

Hildegard's Illumination: Interspirituality

Trappist monk Thomas Keating has helped Christians reconnect with our own contemplative practice through the widespread teaching of Centering Prayer as a spiritual practice. He has also been a pioneer in interfaith work by convening the Snowmass Interspiritual Dialogue over a thirty year period. He says, "What needs to be added to the spiritual or interreligious dialogue is to love other religions. By that I mean to see in them... the presence of ultimate reality." St. Hildegard's is being blessed by opportunities to learn to love other religions as we learn more about them and meet those of other faith traditions.

September 29th-October 4th I participated in "The Dawning of Interspirituality" Conference at the Cascadian Center north of Seattle. About two hundred speakers and participants came from various parts of the US as well as Denmark, Germany, South Africa, Australia and India. Sister Lucy Kurien, founder of Maher Ashram in India was there with Gaus, a talented young man rescued from child labor who has recently graduated from college with numerous awards. Sr. Lucy is a Roman Catholic nun who has created an interspiritual environment for the children who come from many faiths.

I was happy to reconnect with one of the speakers, Sufi Imam Jamal Rahman from Seattle, who presented the "Abiding Joy" conference in Austin several years ago. I also deepened my relationship with Sister Helena Marie from the Community of the Holy Spirit, an Episcopal religious order, and met Mirabai Starr, prolific author on the Christian mystics as well as other faiths and a professor at the University of New Mexico-Taos. The conference was a feast of speakers, music, art and worship experiences created by the participants.

Meanwhile St. Hildegard's Community has been experiencing a liturgical "Season of the Saints: Interfaith Saints." We've heard about the Mussar movement (Jewish), Pema Chodron (Buddhist), Elena Avilar (Indigenous), Rumi (Sufi) with more to come this month. One Sunday we heard about the Hindu philosopher and poet Rabindranath Tagore from Gretchen Stolfo and were blessed to hear two of his songs sung by a woman from India who was visiting Austin to see her new grandbaby. Gretchen Lara Shartle told her personal story of studying in India at *Shantiniketan*, an experimental school founded by Tagore. The liturgy has woven together a walking meditation (Buddhist), prayers at our "wailing wall" (Jewish), a Hindu blessing and an Islamic dance as elements in our Christian Eucharist. As we celebrate the Feast of All Saints we'll intentionally include these saints and others. Could these be the ones Jesus called "his other sheep that don't belong to this fold—I must lead them too, and they will hear my voice." ?

Peace and Blessings,
Judith