**Advent 8-Hour Retreat of Silence**

**December 3, December 5, 2015**

**9:00 to 4:00**

**Turtle Creek Acres**

**“…And the Darkness Has Not Overcome It”**

8:30 - 9:00 ARRIVAL TIME, NAME TAGS, LOOK THE BARNHOUSE OVER,

RESERVE A PLACE, VISIT THE COFFEE AND TEA BAR (BACK HALL)

9:00 – 9:45 GATHER AND BEGIN TO LISTEN (Bell Rings)

* Welcome: What brought you here, and what are you hoping for?
* Pass Out Day Scheme/Explain, Introduce Silence
* Show Where Stations Are, coffee/tea/snacks, chocolate bar
* Introduction Question: When was one of the first times you heard God speak to you and you knew that it was He?
* Give Out Journals
* Scripture for Meditation: Different readings of John 1:1-14—Gullah, James Earl Jones, Script for Two Voices

9:45 – 10:45 SILENCE BEGINS

Question for the Morning: WHAT IS THE STATE OF MY INNER LIGHT? (*Flame*, *radiance*, *glow* are synonyms you might explore.) How do you explain your answer?

NOTE: Listening is often a matter of paying attention to your deeper self. For some people, inner intelligence is often the way God speaks. Intuitive folk are comfortable with a subjective way of knowing. For other people, direction or counsel or comfort comes through a process of mental reasoning. Rational folk are more comfortable with this second approach.

However, God can speak to us through his written word, through quiet inward nudges and communications, through the voice of friends and family, through life’s circumstances, through a study of theology, through something that is read that is not sacred Scripture, through the body, which has a very literal language. Knowing, however it comes, must be accompanied by a practice of silence, solitude, and of listening.

The following two exercises help you to pay attention.

EXERCISE ONE

Ask yourself the Question for the Morning: WHAT IS THE STATE OF MY INNNER LIGHT? Then be still and listen to the answer(s).

Try this exercise: Describe the state of your inner light by using the five senses.

* How does it *feel* if you touch it?
* What does it l*ook* like?
* How does it *taste*?
* What does it *sound* like?
* How does it *smell*?

USE YOUR JOURNAL TO MAKE NOTES, RECORD YOUR THOUGHTS, CAPTURE WHAT YOU ARE HEARING. If you want to make collages to add to the pages, or if you want to color symbols or illustrate your Advent journey in any way (perhaps today at the Tactile Table), leave some pages blank in between your note making.

EXERCISE TWO: SCRIPTURE INTERACTION

The Prologue from the book of John is one of the great literary passages in all of religious literature. Take some time during this hour to interact with it.

Take out the mustard-colored paper in your Day Schedule folder and read the two translations (New International Version and the Old King James Version) and the one paraphrase (The Message). Now interact with the passage.

\* Is there is a word or a phrase that jumps out from the others? Why do you think this word or phrase “has chosen” you (as the contemplatives teach)? Is there a longing in you that this phrase has latched onto? Is there a lack in you? Is there a personal goal? DO NOT RUSH. Let your mind be empty, open and receptive. Listen and receive. Do not be afraid of the silence. Use a pencil or pen to highlight, underline or circle words or passages on the mustard-colored page.

\* Become “mindful”—aware of being aware. What is happening within your body? What are you feeling? What is that inner awareness speaking to you? What emotions are you experiencing? Are you feeling anything in your body? Where might that be?

NOTE: RECORD IN YOUR JOURNAL ANY IDEAS THAT MAY HAVE COME TO YOU.

10:45 -12:00 MORNING GUIDED ACTIVITIES (Bell Rings) Back into the Gathering Room for a few directions.

EXERCISE THREE: USE YOUR BODY MEDITATIVELY

1. GO INTO THE DARK ROOM (master bathroom, first floor), CLOSE THE DOOR, LISTEN.

* Take time to think about the darkness. What do you notice?
* Light one taper candle and settle it in the sand in the bowl.
* Take time to think about the impact of light in the dim room. Light another candle if you like.
* Who are the sources of light in your life?
* What do you notice when light shines in the darkness?
* What do you need to do to step more into the lights in your life?
* Take a moment to read one of the poems by Irish poet John O’Donohue in the Day Schedule folder (either “*Beannacht* [Blessing]” or “For a New Beginning”).
* Read it slowly and consider what it might be saying to you.
* Write down thoughts in your journal.

2. SIT DOWN IN THE MESSIAH ROOM (kids’ room, back hall, go up the stairs).

Take time to listen to Handel’s *The Messiah*,” a seminal religious work that was initially written to raise money to pay the debts of those in debtor’s prison. The first performance, in Dublin, April 13, 1742, raised enough money to free 142 men from prison. Handel conducted many charity concerts with this piece. One biographer noted, “*The Messiah* has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, fostered the orphan more than any other single musical production in this or any other country.”

Generally, unless we are in a chorus, we don’t listen to *The Messiah* with the score in hand. There are several scores on the table in the kids’ room so that several people can listen at the same time. Take a chair. Plug in the CD. Take up a score and look at the gorgeous calligraphy in Tim Botts’ book *The Messiah*. If someone comes midway, they can follow in the score wherever the CD is playing.

3. VISIT THE TACTILE TABLE (in the basement, go down the stairs off the kitchen; feel free to make a mess). Sometimes our hands give formation or definition to the things that are in our spirit that we can’t quiet express with words. Help yourself to the makings and fixings on the table. Cut, paint, tear, glue and paste away. What is it you think you have been attempting to express with your hands?

4. WRITE A LETTER TO GOD OR FROM GOD (go back to your reserved space). Are there things you would like to say to God? Are there things you can imagine Him saying to you? Are there things you wish you could hear Him say? Take some stationery and an envelope from the Great Room counter and write out your letter, address the envelope, seal it. Return it to the counter and we will stamp and mail it to you so you will receive it before Christmas.

12:00 - 12:45 PRACTICE TOGETHERNESS THROUGH SILENCE (Gathering Room Dining Table) (Bell Rings)

Lunch is served. Silence will be kept during this time.

Three soups are available: Broccoli cheese, chicken noodle, pumpkin with a slight hint of salsa; spread-your-own chicken/cranberry salad sandwich, and a quinoa/chopped-kale salad. Apple cider or water to drink. Christmas cookies or bananas and clementines for dessert.

The music playing is *Lammas Ladymass*, a collection of chants, some written by Hildegard von Bingen in mid-century Europe and sung by women’s voices. Hildegard was considered “one of the most important figures in the history of the Middle Ages” and the “greatest woman of her time.”

The Poem in the scroll is “I Am Offering This Poem to You” by Jimmy Santiago. Use it as a type of prayer or mealtime meditation.

12:45 – 1:30 Afternoon Question: WHAT EXCUSES OR DISABILITIES ARE PREVENTING MY INNER LIGHT FROM FLARING , FLAMING AND BURNING BRIGHTLY?

NOTES:

* Make a list of these excuses or disabilities in your notebook, using only one side of one page.
* On another page, pray carefully, then write out some intentions.
* What can you do to change intention into activities? Don’t set your intents too high and don’t set your intents too low.
* What things can you do that will help you step out of the dark and into the light?

1:30 – 3:30: GUIDED ACTIVITIES of SILENCE

\* Walk Down Colby Point Road (it is scarcely trafficked and is about 1.5 miles down to the T—the Fox River is just behind the houses—and back). Take your Scripture page or one of the poems and try memorizing a passage as you walk.

\* Work at the Tactile Table—if you didn’t have time before, create something that represents one of the themes that seems to be emerging from the retreat. Take your Advent journal and decorate the pages with collages.

\* Visit the Stable and Get Acquainted With the Animals. You may give corn to the sheep, a handful only. Please don’t pet the horse; he’s been a little nippy lately with strangers. If you don’t mind the mud, you can peek into the chicken coop. Animals’ names: Pippin the horse. The sheep are Lyric and Jennie and Clementine (a rescue animal). Great Danes and Shiatsu are visiting Papa Mains.

\* Mark the Path to the Firepit. On the Back Patio, fill luminarias with sand and candles. These will be used to mark the path to the Fire Pit. We will carry the red lanterns with us. Check to see that the batteries are still good and replace if necessary.

\* Find a Quiet Corner and Take a Nap—Perfectly fine to take an afternoon nap. Choose a bed (seven are available: in the loft above the kitchen, in the master bedroom, two single beds in the loft in the master bedroom, bedroom in the downstairs apartment, in the two kids’ bedrooms upstairs above the coffee and tea bar—again, hang onto the stairway rail).

Grab a tartan blanket. Put your **Place Reserved** sign outside the door. Close the door. Lie down. Do deep-breathing exercises (breathe in deeply, slowly; breath out slowly). Cover yourself with the blanket. Think of it as representing God’s love.

3:30 SILENCE ENDS: GATHER in GATHERING ROOM (Bell Rings)

Afternoon Question for Group Discussion: WHAT ARE THE WHISPERS THAT YOU HAVE HEARD TODAY?

Time for sharing. End with Candle lighting circle, passing the flame from taper to taper, then placing our tapers in the bowl filled with sand. This is a reminder that our light burns brighter not as solo lights but as a congregate of lights, that we feed one another’s flames, that we stand together against the darkness, that it is harder to blow a hundred lights out than to blow out one light.

Candle-lighting circle. Script for two voices again: 1 John 1:1-14.

4:15 SUNDOWNERS AND A BLESSING BY THE FIRE PIT

* Tear out the page from your journal on which you wrote your excuses and disabilities that keep you from the light. If you feel free to do so, toss it onto the fire with some sort of public announcement or prayer to God—nothing like breaking silence with a verbal vow!
* Since the sun actually sets at 4:20 and the days are snowy and grey, our “sundowner” will consist of standing by the fire pit with a warm cup of chocolate. If anyone wants to lead us in a chorus, we trust to the musical ones among us.
* Day ends with this blessing: *Our Deepest Fear* by Marianne Williamson.

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous,

talented, fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God.

Your planning small does not serve the world.

There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other

people won’t feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do.

We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is written

within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other

people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically

liberates others.