

# PrairieFire



A TWO-YEAR PROGRAM  
**OF SPIRITUAL RENEWAL  
AND FORMATION**

## PrairieFire: The Metaphor

***Applications for the 2020 class will be accepted beginning on January 1, 2020***

In a healthy prairie, one of the most complex yet balanced ecosystems on earth, hundreds of plants and animals exist together harmoniously. The perennial grasses and flowers native to the prairie grow deep, hold water, crowd out weeds, improve the soil by providing nutrients and contribute to the innate beauty of the land.

Before the appearance of humans, lightning, wind, and herds of grazing nomadic, hoofed herbivores managed the prairie. In modern times, we manage the prairie through controlled burns. These fires eliminate invasive weeds not native to the prairie that choke out healthy flowering perennials. In the process, prairie fires clear the way for long-dormant seeds to come to life, germinate, and grow. The variety and lushness of new growth resulting from a burn is often two to threefold from the previous year. Only native perennials that have been the basis for a healthy prairie for eons will survive the prairie fire.

Like the prairie, the human being is a complex system. Within the human condition disturbances can affect our natural spiritual balance. Fear, anger, or worry about our family, professional and work demands, societal expectations, cultural conditioning, and even the state of the world can constrict awareness of our innate spiritual nature that flowers in its oneness with creation. In our life journey, it is necessary to periodically “burn away” that which blocks the growth of the deeper seed of the Divine Presence within all of us. This growth restores natural balance and invites us to renewal, flowering, freedom, and a joyful life.

### **PrairieFire: The Program**

We live in a world where we are taught little about spirituality and our personal spiritual natures. We go through our days in what Thomas Keating calls “ordinary psychological awareness.” A chief characteristic of this type of awareness is that it looks to the outside world for validation and meaning. Family, institutional, societal, and cultural dictums teach us how we “should” be in the world, and yet subtly and powerfully keep us from awareness of our deeper spiritual selves. We live unconsciously as if on automatic pilot with little interior awareness. We behave and become according to what we have been taught, and we judge others who have been taught differently.

At some point in our lives, something often happens to move us into a state of awakening, making us question the wisdom of living out of this ordinary psychological awareness. This movement can take many forms. Perhaps we find we don’t like who we’ve become or the values out of which we’ve been living. We may find that the job, the house, the possessions, or the lifestyle that were supposed to make us happy don’t. Perhaps we have an inner sense that something is just not right, that something important is lacking in our lives. Maybe a crisis, a loss or a betrayal has shaken the foundation of our lives in ways we have never experienced.

Whether spontaneously suffered or intentionally chosen, often such events powerfully draw us from the lure of the outer into new awareness of our inner spiritual being – and deeper still, into awareness of that Presence in whose image each of us is created. This process leads to authentic healing. Just as the prairie recovers or heals following a prairie fire, new life springs forth in us.

PrairieFire, a two-year program of spiritual renewal, deepening and formation, provides a safe and sacred environment to allow the clearing of our inner terrain to promote new growth. In the safety of a community that provides support, resources and containment, we explore together our ways of thinking, our notions about God, and negative attitudes such as attachments, aversions, judgments, competition and expectations. We will discover how to remove the barriers of harmful thinking that keep us from knowing the truth of our divine natures as made visible in our ordinary lives.

The result promises to be a deeper level of acceptance of self and others; a closer relationship with the Divine; increased congruence as our lives more fully express the wonder of oneness with the whole of creation; and a new commitment to live in heightened awareness of the presence and activity of the Divine accompanying us in the holiness of everyday life.

If you are ready to explore and embrace a new way of being in the world while in sacred community with others, we invite you to consider PrairieFire. If your spirit resonates with the spirit of PrairieFire, we encourage you to apply.

### **PrairieFire: Focus**

PrairieFire is an invitation to a deeper spiritual life, an invitation to set time aside for renewing of self and awakening of soul. It is an opportunity for education and mutual guidance and support in developing spiritual awareness and life-sustaining spiritual practices.

## **PrairieFire: Goals and Objectives**

- To build an intentional community where participants will find the safety and structure needed to nurture and revitalize their souls.
- To provide participants with grounding in the contemplative Christian tradition with a focus on Benedictine spirituality.
- To facilitate experiences of contemplative spiritual practices and listening skills for deepening one's relationship with self, others, and the Divine Presence.
- To foster discernment that leads each participant to a way of being in the world, characterized by contemplation, non-reactivity, prayerful listening and emerging expressions of one's true self.

## **PrairieFire: Program Components**

- Monthly gatherings for two years from September 2020 through June 2022
- A two-day retreat each September (2020 and 2021), the retreat for September 2020 will be from Sunday afternoon September 27<sup>th</sup> – Tuesday morning, September 29<sup>th</sup>.
- Day-long gatherings each month from October through June each year. Meetings will take place on every third Saturday from 8:30-4 pm
- Gatherings include a variety of experiences, such as
  - Opening and closing circles of meditation, centering and personal sharing
  - Topical presentation with monthly readings assigned
  - Small group spiritual direction
  - Experiential exercises with time for quiet personal reflection.
  - Community-building with an emphasis on compassionate hospitality

### Course requirements:

- Monthly individual spiritual direction sessions (a list of spiritual directors is available)
- One directed spiritual retreat (a minimum of three days)
- Three assigned books each year and monthly topical articles
- Regular reflection and integration papers (each paper submitted is returned with written comments)
- Participants are expected to faithfully engage in all aspects of the program.

### Topics covered include but are not limited to:

#### Year 1

- The Christian Contemplative Tradition as a Path of Renewal
- Celtic Spirituality: Listening for the Heartbeat of God
- The Human Condition: Addiction, Attachment and Codependency
- Liberating the Heart: Surrender, Letting Go and Forgiveness
- Listening Skills: Deep Listening, Heart Listening, Compassionate Listening

#### Year 2

- The Rule of Benedict

- Incarnated Spirituality
- Obstacles to Spiritual Growth
- Creativity as Spiritual Expression
- Listening Skills: Continued Deepening of Skills Experienced in Year 1

Spiritual Practices include but are not limited to:

- Centering Prayer
- Lectio Divina
- Welcoming Prayer
- Sacred Chant
- Sacred Movement
- Art as Prayer

### **PrairieFire: Meeting Schedule and Class Size**

We will begin with a two-day retreat in September and one Saturday per month, Oct – June.

Class size will be limited to 24 to ensure an optimal experience.

Sample schedule for monthly day-long gathering:

8:00 – 8:30 a.m. – Gathering and Refreshments

8:30 – 9:30 a.m. – Centering, Opening Reflection, and Check-in Circle

9:30 – 11:45 a.m. – Topical Presentations

11:45 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. – Lunch

12:30 – 2:15 p.m. – Spiritual Practices Presentations and Experiences

2:15 – 3:30 p.m. – Group Spiritual Direction

3:30 – 4 p.m. – Closing

### **PrairieFire: Admission Requirements**

Submit the application, including two references and a spiritual autobiography. The application process opens January 1, 2020 and closes on May 1, 2020, or until the class is full. Interested persons are encouraged to apply early since enrollment is limited.

Other admission requirements include:

- A personal interview with the leaders of PrairieFire.
- Demonstration of solid rootedness in one's personal spiritual journey.
- A commitment to going more broadly and deeply into one's spiritual life.

– A commitment to enter regular individual spiritual direction.

### **PrairieFire: Program Cost**

Application fee: \$50 (non-refundable)

Tuition: \$1,950 annually for two years

Tuition payment schedule:

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	Non-refundable deposit. Upon acceptance into the program this will be a down payment toward tuition
\$200	for Year I
\$775	Due September 1, 2020
\$975	Due January 15, 2021
\$975	Due September 1, 2021
\$975	Due January 15, 2022

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Additionally, the cost of books, individual spiritual direction, and your personal retreat will be the responsibility of each participant. Limited scholarship funds are available for those who show financial need.

### **PrairieFire: Spiritual Direction Practicum**

PrairieFire offers an optional third year practicum for those who seek to continue deepening their contemplative listening skills and to discern their personal ministries in the world.

PrairieFire graduates may consider the possibility of serving as spiritual directors upon the successful completion of this third year experience. Meeting all of the requirements of the practicum will lead to a certificate of completion in spiritual direction training.

Spiritual Directors' International defines spiritual direction as “the process of accompanying people on a spiritual journey. Spiritual direction exists in a context that emphasizes growing closer to God (or the holy or a higher power). Spiritual direction helps us to learn how to live in peace, with compassion, promoting justice as humble servants of that which lies beyond all names.” (source: [www.sdiworld.org](http://www.sdiworld.org)).

Very simply, spiritual directors listen deeply to another (the “directee”) as that person awakens to the holy mystery in everyday life, grows in relationship to Divine Presence, and responds by being and relating more authentically in our world.

Participants will also discover other ways to serve the world with their deep listening skills – in the workplace, in the community and in relationships with others. By continuing to meet monthly with their spiritual directors during the practicum, they will engage in this on-going discernment.

To be considered for this practicum in deep listening and spiritual direction, individuals will complete an application and will be accepted into the Spiritual Direction Practicum based upon prerequisites including (but limited to):

- The successful completion of the two-year PrairieFire program that provides the necessary historical, theological, and spiritual background, as well as a basic knowledge of Christian contemplative practices
- Demonstrated listening and relationship skills and indications of spiritual growth as evidenced through participation in PrairieFire
- Recommendations by the PrairieFire team and the applicant's spiritual director
- Approval by the PrairieFire program leadership

As part of the practicum requirements, participants will:

- meet monthly with two volunteer directees which they have recruited.
- provide one verbatim for each monthly supervision session with a trained supervisor in Des Moines.
- write reflection papers based on each supervision session.
- prepare a final reflection paper.

[Click here for a printer friendly information sheet](#)

### **PrairieFire: Leadership**

*Suzanne Hall Stout, M.Div., PrairieFire Co-Director*



**Suzanne Hall Stout** is a teacher, ordained minister, wife, and mother of one adult child. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Special Education and a Master of Arts Degree in Mathematics Education from the University of Florida, and a Master of Divinity degree from Asbury Theological Seminary. Her passion for spiritual formation can be seen in the various ways she has journeyed with children, youth and adults as a mentor, pastor, teacher and friend.

Suzanne is a graduate of the PrairieFire program and a member of Spiritual Directors International. She offers spiritual direction through her work as a congregational pastor, as well as with private clients. As a spiritual director she enjoys companioning people from all spiritual backgrounds and supporting their discovery of the wisdom in their lives.

Suzanne cares deeply about holistic living – viewing mind, body and spirit as integrally and essentially one. And she is passionate about living from our place of connectedness to God, one another, and the universe.

Suzanne enjoys painting and handcrafts, writing, walking, gardening and conversation with others.



**Andrea Severson** is a spiritual director and Licensed Mental Health Counselor at DMPCC and an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church. Her degrees include a Master of Science in counseling from Drake University and a Master of Divinity from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University. She is a member of Spiritual Directors International and graduate of the PrairieFire program. Andrea is grateful for opportunities to hear the unique stories of others, to explore intersections between mind, body and spirit and to bear witness to the work of the Sacred through her work in spiritual direction and counseling. In her practice, she works with adults from a variety of backgrounds and faith traditions. Outside of work, Andrea enjoys reading historical fiction, listening to live music, and camping with her family.

Guest presenters and small group facilitators will be posted online as scheduled.

### **PrairieFire: Foundational Bibliography**

Texts for the 2020-2022 year will be announced. Foundational texts for the 2018-2020 program included:

Bourgeault, Cynthia, *The Wisdom Way of Knowing: Reclaiming an Ancient Tradition to Awaken the Heart*. Jossey-Bass, 2003.

Chittister, Joan, *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*. San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1990.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Illuminated Life: Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Dougherty, Rosemary, *Discernment: A Way of Life*. Ottawa, Ontario: Discern Products, 2014.

Lindah, Kay, *The Sacred Art of Listening: Forty Reflections for Cultivating a Spiritual Practice*. Niguel, California: Skylight Publishing, 2002.

Rohr, Richard, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer*. Revised and updated edition. NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003.

Spiritual Group Process (one of the following):

Palmer, Parker. (2004) *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Dougherty, Rosemary. (1995) *Group Spiritual Direction: Community for Discernment*. NJ: Paulist Press

Fryling, Alice. (2009) *Seeking God Together: An Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books.

**How to apply in three steps:**

1. Contact Diane McClanahan to let her know you're interested: [dmcclanahan@dmpcc.org](mailto:dmcclanahan@dmpcc.org), telephone: 515-251-6667.
2. Applications will be accepted in January 2020. [Download application form here.](#)
3. [Pay the \\$50 non-refundable application fee here](#)
4. Secure two recommendations to go with your application. [Download recommendation here.](#)