

# CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  January/February 2009

## The Wisdom of Dough: Everything in Its Own Time

One of the things I enjoy about having free time during the holidays is that it gives me a chance to bake. There is something special about mixing, kneading and shaping dough with my hands that I find creative and renewing. It reminds me in a way of working with clay – another pastime of mine in days gone by. In my pottery-making days, the constant dilemma was “What am I going to do with all the pieces I made?” You can only give so many away to friends and family, before they begin to cringe when they see you coming with yet another “work of art.”

Baking doesn't present the same difficulty; people generally welcome something to eat. Pies with lattice tops, rustic tarts, cookies, scones and cinnamon rolls are among my favorites. I also enjoy the smell of fresh bread in the oven – oatmeal loaves, multigrain baguettes, and sweet bread for the holidays. Most recently, I've begun to dabble in pizza crusts, and especially like the flavor of those baked on an outside grill in the summertime.

When it comes to the ancient craft of bread-baking, I consider myself still very much of a novice. I say “novice” because it is still too easy for me to forget that each batch of dough has its own character, and will rise in its own time. Each time I forget this simple fact of life, I am jolted back to reality when the dough does not come together or rise in the manner or time I expect. This most often occurs when I am rushed.

During a recent experience of being impatient and trying to rush the rising process of a batch of sourdough with predictably disastrous results, I was set back a bit when the thought flashed through my head, “bread baking is a sacred, spiritual endeavor.” This is not a new thought; others have talked about it for centuries. But this little “ah ha” experience did lead me to consider exactly what the characteristics of a “sacred, spiritual endeavor” were for me.

### Good Things Come to Those Who Wait

The thought that most immediately came to mind was that in the world of bread baking, as in the world of “sacred, spiritual endeavors,” everything has its own time. In the realm of the spirit, events unfold when all the needed

resources and forces are in place, not when I think, “It's time!” This is a reality that easily gets lost in a world of mass produced products where predictable, on-time and on-demand delivery is the expected norm.

I shouldn't have been surprised, since this central lesson of life – that everything and everyone has its own time – is one that I know well. I am continually kept humble by my psychotherapy clients who courageously move at their own pace and in their own directions. The small prairie that I tend reminds me daily that it will grow and bloom as it will, and I am always enthralled by whatever it offers up. It is a lesson I am reminded of as I watch an artist hold and mold a clump of clay into an intricate pot, sometimes after a brief mishap or two. Or as I watch a craftsman use his ingenuity to painstakingly repair an old barn.



I am reminded of this life lesson as each of the participants in the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center's Pastoral Care Specialist Program<sup>1</sup> talk of their desire to hone their particular care giving skills for better service to others. And it is a lesson reinforced by the stories told by those in PrairieFire,<sup>2</sup> each of whom recognized outside signs or inner voices too loud to ignore that it was time to seek spiritual renewal in community with others on a similar journey.

### Getting to the “Art” of the Matter

The second thought that came to mind was that baking bread can be an art form. It involves knowledge of certain basic principles, the trained ability to feel and read the nature of the materials (each batch of dough) and create the best set of circumstances for their expression (dough to rise), and enough patience and trust to relax and avoid rushing a process that will unfold in its own time. The best bread I have baked has always been the result of staying attuned to this very special process, engaging it with a sense of gratitude, respecting its power, and being willing to work with it, rather than against it. “Sacred, spiritual endeavors” are like that also.

What I have learned from bread baking about “sacred, spiritual endeavors” is that both take a

continued from page 1

high level of intention, focus, and work: creating an environment conducive to the particular processes operating at the time, attuning myself to those processes so I can work with them rather than against them, and refraining from the inclination to impose an outcome that is not intrinsic to them.

In a world filled with mass-produced goods and chain stores that are exact replicas of one another, it is important to feed our souls by taking the time to seek out and recognize the “sacred and spiritual” that surround us. When it comes to matters of the spirit, bread baking continues to teach me a number of important lessons. The first is that everything has its own season; Nature’s time and God’s time are not the same as ours. This central lesson of life easily gets pushed aside as we rush about trying to stay on schedule. The second lesson bread baking teaches me is to relish and savor the unique, work with it rather than against it, and learn from the journey.

It’s amazing what you can learn from a batch of “flopped” sourdough. There’s a good deal of wisdom in dough. I learned my lessons well; the cinnamon rolls were great!

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. In addition to his clinical practice at the Center, Dr. Means has interests in teaching, writing, supervision, professional formation, and clinical case consultation. He is the author of Trauma & Evil: Healing the Wounded Soul, published by Fortress Press, 2000.*

#### **References**

<sup>1</sup> The Pastoral Care Specialist Program is a two-year program of professional development and renewal designed for pastors, chaplains, and other persons involved in ministries of pastoral care. Participants meet monthly to learn about areas critical to effective pastoral care, and for support, encouragement, and consultation on their work. Contact the Center for more information (515.274.4006).

<sup>2</sup> PrairieFire is a two-year program designed to invite participants into a deeper, richer spiritual life through participation in an intentional learning community. See [http://www.dmpcc.org/newsletter/jan\\_feb\\_08.pdf](http://www.dmpcc.org/newsletter/jan_feb_08.pdf) for more information, or contact the Center (515.274.4006).

#### **Suggested Reading**

Lindahl, Kay. *Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening: A guide to enrich your relationships and kindle your spiritual life*. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2003.

Rupp, Joyce & Macrina Wiederkehr. *The Circle of Life: The Heart's Journey through the Seasons*. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2005.

Thich Nhat Hanh. *The Spirit of Mindfulness*. Translated by Mobi Ho. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987.

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

### **Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life**

Children grow and become their unique selves when provided an environment that pays attention to the process of development as much as the outcome. Just as the prairie flourishes with a steward on the side, or the bread rises with the right combination of yeast, water, flour, kneading, and time, so do our children develop when we attend to their basic needs with patience, discernment, grace, and gratitude. We encourage you, as parent, guardian, teacher, bread baker, to ask yourself:

- \* Am I the “guide on the side” rather than the “sage on the stage”?
- \* Do I take time to “read” facial expressions and body language that accompany words?
- \* Do I allow time and space for processing complex and intense feelings, including the negative feelings that may be directed at me?
- \* Do I allow the expression of feelings and thoughts that are different from mine without becoming critical and hostile?
- \* Do I provide the encouragement and reassurance needed, especially after a failure?
- \* Do I recognize and prioritize basic needs for relationship, healthy food, exercise outdoors, and adequate sleep?
- \* Do I make time for and provide materials for development of particular talents and interests?
- \* Do I actually say, “I believe in you”?

## **Annual Meeting Announcement**

The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center’s Annual Meeting will take place on Tuesday, February 10, 2009. 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 The Reverend Matt Mardis-LeCroy, M.Div., Minister for Spiritual Growth at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, as guest speaker. His presentation is titled, “*The Question of Identity and Belonging: Confessions of an American Nerd.*” If you are interested in attending the annual meeting, please call the Center (274-4006).

## Women Helping Women Annual Luncheon Friday, March 6, 2009



**Speaker:** Kali VanBaale, Award-winning young Iowa author of The Space Between

**Topic:** *Finding Sisterhood: An Unexpected Journey*

**Date:** Friday, March 6, 2009  
**Time:** 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.  
**Location:** Sheraton West Des Moines  
1800 – 50<sup>th</sup> Street, West Des Moines  
**Tickets:** \$40 (includes lunch); \$400 / table of 10

*“Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.” ~ Anais Nin*

Author Kali VanBaale will discuss her unusual journey from new mother to published author, and the profound effect one woman can have on the life of another. She will bring the same unflinching compassion and lyrical power of her writing to the podium.

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.

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.

*Kali VanBaale was born and raised on a dairy farm in rural southern Iowa. Her first novel, The Space Between, won a 2007 American Book Award, a 2007 Independent Publisher’s Silver Medal for General Fiction, a 2007 Iowa Reader Literary Award for Fiction, and the 2006 Fred Bonnie Memorial First Novelist Award. For work on her second novel-in-progress, Mercy Road, she received a full scholarship to the Key West Literary Seminar. She was most recently awarded a State of Iowa Major Artist Grant to begin work on a third novel in 2009. Her short stories and essays have appeared in the anthologies Voices of Alzheimer’s, Voices of Caregiving and A Cup of Comfort for Adoptive Families. She teaches creative writing for Des Moines Adult Community Education and lives outside Bondurant with her husband and three small children.*

## Dietary Influences on Mental Health



**Speaker:** Billie Jo Gessman,  
Wellness Coordinator

**Topic:** *Dietary Influences on  
Mental Health*

**Date:** Tuesday, March 10, 2009  
**Time:** 5:30-6:30 p.m.  
**Location:** Plymouth Congregational Church,  
42nd Street & Ingersoll Ave., Des Moines  
**Cost:** Free! Please contact the Center to  
pre-register (515.274.4006)

Billie Jo Gessmann is the Wellness Coordinator at Swain Chiropractic. Billie has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Health Promotion from the University of Northern Iowa with an emphasis in Women’s Health, and is near completion of a Wellness Certification through the International Chiropractic Association. Billie is experienced in providing nutrition consulting and instruction to people of all ages. She has a special interest in working with children and adolescents with developmental disabilities, behavioral disorders, and other neurological conditions.

Billie will cover the following points in her presentation: the gut-brain connection; food dyes, additives, preservatives – effects on function; why eliminate certain foods – the science behind it; the problem with processed foods; creating positive relationships with food; nutritional supplementation.

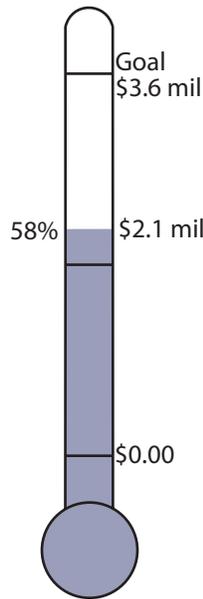
### Our Mission

To bring understanding,  
hope and healing to  
persons of all ages  
through counseling  
and education.

## 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.

## Campaign for Hope and Healing



The *Campaign for Hope and Healing* is a capital project entailing property acquisition and construction of a new larger enhanced facility. The project's ultimate goal is to create the most effective and efficient healing space to meet the growing need for quality, affordable counseling in central Iowa.

Please consider a gift to the Center's *Campaign for Hope and Healing*. Call Kathleen Murrin at the Center for more information.

### Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation

Leaving a legacy is more than passing funds to the next generation. Leaving your legacy is also about an opportunity to send a message that reflects your values and continues your commitments. We encourage you to consider a bequest or planned gift to the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation. Contact Kathleen Murrin at the Center for further information.

[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

is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, not-for-profit organization. Celebrating 36 years of service to adults, families, adolescents, and children for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in Ankeny, Lamoni, Lenox, Leon, Mt. Ayr and Osceola. Editor: Kathleen Murrin

### Inside this issue: Everything in Its Own Time

<i>The Wisdom of Dough: Everything in Its Own Time</i> .....	Page 1
C.O.O.L Corner.....	Page 2
Women Helping Women Luncheon.....	Page 3
Dietary Influences on Mental Health.....	Page 3
Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation.....	Page 4
Campaign for Hope and Healing.....	Page 4



Des Moines Pastoral

**Counseling Center**

2929 Westown Parkway, Suite 110 • West Des Moines, Iowa 50266

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage

**PAID**

Permit No. 644  
Des Moines, IA