

## In this issue

PATHWAYS P2  
Book of the Month P2  
Education P3  
Service & Outreach P3  
Thrivent Action Grants P3  
Christ in Literature P3  
Nursery News P3  
Young Adults P4



## Breathe in the Love of God

Many are hesitant to try a contemplative practice because they are afraid they won't be successful. Martin Laird in his book, *Into the Silent Land*, describes one of the practical struggles many of us face as "the inner chaos going on in our heads, like some wild cocktail party of which we find ourselves the embarrassed host." Contemplative practices are a skill, not a technique, which disposes us to allow something to take place. One example he uses is that of a gardener. The gardener doesn't actually grow the plants, but practices certain gardening skills that help facilitate their growth beyond the gardener's control. As we practice contemplation, we are not controlling the outcome, but rather providing space for something to take place, for the Spirit to speak to us at that time and in that place.



While many who practice contemplation are able to do so for prolonged periods of time, it does not mean they started out that way. I suggest starting small – 3-5 minutes of silence each day. Set a timer so you aren't distracted by watching the clock. Once that feels comfortable, move up to 8-10 minutes, and eventually to 20-30 minutes of silence each day.

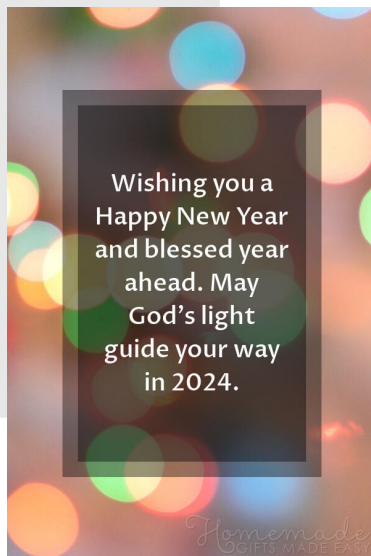
Make sure you are seated in a simple, flat-seated desk or kitchen chair rather than an arm chair in order to avoid nodding off. Some find it easier to be less distracted if they close their eyes. Some find it helpful to use a prayer word to help as distractions arise. You could use a simple phrase such as, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening," or "Jesus, have mercy on me," or a single word such as "grace," "mercy," "love," "peace," or a word that is part of your prayers. Pay attention to your breath and focus on each one as you breathe in the love of God and breathe out the anxiety, tension, and fears you are feeling.

Deacon Laura

## Special Congregational Meeting

Please plan to attend a very important congregational meeting on Sunday, January 28, when the Executive Committee will present a *first look* at CLC's 2024 Ministry Spending Plan (Budget) ahead of the Annual Meeting on February 11. We will gather in the sanctuary for this non-voting meeting, following that morning's 9:30 am worship service. Your attendance is encouraged at this meeting.

Please note: There will be one service only on Sunday, January 28 at 9:30 am.





**PATHWAYS**  
A CENTER FOR SPIRITUAL RENEWAL

# PATHWAYS

## new year, new offerings

Building upon the growth achieved in 2023, the PATHWAYS Team is excited about an even larger slate of offerings scheduled in this new year. Stay tuned for information about the wide variety of events to be presented.

One new offering this year is **Spiritual Practices**. On the first Thursday of the month, we will introduce you to ancient spiritual practices, and "rediscover" our faith as a way of life, not simply a belief system.

Borrowing from author Brian McLaren, "Spiritual practices can help reshape us for a more intentional, attentive and perceptive way of living... (and) are ways of becoming awake and staying awake to God. The purpose is not to make us more religious; it is to make us more alive. Alive to God. Alive to our spouses, parents, children, neighbors, strangers, and yes, even to our enemies."

Practices are for those who feel the need for change, growth, development, and learning, and are designed for disciples. The "ancient" way is about joining God in the spending of every day.

Please join us for our first *Spiritual Practices* offering on Thursday, January 4 at 10 am.

*Spiritual Practices* replaces monthly *Centering Prayer*.

### Book of the Month (staff pick):

*The Dark Night of the Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth*  
by Gerald G. May, M.D.

This month's read is a great follow up to our Advent and Christmas worship theme, *How Does a Weary World Rejoice?* In *The Dark Night of the Soul*, the author emphasizes that the dark night is not necessarily a time of suffering and near despair, but a time of deep transition, a search for new orientation when things are clouded and full of mystery. The dark gives depth, dimension and fullness to the spiritual life. Only the honest, sometimes difficult encounters with what Christian spirituality has called and described in helpful detail as 'the dark night of the soul' can lead to true spiritual wholeness.

Distinguished psychiatrist and spiritual counselor, Gerald G. May, helped found the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, sponsor of *Going Deeper*, Deacon Laura's current continuing education emphasis. Since 1973, Shalem has fostered contemplative living and leadership by caring for the spiritual heart in prayer and by welcoming individuals wherever they are on the path of spiritual discovery.

*submitted by Pastor Carol*

## CLC Christmas Party

The annual Christ Lutheran Christmas Party, hosted by Men of Christ on December 9, was a joy-filled event and wonderful way to celebrate the season. A total of \$423 was raised in donations for ELCA World Hunger. The beautiful centerpiece, donated by Sandy Stansell, was won by Michele Lally (inset right). Our thanks to Men of Christ for their work on this special event!



**January 7**  
Genesis 1:1-5  
Psalm 29  
Acts 19:1-7  
Mark 1:4-11



**January 14**  
1 Samuel 3:1-10[11-20]  
Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18  
1 Corinthians 6:12-20  
John 1:43-51



**January 21**  
Jonah 3:1-5, 10  
Psalm 62:5-12  
1 Corinthians 7:29-31  
Mark 1:14-20



**January 28**  
Deuteronomy 18:15-20  
Psalm 111  
1 Corinthians 8:1-13  
Mark 1:21-28

# Education

## Confirmation Winter Module

begins on Sunday, January 7. We will meet for five weeks from 12-3 pm weekly with lunch included. If you feel that your youth is ready to start our readiness-based program, please speak to Deacon Laura.



**Adult Forums** focuses on different spiritual practices this month, such as mindfulness, examen, and lectio divina. Join us at 9:30 am weekly!

**Godly Play** meets on January 7 and 21. All children ages three through 5th grade are invited to join us. Let's have fun learning new stories and playing together!

# Christ in Literature

Join us for our annual movie afternoon on January 8. We'll have popcorn and watch *The Case for Christ* based on the true story of Lee Strobel.



This American Christian film drama follows Strobel, avowed atheist investigative journalist, and his attempt to prove that Jesus' death and resurrection are just legend. All are invited to our 3 pm gathering.

# Service & Outreach

**THANK YOU** for your generosity through the "Hope for the Holidays" program. Your generosity helped provide Christmas gifts for 75 children in foster care through LSSI. It also helped provide 25 Christmas stockings for Mosaic clients. There was even enough left over to donate towards a Christmas meal for Mosaic group homes. What a wonderful outpouring of support – nice job, CLC!

# Thrivent Action Grants

Are you a Thrivent member? If so, did you know you can apply for two grants up to \$250 per member annually? Christ Lutheran uses these grants to help support many different programs: Vacation Bible School, Confirmation, Service & Outreach ministry projects, book studies, and much more! If you are a Thrivent member, please fill out our [Thrivent survey](#) so that our records can be the most up-to-date for this important ministry. Hard copies of this survey are available in the gathering space.

# Nursery Update

Beginning on January 7, please be advised that our church nursery will be staffed Sunday mornings from 9:30 to approximately 11:45 am. This allows for child care coverage during our Education hour and 10:30 am worship service. On Sundays when CLC has congregation-wide meetings or special events outside of the "regular Sunday schedule," a staffed attendant will be on hand to provide care during those times.

Parents, of course, are always welcomed to stay with their children in the nursery should the need arise. Please see Deacon Laura with any questions.



# happy new year!



# Christ Lutheran

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Phone: 815-885-2522

[makingChristknown.org](http://makingChristknown.org)

 [facebook.com/Christ.Belvidere](https://facebook.com/Christ.Belvidere)

Also on Facebook, search:

*Pathways: A Center for Spiritual Renewal*

† **Worship:** Sundays 8:00 & 10:30 am\*

**\*Sunday, Jan. 28 @ 9:30 am (one service only)**

## RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

### Our Council

Al Francik	President
Lee Blackburn	Vice President
Sue Hunter	Secretary
Jeff Bieck	Treasurer
Jenny Campbell	Council Member
Tari Flack	Council Member
John Herring	Council Member
Peter Hightower	Council Member
Lori Murphy	Council Member
Syd Nolan	Council Member
Denise Rindels	Council Member
Dave Swanson	Council Member

### Our Staff

Rev. Carol Baumgartner	Transition Minister
Deacon Laura Gorton	Associate Minister
Deacon Jennifer Fox	Minister for Worship & Music
Katie Belinson	Dir. of Outreach & Communications
Dagny Brandt	Church Musician
Michelle Nelson	Finance & Office Administrator
Chris Parkinson	Church Musician

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# LASER TAG

Young Adults: Mark your calendars! We are coming together for a fun game (or two) of laser tag. Meet up at Sector 815 (in the former Laser Quest building) on Saturday, January 6 in the afternoon. Time will be announced soon. If interested in joining in on the fun, please let Deacon Laura know by Wednesday, January 3.

it's a young adults thing