

Counselor's Corner: Something Old, Something New

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In my work as a family therapist and pastoral counselor at the Westminster Counseling Center, I often find myself helping people to learn to be more mindful and more attentive to their lives by using the tools of Centering Prayer, and Mindfulness Meditation. These modern day spiritual practices mesh very well alongside some of the contemporary techniques of cognitive psychology. They are based on the premise that we often have difficulty making changes in our lives because we do not pay enough attention to the simple strategies necessary to bring about effective changes.

People like the author Jon Kabat-Zinn, have demystified some of the most basic teachings of Buddhist meditation in such a manner that they are now often a common part of clinical practice. Mindfulness meditation asks simply that we "pay attention" to the simple process of our breathing, and the sensations in our body. The discipline of undertaking a "practice" of Mindfulness entails an awareness and intentionality about events that we might otherwise not really have much awareness of—since often our lives can seem to be occurring almost on auto-pilot.

By practicing Mindfulness we may find that the development of this ongoing moment-to-moment awareness can liberate us from some of our most confining habits of perception and relating. Kabat-Zinn calls these, "the straitjackets and prisons of the mind that have been passed down to us or that we have somehow constructed for ourselves."

Thomas Keating's teachings about Centering Prayer incorporate concepts similar to Mindfulness Meditation, but have their roots in ancient Christian spiritual prac-

tices. Keating is a contemporary teacher, drawing on ancient wisdom to promote in the present day, some simple methods of relaxation, paying closer attention to the activities of our lives, and listening more deeply to the words and messages of Scripture—all of this leading to a more "wide-awake" consciousness in our spiritual life.

"Centering prayer," says Keating, is designed to "withdraw our attention from the ordinary flow of our thoughts." He believes that we mistakenly tend to identify ourselves with that flow of thoughts. Centering Prayer can open our awareness to a deeper, more spiritual level of our being. "This level," Keating says, "might be compared to a great river on which our memories, images, feelings, and inner experiences are resting." They are resting, according to Keating, "on the inner stream of consciousness, which is our participation in God's being."

Centering Prayer and Mindfulness Meditation are helpful adjunctive activities that can enrich the experience of counseling or spiritual direction by nurturing a more "wide awake" awareness as part of the process of promoting change and spiritual development. Thomas Keating and Jon Kabat-Zinn have each written several books that further articulate the modern day application of these ancient spiritual practices, and two of my favorite are: *Everyday Blessings*, Myla & Hon Kabat-Zinn, Hyperion Books, New York; and *Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life*, Continuum Books, New York.



Stephen Lander

Sexuality Curriculum for 4th & 5th Grade Families

By Meghan K. Gage, Associate Pastor

During September and October the Children, Youth, and Families Council will offer our first opportunity for learning and discussion on the topic of sexuality. Following church on Sundays September 14 & 28, and October 12 & 26, Fourth and Fifth grade students and their parents will meet with their leaders for conversation and education. Lunch will be provided as well as child-care for younger siblings. It is important that Westminster is a place where both parents and young people feel comfortable talking about our sexuality and what it means to be created in the image of God, and that it is a place where communication within families is fostered.

If you are interested in being a part of this fall's sexuality curriculum, please sign up with Barbara Prince at bprince@wpc-mpls.org or 612.332.3421.

Mark your Calendars with these Important Dates for Middle and High School Youth!

Saturday, Sept. 6, 6:00-8:00PM

Senior High Welcome Back Night
and Spaghetti Dinner

Thursday, September 18

Confirmation students meet with Session

Sunday, September 21

Confirmation Sunday

Wednesday, October 1, 6:30PM

Confirmation 2008-2009 begins with
Parent/Student meeting

Friday, October 24

Middle School Lock-In

Friday-Sunday, November 21-23

Senior High Retreat

Saturday, November 29

Advent Decorating