themes. Then we spent a spacious lunch hour enjoying the amazing food of the Naramata kitchen while listening to one another's musical selections. Each person, in turn, spoke about the reason for their choice of music. Amazingly, two people in June chose exactly the same song by Pink Floyd and another two participants in October chose pieces by the same contemporary choral composer, Karl Jenkins.

Incidentally, on the matter of music, there is a whole section of chants toward the end of the book. A Florida musician, Velma Frye, has written and recorded a CD of music to accompany these chants. They are easily available from www.velmafrye.com and can be purchased there or through itunes store. They are definitely a not-to-be-missed programmatic resource.



In addition to the times of contemplation, I ensured that there were opportunities for active reflection. For example in June our practice of the **Blessing Hour**, an hour which includes time for

thinking about our work and engagement with our mission in the world, consisted of making Soul Collages on cards about 5x7 inches. If you are interested in knowing more about this lovely reflective practice of soul collage, go to Seena B. Frost's book, *Soul Collage: An Intuitive Collage Process for Individuals and Groups* (www.soulcollage.com).

It occurred to me as we were living the seven sacred hours in our October weekend that it would be quite feasible to line up the seven spiritual practices of the Common Life Program (daily prayer; engagement with scripture; action for justice; mutual support for learning and spiritual growth; participation in the meetings of the group; retreat time; and discernment concerning the faithful use of personal resources including land, water, our bodies and our money) with the seven hours of the day, allowing each hour to influence the exploration of the significance of that Common Life practice. There is a lovely coming together of the traditional practice of the hours and the intention of the Common Life program in this gift that Macrina Wiederkehr has shaped out of her own life of action and reflection. Definitely one of the great book finds of 2008 that will be an inspiring companion for years to come!



Tim Scorer, Bowen Island, BC timscorer@gmail.com

Material from seven sacred pauses: *Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day*, Macrina Wiederkehr, Sorin Books 2008 (page 168)



Ending Our Silence

Margaret Wheatley

Eight hundred years ago, Catherine of Sienna, who was later canonized as a Catholic saint, stated, “Speak the truth in a million voices. It is silence that kills.” Her words haunt me today, as I notice how much silence there is and how much it is growing around the world. This silence, like a thickening fog, is becoming visible in many places.

- At an international peace conference in Croatia, participants were asked, “What keeps you from speaking up for peace?”
- At an educator’s conference in the United States, a well-known champion of public education confronted his audience with three important issues that no one was talking about, behavior he dubbed as “our great silences.”
- In Europe, many people express remorse that their nations stayed silent as war in the Balkans escalated. Why didn’t they act to prevent the atrocities and massacres of the Bosnian war? (The United Nations issued a formal apology for its failure to prevent the massacre in Srebrenica.)

- In Africa, both Europe and the United States keep expressing regret for not intervening to stop the slaughter of millions in Rwanda, or the Sudan, or Sierra Leone. But the slaughter continues.
- In a rural Kenyan village, a young African woman dying of AIDS wonders why America is so silent on the AIDS pandemic. She asks her sister who lives in Seattle. “Does anybody know that we’re dying?”

Why is silence moving like a fog across the planet? Why is it growing in us as individuals, even as we learn of more and more issues that concern us? Why do we fail to raise our voice on behalf of the things that trouble us, and then regret what we didn’t do? As I’ve watched the silence grow in myself and others, I’ve noticed a few reasons for the silence, but none of these are entirely sufficient as explanations.

We don’t know how to talk to each other anymore.

Even in nations where there is a strong tradition of citizen participation, people have stopped talking to one another about the most troubling political issues. A Danish woman explained that political correctness made people fearful to engage in conversation about the influx of immigrants that is impacting Denmark’s homogenous culture, forcing them to deal with diversity and inclusion. She explained that since

Article

reasonable people failed to talk about this issue, right wing splinter groups have developed, marketing fear-based, exclusionary solutions. As she described this behavior, it felt like an accurate description of what's happened in many democratic societies. The silence of thoughtful people creates a vacuum filled by extremists.

We're overwhelmed by the amount of suffering in the world. It's impossible to notice what's going on in the world during this dark age without feeling overwhelmed and helpless. There are very few true solutions. Most solutions only result in more complex problems, and every act of compassion is countered by more acts of aggression and greed. The sheer numbers of problems, and their unending nature and global scale, has pushed many of us into silence. It is too much to bear, and so we choose numbness over involvement.

People feel more powerless than at any time in recent history. Recently I was in a conversation with twenty-five people, ages twenty-two to sixty, from fifteen different countries. I was saddened to hear that all but one of us shared the same experience – we do not feel represented by our governments, and we feel powerless to change this. Decisions are being made in our name that we absolutely disagree with. As one young leader from England now living in Holland remarked, "I see all these decisions being made by men in ties. I feel so angry. I see the youth not being heard, getting pissed off and going to the streets in protest, and look what happens to them!"

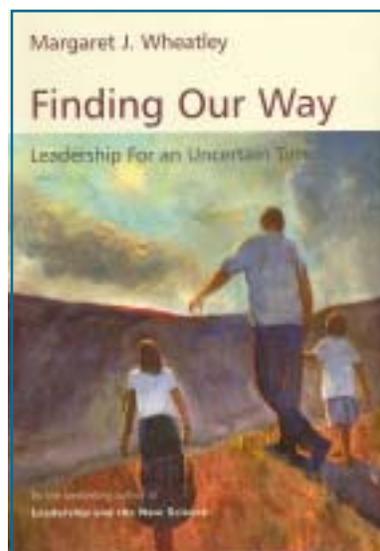
We're afraid of what we might lose if we speak out. A young Ecuadorian environmentalist working for her government described how she couldn't get support from local environmental organizations because they were afraid they might lose their government funds. The U.S. educator who named "our great silences" noted that educators fear the loss of funding or favors if they question current policies. In the sixties, this was called "being co-opted," forfeiting one's integrity and principles in order to stay on the good side of those in power. Since then co-optation seems to have become far more prevalent, just more subtle. We hesitate to challenge those who offer us employment, funds, or respectability. We want to see change, justice, peace, but delude ourselves into thinking these can occur with no cost to ourselves.

We've convinced ourselves that what is happening elsewhere doesn't affect us. Perhaps we're still denying our interconnectedness, believing that things happening far away do not threaten us. Or perhaps we're grasping for whatever personal benefits we can while we still have time, sensing that things are only getting worse.

I had a personal wake-up call about silence and giving voice several years ago, when I was working with a colleague from South Africa. It was just eighteen months after the elections that brought Nelson Mandela and black South Africans to power. My friend, like many white South Africans, was just then learning the details of apartheid, the system under which he as a white, had prospered, while millions had suffered so horribly. As more and more atrocities were revealed, his twenty-seven year old son confronted him one day: "How could you not have known what was going on? How could you not know? I was sitting in the serene comfort of a conference room in America when I heard this story. But the question pierced right through me. **I knew in that moment that I never wanted to be in the position of my friend, that I never wanted to be confronted by my own children or grandchildren.***

Since then, I do not speak up for all the issues and problems that disturb me. I give voice to some but not for others. I can't pretend that I make rational choices, where I "choose my battles." Sometimes I am just too tired to care; sometimes I lack courage; sometimes I notice that others have picked up that cause and I don't have to. But at least now I notice when I remain silent and am more conscious that silence is a choice I make. I'm learning that silence is not the absence of action, but another form of action. **And I hold myself accountable for that.***

The eighteenth-century historian Edmond Burke said it clearly, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men [and women] to do nothing." I hope that I am doing what I can, although it may not be enough. And if my grandchildren one day come to ask, "Why didn't you do something?" at least I will be able to tell them what I did.



From:
Pgs. 226 – 229, *Finding Our Way: Leadership For an Uncertain Time*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, 2005.
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Can't be an innocent bystander in a world of pain and fire and steel.

Bruce Cockburn

Personal Contributions

The Great River through Eed

Michele Braniff

Michele got the idea for this river story at the Five Oaks' Greening Our Faith workshop when one of the leaders asked the question, "How much water does the river need?"



Once upon a time, not very long ago and not very far away, there was a river. Deep, clear, pure, wide and powerful, they called it simply, the Great River. The Great River ran through the land of Eed. For seven generations, the land of Eed had been governed by a king and queen who ruled with justice, compassion and wisdom. The family motto of the royal house of Eed was: "A wise frog does not drink the pond dry". This may seem like a strange motto but let me explain.

For seven generations, seven princesses of Eed, while walking in the royal gardens, had met an enchanted, talking frog. You may have heard stories about the princess and the frog. If you have, you will not be surprised when I tell you that each princess, each for her very own reasons, had occasion to kiss an enchanted talking frog. The frog turned into a handsome prince. The princess and frog prince fell in love, married and lived happily ever after and ruled the land of Eed with justice, compassion and wisdom. Each queen and king held in their hearts the family motto and proudly hung the motto on a sign on the castle wall.



Until the eighth generation. The young Prince of Eed, Prince Grrr, was very different from all those who had come before, mostly because he wanted to be different. He wanted nothing to do with frogs and he hunted and trapped the frogs to make sure that none would find its way into the royal garden. When the young prince became king of Eed, King Grrr of Eed refused to hold the family motto in his heart and he took the sign down from the castle wall. King Grrr of Eed was not interested in ruling with justice, compassion and wisdom. What King Grrr of Eed wanted was gold.

And King Grrr figured out a way to use the Great River to get lots and lots of gold. He made people pay gold for drinking water, to swim in the river, to use the power of the river for electricity and to travel on or near the river. For the payment of gold, King Grrr let people dump garbage and sewage into the river. He did not care what happened, so long as he got his gold.

There were some who made up a nickname for King Grrr of Eed. They dropped the "of" in his title and called him King Grrr Eed. Eventually, they had a nickname for the river. They called it "not So". At first, "not so Great" because over the years the river became less wide, less deep, less powerful and less clean. Later, they called it "not so", as in "not so much of a river". It was

around that time that the people of Eed began to call meetings to try to figure out a way to help the river be great again.

King Grrr of Eed was always invited to the meetings but he never came. Not until the year that the river ran dry. Some people say that King Grrr only came to the meeting to try to collect the gold that had not yet been paid. That was the first thing he asked about when he arrived. The people tried to explain that the river needed some of the water.

The princess, King Grrr's sister, was listening to the people. "How much water does the river need?" she asked. "That's the question, isn't it – How much water does the river need?" King Grrr of Eed just scoffed. "No, that is a stupid question. It does not matter. The question is, 'If the river wants water, does the river have gold to pay for the water it wants.' That is the question!" One of the prospectors told King Grrr that the river had plenty of gold – upstream in the hills where the prospectors panned for gold. He spoke the truth and King Grrr knew it.

Before you could say "water is wet," King Grrr had taken the crown off of his head and given it to his sister, the princess and King Grrr was on his way to the counting house to collect all his gold and head off to the hills to prospect for gold. There was not enough gold left in the entire great river valley to satisfy King Grrr.

King Grrr's departure left the princess in charge. She remembered the family tradition of justice, compassion and wisdom. The princess asked again, with authority: "How much water does the river need?" The mothers said that the river needed the water to be clean. The fishermen said that the river needed all the water with none to spare. The farmers said that they must take care of the river, like they cared for the land. Each one had his or her own idea.

"This is so confusing," said the princess. "I think we should ask an expert. We should ask the fish. We should ask the fish how much water the river needs." And that is exactly what the princess set off to do. It would have been much easier a year or two earlier, before the river ran dry.

The princess searched and searched and eventually she found a pool of water with little fish. It was more like a puddle because the water upstream had run dry and the water downstream had run dry. In the middle, in the puddle were tiny fish – so small that they were more like bait. But they swam like fish so the princess asked them: "How much water does a river need?"

Personal Contributions

The princess asked quietly. She asked loudly. She asked slowly and more quickly. She asked blowing bubbles into the water and sending a powerful breath of waves across the surface of the water. The princess got no response. She may still be asking the same question except that she was interrupted by a frog. You may not be surprised when I tell you that this was a talking, enchanted frog.

The frog explained to the princess that the fish could not understand what she was saying. Air creatures speak air words and fish are water creatures who speak water words. Lucky for the princess, frogs are creatures both of air and water and speak both kinds of words. When the princess asked him, the frog agreed to ask the fish, How much water does a river need? And so, he dove into the water and was back to the surface before the princess could wipe the puddle-splashes off her face.

Puzzled by the frog's silence, the princess asked him what the fish had said. "It's easy to turn air words into water words but almost impossible to explain water words in air words", said the frog.

"Water words are just so much deeper. Ideas float on water words. There are undercurrents of meaning." The princess pressed him to try.



The frog opened and closed his mouth – very wide and several times. Finally, he said, "A river needs... enough water.... for the upstream to flow into the

downstream." The princess already knew that. Otherwise, the fish would have been in the river instead of trapped in a puddle. She told the frog to try harder.

The frog said that he had no words but told the princess that if she were to gather her people, they should have a festival. No, a Mardi Gras. A parade. A party. With music and dancing and food and celebration. They should all dress up like waves, fish, rocks, like parts of the river and like birds and insects flying over the river. Like plants living within and beside the river.

The princess did not understand what the frog was talking about but she brought him to the people and let him explain. It is funny with people. They all hear the same thing but the message they get is different for each one. Some heard "party" and that was enough. The farmers thought that the dancing may be like a rain dance. Some of the old timers liked the idea of following the advice of a frog. Others, and not all of them women, thought "hmm, enchanted, talking frog – perhaps the festival will be romantic and maybe the princess will kiss the frog and he will turn into a handsome prince?"

They each had different reasons and it does not matter why. What counts is that they all came together to make the festival – Mardi Gras – parade happen. There was so much colour and music and celebration! The animals and birds and insects came to watch and stayed to join in the festivities! It started to rain. And maybe it was because they were all together or because they were wet, but it was like they were all connected – the people, the animals, birds and insects, the plants. It was like they were part of the river!

The princess was so happy that she kissed the frog. You will not be surprised when I tell you that he turned into a handsome prince. The princess and the frog prince fell in love, got married and lived happily ever after. They ruled the land of Eed as Queen and King. They ruled with justice, compassion and wisdom. They held the family motto close to their hearts. They found the old sign in the attic and hung it again on the castle wall: "A wise frog does not drink the pond dry!"



Recipe

When the Free Spirits group stays overnight at Five Oaks, John Klassen and Marion Kirkwood usually provide a nutritious and delightful breakfast. The group particularly enjoyed the muffins at our September meeting.

Cranberry-Blueberry Muffins

Marion Kirkwood

2 ½ cups	whole wheat flour
2/3 cup	sugar
2 tsp	baking powder
1 tsp	baking soda
¼ tsp	salt
1/3 cup	reduced calorie margarine, diced
3/4 cup	plain nonfat yogurt
1/3 cup	thawed frozen orange juice concentrate
2	eggs
1 ½ cups	fresh or frozen blueberries
1 cup	fresh or frozen cranberries
24	dried apricot halves, chopped

1. Preheat oven to 400 deg. F. Spray eighteen 2 ¾" non-stick muffin pans with nonstick cooking spray, or line with paper liners.
2. In a large bowl, combine the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Using a pastry blender or 2 knives, cut in the margarine until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs.
3. In a medium bowl, combine the yogurt, orange juice concentrate and eggs. Stir into the flour mixture until just combined (do not over mix). Gently stir in the blueberries, cranberries and apricots.
4. Spoon the batter into the cups, filling each about 2/3^d full. Bake until golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 15-20 minutes. Cool on a rack 10 minutes; remove from the cups and cool completely on the rack.

From Weight Watchers *Simply Best* cookbook, page 239.

General News from the Centres



News from Mardi

“Summer is a reminder that for this single season at least, we might cease our anxious machinations and give ourselves to the abiding and abundant grace of our common life.” ~ Parker J. Palmer



Parker’s words have special meaning today as I prepare this update in the later days of the summer season and reflect on the *abundant grace of our common life*.

Five Oaks is singing at this very moment with young adults from across the country who are here for Kairos, and a few of them have

noticed the lovely new Common Life brochure prepared by Robin McGauley, along with the fantastic newsletters which Yvonne has edited, displayed in the Upper Room. Some have talked with me about this community and how they might get involved. So we may yet get a young adult group going!

Pilgrimage to Iona

My three-month sabbatical began with a pilgrimage to Iona where Kathy Galloway talked with us about the evolution of the Iona community and the concept of pilgrimage in these times. Staying at the MacLeod Centre and in program with members of the Iona community was a real inspiration vis-à-vis Common Life. (Eleanor Brent, another CLC member was also in our pilgrimage group.) There are small groups within the Iona Community (of 5 members) who are making such a difference. And even though the community of full members is still only 260, they have such a witness. As a community they’ve committed to reduce their carbon footprint by 5% each year (an inspiring ‘common task’ that we might consider) AND enough members have stepped up to reduce their own carbon footprint in addition to this goal, in order to ensure that Kathy Galloway’s travel on behalf of the community, is carbon neutral. I think that this is a fantastic model for our church.

Change in Five Oaks’ Rates

As you know, Iona community members must commit a percentage of their income to financial support of their place and community. At Five Oaks, we haven’t prescribed anything like this for our Common Life Community, so are deeply grateful for your donations, and others’ donations that sustain this ministry. In stark contrast to Iona, we provide *subsidized* rates for

Common Life. Since 2002 we haven’t even raised our day rates for Common Life gatherings, even though we’ve had to raise rates for others (and numbers of those coming to the centre are increasing.) We want to encourage and support you to come, and we trust that this has helped, as we also hope the 15% off room and board rates for other programs have helped in your *dedication to learning*. Subsidized rates will continue as a sign of the abundant grace of our common life, but the gap between our rising costs (largely energy-related, which affect everything, including food) and our current Common Life rates is becoming too great for us to manage.

In 2009, we will continue to offer you less-than-regular rates, and the 15% discount mentioned above, but our Common Life rates need to come a bit closer to what others pay, so we are increasing Common Life rates as follows:

- Day rate will move from \$20 to \$25
- Overnight and breakfast will remain at \$40
- Overnight and lunch will move from \$60 to \$68
- Overnight, breakfast and lunch will move from \$70 to \$80
- Overnight, breakfast, lunch and dinner will move from \$80 to \$90
- A retreat that begins with dinner on Day 1 and ends with dinner on Day 2 will amount to \$102

Donations will continue to help us meet today’s challenging costs.

Hello and Goodbye

Another sign of the abundant grace of our Common Life is that **two new members for our Five Oaks Common Life Leadership Team** have come forward: Pam Byers and Lloyd Smith will join Nancy Hardy and me as we prepare to **bid farewell to Don Robinson** later this year and plan for upcoming Common Life group formation programs. We have a **new Common Life group** forming as a result of the October Discernment Day. Please continue to help us get out the word about the abundant grace of Common Life so that others may join and be blessed, and deepen their blessing, through the work and witness of this community.

A number of you have had trying summers with health and other concerns. Our Five Oaks prayers have continued daily for you and your Common Life group, and I trust that you have known the abundant grace of our common life through prayer and companionship.

As you read this, we are well into the season of harvest-gathering. Thank you for your sabbatical blessings which you have sent my way and which I have received with deep gratitude as harvest-time fruit.

Peter and Sue Short are already preparing for our **spring retreat for May 3rd and 4th**, 2009 and I hope to see you all well before then!

Editor’s Note: Congratulations and best wishes to Mardi on her nomination for Moderator of the United Church. She hopes this nomination will help draw attention to the important work of our Centres.

General News from the Centres

Five Oaks Annual Common Life Retreat

Threads of Community: Weaving with Warp and Woof June 2008

On her way from her position as professor at the Atlantic School of Theology to a pastoral charge in Saskatchewan, Nancy Cocks, former deputy warden of the Iona Community stopped by Five Oaks to provide enthusiastic leadership to our well-attended CLC gathering.



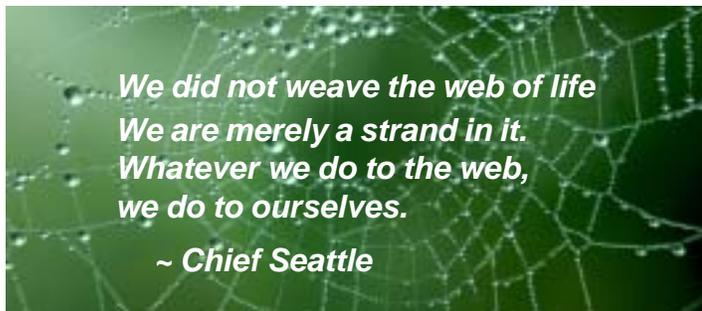
Nancy Cocks

She introduced her sub-themes by a) describing a practical aspect of life in the Iona Community, b) reflecting on it theologically and c) inviting us to reflect on its significance for our particular group's common life. Here is a "threadbare" outline of her presentations.

I Sharing Space: Self & Other as Warp and Woof

- Iona intentionally provides guest accommodation in shared rooms and washrooms. Programs include participants of differing economic means. Household tasks ranging from cleaning public toilets to cooking are assigned to mixed groups of visitors. This arrangement calls middle class tourists out of their need for privacy and enables them to work at similar tasks alongside the socially excluded.
- An underlying principle at Iona is setting self aside to be open to the stranger; to what God has in store for us in the other. In community, we have to invite people to give so they know they are needed. It is more powerful when the powerful do the toilet cleaning – like Jesus washing feet.
- What is our task as Christian communities, as those who share a common life, in a society that fears the stranger?

How do you understand or experience the interconnection between self esteem and self giving in common life?



II Weaving a Vision: Work and Worship as Warp & Woof

- "...a demanding common task builds community." *George MacLeod* The Iona Community is committed to addressing unjust structures and to providing personal support. The personal and systemic dimensions of the vision weave together. For example, members are willing to advocate for a high quality educational system for all and as well work with individuals to help them improve their level of literacy.
- A demanding common task is motivated by a shared sense of vision and purpose such as sharing in God's healing work in the world. A demanding common task involves a sharing of different God-given gifts among all who learn and participate in a group.
- What is/might be our 'demanding common task' as a Common Life group? As a movement? As a church?

What do we experience or imagine as the practical and theological potential of this demanding common task? What might it add to our vision of our common life? What might its challenges be for common life?

III Sharing Table: Ethics & Etiquette as Warp and Woof

- Iona volunteers prepare meals together. (There can be politics around who controls the kitchen!) Iona guests are encouraged to sit and talk with strangers; to eat slow food slowly.
- Conversations over meals with strangers can be a miracle. What happens at table relates to what's brought to the table and what's brought to the table can be transformed.
- How important is diversity at table, considering both food and people? How important is simplicity? Abundance? How important is time and talk at table?

How can our meal time sharing connect us to the wider world? The hungry? The harvesters? The land and sea and air?

Does our experience of communion connect the etiquette of a wide welcome and the ethics of how we participate in the life of the world?

*This newsletter has been formatted by Debra Brown,
Communications Coordinator at Calling Lakes Centre.*

As I prepared this, my mind turned again and again to our Interconnectedness. We can no longer ignore the fact that our actions (and inactions) impact communities and relationships at home and around the globe ~ with humans and the more-than-human world. "We each share responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world." (Earth Charter)



So then, each of us will be accountable to God. Romans 14:12