

# CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  January/February 2008

## Reconnecting with Our Souls, Enlivening Our Spirits “PrairieFire”

An esteemed professor of mine in graduate school, James Ashbrook, once told the following story: A traveler was on a safari in Africa. Eager to make their next camp before nightfall, he pushed himself and his porters unmercifully for several hours without stopping. Suddenly, all the porters sat down en masse. Despite his incessant urgings, they refused to budge. Through an interpreter he asked what the problem was and why they were refusing to move on. The reply was simple and profound: “We are waiting for our souls to catch up!”

In an age of instant messaging, multi-tasking, and a never-ending line of technological gadgets that mesmerize and distract us, it is easy to lose the connection between our selves and our souls. When this connection is lost, however, the soul grows weary and withers; we lose our vigor for life and our spirit becomes depleted. Some would say we “burn out.”

Ashbrook talks about soul as the integral and inseparable “core” of who we are: “...*soul is that which each of us can call our own.* It is our unique essence, that which distinguishes us from everything else in the universe.”<sup>1</sup> For many people of faith, the soul is that God-given spark of life within each of us that enlivens the spirit and makes us uniquely who we are.

The self is different. While soul is the God-given essence of each of us, the “self” is a socially derived extension of the soul. The self develops through the interactions we have with others who, in their exchanges with us, reflect us back to ourselves through their words, facial expressions, and body language. When those reflections mirror us accurately and with a sense of celebration for who we are, when those interactions are attuned, nurturing and restorative, a “true self” is called forth – a self that is a true reflection of the soul. When those reflections mirror a distorted image of who we are, when we are repeatedly shamed, discounted or mistreated, the true self goes into hiding behind a protective “false self.”

The role of the false self is to relate to others in whatever way is necessary to reduce the dissonance between who we truly are and how we are being perceived and treated. Sometimes this means we

become compliant and submissive; sometimes it means we become rebellious and uncaring; other times we just become the person others expect us to be. In any case, the person we were meant to be (the true self) goes into exile and gets buried beneath a pile of pretexts and pretenses. The more actively we engage the world through a protective false self, the more entrenched it becomes. As a result, we become increasingly disconnected from our true self and the soul it was meant to reflect, and our spirit suffers.<sup>2</sup>



One of the tragedies of modern life is that these disconnections within people are all too common. Lives lived on-the-go, work environments that focus on understaffing as a way to maximize profits, and a consumer-focused economy that seduces us into buying more of what we don't really need are just a few of the forces that constantly erode our true selves,

separate us from our souls, and weaken our spirits. We see the telltale signs of these forces on our faces as we look in the mirror every morning and in the wearied appearance of friends. We recognize their toll in the wise words of our children who catch us off guard with comments like, “When I get older, I want to have more time at home than you've had, Dad.”

While we may not usually talk about it in these terms, much of the therapeutic work we do at the Center is aimed at healing these disconnections within the people we serve. We do this by providing a restorative environment and a working relationship that are conducive to: 1) lessening the defensive shields of the false selves of our clients through which they have been engaging the world in an automatic and non-reflective manner; 2) recognizing and increasing the vitality of their true selves; 3) restoring the connection between their true selves and their souls; and 4) renewing their spirits.

In an effort to broaden the resources available for restoring these lost connections within people's lives, the Center has been involved in developing a new program of spiritual renewal and formation. We are calling this program “PrairieFire.” Co-directed by Kathy Reardon and Kay Riley, this program is designed to

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address the longings within many clergy and lay people for nurturing their souls and revitalizing and deepening their spiritual lives.

The name "PrairieFire" reflects the rich diversity and miraculous endurance of prairie eco-systems. It calls to mind the ever-changing face of the prairie as native flowers and grasses alternately come into bloom and then wither; the multitude of wildlife that find shelter and food in its underbrush, and the periodic fires required to clear the ground to make room for new life.

Our plan is to offer this program beginning in September 2008. Designed as a two-year program rooted within the Christian contemplative tradition, *PrairieFire* will create an intentional learning environment. Monthly meetings will include time for topic presentations, group spiritual direction, and small group experiences. Outside work will include assigned readings and reflection papers, monthly meetings with one's personal spiritual director; completion of one spiritual retreat each year; and journaling about one's spiritual practice experiences.

During our time together, we envision a community developing - one characterized by trust and shared vulnerability - that reflects a desire to know the truth about oneself, a desire to be more fully who each person is called to be, a view of feelings and symptoms as voices and messengers seeking to guide us on our journeys, and an openness to having our pain and suffering being met with compassion by others. Our sense is that within such a community of people, major barriers to spiritual growth can be addressed with sensitivity and compassion, new spiritual practices can take root, and the lost connections between our selves, our souls, and our spirits can be restored and enlivened.

We are excited about this new offering. If what is described here strikes a resonant chord with you, we invite you to join us in September. More information will follow in the months ahead. Interested persons may contact Kathy Reardon at the Center (274-4006).

### **J. Jeffrey Means, M.Div., Ph.D.**

*J. Jeffrey Means is Director of Professional Education at Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center and Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Behavioral Medicine at Des Moines University.*

*He is a licensed clinical psychologist, pastoral counselor, and marriage and family therapist. He holds a master of divinity degree from Christian Theological Seminary and a doctoral degree in pastoral counseling and psychotherapy from Northwestern University.*

*He is the author of Trauma & Evil: Healing the Wounded Soul, published by Fortress Press, 2000.*

## **C.O.O.L. Corner**

*Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life*

### **Calling Forth Soul in Play**



A "special" way of playing with children involves a way of interacting that puts the child at the center and in charge of the play. This type of special play calls forth the soul of the child by creating a nonjudgmental, unconditional, child-focused space and time.

- Use words that reflect the actions, feelings, and words of the child; avoid opinions, judgments, questions.
- Appear interested in the child's play even if the "game" is boring or repetitive.
- Engage in the play when invited, otherwise remain a "reflective witness."
- When invited to play, do only what the child directs.
- Allow the child to struggle with things or do things in ways that may appear "incorrect," unless the child specifically asks for help.
- Be flexible and allow the child to change the rules.

### **References:**

- <sup>1</sup> Ashbrook, James B. *Minding the Soul: Pastoral Counseling as Remembering*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996, p. 178.
- <sup>2</sup> Means, J. Jeffrey with contributions by Mary Ann Nelson. *Trauma & Evil: Healing the Wounded Soul*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000.

### **Additional Suggested Reading:**

Moore, Thomas. *The Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*. NY: Harper Perennial, 1994.

## WOMEN HELPING WOMEN

Annual Luncheon

Friday March 14, 2008

Guest Speaker Lesley Jane Seymour  
Editor-in-Chief of *More* magazine



*More* magazine is recognized as the leading lifestyle magazine for women over 40. Besides her many years of editorial experience, Lesley Jane Seymour has also authored two books, *On the Edge: Images from 100 Years of Vogue* and *I Wish My Parents Understood: A Report on the Teenage Female*.

Photo Credit:  
GREG DELVES

Topic: "Reinventing Yourself"  
Date: Friday, March 14, 2008  
Time: 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
Location: Sheraton West Des Moines  
(new location) 1800 – 50th Street, West Des Moines  
Tickets: \$35 (includes lunch); \$350 / table of 10

Since 1999, the Center has sponsored an annual luncheon to raise awareness of our work with women struggling with the challenges of life on limited resources and to generate funds to help subsidize counseling for low-income women and girls. This year's featured speaker draws upon decades of editorial experience and a keen observation of women and their life changes. Please join us for this uplifting event in celebration of women. Invitations will be in the mail soon. Or call the Center today to request an invitation.

### Annual Meeting Announcement

The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center's Annual Meeting will take place on Thursday, February 28, 2008. The event will be held at the Waveland Golf Course Club House, 6:30 p.m. reception, 7:00 p.m. dinner and meeting. The program will feature Diane Stephens, M.A., as the guest speaker. Her presentation is titled, "Simply Inspired."

*What would happen if we lived below our means?  
...If we said "no" to unnecessary commitments?  
...If we invested only in relationships we really care about and only in work that's meaningful? We would be living as if we truly believe less is more. If you are interested in attending, please contact the Center, (515) 274-4006 or [info@dmpcc.org](mailto:info@dmpcc.org).*

## SPIRITUAL PRACTICES for BUSY PEOPLE

Diane Stephens, M.A.

Friday, February 29, 2008

8:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Plymouth Congregational Church UCC

42nd and Ingersoll, Des Moines, IA

Fee: \$35 (includes lunch)

Register by calling the Center

(515) 274-4006



Work deadlines. Family. Job security. Health concerns. These are just a few of the 20 stressors identified by Worklife Report that contribute to the frantic pace of 21st century living. Sure, spiritual practices could lead to a more balanced lifestyle, but who has the time? Join us for a day of learning and renewal as we explore the evolution of spiritual practices over the centuries and across continents – and discover the life-giving possibilities of mini-meditations, *imago divina*, and other practices designed specifically for people on the run.

This seminar is intended for professionals in ministry, spiritual formation, mental health, education and for spiritual directors and spiritual companions.

Each session features lecture, group discussion, how-to information, and an opportunity to experience a spiritual practice designed for busy people.

### Beyond Busy

That's how we describe our lives, isn't it? *Beyond busy*. Perhaps, instead, we could move from *beyond busy* to more gracious living. The *abbas* and *ammans* who worked, worshipped and prayed in the deserts of the Middle East in the 3rd - 5th centuries discovered how. Together we'll explore what they learned and its truth for our lives today.

### A Breath of Fresh Prayer

Among the wisdom gleaned from the desert is a variety of spiritual practices. Some familiar, some not. We'll look at a few that seem most appropriate for 21st century living, and others that, with some modification, will soothe the souls of even the most hurried among us.

### A Closer Look

From Creation to sculpture to Eastern Orthodox icons, our world is filled with images that offer us glimpses of the Holy. Yet we often don't notice. Through a process of *imago divina*, we'll take a closer look at a few images of inspiration, consider their theological and artistic significance, and allow them to guide us in heartfelt prayer.

Diane Stephens is a spiritual director, writer, retreat leader and congregational consultant. Diane serves as affiliate faculty in spiritual formation at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL, and as faculty of the new CREDO program of renewal for Presbyterian pastors. She is a contributing author to *The Thoughtful Christian* and *Homily Service*, moderator of the Liturgy & Spirituality Seminar of the North American Academy of Liturgy, and member of the Board of Directors of the Institute for Spiritual Companionship in the Chicago area. Diane received her B.A. from Duke University and her M.A. in

Spiritual Formation and Evangelism from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. She is an ordained Elder and Deacon in the Presbyterian Church (USA).



## Sharing the Masculine Journey

MANifest is a program for men facilitated by male counselors, built around weekend retreats and Saturday workshops. MANifest is for men of all ages and from every walk of life.  
*Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D., facilitate all MANifest programs.*

### MALE/FEMALE COMMUNICATION

This workshop will provide insights to creating the relationship you really want with your life partner.

**Date:** Saturday, February 23, 2008

**Time:** 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

**Location:** Queen’s Point, 2793 St. Charles Road

**Cost:** \$50, includes lunch

**Facilitators:** Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D.

**Pre-register:** Call Lowell Houts or Mike Sears at the Center (274-4006) to pre-register. Registration is limited to 20 participants to allow for adequate discussion and interaction.

### Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center FOUNDATION

One very prudent resolution for the new year would be to find out more about the fiscal advantages to you and your heirs in naming the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center FOUNDATION as beneficiary for all or part of your IRA/401 (k)/retirement fund assets. These are tax-deferred, not tax-free, instruments. Leaving all or part of your retirement funds to the FOUNDATION means your hard-earned savings would not be diminished by estate or income taxes. Your tax adviser or financial planner can help you with this.

[www.dmpcc.org](http://www.dmpcc.org)

Visit the Center’s website for more information on the Center’s counseling services and staff, special events and classes.

## CONNECTING

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Des Moines Pastoral

## Counseling Center

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