

❧ WINTER SPIRITUALITY ❧

At this time of year most people think I'm a little weird. Actually some of them think that at any time of year. But at this time of year many more arrive at that conclusion. You see - I like winter. And those of you who come to Stillpoint will know I'm still wearing my sandals in July! Perhaps it is because I was born in Mt Gambier in winter and have that in my DNA.

Most likely though it is because I find winter restful. The frantic rush of the other seasons seems absent to some degree from winter. The grass grows much more slowly, so I don't have to mow the lawn every week, which sometimes happens twice in the peak growing season. The leaves have fallen and no longer need clearing. There is little point in washing the car - it will be dirty again tomorrow anyway. The weather means that some outside tasks need to be delayed until a later time, leaving space to do things I'd prefer to be doing anyway. Yes, I like the restfulness of winter.

At this time of year we see the earth resting, lying in wait for what is to come. At times the earth can even take on quite a dead appearance. There is a tree at Stillpoint I thought had died a couple of years ago. I knew it lost its leaves in autumn, but it looked to me like it had done more than that and finally died. Had I had the time and energy it would have been tempting to take it out. Thankfully for the tree I didn't, for at the right time it sprung back into life.

The resting phase in the circle of life is necessary. We may prefer the colour of spring or the fruitfulness of summer, but without the rest of winter it would not be the same. Nothing can grow and produce 365 days of the year, people included.

Perhaps it is the busy pace of life we so often find ourselves caught in that encourages us to be 'rushaholics', or because there seems to be so much to do, so many expectations to meet, that we find resting difficult. Not only do we not find time to rest and are thus 'rest-less', but we feel guilty if we do manage to stop for a moment.

No wonder then that Jesus' invitation in the Gospel sounds so appealing to us.

*"Come to me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens,
and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me;
for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

To enter into this rest is a part of our faithful and radical following of Jesus. The word itself, rest, takes us back to the creation story where we read that God rested. We rest because God rested on the seventh day of creation. That is, the rest to which we are invited is a rest which God initiated and in which God participates. Rest, like maleness and femaleness, like land being separated from the sea, is a part of the structure of created reality. Rest and our ability to rest are part of a faithful life, our life lived in relationship with God. This means our lives are not to be marked by frenzy, busyness or restlessness. Restlessness, which is so pervasive in our lives and which we seem to view as normative and inevitable, is not ordained into our lives. If God can rest without the world falling apart, we can too.

There's an old story told about Abba Antony, generally considered to be the first Christian monk. One day a visitor came and saw him playing with his followers and became outraged. He thought he should be more dedicated. So Antony told him to fire an arrow with his bow. He did and Antony told him to do it again. And then for a third time. Antony asked the visitor if he could keep doing it. Of course he answered 'No', as the bow would break under the strain. So, said Antony, it is with the human person - if you don't learn to rest, eventually you also will break.

Perhaps then we can take our lead from winter. There will be plenty of time for the vibrancy and productivity of spring and summer. So for now, perhaps you can take a rest. And I promise not to tell anyone if you do.

Gary Stuckey

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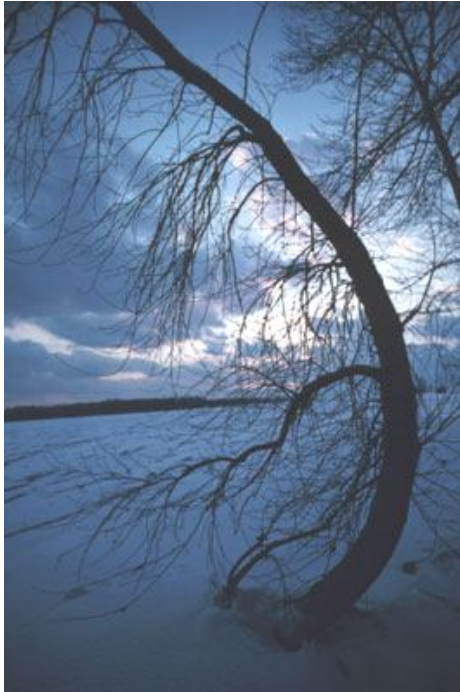
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Winter Reflections

Blessed are you, winter, your bleak, barren trees preach wordless sermons about emptiness and solitude.

— Joyce Rupp and Macrina Wiederkehr in

The Circle of Life



John of the Cross was one who understood the role of the dark times in our spiritual journey. He wrote; "To come to the pleasure you have not you must go by a way in which you enjoy not. To come to the knowledge you have not you must go by a way in which you know not. To come to the possession you have not you must go by a way in which you possess not. To come to the way you are not you must go by a way in which you are not."



"Winter is a lesson about the fine art of loss and growth. Its lesson is clear; there is only one way out of struggle and that is by going into the darkness, waiting for the light, and being open to new growth."

-Joan Chittister



"In the depth of your hopes and desires lies the silent knowledge of your beyond; and like seeds dreaming beneath the snow your heart dreams of spring."

-Kahlil Gibran The Prophet

"Winter in the Upper Midwest is a demanding season—and not everyone appreciates the discipline. It is a season when death's victory can seem supreme: few creatures stir, plants do not visibly grow, and nature feels like our enemy. And yet the rigors of winter, like the diminishments of autumn, are accompanied by amazing gifts.

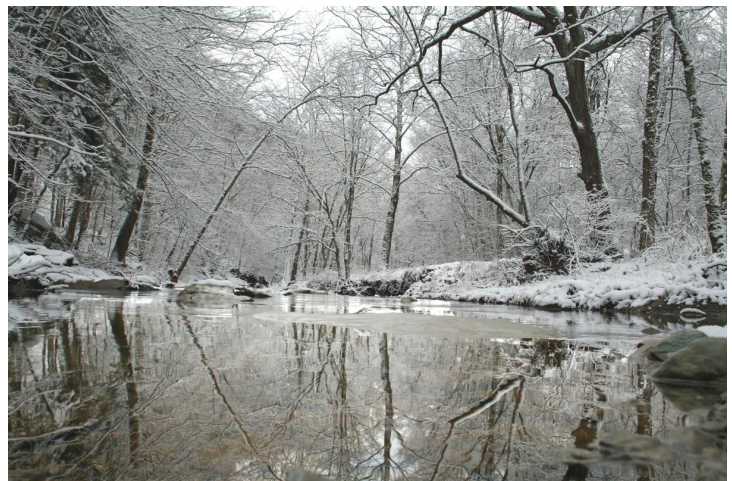
One gift is beauty. I am not sure that any sight or sound on earth is as exquisite as the hushed descent of a sky full of snow. Another gift is the reminder that times of dormancy and deep rest are essential to all living things.

But for me, winter has an even greater gift to give. It is the gift of utter clarity. In winter, one can walk into the woods that had been opaque with summer growth only a few months earlier and see the trees clearly, singly and together, and see the ground they are rooted in. Winter clears the landscape, however brutally, giving us a chance to see ourselves and each other more clearly, to see the very ground of our being.

Our outward winters take many forms—failure, betrayal, depression, death. But every one of them yields to the same advice: 'The winters will drive you crazy until you learn to get out into them.' Until we enter boldly into the fears we most want to avoid, those fears will dominate our lives.

But when we walk directly into them - protected from frostbite by the warm garb of friendship and inner discipline or spiritual guidance—we can learn what they have to teach us. Then we discover once again that the cycle of the seasons is trustworthy and life-giving, even in the most dismaying season of all."

From *Let Your Life Speak* by Parker Palmer, Jossey-Bass, 2000.



Bread for Life's Journey

by Lynona Hawkins

"We will be nourished with home made bread and the Bread of Life" read the brochure for the women's retreat held on the last weekend of May. Twenty three women from different denominations around the Ceduna area gathered in Smoky Bay to spend time in meditation, reflection, prayer, sharing meals, insights and experiences.

With bread as our theme we began by both tasting and reflecting on *unleavened bread*, this fast food of breads, a symbol of the Jewish people's hasty delivery from slavery in Egypt and to this day a part of the Passover celebration. We connected with this bread as we considered the celebrations of our Christian tradition. We even ended the day with a bedtime story, *Making Heart Bread*, a delightful book for children (and adults) explaining how to practice the Ignatian process known as "the examen".

Saturday found us moving into the wilderness and discovering *manna*, not the real *bread of angels* of course as that tended to rot overnight! We reflected on how manna symbolized the Israelite's dependency on God, and spent time quietly meditating on the life-giving, undeserved gifts of manna we receive in our daily lives which build our faith and trust in God.

In the afternoon *Bread for the World* was the theme as we considered Isaiah 58:6,7: *Is this not the fast that I choose ... Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house...* and the Latin American prayer which reads; *Lord, to those who hunger, give bread. And to those who have bread, give the hunger for justice.* How do we respond to the hunger of our world recognizing that hunger comes in many forms – hunger for food, love, justice, acceptance, work, safety, hope, peace...



The evening found us traveling to Emmaus and recognizing God in the everyday act of breaking bread. How many times do we miss seeing our Lord because we are not looking or expecting to find the Presence of the Sacred in the ordinary? It was the offer of hospitality, "Stay with us," that led to the discovery that *Jesus is risen!* Hospitality was such a feature of the weekend with these wonderful country women catering not only for the meals with such generosity but sharing their faith in tangible and loving ways. The Sacred was indeed alive and present.

Sunday morning we heard Jesus offering himself as the *bread of life*. We spent time kneading, moulding and shaping dough into rolls and reflecting on our life experiences of being stretched, pulled, shaped and then waiting for the rising. Making bread is a slow process and cannot be hurried. We each need to rely on our Master Baker to shape each one of us into the unique loaf which is God's plan for us and which will bring the wonderful *fresh bread aroma* to others.

Holy Communion, including of course home-made bread, completed a wonderful weekend of fellowship, sharing, tears, laughter, eating, singing and prayer. Psalm 34:8 suggests; *Taste and see that the Lord is good.* We did and it was very good.

Lynona is a valued member of the Ministry Team at Stillpoint.

Let's not say Goodbye...

Most of you probably know by now that I will be relinquishing my position as Office Manager of Stillpoint at the end of September. I'm not sure where the last two and a half years have gone, but they've passed very quickly, and during that time I have thoroughly enjoyed meeting you, emailing you and talking to you on the phone! Stillpoint is a special place that serves a very special function within the Uniting and wider church, and I encourage you to continue to take advantage of the wonderful opportunities it presents for retreat, reflection, meditation and prayer. And perhaps we'll meet again at one event or another at the Centre...

Blessings, Meredith

A New venture for Stillpoint by Gary Stuckey

One of the persistent criticisms I hear of the monastic life is that it is too self-focused. Some people seem to feel it is simply about sitting around praying and enjoying the fruits of that prayer.

This caricature couldn't be further from the truth. In Chapter 4 of the Rule of Benedict entitled, "What are the Tools of Good works?", he outlines the practices in which the monastic is expected to engage. Among the seventy or so actions he says this: *"Assist the poor. Clothe the naked. Visit the sick. Bury the dead. Come to the aid of those in trouble. Console the sorrowful."*

With participants in Stillpoint coming from all over and even beyond Adelaide, many of them already involved in such work, it has not been easy for Stillpoint to engage in this essential aspect of Benedictine monastic spirituality.

So when an invitation came from the Blackwood Uniting Church for people to become involved in their Friday night meals program it was embraced enthusiastically by a few in the community.

For about 18 months the Blackwood UC has been opening its premises on a Friday night to serve a meal to any who come. It is a place of gathering and friendship for people who struggle in some part of their lives. It may be economic circumstances that bring them. It may be they are lonely. It may be any number of reasons. What they find is a meal and good companionship. Each night two teams cater for the meal. One is a cooking team who prepare meals at home. Another is a serving team who set up on the night, serve out the meals, eat and talk with the guests, and clean up.

The five Stillpoint participants who responded to this invitation are one of the serving teams. Once every eight weeks we go along and endeavour to fulfil that part of Benedict's Rule and the Gospel about caring for those in need in practical ways.



Book Review The Monastery of the Heart by Sr Joan Chittister

Anyone who knows me well will know how much I enjoy and value the writings of Sr. Joan Chittister, a Benedictine Nun. I have found her writings incisive and of great benefit in increasing my understanding of monastic spirituality.

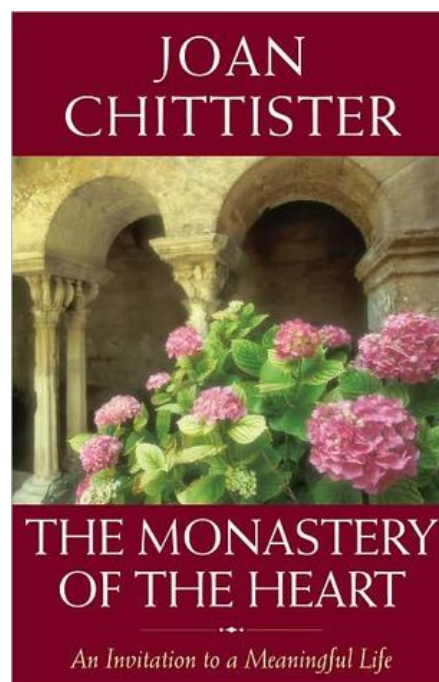
So it was with great anticipation I read her latest offering, *The Monastery of the Heart*, which has the subtitle: *An Invitation to a Meaningful Life*. The book covers much of the same material that Sr. Joan has already written about in other works. She takes another, updated and fresh, look at the great themes of particularly Benedictine spirituality: hospitality, humility, obedience, stability, prayer and reading.

To be honest, when I started reading it I was somewhat disappointed. Perhaps I have read too much of her other work, but there seemed little that was new in this book. In her usual poignant way, however, there were always gems to uncover, especially in the way she drew implications for monastic spirituality as it intersects with our daily lives.

But as usual, as I read on she drew me in. I think my disappointment was that there was not a lot of depth to this book. And near the end it dawned on me that this is its beauty. For people wanting a simple, eminently readable, very relevant and practical introduction to monastic spirituality, this book is a treasure. It won't take long to read but it has the potential to impact the way you live for many years ahead.

Gary Stuckey

[This book will soon be in the Stillpoint library.]



The Path of Happiness

Stillpoint's Residential Retreat ~ September 2011

Most people want to be happy. Happiness is a topic that has occupied the minds and thoughts of people from great philosophers, theologians, artists, musicians and writers to those gathered around a back yard BBQ.

Yet happiness seems to elude many people. Too often dreams of happiness can end in disappointment even though we invest large amounts of time, energy and money into trying to find it.

Is it possible that we are looking for happiness in the wrong places and wrong ways? We perhaps have pinned our hopes of happiness on material things, or other people, or fleeting sensory experiences. Perhaps we feel that if we could change something in our lives we would then be happier. If we had a different job or lived in a different place.

The wisdom of the ages is that happiness comes from a life well-lived, in taking time to experience the deep pleasures of life, to connect meaningfully with others and to live our lives in a way that is authentic to us.

Those thoughts will be the focus of this year's Stillpoint Retreat. We will be drawing on the wisdom of the monastic tradition and of contemporary psychology on the theme of happiness to explore how each of us can find a greater sense of contentment and fulfilment in life.

We will be focusing our reflections on the work of an ancient by the name of Evagrius of Pontus. His belief was that our unhappiness comes from the false thoughts that occupy our minds. He identified eight principal thoughts that lead to unhappiness. If we desire to be happy, he says, we need to aware of these thoughts and counter them through contemplation and by practicing the eight virtues that are the opposite of the false thoughts.

We will be also drawing on the work of Martin Seligman Ph.D., a psychologist who has done a lot of pioneering work in the field of positive psychology and happiness. Like Evagrius, he found, through scientific research, that the area of our lives where we have most control in our own happiness is in practicing virtues and developing character.

You will have time in the quietness and gentleness of a retreat atmosphere to spend time reflecting on your own thoughts and on how you can nurture the eight virtues that are the path to happiness. You will also have the option to take Seligman's self-administered test to discover the virtues you already display and identify those areas that you can work on to increase your happiness.

My hope in offering this retreat is that you will find ways to engage in practices that bring a great sense of fulfilment and happiness to your life.

About the Retreat

The retreat is being offered by the Stillpoint Spirituality Centre, housed on the property of Nunyara Conference Centre, our venue for the event.

It will be led by Rev Gary Stuckey, Director of Stillpoint and Minister of the Faith Community. Gary is a life professed Domestic member of the Brothers and Sisters of Charity, an integrated monastic community. He has spent 7 years in monastic formation and has spent time living in the monastic community. He is a spiritual director, teacher of meditation and contemplative prayer and has a deep interest in the way monastic life can guide our daily Christian journey.

We will begin with registration on the Sunday evening and finish with lunch on Thursday.

Accommodation will either be in single or twin share rooms and is limited to 15 participants.

Cost:	Single Room	\$400
	Single Concession	\$360
	Twin Share	\$350
	Twin Share Concession	\$320

A \$50 non-refundable deposit must accompany your Registration Form with the balance payable on arrival at the Retreat. Registration forms have already been emailed - please let us know if you need another copy.

**Registrations MUST be in by Thursday
8th September 2011.**



Our Continuing Program for 2011

STILLPOINT CENTRE

RESIDENTIAL RETREAT

'The Path of Happiness'

Entitled 'The Path of Happiness', our five day retreat will draw on the wisdom of the monastic tradition and the discoveries of modern psychology in helping to uncover ways we can live more happy lives. The Retreat will run from 18th – 22nd September and Nunyara Conference Centre will be our venue. Rev Gary Stuckey will be leading.

ADVENT RETREAT DAYS

Self-led one-day retreat using specially prepared material. 25th November, 1st or 10th December, 9.30am - 4pm. Spiritual conversation available if requested at time of booking. Up to six people per day. \$25 full day: \$15 half day. Also available for home use: \$15.

BE STILL & KNOW

A monthly gathering for prayer and reflection at the Stillpoint Spirituality Centre. Tuesdays 1pm - .2.45 pm. No registration required. All welcome. Gold coin donation. September 13, October 11, November 8.

FAITH COMMUNITY

WORSHIP

6.30pm in Nunyara Chapel (unless otherwise indicated):

August 28	September 11	September 25 (Stillpoint Centre)
October 9	October 23	November 13
November 27	December 11	December 24 (Stillpoint Centre)

6.30pm at Lefevre UC (63 Gedville Rd, Taperoo)

Sept 18, Nov 20

A CENTERING PRAYER GROUP

The Centring Prayer Group has been discontinued for the time being. Please call Rev Gary Stuckey with any enquiries.

REFLECTION GROUPS

At Stillpoint, Mondays & Tuesdays 7pm - 8.30pm.

A Study based on the writings of Thomas Merton is currently running until 13th September.

Why not give the gift of time?

You can purchase a day or half day retreat for a friend, family member, work colleague or even your minister - this is a lovely idea for someone who may not usually allow time for themselves.

Prices and options:

Half day in quiet room	\$30.00	Half day retreat (with resources)	\$40.00
Whole day in quiet room	\$50.00	Whole day retreat (with resources)	\$60.00
Half day retreat (with resources & spiritual direction)	\$60.00		
Whole day retreat (with resources & spiritual direction)	\$80.00		

Gift vouchers may be purchased from the Stillpoint Centre:

5 Burnell Drive, Belair SA 5052

8178 0048

stillpoint@internode.on.net



Stillpoint Spirituality Centre & Faith Community

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phone: (08) 8178 0048

email: stillpoint@internode.on.net

web: www.sa.uca.org.au/goto/stillpoint

Find us on Facebook

Office Hours: Mon - Thurs, 9.30am - 1.30pm
Centre Director & Minister of the Faith Community:

Rev Gary Stuckey

Office Manager: Meredith Spangler