

**DEEP ABIDING:  
PRAYING, LIVING, AND LOVING FROM THE INSIDE OUT**

**BY  
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## **DEDICATION**

In honor of Rachel.

In gratitude for Craig.

With deep bow

for

Mary, Our Mother of Good Counsel and Compassion.

1 John 3:14a; 4:12-13

## ABSTRACT

This thesis project involves the creation and assessment of a heart-focused interior prayer/compassion meditation program for an inter-spiritual, liberal arts college ministry context. The Deep Abiding project was not only intended for participants' personal solace, healing, and empowerment. Reflecting Cornell College's mission and core values concerning civic engagement, social responsibility, and moral courage, this program also sought the original purpose of many Western and Eastern contemplative traditions: namely, to live, love, lead, and serve as instruments of healing peace, and to awaken awareness of our inter-connective oneness.

Sound quantitative and qualitative assessment instruments were used to measure whether heart-focused formal and informal contemplative practice of "tuning in" and identifying with indwelling life force energy or Spirit as one's Deepest, Truest Self contributed to participants' personal and communal healing. Also measured was the implied assumption that this practice would increase awareness of inter-connective oneness, compassion, mutuality, and solidarity with others.

Chapter I provides introduction to this research project through background on this liberal arts college ministry context, rationale for a contemplative healing approach, thesis statement and intended outcomes, as well as multi-cultural and inter-spiritual perspectives on indwelling life force energy or Spirit, and heart-focused contemplative practice. Chapter II explores indwelling Spirit as found in Jewish and Christian scriptures, and in the wisdom of Sts. Clare and Francis of Assisi, and Teresa of Avila. Chapter III samples some of the growing scientific research on psycho-physical and psycho-social healing benefits of meditation/interior prayer generally, and heart-focused

meditation/interior prayer specifically. Chapter IV and the Appendices address project design and assessment instruments. Chapters V-VI offer data analysis and interpretive conclusions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation involving awareness of indwelling life force energy, or Spirit, flows from the influence of countless people. These people include my maternal grandmother, Millie. Abandoned by her parents in the 1920s, Millie was given Christ's words "Lo I am with you always (Matt 28:20)" by The Rev. Schuh. He said he did so because if ever there was a child who needed such awareness, it was her. This inner Presence sustained and empowered Millie throughout a life of leadership and what she called "Mother Love"—a fierce compassion which often spilled over into the care of the downtrodden including orphaned children. I also acknowledge the influence of my mystically wired paternal grandfather, Howie. When in his nineties Howie spoke of solace found in this indwelling, companioning Presence. So did my mother's notes scribed in the margins of her Bible in the mid-1970s concerning the fruits of the Spirit. Same with a little book entitled *The Quiet Mind* given to me in my youth by my father. In hindsight, I can see how these influences, combined with teenage mining for spiritual wisdom in my parents' books like James Allen's *As A Man Thinketh*, and *The Bhagavad Gita*, shaped the creation of this research project three decades later.

Completion of this doctoral program would not be possible without the enduring love and support of my beloved life mate, Craig. No Craig—no dissertation. The late Jacquelyn Phillips was well into her nineties when she helped inspire this project through her mentorship on being a channel for the transmission of God's healing energies. Friend and fellow clergywoman, Lori Erickson, inspired the dissertation title. My dog, Atticus Finch, provided patient accompaniment throughout countless hours of writing.

Gratitude extends to my sisters and brothers at Washington Theological Union.

This includes the guidance of Academic Dean, Sister Anne McLaughlin, and Program Thesis Director, Dr. Kathy Brown. Dr. Brown helped keep this project focused and thus manageable. Gratitude also extends to my dissertation readers, including for their humor. Sage counsel of spirituality professor, Dr. Pat Fosarelli, who is also a medical doctor and researcher, ensured that my design of research assessment instruments was scientifically sound. She was also invaluable as an editor. Father John Welch's insights into Carmelite Spirituality, including the wisdom of Teresa of Avila, will continue shaping me on the journey. Other WTU contributors include adjunct professor Dr. Gillian Ahlgren who offered mentoring in Franciscan spirituality while in Assisi and La Verna, Italy. Fellow D.Min. students provided inspiration and encouragement.

Finally, I thank members of Cornell College and Mount Vernon, Iowa communities who assisted with this project. This includes participants in the Deep Abiding research study, as well as faculty, staff, clergy, spiritual directors and healers who participated in the pilot version of this project. Cornell Institutional Research staff gurus, Dr. Becki Elkins and Elizabeth Jach, were also priceless. They have almost transformed my resistance to student learning outcomes assessment and used of web-based survey software into a pleasure. Assisting with research data verification and/or analysis are Cornell Mathematics professor and statistician, Dr. Ann Cannon, Chaplain and Spiritual Life Student Office Manager, Kim Boche, Technical Services and Consulting Librarian, Greg Cotton, and Consulting Librarian for the Natural Sciences, Mary Iber. Mary, a fellow meditator who, like Jacqueline Phillips, died shortly after this dissertation was submitted, will be remembered for her support and ability to radiate Light. Psychology professor, Dr. Alice Ganzel, offered encouragement and a helpful



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## Chapter I. INTRODUCTION

*God is living in us not as a statue or a picture, but as energy ready to direct all our actions moment by moment. Hence the necessity of a discipline of prayer and action to sensitize ourselves to the divine energy Paul calls Spirit or the pneuma which we translate as God.*

~ Fr. Thomas Keating<sup>1</sup>

*A human being is a part of the whole, called by us "Universe," a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish the delusion but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind."*

~Albert Einstein<sup>2</sup>

### A. Research Project Background Information and Ministry Context

Deep Abiding is a contemplative prayer/meditation program and doctoral research project. It was created for use within a spiritually diverse, liberal arts college community context. Deep Abiding approaches contemplative prayer of the heart (also referred to throughout this dissertation as heart-focused compassion meditation) not only as a formal spiritual practice which occurs in seated silence. It is also an awareness and way of being while in the midst of everyday life activities and encounters.

Spirituality concerns a deliberate way of living. Unlike other academic fields such as theology, scholars like Philip Sheldrake and Sandra Schneiders remind us that the study of spirituality involves lived experience; experience that is not only informative but transformative.<sup>3</sup>

Spirituality is also more than private satisfaction. As Schneiders puts it,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Keating, *The Mystery of Christ: The Liturgy As Spiritual Experience* (Amity, NY: Amity House, 1987), p.24.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Einstein, Letter of 1950, as quoted in *The New York Times* (29 March 1972) and *The New York Post* (28 November 1972).

<sup>3</sup> See Philip Sheldrake, "Spirituality and Its Critical Methodology," in *Exploring Christian Spirituality*, edited by Bruce H. Lecher and Elizabeth Liebert (New York: Paulist Press, 2006), 23.

spirituality involves moving beyond self-focus and toward “the ultimate good.”<sup>4</sup> This ultimate good “may be God but might also be something other than God [such as] the full personhood of all humans, world peace, enlightenment, or the good of the cosmos.”<sup>5</sup>

That is why the Deep Abiding program was created not only for participants’ personal solace, healing, inner peace, and empowerment amid their often overstretched, busy lives. Reflecting Cornell College’s mission and core values concerning engaged citizenship, moral courage, and both civic and social responsibility, the program was also created to reclaim the original purpose of many contemplative spiritual traditions: namely, to help awaken awareness of life’s inter-connective oneness, and to live, love, lead, and serve as instruments of healing peace. This larger purpose is why social or communal healing experiments involving Cornell College and Mount Vernon, Iowa communities were included in this project.

Many people are increasingly aware of our inter-connective oneness as a human species and planet. Photos of planet Earth, our island home, remind us of how we share a reality as one small drop in the vast ocean of the cosmos. Technology provides instant access to people and events half a world away. Environmental, humanitarian, political, and economic crises trigger chain reactions across the globe. Then there is quantum field theory and what British biologist Ruper Sheldrake and others refer to as morphic resonance. Judy Cannato described morphic resonance in a book wherein even the title informs. In *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology Is Transforming Spiritual Life*, Cannato spoke of human persons and other life forms as systems of inter-connective

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<sup>4</sup> Sandra Schneiders, “Approaches to the Study of Christian Spirituality,” *The Blackwell Companion To Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur Holder (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



relationship. For example, through fields (non-material regions of influence), energy and information rooted in our bodies also extends beyond them in ways that interact with the energy and information of others.<sup>6</sup> Numerous intention-based scientific experiments are suggesting that mind-body-spirit practices like heart-focused compassion meditation/interior prayer work with and through these energy fields.<sup>7</sup>

From these and other examples of our inter-connective oneness, science is confirming what mysticism, indigenous peoples, and age-old Eastern and Western contemplative wisdom traditions and related practices have always held concerning the illusion of our separateness. Or, as Ursula King put it in light of the work of paleontologist, philosopher, and Jesuit priest, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: a united human community is possible amid our evolutionary becoming; but this reality cannot take place without the contributions of the different world religions including the transformative power of Christianity's incarnational, action-oriented faith.<sup>8</sup>

In light of a convergence between a) Cornell College's mission and core values, b) understanding reality as inter-connective oneness by scientists, mystics, and contemplative traditions, as well as c) growing Western interest in mind-body-spirit practices like Tai Chi and energy medicine like healing touch and Reiki, I sensed the time, and this college ministry context were ripe. Ripe for an experiment. I wanted to know what would happen if a research pool of Cornell students, faculty, staff, and area community members dedicated themselves to multiple weeks of heart-focused,

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<sup>6</sup> Judy Cannato, *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology Is Transforming Spiritual Life*, (Notre Dame: IN, 2010), 7, 25-77.

<sup>7</sup> Lynn McTaggart, *The Intention Experiment: Using Your Thoughts To Change Your Life and The World* (New York: Simon and Schuster Free Press), 2007.

<sup>8</sup> King, Ursula. *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin Writings Selected With an Introduction by Ursula King* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2012) 13<sup>th</sup> printing, p.123.

compassion-based interior prayer/meditation. Would there be increased awareness of this inter-connective oneness while in the midst of everyday activities and encounters? Could this awareness contribute in some way to not only personal but communal healing? Could an inter-spiritual college chaplaincy program that involved setting the *intention* to pay *attention* to indwelling life force energy or Spirit result in transformative healing peace in ways that are measurable?

Various names for Divine indwelling, or indwelling life force energy or Spirit have existed throughout human history. These names include *ruach*<sup>9</sup> in Hebrew Scriptures, *pneuma* and *energon*<sup>10</sup> in Paul's epistles of the New Testament, and *prana* in the yoga systems of India and Tibet. Other names include *chi* in China, *ki* in Japan, *baraka* by Sufis, *wakan* by the Lakota, *num* among the Kung San people of Africa's Kalahari Desert, *ha* by indigenous peoples of Hawaii, and Holy Spirit or third member of the Trinity in Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Not only Teresa of Avila and Clare of Assisi but also *The Bhagavad-Gita*, and Marcus Aurelius' *Emperor's Handbook* wherein he counsels "let the god within command you," are examples of countless sources. Such sources speak of

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<sup>9</sup> As will be explored in Chapter Two, *ruach* is used over 380 times in Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament, to refer to God's breath or spirit embedded in material creation including in human beings.

<sup>10</sup> *Energon* [energy or energizing] and other variations of the Greek word *energeia* appear over 30 times in the New Testament including 22 times in Paul's letters, and in reference to healing prayer (James 5:16). There is no Latin equivalent for this Greek term which usually gets translated into English Bibles as God "working," thus losing the original meaning the Eastern Church maintains as God's "energies." See Frederica Mathewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer: The Ancient Desert Prayer That Tunes The Heart To God* (Brewster, Mass: Paraclete Press, 2010), 23.

<sup>11</sup> For a Christian example of such a multi-cultural, global understanding of the Spirit see Grace Ji-Sun Kim's *The Holy Spirit, Chi, and the Other: A Model of Global and Intercultural Pneumatology*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

being indwelt, and of tapping into this inner force or Spirit in order to serve, lead, and face the demands of daily life.<sup>12</sup>

Just as Sheldrake speaks of Christian spiritual interiority being for the sake of outward love, life in community, and social action, so does this project. This project attempted to honor a postmodern desire for an inter-spiritual, multi-cultural, global pneumatology<sup>13</sup>—an aim well-suited for this diverse college ministry context. That said, this project was carried out in a way that tried to avoid the hazards of relativism in which the distinct gifts of differing traditions are ignored. At the same time, echoing Sandra Schneiders’ description of an anthropological approach to the study of spirituality, this project attempted the mobilization of diverse spiritual resources for the transformative healing of others, self, the human race, and planet.<sup>14</sup> As such, throughout the program participants were free to interpret indwelling life force energy or Spirit as best fit their own religious, secular, or spiritual-but-not-religious perspectives.

The creation of this project also stemmed from a lack of known inter-spiritual contemplative programs geared for colleges like Cornell. In other words, educational settings wherein people of diverse religious, spiritual-but-not-religious, and secular perspectives use an inter-spiritual, educational model as they sojourn in transformatively healing, liberating, and empowering ways through both personal and shared communal difficulties. Known were programs and practices either anchored in a specific tradition,

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<sup>12</sup> C. Scot Hicks and David V. Hicks, *The Emperor’s Handbook: A New Translation of the Meditations*, (New York: Scribner, 2002), 35.

<sup>13</sup> The term “pneumatology” comes from the Greek word “pneuma” meaning the vital breath, wind, or spirit. In Christian theology pneumatology refers to the study of the Spirit.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 26-27.

or stripped of much, if not all, spiritual wisdom.<sup>15</sup> While such approaches are appropriate for other contexts, what was sought for the Cornell College Chaplain and Spiritual Life Office was an inter-spiritual, liberal arts approach for this spiritually diverse, liberal arts ministry context. The aim was to create an inter-spiritual program that integrated insights from mystical, monastic, and other contemplative wisdom traditions including Carmelite spirituality which is lesser known beyond Roman Catholic settings. Learning sessions for this multi-week program would also enfold the visual arts, as well as resources from the growing body of scientific evidence concerning the psycho-physiological and psycho-social benefits of contemplative practices.

## **B. Cornell College Ministry Context**

I am an Episcopal priest serving in highly ecumenical and inter-faith ways as chaplain of Cornell College since 1996. Cornell is a selective liberal arts college of approximately twelve hundred students, 80% of whom are from outside the state of Iowa. Older than the Cornell in Ithaca, New York, Cornell College was founded in 1853 in Mount Vernon, Iowa. Historically Cornell College is affiliated with The United Methodist Church.

As is the case at many liberal arts colleges, Cornell has one chaplain serving a highly diverse religious, spiritual-but-not-religious, and secular campus community.

There is one of me for approximately 1,500 students, faculty, and staff. In addition to

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<sup>15</sup> Laurence Freeman, OSB, points out how although meditation was “born and is embedded in spiritual traditions,” secularized, scientific models are the current trend wherein technique is emphasized. He claims that TM secularized dhyana Hindu meditation, and Jon Kabat-Zin’s Mindfulness Training secularized sattipatthana, one of Buddha’s eightfold path. Still, both secularized methods have contributed to the relief of suffering and increased happiness of many people, and I believe they have made spirituality accessible to people otherwise untrusting of religious approaches. Freeman notes how these secularized paths challenge religious leaders to examine the shortfalls in their churches’ spiritual depth and accessibility. See Freeman, *Meditatio Newsletter*, Dec. 2013, 3-4.

pastoral care and spiritual guidance, programming and worship, occasional teaching, church relations, and serving various Divisions of the College (Academic Affairs, Admissions, Alumni and Advancement, President's Office, Student Affairs), I have been, or currently am, faculty-staff advisor to ecumenical Christian, inter-faith, Jewish, Muslim, evangelical, Roman Catholic, Buddhist, and secular student organizations.

At least half of the student body self identifies with some kind of religion or spiritual orientation when beginning their college years.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Institutional Research conducted a student body assessment on spirituality four years ago, using focus groups and an adapted version of the *UCLA Higher Education Students' Beliefs and Values Survey*. Results showed Cornell students reflect national trends of many college age students by having strong interest in spirituality, but lesser so in terms of religiousness.<sup>17</sup> In line with spiritual and human development theory involving this age group, many of these students (yet also Cornell faculty and staff), question and/or distance themselves from faith-based contexts yet still seek this chaplain for spiritual solace, wisdom, exploration, and support. Secular college people and townspeople also seek spiritual guidance and care, as do unchurched religious townspeople.

The following information about this ministry setting is useful for understanding this project, especially as it pertains to the communal healing experiments involving the communities of Cornell College and Mount Vernon.

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<sup>16</sup> This data is based upon student responses to an optional question about religious affiliation on the college application.

<sup>17</sup> Dr. Becki Elkins, head of Cornell's Office of Institutional Research graduate student Stephanie Preschel, *Pathways: A Study of Spirituality and Vocation at Cornell College*, Spring 2010.

Cornell students, faculty, and staff reflect the College's mission and core values of intellectual and personal growth, engaged citizenship, moral courage, and social responsibility. There are rigorous academic demands. They carry heavy workloads, leadership responsibilities, and engage in numerous extra-curricular activities and/or committee work which helps run the college. Three quarters of our students engage in voluntary service. Many students, faculty, and staff are interested in issues pertaining to social justice, diversity, peacemaking, and global consciousness. More than a few Cornell students also engaged in spiritual exploration in and beyond their own backgrounds and perspectives. They seek inter-spiritual wisdom for personal solace, intellectual and cross-cultural exploration, and to expand their sense of meaning, purpose, and relationship with self, others, world, and in many cases the Sacred.

Cornell students, faculty, staff, and faculty/staff life partners are not immune to familial and other relationship challenges, nor to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual difficulties. Self-doubts can increase stress levels; so can measuring personal worth by accomplishments, and by the judgments and expectations imposed by self, others, and society. There are fears and frustrations with life's uncertainty, including financial worry. These internal and external pressures are amplified by the fast pace of Cornell's intensive One-Course-At-A-Time academic calendar wherein a semester's worth of learning for a class is covered in eighteen days.

Like other colleges and universities, economic consequences of the 2008 stock market crash negatively impact faculty and staff. Multiple institutional paradigm shifts also impacted morale. Change can bring fear, frustration, and occasionally anger and hurt. The need to increase enrollment amid realities such as understaffing, departmental

budget lines which haven't seen increases for several decades, and the necessity of raising the bar of expectations for already overstretched, underpaid employees points to the need not only for additional funding. There is need of interior resources which help heal and empower. There is need for the cultivation of skillful, compassionate ways of relating to the demands and difficulties of life.

### **C. Mount Vernon Community Ministry Context**

Mount Vernon, Iowa is a college community of approximately 4,500 people. It is a bedroom community for mostly white collar, highly educated people. The main local employer is Cornell College. Other employers include The University of Iowa and its research hospital and clinics in Iowa City, three colleges in Cedar Rapids, and companies like Quaker Oats, Go Daddy, and aerospace and defense technology corporation Rockwell International. Mount Vernon has been described as an idyllic small college town. In the October 2009 edition of *Budget Travel Magazine*, Mount Vernon was mentioned in an article entitled "America's Coolest Small Towns." Still, these perceptions mask realities like minimal ethnic diversity beyond the college student body. Also masked are the estimated 150 families in the Mount Vernon/Lisbon area relying upon the local food pantry for groceries on a weekly basis.

There is also the grief impact of three consecutive suicides by Mount Vernon high school youth upon this small town. The deaths of these boys occurred over a seven month period beginning in the fall of 2010. Two of the three boys were members of this year's high school graduating class. The grief impact has coincided with the duration of this doctoral program.

The ripple effects of this loss and grief impacted the youth of the Mount Vernon Community School District in this tightly interwoven town. It also meant secondary, or vicarious trauma,<sup>18</sup> for large numbers of parents and grandparents, teachers, school administrators, emergency responders, and others.

Parents, educators, counselors, clergy, and other care responders attempted to stop the suicide contagion, media invasion, and the blame game. Since that tragic year, children and adults alike waded through the grief and fears, and that of their friends. Transformative healing takes time.

Simultaneous with this community grief, since early 2011, the City of Mount Vernon has also experienced divisive and at times uncivil community conflicts. These conflicts involve both civic and school board issues aired in highly public ways, including through local and regional media.

The above named adversities do not define or limit the people of Mount Vernon and Cornell College. These are vibrant, talented, resilient people. Given that these community adversities have been part of my ministry context throughout the duration my doctoral program, it makes sense that they would shape my Doctor of Ministry project.

#### **D. A Contemplative Healing Approach**

The healing task of a chaplain in circumstances like those named above includes spiritual care and presence. It also involves inviting members of a spiritually diverse

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<sup>18</sup> David Conrad, LCSW of University Colorado-Denver defines secondary trauma as “stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person.” He defines vicarious trauma as the “cumulative transformative effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events.” See <http://secondarytrauma.org/>.



college community and town<sup>19</sup> to come together for mutual support, as well as for tools, tools people can use for solace, strength, tender mercy, and courage so they, in turn, can live as instruments of healing peace, love, and servant leadership.

Contemplative practices have been attracting religious and non-religious Cornell community members seeking spiritual healing wisdom, care, and growth. This contemplative healing approach to spirituality reflects national trends.<sup>20</sup> Weekly meditation, mindfulness, and mind-body-spirit gatherings, a waitlist for a chaplain-led Christian-Hindu comparative mysticism class on Divine indwelling taught in India, and strong interest in monastic and other contemplative retreats year after year have pointed toward this interest and need.

Heart-focused compassion meditation or interior prayer of the heart has been a viable way of programming to a diverse constituency, since numerous cultures and religious traditions do so. The same is true of speaking in inter-spiritual ways about indwelling life force energy or Spirit which, for several Eastern and Western traditions, is integrally part of heart-focused contemplative practices. Secular, religious, and spiritual-but-not-religious people in this campus community context have found this expansive, inter-spiritual approach to be something they can do together amid their differences. This includes as a way to responding during healing peace vigils in the wake of national and international tragedies. Adaptations of a given modality allow participants of differing

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<sup>19</sup> A six-week mindfulness stress reduction program was offered by Molly Marty and myself for Mount Vernon parents and others as part of the town's numerous care response offerings through The Resiliency Project.

<sup>20</sup> Maia Duerr, "Assessing the State of Contemplative Practices in the United States," in *Contemplative Nation: How Ancient Practices Are Changing the Way We Live* (Kalamazoo, MI: Fetzer Institute, 2011), 9-34.

religious, spiritual-but-not-religious, and secular backgrounds to engage in healing practices through both individual and shared communal adversities together.

**E. Thesis Statement and Intended Outcomes:**

In society and at liberal arts colleges like Cornell, there are people living busy, overstretched, and often anxious lives who seek the healing benefits of contemplative practices. They do so not only out of a desire for personal transformative healing, liberation, and empowerment but also in order to live, lead, and love as channels of healing peace in the world.

This project explored the role heart-focused interior prayer/compassion meditation plays in personal and communal healing. It spoke of an inner, gentle gesture of surrender and awareness which—like an antenna or little radio dial inside us – tunes us to the deep abiding presence and healing action of indwelling life-force energy or Spirit. It is the same eternal life force of the universe dwelling in, yet also beyond, all beings linking all life as one. This practice was intended to be used as a way of being amid everyday life activities and encounters.

Intended Learning outcomes were as follows:

- Participants cultivate a practice which opens them to both personal and communal healing.
- Participants find that the inner gentle gesture of surrender to indwelling life force energy or Spirit while in the midst of everyday life activity and encounters helps them work more skillfully and compassionately when confronted with fear and sadness amid the demands, discomforts, and difficulties of life.

Even if participants eventually dropped the fifteen or more minutes of formal practice five or more days a week, the intended outcome was that more than a few participants

will continue using the informal “re-tuning” and “sending” contemplation-in-action practice amid daily life activities and encounters. Participants were free to interpret indwelling life force energy or Spirit as best fits their religious, secular, or spiritual-but-not-religious perspectives.

Implicit, though not specified, among intended outcomes was the following operative assumption: Cultivating an awareness of indwelling life force/Spirit increases exterior awareness of inter-connective oneness and solidarity with others. This in turn deepens a *communio*<sup>21</sup> of compassion with other people and all creation.

Regardless of whether participants interpreted life force energy or Spirit in and between all living beings as occurring on a quantum field and/or metaphysical level—or merely as a feel good but not “real” focusing device clothed in the language of mystics—the assumption was that participants would expand their capacity for unitive consciousness and love. Included were quantitative and qualitative assessment methods that attempted to measure whether this was so.

#### **F. Heart-focused Meditation/Interior Prayer**

There are five reasons why the Deep Abiding program uses a heart-focused contemplative practice. First, given my ministry context, I wanted to make this practice accessible to people of diversely religious, secular, and spiritual-but-not-religious perspectives. So I called the contemplative practice interior prayer of the heart/heart-

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<sup>21</sup> *Communio* is a Latin term meaning mutual participation, sharing, community, fellowship, and communion.

focused compassion meditation. The name conveys something universal<sup>22</sup> amid our differences about the inner journey for the purposes of personal and communal compassion-based healing.

The second reason for using a heart-focused contemplative practice is because the heart center of the body has been a place of worship to commune with the Divine in numerous indigenous, as well as Eastern and Western, traditions throughout history. This includes early Christian ascetic and mystical literature. Heart-focused contemplative prayer has been used in order to commune with indwelling Presence, to heal non-life giving thoughts, and to be empowered with tender mercy for service to others. Examples of this include The Sacred Heart tradition of Roman Catholicism, the Jesus Prayer of the Eastern Orthodox Church which grew out of Desert pre-monasticism and the medieval Hesychast movement, and Quaker spirituality. Traditions beyond Christianity include Sufism with its image of the winged heart. Sufism understands the heart as both earthly and heavenly; it is the “throne of mercy” manifesting God’s love.<sup>23</sup> The *Chandogya Upanishad* speaks of the dweller inside the little house within the lotus of the heart as being Brahman Itself.<sup>24</sup> Lakota visionary and healer, Black Elk, spoke of the heart as “a sanctuary at the center of which is a little space wherein the Great Spirit abides.”<sup>25</sup> As scholar of the heart-centered Salesian spiritual tradition and my thesis advisor, Dr. Kathy Brown, notes, the heart is far more than a symbol of emotions for these traditions. “The

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<sup>22</sup> For examples ranging from Celtic to Sufi and Taoist traditions see David Richo’s *The Sacred Heart of the World: Restoring Mystical Devotion to Our Spiritual Life*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), especially 11-62.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Chandogya Upanishad 8:1:1,2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 17.

image of the heart is a way of speaking of the vital, central dynamic of the person.”<sup>26</sup>

A third reason for using heart-focused contemplation is very practical. Having the heart center of the body as a focal point provides a tangible “home base” or anchor for practitioners to return to whenever noticing one’s racing thoughts, the so-called “tyranny of one’s thoughts” which can afflict the mind, body, and soul.<sup>27</sup> As with Desert monastic tradition which speaks of the differing types of thoughts which “hook” us,<sup>28</sup> heart-focus contemplative practice can help redirect one’s thoughts to the Eternal within as one’s deepest, truest self. This is so not only during formal practice but throughout one’s day. As Eastern Orthodox tradition puts it, one simultaneously keeps an inner eye upon the heart amid everyday life activities and encounters, so that the other eye can more clearly see, revere, and love the world.

The fourth reason for using heart-centered interior prayer/compassion meditation is because the heart has been understood for centuries as an energy center of the body. Despite differing cultural, social, and historic contexts, numerous traditions speak of the heart as the communication center for receiving/sending inter-connective, transforming, and revitalizing healing energies of the universe and/or the Divine. Hindu, Tibetan Buddhist, Reiki, Healing Touch Ministry, Eden Energy Medicine, Capacitar, and Master Chao Kok Sui’s Pranic Healing approaches are some of these traditions.

Finally, I am using heart language for this project because psycho-physiological and psycho-social medical research conducted by HeartMath Institute and other scientists. This research will be described in Chapter III.

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<sup>26</sup> Conversation, January 3, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Margaret Funk, *Tools Matter for Practicing the Spiritual Life*, (NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), 51-56.

<sup>28</sup> Funk, *Thoughts Matter: the Practice of Spiritual Life* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 9-25.

## **G. Chapter Overview**

To keep this dissertation realistically manageable, the theological underpinnings for this dissertation do not cover multiple religious traditions. Instead, Chapter II begins with a brief overview of biblical tradition on indwelling life force energy or Spirit in all physical matter, including as part of our anthropology. It then turns to Franciscan and Carmelite spiritualities.

I acknowledge that there are other ways interior prayer is spoken of within and beyond the Christian mystical contemplative tradition (i.e. prayer of quiet, contemplative prayer, and mental prayer). Though St. Teresa referred to this interior practice as mental prayer, I will use her as well as St. Clare's journey within as a model for the interior journey to God dwelling in the heart or soul of one's being.

Chapter III addresses medical and other scientific evidence of the healing benefits of belief, intention, and meditation/interior prayer. It also includes the growing body of theoretical knowledge and research pointing not only to psycho-physiological but psychosocial healing benefits of contemplative practices including heart-focused compassion meditation/interior prayer.

Chapter IV describes the project. It includes a composite profile of participants in this study, and explains the project design, learning sessions, and participant "homework" practice occurring between learning sessions. It also describes research tools and methods, and addresses issues concerning research objectivity in the academic field of spirituality.

Chapter V analyzes qualitative and quantitative evidence to see whether the Deep Abiding project's thesis and intended outcomes occurred. Chapter VI makes a case for what can be generalized or concluded from this study. It also names research questions this study raises for further investigation and possible uses of the data for ministry on and beyond the Cornell College campus. The chapter ends with a brief reference to some of the ways this dissertation transformed my inner and outer life. Appendices offer details pertaining to the spiritual practices, the foci of the five learning sessions, the research instruments, and additional findings.

## Chapter II BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

For manageability sake, this chapter limits exploration of divine indwelling to biblical, Franciscan, and Carmelite spirituality.

This chapter opens with a brief examination of biblical references to God's indwelling Spirit in all of creation, including human anthropology. Note that this chapter is not examining a contemplative lens through which one discerns an "inner meaning" of Scripture pointing to the Divine within. I acknowledge how reading Scripture through a mystical interpretive lens was quite normative within patristic and medieval Christianity.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, I acknowledge more recent efforts like those of Swami Prabhavananda's (d.1976) *Sermon on the Mount According to Vedanta*, New Testament scholar Ravi Ravindra's *Gospel of John in The Light of Indian Mysticism*, and Fr. Bede Griffiths (d. 1993) to help Westerners reclaim the deep well of mystical wisdom in Christian Scriptures. Still, the biblical section of this chapter limits itself to examples of passages directly speaking of God's indwelling presence and activity in creation including human beings. These examples are drawn from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), the Letters of St. Paul, and St. John's Gospel. Attention then shifts in more substantial ways to spiritual healing wisdom on Divine indwelling as lived and taught by Christian mystics St. Clare and Francis of Assisi (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> c.), and St. Teresa of Avila (16<sup>th</sup> c).

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<sup>29</sup> Origin of Alexandria (185-254), one of the most influential of the early Christian biblical interpreters, spoke of a literal/historical meaning, an allegorical or spiritual meaning, a moral meaning, and a heavenly level of meaning of scripture. The key for Origin was Logos instructing the soul through the text, thereby "teaching all readers the gifts of salvation: contemplation [and] divinization." Barbara Green, "The Old Testament in Christian Spirituality," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, Arthur Holder, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005) p. 39.



## A. Biblical Foundations for Indwelling Spirit

*[S]he pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God, and a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty....a reflection of eternal light....she renews all things....I determine to take her to live with me knowing that she would give me good counsel and encouragement in cares and grief.*

~The Wisdom of Solomon 7: 24b-26, 27b, 8:9

Throughout the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament, there are numerous references to Spirit dwelling in physical matter. This includes in and through human bodies, as well as life in community. These biblical passages point to various ways in which ancient Israel and early Christian followers of The Way attuned their minds, hearts, embodied being, and collective life to indwelling Spirit for the purpose of personal and communal healing,<sup>30</sup> vitality, liberation, and empowerment.

Indwelling Spirit is referred to as *Ruach* some 380 times in the Hebrew Scripture. This term has several meanings. *Ruach* refers to the human breath and the Breath or Spirit of God inside a person. As such, *Ruach* is an animating life force operative in humans as well as in other beings.<sup>31</sup> In the first creation story of Genesis, *Ruach* is God's presence and primordial power breathing in and upon creation (Gen 2:7). *Ruach* also refers to a wind or gentle breeze bringing nourishing rain to fields, thereby making a difference between life or death.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, it is a term used to speak of God's saving help inside us. It is an interior empowerment and revitalization of both a person and community. In Ezekiel, *Ruach* is God's revitalizing breath upon dry bones (Ezek. 27) and the healing balm God pours upon people amid their exile like water on thirsty ground

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<sup>30</sup>For a comprehensive summary of the art of spiritual healing as found in the Bible and the Church history see Morton Kelsey, *Psychology, Medicine, & Christian Healing*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

<sup>31</sup>*The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*, s.v. "Holy Spirit."

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

(Is. 44:3). Conveyed is the message of indwelling Spirit transformatively breathing new life within a disheartened people (Ezek. 37).

We see another example of indwelling Spirit's revitalizing, healing work in Psalm 51. Here the psalmist uses the term *Ruach* four times (51:10, 12, and 17). As *The New Interpreter's Study Bible* notes, the psalmist's petition is for "re-creation of mind and will (heart), and of inner disposition of energy (spirit)." The psalmist prays:

*Create in me a clean heart or Lord and renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your holy Spirit from  
me. Grant me the joy of your saving help again, and sustain me with your  
bountiful Spirit (Ps 51:10-12).*

*The New Interpreter's* commentary notes how this text speaks of Divine Spirit as an integral part of the person's inner nature and outlook. Still, Spirit also comes to the person as a help and strength from beyond.<sup>33</sup> As such *Ruach* is used throughout the Hebrew Bible to speak of an interior empowerment of people, including leaders and entire communities, for doing things they would not have strength to do on their own. An example of this empowerment is the Spirit of the Lord coming upon Samson to defend Israel (Judge 13:25; 15:14-15).

Note how this biblical understanding of Spirit is not antithetical to bodies and matter.<sup>34</sup> With the exception of references to a dead corpse, there simply is no word in the Hebrew Bible that refers to the human body as a separate, non-spirit filled material reality. Instead, the Hebrew Scripture understands the human person holistically as a *nefesh*: a psycho-physical-Spirit-filled being. Retrieval of this biblical understanding of

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<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Psalm 51 is one of two passages in Hebrew Scriptures referring to Spirit as Holy. The other is Isaiah 10f ("they...grieve his Holy Spirit"). See Grace Ji-Sun Kim, 39.

<sup>34</sup> For a helpful resource on this topic, see *Reclaiming The Body In Christian Spirituality*, Thomas Ryan, ed., (New York: Paulist Press, 2004).

human anthropology is well suited for contemporary interest in, and need for, mind-body-spirit practices for inner and outer healing of others and self, empowerment, leadership, and service.

*Shekinah* is another word used throughout the Hebrew Bible. *Shekinah* refers to Divine glory or the indwelling, immanent light. As this indwelling, infinite and immanent light or glory (*kevod*) of the Creator, *Shekinah* fills the world and God's people. In Exodus 26-28, the *Shekinah* is also said to have been with the tabernacle as God's dwelling place while the people Israel wandered in the wilderness. Later rabbinical texts understood *Shekinah* as filling and accompanying God's people amid their exile and suffering. We see this in various mystical texts which mingle *Shekinah* with the biblical figure Rachel, the Mother of Israel, who according to the Book of Jeremiah weeps for exiled children (Jer. 31:15).

The Hebrew letters for the name Rachel are RHL. The rabbis transformed RHL into *Ruah El*—the spirit of God, hence the double reference. Thus, in texts like the *Tana deBe Eliyahu* (5<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> c C.E.), it is not the pleas of Moses, or Jeremiah, or the patriarchs which awaken Divine mercy. Rather, it is the earthly RHL rousing her counterpart *Ruah El*, spirit of God.<sup>35</sup> This mystical understanding of *Shekinah* and/or RHL depicts her as granting comfort, strength, and mother love, while sharing in human suffering amid exiles, expulsions, crusades, pogroms, and other adversity known throughout Jewish history. Artists have continued this midrashic tradition within interpretive Holocaust

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<sup>35</sup> Samuel H. Dresner, *Rachel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 183-184.

art.<sup>36</sup>

*Holy Wisdom* is yet another female representation of Divine Spirit with us and in us. Included in Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Anglican biblical canons, the Book of Wisdom speaks of God's immortal Spirit as Wisdom dwelling in all things (Wis. 12:1) By the time of the Early Church, Holy Wisdom was becoming identified with the third member of the Trinity. She was often depicted in art as a woman seated on a throne, and later was also associated with Mary the God-Bearer. Masses were eventually developed in honor of the Holy Wisdom or Spirit, though again there was a blurring of lines between the figures of Holy Wisdom and Mary. As for the Eastern Orthodox Church, it boldly speaks of Holy Wisdom as the energies of God in us and all creation.

St. Paul's letters and St. John's Gospel give the clearest New Testament expression of Divine indwelling. Paul spoke of *pneuma* which, when translated into Latin by second and third century writers, became *spiritualis*. The Latin adjective *spiritualis* means "of *or* belonging to breathing *or* to air," and the verb *spirare* means "to breathe." As James Wiseman notes, what Paul meant by this is that one is living according to the promptings of God's Spirit.<sup>37</sup> Wiseman writes:

*Spiritual persons are...those who are open to the Spirit of God. Paul contrasts these with persons who are 'natural (psychikos)' and 'fleshy' (sarkinos)...[T]he point of contrast is not between what is corporeal and what is noncorporeal...To live 'according to the flesh' means to live according to purely self-centered inclinations...What Paul seeks is spiritual maturity, living according to the promptings of God's Spirit, whose fruit he describes in another of his letters as 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control' (Gal. 5:22).*

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<sup>36</sup> See Ziva Amishai-Maisels, *Depiction & Interpretation: The Influence of The Holocaust on the Visual Arts*, (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), 172, 184, 344, 432 (fn.149), 433 (fn. 150), 437 (fn. 56), 500 (fn. 156).

<sup>37</sup> James Wiseman, *Spirituality and Mysticism*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), p. 2.

*For a follower of Christ to live in such a way is a preeminent mark of what Paul means by ‘a spiritual person.’<sup>38</sup>*

Paul speaks of our being filled with the fullness of God (Eph. 3:19). He notes that our bodies are temples for the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 6:19), how Christ and the Spirit live within us (Rom. 8:10-11), and how the Divine rather than ego or surface self is our Deepest Truest Self (“Not I but God in me”, Gal. 2:20).<sup>39</sup> Paul addresses spirituality not only as an individual but also as a communal reality. He speaks of Spirit making us interdependently and mutually part of one another, like differing parts of the same human body being in need of one another in order to function (1 Cor. 12). Like the Hindu Vedanta expression “the One dwelling in the many”, Paul tells how, through baptism, differing members become one body through the one Spirit (1 Cor. 12-13).

In addition to Paul’s reference to *pneuma* or Spirit, he spoke of God’s *energon* which translates into “energy” and “energizing.” These and other variations of the Greek word *energeia* appear over thirty times in the New Testament, including twenty-two times in Paul’s letters. It also occurs in reference to healing prayer (James 5:16). There is no Latin equivalent for this Greek term; it usually gets translated into English Bibles as God “working” or “operating” in us, but these may lose the potency of the original meaning, which the Eastern Church maintains as God’s “energies.”<sup>40</sup>

Age-old Eastern Orthodox, as well as biblical references to God’s energies working in and through us, are authoritatively grounding and thus noteworthy for this Deep Abiding research project. In other words, this program’s emphasis upon “tuning”

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.”

<sup>39</sup> For Pauline passages most frequently cited by mystics since the Early Church see Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (NY: Crossroads, 2005), 71-79.

<sup>40</sup> Aristotle, writing three centuries before Christ, use this term in a metaphysical sense.

into indwelling life force energy Spirit cannot not be easily dismissed as some New Age spiritual invention. Orthodox writer Frederica Mathewes-Green describes it this way when speaking of the ancient desert Jesus Prayer that tunes one's heart to God. Drawing from the biblical Greek understanding of Paul's Letter to the Philippians, she notes how reorienting it is when one understands the original meaning of text as saying: "God is energon [energizing] in you, both to will and to energein [energize] for his good pleasure (Phil 2:13)."<sup>41</sup>

It is time to turn to the Gospel of John. John's Gospel, considered by many to be the most mystical of the four Gospels, has numerous references to oneness with the Divine abiding inside us. These references include Jesus telling his disciples how he will not leave them orphaned after he is gone (Jn. 14:18). Instead, God will give them an inner Advocate—the Holy Spirit and Comforter (Jn. 14:16, 26) to abide with and in them (Jn. 14:17). He tells them "I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn. 14: 20), and how he and the Father will make their home in them (Jn. 14:23). "The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything." This Advocate will grant a peace which the world cannot give (Jn. 14:26-27). Jesus tells his disciples how he needs to go away so Helper-Spirit could complete Jesus' healing work in and through them. In other words, as long as the disciples had Jesus with them, they would not awaken to Spirit's healing, empowering presence. Jesus tells his followers how, through the assistance of indwelling Spirit, they will be able to do even greater works than him (Jn. 14:12). He adds, "Abide in me, as I abide in you" (Jn. 14:4).

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<sup>41</sup> See Frederica Mathewes-Green, *The Jesus Prayer: The Ancient Desert Prayer That Tunes The Heart To God* (Brewster, Mass: Paraclete Press, 2010), 23.

After the crucifixion, the risen Christ greets the disciples with healing peace amid their fear. Their apostolic ministry in and through indwelling Spirit ensues. Christ says “as the Father has sent me, so I send you” (Jn. 20:21). He then *breathes* on them saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit” (Jn. 20:22).<sup>42</sup> It appears to be not unlike the gnostic Gospel of Philip wherein Jesus is said to kiss Mary Magdalene on her [mouth].<sup>43</sup> Though not excluding the possibility of other meanings, this gesture may also be a sign-act signifying Jesus filling Mary (who is associated with healing) with the Breath or Spirit of God to empower her as disciple, vessel, and conduit of God’s energies for the purpose of doing God’s healing work and servant leadership in the world.

There are many reasons why biblical and Early Christian understandings of indwelling Spirit as a non-created grace embedded within all physical matter—including human anthropology, was lost over the course of time. Those reasons include the body/spirit dualism of Hellenistic philosophy entering much of Western Christian thought. Still, Wiseman notes how in the Christian West it wasn’t until the early Middle Ages that we see the category of “spiritual” and “spirituality” as something contrasted with bodily, material reality.<sup>44</sup> Some scholars point to the dominance of Thomistic theology as the reason. Wiseman cites Aquinas’ use of the noun *spiritualitas* approximately seventy times, most often in contrast to materiality or bodiliness.<sup>45</sup> There was the Reformation’s reaction against the sensual sacramental tradition of the Roman

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<sup>42</sup> This commission through the assistance of Indwelling Helper Spirit or Christ Within is also part of the meaning of the final words in Matthew’s Gospel: “Lo I Am with you always (MT 28:30).”

<sup>43</sup> There is a whole in the scroll though scholars like Elaine Pagels conjecture that the missing word is “mouth.” For reference to a translation of this passage see Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, (New York: Vintage, 1981), 77.

<sup>44</sup> Wiseman, 3.

<sup>45</sup> See Buggert, Don, O.Carm., “Grace and Religious Experience: The Everyday Mysticism of Karl Rahner,” in *Master of the Sacred Page: Essays in Honor of Roland E. Murphy, O.Carm. on the Occasion of His Eightieth Birthday* (Washington D.C.: The Carmelite Institute, 1997), 191.

Catholic Church,<sup>46</sup> and against the increasing Platonic idealization of the human bodily form during the Renaissance.<sup>47</sup> Then there was the counter-Reformation's suspicion of a mysticism which spoke of interiorization in ways that smacked of privatized, Protestant sensibilities. There were also the influences of modern philosophy such as Kant's emphasis upon religion "within the limits of reason alone," and Descartes' "I think therefore I am" which, as Paul Ryan notes, had serious ramifications for a "disincarnate" understanding of our bodies.<sup>48</sup>

Yet recovery of a more embodied understanding of indwelling life force Spirit has other hazards. Just as Paul spoke of one Spirit dwelling in many members of the interdependent, communal body, so a post-modern emphasis on individual autonomy will not fully comprehend indwelling Spirit if the communal—including ecclesial, understanding is ignored.

Finally, another caveat: in Lossky's writings on Eastern Orthodox tradition, he emphasizes our participation in God's energies—not essence.<sup>49</sup> In other words, God remains a distinct transcendent reality—the "Beyond within." Hence, we are given a panentheistic rather than pantheistic understanding of indwelling Spirit. So it is with biblical and Christian mystical understanding of indwelling Spirit in the West. All is indwelt by the Eternal, but all cannot contain the Eternal.

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<sup>46</sup> Though Luther and others did continue to claim the mystical emphasis upon divinization.

<sup>47</sup> *Encyclopedia of Science and Religion*, Vol. 1, Second Edition, 2003, "Embodiment."

<sup>48</sup> Ryan, vii-viii.

<sup>49</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 67-90.



Through humble emptying of ego-mind's autonomous sense of self, one puts on the mind of Christ.<sup>50</sup> This "Christ consciousness" sensitizes one to the Divine in all that is—the One dwelling in the many, beading all together on a string of love. As twentieth century theologian Karl Rahner put it, this indwelling grace resides in everyone, not just baptized Christians; moreover, it does not flow from "out there." It bursts from the inside out when one surrenders in co-participating ways to this grace and Divine Presence abiding inside us.<sup>51</sup>

**B. Franciscan Spirituality and Divine Indwelling: Sts. Clare and Francis of Assisi**

This section explores what the lives and spiritual counsel of Clare<sup>52</sup> (1194-1253) and Francis (1181 or 1182-1226) of Assisi offer as theologically underpinning for this research project's use of interior prayer of the heart for the purpose of personal and communal healing. Themes explored include the following: Clare and Francis' understanding of creation—including human anthropology – as being drenched with energies of life-force Spirit and God's companioning Love; how awareness of this self-knowledge is transformational; and how interior prayer assists with this awareness. This section includes Clare's writings on gazing, as well as the subsequent sacred dignity derived from knowing self as a dwelling place, carrier, and reflection of God's sublime beauty, blessed poverty, and vitality (3.12-14, 22-25; 4.15-16.) Also included in this section is reference to what Clare called the "shrine of the heart (4.1)" where one communes with God as companioning friend, Spouse, and Lover.

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<sup>50</sup> "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5)."

<sup>51</sup> Karl Rahner, *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1992), 82-83.

<sup>52</sup> This paper leans more heavily upon the letters of Clare to address the topic of transformative contemplation not only because of their content, but because much of what has been written on Franciscan Spirituality has ignored the contributions of Clare and other women.

Yet living from this awareness, dignity, and heart is not enough. This awareness works in tandem with another kind of awareness of which this paper also speaks: namely, Clare and Francis's insistence upon accepting our spiritual poverty and thus dependency upon the indwelling invisible embrace, tender mercy, and friendship of God. Therefore, this analysis includes an examination of God's tender mercy or *miserericordium*. This theme is central to the spiritual practice of this research project wherein participants commune with both indwelling Spirit and all who have ever shared the struggles (poverty) they, loved ones, and others have known. This leads to a final theme: How contemplation is for the purpose of loving service and conscious participation in the ongoing Incarnation in a *communio* of love.

### **B.1. Contemplation as Transformation**

*Prayer of the heart, that unceasing prayer where God breathes in us and our hearts are turned toward God, allows us to deepen our identity in God.*<sup>53</sup> ~ Ilia Delio, O.S.F.

Clare's letters are saturated with the transformative healing benefits of reclaiming our Sacred anthropology through interior prayer. Just as Teresa of Avila would do three centuries later, Clare speaks of interior prayer as friendship with God and the means by which one knows oneself as indwelt by the Eternal. In her *Third Letter to Agnes of Prague* (1238), Clare writes:

*Place your mind before the mirror of eternity!  
Place your soul in the brilliance of glory!  
Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance  
and, through contemplation,  
transform your entire being into the image of the Godhead Itself,  
so that you too may feel what friends feel in tasting the hidden sweetness  
that, from the beginning,*

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<sup>53</sup> Ilia Delio. *Franciscan Prayer* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007), 113.

*God Himself has reserved for His lovers (3.12-14).*

Here and elsewhere throughout Clare's writings, she speaks of silent attentiveness to God's indwelling presence as a prayer form similar to the companioning presence of old friends and lovers. There is no need always to speak. Refreshment is found simply by being in each other's presence. Franciscan scholar Ilia Delio puts it another way: she describes contemplation as "being grasped by the power of God's love....and giving ourselves over to that love."<sup>54</sup> Such contemplative awareness is transformative in that it offers healing peace, solace, stability, dignity, and revitalizing strength. Such transformation happens when one shifts identification with a separated sense of self to the Divine as one's Deepest Self. The grace of this inner Light refreshes, liberates, and grounds. Communing with Holy Lover and Spouse in the wine-cellar of one's heart inflames one to live afire with the Light and love of God (4.10-18, 27). This includes when one is in the midst of difficulties and demands of everyday life, leadership, and service.

Clare is not saying that prayer causes Spirit's abiding presence and loving action in us. Instead, Spirit has been breathing and abiding in us all along, waiting for our awareness to more fully unleash God's transforming power. Moreover, Clare suggests interior prayer is not only about contemplating God. During contemplative prayer, we consent to let Spirit pray in us. In other words, we are neither fully active nor passive; it is mutual participation of the human and Divine. Franciscan scholar Gillian Ahlgren speaks of it this way when using the example of the Annunciation visually depicted inside the Santuario Franceseano della Verna built beside the cave where St. Francis is

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<sup>54</sup> Ilia Delio, *Clare of Assisi: A Heart Full of Love* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2007), 54.

said to have received the stigmata. Mary's foot is coming out of the scene. It symbolizes Mary's *active*, consenting "Yes." It is this active consent which allows Spirit to enter her. The communing moment in the human-divine relationship happens through collaborative agreement in the relationship.<sup>55</sup> Therefore self-surrender entails opening one's embodied being—one's body, mind, heart, and soul—to the life-force energies and will of God's loving presence and action inside us. It is mutual participation.

This mutual participation speaks throughout Clare's *Fourth Letter* to Agnes. Not only is Agnes to contemplate God inside her (i.e. 4.27), but also God is contemplating inside of Agnes:

*Happy, indeed, is she...[who clings] with her whole heart to Him... Whose tenderness touches, Whose contemplation refreshes, [and] Whose kindness overflows....(4.9-11).*

Again, such mutual contemplation is akin to old friends and lovers opening themselves to each other's companioning embrace. Or as Delio puts it, the heart's open arm embrace creates a space for the other to enter in.<sup>56</sup> Yet sheer willpower alone will not make one capable of "letting go and letting God," in this dynamism of co-participation. One's "yes" needs the help of grace which is of the Spirit:

*[It] is the Spirit within us who really gazes or, we might say, who 'embraces' the God of humble love. The Spirit who dwells in the depths of the human heart searches the depths of God...and cries out 'Abba!' It is the Spirit who joins us to Christ and leads us into the embrace of the humble love of God.<sup>57</sup>*

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<sup>55</sup> Conversation while on Franciscan Pilgrimage in LaVerna, Italy, June 2013.

<sup>56</sup> Ilia Delio. *Franciscan Prayer*, 78.

<sup>57</sup> Delio, *Clare*, 32.

Clare asks Agnes to look into a mirror each day in order to enter the dynamism of this mutual loving gaze (4.15). She says continually “study your face in it, that you may adorn yourself completely within and without (4.15-16).” She is to acquire self-knowledge by gazing into the mirror and seeing reflected back the eternal Godhead and Jesus’ humility, poverty, love, and radiance. As Gillian Ahlgren notes, the empowering and transformatively healing insight implied here is this: “We can see the Divine in the mirror only if it is already in us.”<sup>58</sup>

“Gazing is of the heart by which the heart ‘opens its arms,’” says Delio.<sup>59</sup> Like Clare, Francis also spoke of the heart as a habitation and meeting place with the holy.<sup>60</sup> In his *Earlier Rule*, he spoke of the Spirit of the Lord who makes a home and dwelling place [Jn 14:23] inside our hearts and bodies [1 Cor. 6:20] so that we are able to do the works of God (*Earlier Exhortation* I.6-7). In doing so, indwelling Spirit makes us spouses, brothers/[sisters], and Mothers of Christ [Mt 12:50] (ibid):

*We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers to Him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven. We are mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through a divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to Him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others (Ibid, II.8-10).*

Clare speaks richly in such manner. She speaks of being the Spouse, sister, and mother of Christ (1.12). As Mother, one spiritually carries the Divine in imitation of Mary the God-Bearer:

*As the glorious virgin of virgins carried [Him] materially, so you too, by following in her footprints, especially [those] of humility and poverty, can without any doubt, always carry Him spiritually in...your body, holding*

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Delio, *Clare* 31.

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter Six: “Heart Turned Toward God,” in *Franciscan Prayer*, 107-124.

*Him by Whom you and all things are held together [Wis 1:7] (3.24-25).*

Likewise, Clare cites from John's Gospel concerning Jesus and the Father coming to make their dwelling place within Agnes (3.23; John 14:21, 23).

Our unfolding spiritual growth in God, as understood by Clare, is a process in which we are deified or transformed into the Divine likeness. Biblical anchoring for this understanding include these words by Paul:

*And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:18).*

Before shifting to the theme of poverty, let it be said that interior prayer of the heart, as understood by Clare, is not only about contemplation during time set apart for formal prayer. Interior prayer is also about the active life. It involves prayer as a way of being and as an awareness while living the apostolic gospel way of life, including when coming up against the discomforts and difficulties of leadership and service.

For example, in her *Second Letter*, Clare encourages Agnes to stay with the gaze when experiencing external conflicts (2.14, 17). Using the figure of Rachel as a symbol for contemplative prayer,<sup>61</sup> Clare says this prayer form will help her go forward securely, swiftly, and even joyfully in her commitment and vocation to which God had called her (2.11-4). Anyone speaking to her, or treating her, in contrary ways is still to be respected by Agnes, but Agnes is not to be dissuaded (2.17). Clare tells her not to leave the gaze. Agnes is to stay with it and thus with the empowering dynamism of union with the

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<sup>61</sup> In a footnote, Regis Armstrong notes that the figure Rachel, in the context of medieval tradition, represented the "withdrawn life of prayer, asceticism and contemplation. Regis J. Armstrong, ed. and trans. *Clare of Assisi: The Lady (Early Documents)*, (New York: New City Press, 2006), fn b, 48.

Spouse dwelling in the shrine of her heart. She is to hold onto this grounding inner dignity, wisdom, power, love, and purpose which no one can take from her.

Like Clare, Francis faced adversities amid his apostolic leadership and ministry. Since his conversion at age twenty-four, Francis turned within the shrine of his heart in order to find God's assistance amid external life challenges. As it is for so many within and beyond Christian spirituality, the heart for Francis was a place of worship and intimacy with the Divine.<sup>62</sup> Thomas of Celano gives an example of this in his *Life of Saint Francis* (1228-1229) when describing an account of Francis' stay with brothers in Rivo Torto:

*At that time the emperor Otto passed through that area, traveling in great pomp and circumstance to receive the crown of an earthly empire. The most holy father and his followers were staying in that small hut next to the very parade route. He did not go outside to look and did not allow the others to do so, except for one who, without wavering, proclaimed to the emperor that his glory would be short-lived. The glorious holy one, living within himself and walking in the breadth of his heart, prepared in himself a worthy dwelling place of God. That is why the uproar outside did not seize his ears, nor could any cry intrude, interrupting the great enterprise he had in hand. Apostolic authority resided in him; so he altogether refused to flatter kings and princes. He was always strong for holy simplicity, refusing to allow the narrow place to restrict the breadth of his heart.<sup>63</sup>*

As it was with Clare,<sup>64</sup> Francis held that following Christ entailed being “inflamed with the fire of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>65</sup> In doing so, one could live from the inflow of God's

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<sup>62</sup> Delio, *Franciscan Prayer*, 115.

<sup>63</sup> Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis” Chp. XVI, 43-44 in Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, eds. *Francis of Assisi: The Saint (Early Documents)*, (New York: New City Press, 1999), 221.

<sup>64</sup> The tradition speaks of early Franciscanism as primarily a male movement with Clare receiving a few respectful though inconsequential pages instead of what primary sources and early witness accounts describe as her influence, faith, and commitment to the apostolic Way before Francis had even experienced his conversion. Witnesses at her canonization portrayed her as having great holiness from the very

energies of love and grace swelling the human heart. As is described below, a dynamism of inter-connective resonance or *communio* of love between others, God, and self ensues.

## **B.2. Embrace of Spiritual Poverty, Mutuality, and Tender Mercy**

Delio describes transformation not as a process or method but as a redirection of our life's energy.<sup>66</sup> Acceptance of our poverty is the door to that transformation. When we are emptied, we create a space to welcome and become "one" with the Divine in the shrine of our hearts, even though the One dwelling in, yet also beyond, all beings has been quietly awaiting our awareness all along.

And so it was for Francis and Clare. Their insistence on radical poverty wasn't driven by a rejection of the material world as bad. It wasn't about relieving guilty feelings over having grown up privileged, nor about living without material want. Forgoing personal ownership of possessions in imitation of Jesus' words to his disciples was essential for their apostolic gospel way of life because it meant utter dependency upon the Divine. Or, as Clare put it, the goal of "God-centered poverty" (Letter 1:17) was to strip oneself of worldly honor and possessions in order to be clothed in the embrace of Christ as one utterly open to and dependent upon the loving kindness, grace, Beauty (4.10), and empowering strength of the Divine (Letter 1.6-13, 27-29).

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beginning of her life (Seventeenth and Eighteenth Witness, 192-193), and that it was Francis who heard of her fame and therefore came to her when he began his preaching (Twelfth Witness, 183). Moreover, in "Life of St. Francis" 12.1-2 Bonaventure tells of Francis seeking Clare's spiritual counsel for his apostolic ministry. See, Bonaventure, *The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Life of Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978, 192-103.

<sup>65</sup> Francis of Assisi, "A Letter to the Entire Order" 51 in *Francis of Assisi: The Saint (Early Documents)*, I, p.120.

<sup>66</sup> Delio, *Clare of Assisi*, 78.



Radical poverty as the core of Francis's way of life was built around these words by Jesus to the disciples as recorded in the Gospels: "If you wish to be perfect, sell what you have and give it to the poor" (Mt. 19:21); "take nothing for your journey" (Mt 16:24); and "He who wishes to come after me must deny himself" (Mt 16:24). When we are poor and vulnerable, we make room for God to enter. We open ourselves to the embrace of the Holy Lover. Yet, radical poverty is also for the sake of a communion of interdependency among peoples, because radical poverty made the brothers and sisters dependent not only on God but also on each other. When the brothers became more self-sufficient, they didn't want to give and receive with the sisters of San Damiano. As a result, they eventually came to see their sisters as a burden rather than gift in a dynamism of mutual love.

Opinions differ as to whether Francis' transformative encounter with the leper precedes or follows his encounter with the Crucified Christ amid the rumble of the abandoned Church of San Damiano. Either way, Francis experienced self-recognition and communing love through both encounters which, in turn, granted him transformative healing wholeness. A deeper way of being emerged as he experienced an active, empowering communion and the outflow of God's infinite compassionate, accepting embrace.

### **B.3. Tender Mercies, Participation in the Incarnation, and a *Communio* of Love**

In the time of Francis and Clare, lepers were isolated, shunned, and had no rights under the law. Perhaps before his conversion, Francis passed by numerous lepers shunning them with disgust, as was the cultural norm. As Francis notes in his *Testament*,

“When I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers.”<sup>67</sup> But that was before Francis recognized himself and the Divine in the leper, while in the midst of his own life pain and struggle. Francis went from being a vain, spoiled, carefree, unreliable son of a wealthy, social status climbing father, to a broken young man who had experienced the horrors of war, imprisonment, mental and physical illness, and abuse at the hand of his father.

Francis failed to measure up to the values and sense of human worth set by the well-to-do mercantile class and nobility. He was now an outcast, just like the leper. When he sees the leper, Francis has nothing to offer other than to get on his knees and both offer and receive an embrace. This was not an embrace of pity. Pity doesn’t heal. Offered and received was tenderness, life-giving kindness, and comfort. *Communio*. As Francis himself puts it, this encounter is *misericordia*:

*And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy [misericordiam] to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world.*<sup>68</sup>

Francis’ *communio* of love was larger than an encounter with one leper. He and his brothers lived and ministered in mutuality among them. The tender mercy and compassion they shared was solidarity, mutuality, and a *communio* of love.

Gillian Ahlgren describes the rich biblical and spiritual meaning behind this term *misericordiam* as being far more than what is often translated as mercy or compassion. It is “a relational reality of care that sustains human life: [it] empowers, nurtures,

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<sup>67</sup> Francis, “The Testament,” in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*. Regis J. Armstrong, J.A. Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short, eds. New York: New City Press, 124.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

challenges, comforts, and inspires.”<sup>69</sup> Unlike a sentimental use of the word *heart*, this is a courage-filled, holistic understanding arising from the core of our being. It is an “attitude and a relational disposition that comes from our inner depths—a courageous, generous *heartedness* that empowers us to make a difference in the lives of others.”<sup>70</sup>

This leads to a related and already implied theme: contemplation is not a fleeing from the world. It is an awareness and way of being for the purpose of loving action and service.

Witnesses to Clare’s canonization claim she “very much loved the poor” and was held in veneration because of her “good manner of life.”<sup>71</sup> She insisted that one of the consequences of radical poverty is the ability to recognize oneself and God in the poor, vulnerable, and shunned. Moreover, in her *Third Letter to Agnes*, Clare tells her, “I judge you to be a co-worker of God Himself and a support for the weak members of His ineffable Body” (3.8).

A final interrelated theme arising from contemplative awareness of indwelling life force-Spirit has to do with our participation in the ongoing Incarnation. Building on Raimon Pannikar’s work which he called *Christophany*, Delio says we are to “*continue* the work of the Incarnation,” because it is not confined to a moment in the past.<sup>72</sup> It is

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<sup>69</sup> Throughout the research project I will be using the phrase “tender mercy” in order to reference this perspective on compassion and mercy. See also Cynthia Bourgeault’s commentary on reclaiming the biblical meaning of mercy in *Mystical Hope: Trusting in The Mercy of God*, (Chicago: Cowley Publications, 2001), 9-10, 18, 21-25.

<sup>70</sup> Ahlgren, Gillian. Unpublished work, “Chapter 4: The Core of the Franciscan Charism: The Praxis of Misericordia and the Invitation to *Communio*.”

<sup>71</sup> “Acts of the Process of Canonization of Clare of Assisi, First Witness,” 1:3 in *Clare of Assisi: The Lady*, 145.

<sup>72</sup> Delio, *Clare*, 110.

ongoing and unfinished. Required of us as co-participants in the Incarnation is our living from an awareness of the indwelling Word of God rooted within us.<sup>73</sup>

Clare points to Wisdom 1:7 which references the Spirit of the Lord filling all creation. She notes how this Spirit within our bodies is the same Spirit holding all things together (3.26). Perhaps Clare is inferring that Spirit is not only the inter-connectivity within individual things but among them, thereby unifying all that is held together. Implied is an Incarnational dynamism of inter-connective oneness not only between God, other people, and self but also with all of creation and the cosmos. By not losing the gaze—by keeping the eye of the heart upon the interior, mutual, loving gaze and embrace between oneself and the One dwelling in the many – we, in turn are “oned” with all living things as fellow participants in creation and the cosmos. As it was with Francis, there is a humbling equality with all of creation which comes from living from the Divine within and seeing through Incarnational eyes. With one eye gazing upon the shrine of the heart while the other looks upon the world, we can join Francis when

*he considered the primordial source of all things [and] was filled with even more abundant piety, calling creatures, no matter how small, by the name of brother or sister, because he knew they had the same source as himself.<sup>74</sup>*

The spiritual counsel of Francis and Clare invite transformation of consciousness. Yet, this transformation resulting from interior prayer does not mean we are to go forth heroically engaging in grandiose endeavors. Borrowing the words of Keating, the transformation of which Christian contemplative mysticism speaks takes place through ordinary means like this:

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<sup>73</sup> Delio, 96.

<sup>74</sup> Bonaventure, 8.6.

*If one is truly transformed one can walk down the street, drink a cup of tea or shake hands with somebody and be pouring divine life into the world. In Christianity motivation is everything. When the love of Christ is the principle motivation, ordinary actions transmit divine love. This is the fundamental Christian witness...The essential thing if one wishes to spread the Gospel, is the transformation of one's conscious. If that happens, and in the degree that happens, ones ordinary actions become effective in communicating the Mystery of Christ to whoever comes into one's life....Transmission is the capacity to awaken in other people their own potentially to become divine.<sup>75</sup>*

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<sup>75</sup> Keating, 25.

**C. Carmelite Spirituality and Divine Indwelling: Teresa of Avila**

*Praise to you,  
Saint Teresa of Avila,  
whose wisdom, courage, and humor  
flow so abundantly through the centuries,  
bringing vibrant life  
to the garden of our souls.  
With passion and grace  
you transcended the limits imposed upon you  
and became a tireless teacher  
of the Way of Love.  
You lived that beautiful balance  
between active service  
and quiet contemplation.  
Teach us to be of use in this troubled world  
at the same time that we cultivate  
joyous intimacy  
with the Beloved who lives inside us.  
Thank you.  
Amen.*

~ Mirabai Starr<sup>76</sup>

What might Teresa of Avila's insights on interior prayer and Divine indwelling offer contemporary people who not only turn to contemplative practices for inner peace, personal healing, and empowerment, but who also want to live, love, and serve others as instruments of healing peace?

Teresa of Avila's 16<sup>th</sup> century mystical writings offer a timeless message on prayerfully perceiving, healing, living, leading, and loving from the Divine depths of one's being. In the spirit of St. Paul's "Not I but God in me" (Gal 2:20), Teresa invites awareness of—and a gentle gesture of cooperating surrender to—God's loving presence

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<sup>76</sup> Mirabai Starr, *Saint Teresa of Avila: Devotions, Prayers, & Living Wisdom* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, Inc., 2007), xiii.

and action inside us. This awareness and consent as one indwelt by the life force energies and love of God swells one's being with grace, healing peace, and vitality. This, in turn, strengthens us for doing the work, leadership, and loving service to which one's life is summoned. As Bernie McGinn described this unity of contemplation and action of which Teresa speaks, it not only represents an ancient and honorable tradition in the history of Christian mysticism, but it also offers much needed wisdom for our action and activism oriented lives today.<sup>77</sup>

This chapter now mines the relevance of Teresa's spiritual wisdom for transformative personal and social healing while in the midst of the demands and difficulties of daily life. Building upon Teresa's insights in *The Book of Her Life* and *Spiritual Testimonies*<sup>78</sup> as well as the *Interior Castle*<sup>79</sup>, this portion of the chapter is divided into three sections.

Section one explores Teresa's three foundational and transformatively healing tenets concerning self-knowledge. The first tenet is that knowledge of being indwelt by the Divine—in other words, understanding Divinity as not only “out there” but also intricately part of one's embodied being—is knowledge that heals, liberates, and empowers. Explored within this tenet concerning our sacred anthropology are Teresa's writings on how the companioning presence and loving action of God abides in the human soul at all times as one's Deepest, Truest self. In her playfully wise, self-

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<sup>77</sup> Bernard McGinn, “The Carmelites in the History of Western Mysticism,” in *Carmel And Contemplation: Transforming Human Consciousness*, editors Kevin Culligan and Regis Jordan (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2000), 43.

<sup>78</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Book of Her Life, Spiritual Testimonies, Soliloquies* in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 1, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 2002).

<sup>79</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. *The Interior Castle* in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, vol. 2, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, O.C.D., and Otilio Rodriguez, O.C.D. (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 1980).

deprecating way, Teresa uses her own life to tell how this is so, especially when compared to the sense of self derived from ego-mind's fears and harsh self-criticisms, judgments by society, and the unquenchable quest for validation by others. The second foundational and transformatively healing tenant concerning self-knowledge explored in this section is Teresa's emphasis upon the need to acknowledge and befriend one's fallibilities. In other words, self-knowledge of one's spiritual poverty is healing, liberating, and empowering. The third tenant involves Teresa's practical advice on interior prayer and the path of self-surrender. This section addresses people's uneasiness with surrender, potential hazards, and how self-surrender can be healing, liberating, and empowering when it is understood as something far different from giving in, or as achievable through sheer will power. Also explored is how Teresa understands surrender as something other than utter passivity in relationship with the Divine.

The final section addresses the use of interior prayer for social healing and loving service. Emphasized is Teresa's insistence that interior prayer is not for the sake of interior calm and enjoyment of self alone but for exterior calm and strength to serve (*IC* 7.3.3; 5-8, 7.4.10-12).<sup>80</sup> Teresa transforms the understanding of Mary and Martha (Luke 10) as dualistically representing the contemplative versus active life. Teresa unites them, and speaks of interior prayer as connection and loving communion with God's indwelling presence and action inside us, the outflow of which is our participation in the ongoing Incarnation as we live the Gospel way of life in the world. In other words, contemplative prayer is meant to be lived. It is about being a living prayer and sacrament. Resting in the

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<sup>80</sup> Throughout this paper I will be referencing *Interior Castle* as "IC", *Book of Her Life* as "Life," and a collection of her miscellaneous writings group by Kavanaugh and Rodriguez under the heading "Spiritual Testimonies" as "ST."



loving embrace of the Holy Lover and Spouse in the wine cellar of the soul, fuels one for brave action, leadership, and loving service.<sup>81</sup> Having been divinized, one is strength to serve as a conduit of God's energies, healing presence, and loving, redemptive action in the world (*IC* 7.4.12).

### **C.1. Self-Knowledge of Sacred Anthropology Heals and Empowers**

“[W]e don't understand ourselves or know who we are”(IC 1.2). So writes Teresa of Avila in her opening comments of the *Interior Castle*. Seldom do people “consider the precious things that can be found in [the] soul, or who dwells within it, or its high value” (*IC*1.2). With this statement, Teresa sets the stage for her book on interior prayer as the transformative, inner journey, through which people can awaken to their oneness with the Presence and action of the Eternal's redemptive, revitalizing loving power they unknowingly had inside them all along.

This counsel is needed as much today as in Teresa's time. So many people in the West continue to approach God's presence as something entirely separate from one's own. As Gerald May aptly described it in his commentary on Teresa and John,

*...we give lip service to God's presence, but then feel and act as if we are completely on our own. I think of church committee meetings, pastoral counseling sessions, or even spiritual direction meetings I have attended. They often begin with a sincere prayer, 'God, be with us (as if God might be in attendance at another meeting) and guide our decisions and our actions.' Then at the end comes, 'Amen,' and the door crashes shut on God-attentiveness. Now we have said our prayers and it is time to get down to business. The modern educator Parker Palmer calls this*

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<sup>81</sup> For commentary on the relationship between interiority and loving social action, including within the works of Augustine as well as in Teresa's reference to Mary united with Martha, see Philip Sheldrake's "Prayer and Social Engagement: Interiority and Action," in *Explorations in Spirituality: History, Theology, and Social Practice*, New York: Paulist Press, 2010), 93-105.

*'functional atheism...the belief that ultimate responsibility for everything rests with me.'*<sup>82</sup>

Spiritual harm caused by these approaches to self-knowledge and prayer overlook scriptural foundations on Divine indwelling, like those cited by Teresa, which speak of our inherent union with God.<sup>83</sup> Teresa offered an alternative approach. She used the analogy of a person being like a castle, and the Divine—though transcendent—being like a king abiding in the castle's interior. Like May, she also gave warning about the hazards and spiritual pain caused by the lack of this interior awareness:

*This lack of knowledge causes the afflictions of many people who engage in prayer...melancholy and loss of health; and even the complete abandonment of prayer. For such persons don't reflect that there is an interior world here within us. ...[T]he soul is...completely joined with him in the dwelling places very close to the center, while the mind is on the outskirts of the castle suffering from a thousand wild and poisonous beasts, and meriting by this suffering. As a result we should not be disturbed; nor should we abandon prayer which is what the devil wants us to do. For the most part, all the trials and disturbances come from our not understanding ourselves (IC 4.1.9).*

Teresa said we have too small a sense of self when we place all of our attention on what is external beyond the castle walls. That includes when we lose ourselves in anxious, unpleasant thoughts and feelings over the discomforts and difficulties of our everyday lives, and when we focusing exclusively on our physical bodies (IC 1.2).

Note, however, that by raising the issue of our bodies, Teresa was not claiming a false dichotomy between the inner and outer life, nor of the physical body and life in the Spirit. She speaks of the supernatural consolations of peace and revitalizing energies

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<sup>82</sup> Gerald May, *The Dark Night of The Soul: A Psychiatrist Explores the Connection Between Darkness and Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 44.

<sup>83</sup> Examples include John 17:20-23 in which Jesus speaks of the Lord who fills and "ones" us.

flowing from the Presence and loving activity of the Eternal abiding in the center of the soul. Such grace swells from a place deeper than the heart, then expands in healing ways that cause the body to also benefit (*IC* 4.5.5-6). From mental or interior prayer, which Teresa understands as “nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends” (*Life* 8.5), the body is given more health (*Life* 8.6). When repose of the soul is great the body “shares in that joy and delight” (*Life* 17.8).

In Chapters 1-10 in *Book of Her Life*, Teresa speaks in self-disclosing ways about the hazards of having an external sense of self derived from the judgments and opinions of others.<sup>84</sup> This includes concern over one’s social status, measuring personal worth according to standards of the world, and having concern over one’s reputation for virtue and holiness. As Rowan Williams put it when commenting on Teresa’s writings on interior prayer and communal living, “neither one’s own judgment of oneself, nor another’s judgment of oneself, nor one’s judgments of others is guaranteed to be accurate.”<sup>85</sup> Hence the need to place our criteria for self-knowledge and worth somewhere other than in external sources.

Having learned from this hazard, in the *Interior Castle* Teresa holds this fundamental, ontological truth concerning our nature and identity: Not only is the human soul an image and reflection of the Divine from which we derive an inherently sublime Sacred dignity and beauty (*IC* 1.1), but we are embodied carriers or dwelling places of the Divine. At the very center of the soul is an interior light and heaven where God is always present and never parts (*IC* 7.1.3). This Presence is there even if one does not

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<sup>84</sup> See Rowan William’s commentary “Purity and Honor: Teresa’s Social World,” to understand Teresa’s social historical context as a converso, mystic, and female reformer writing during the Inquisition of 15<sup>th</sup> c. Spain. *Teresa of Avila* (London: Bloomsbury, 2003), 15-54.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 31-32.

perceive it, much like a person who is in a bright room with friends knows they are still there if the shutters are closed and the room goes dark (IC 4.1.9). And so it is that in this inner chamber of God “the very secret exchanges between God and the soul takes place” (IC 1.3).

It is here, *inside* oneself, that one is to seek and synchronize one’s being in cooperating ways with the presence and loving assistance of God’s healing grace. Like having a little radio dial inside us, through interior prayer one re-tunes, re-aligns, and re-identifies with this living, indwelling Presence as one’s True and Deepest self. One humbly opens one’s being to receive and become “one” with the transmission of God’s empowering energies of love, grace, courage, good counsel, and cure amid the discomforts, demands, and difficulties of everyday life (Life 26.1-2). As Janet Ruffing notes, awareness of this interior oneness is transformative:

*Mysticism is a transformative process that supports self-transcendence, the overcoming of too small a sense of self...The self discovered in mystical consciousness is a self-related to Ultimacy, a self that is more than the self can imagine itself to be and surely more than any society conventionally wants it to be.*<sup>86</sup>

One increasingly learns to prayerfully live from this Deeper Self. As Teresa notes:

*Each day this soul becomes more amazed, for these Persons never seem to leave...it clearly beholds, in the way that was mentioned, that they are within it. In the extreme interior, in some place very deep within itself, the nature of which it doesn’t know how to explain, because of a lack of learning, [but] it perceives this divine company (IC7.1.7).*

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<sup>86</sup> Janet Ruffing, “Introduction,” in *Mysticism and Social Transformation*, ed. Janet K. Ruffing (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 12.

Note how Teresa refers to having within herself the company and dynamism of the three persons of the Trinity. Previously in *Book of Her Life*, there was little if any reference to indwelling Creator or Holy Spirit. Inner companionship with Christ was Teresa's primary focus. For example, in and beyond her conversion experience, Teresa experienced Jesus in the Garden inside her. Conversion occurred when it dawns on her that Jesus needs *her* befriending presence. Jesus needs *her* accompanying awareness amid *his* weakness, ache, and fear (*Life* 9.4). Herein, she encounters the Divine as weak, needy, and in need of love, just like herself. This awareness of Divine suffering and need for companionship, meshed with her own self-knowledge, helps Teresa deepen awareness of oneness with the Sacred inside her. This in turn helps her be more attentive to living as a habitation of the Holy including amid her own weakness, ache, and fear. At play for Teresa is mutual cooperation and participation in a *communio* of love. As will be stated later, such mutual cooperation is fundamental to her understanding of self-surrender as something far more than sheer passivity.

In the Seventh Dwelling Places (i.e. *IC* 7.1.6), and in various writings produced several years after *Life*, Teresa embraces a more Trinitarian understanding of divine indwelling. In a document dated June 30, 1571, Teresa wrote how previously she was mistaken to think she was only communing with Jesus inside her during interior prayer; that is, she was mistaken to only think of things of the soul through comparison with corporeal things (*ST* 14). She shifts to a more expansive understanding of herself as being like a sponge saturated with water. She now understands her soul as being saturated and overflowing with divinity of all three Persons. She describes how it was from within her soul that "I saw these three Persons present—these Persons were

communicating themselves to all creation without fail, nor did they fail to be with me” (ibid). This is a significant theological statement about interior prayer as the means by which we enter awareness of our participation in the ongoing Incarnation. This is also reference to Divine indwelling as an inter-connective dynamism not only between the individual and members of the Trinity, but also our metaphysical inter-connection with all of Creation.

Teresa went on to say in another document that “the Trinity is in our souls by presence, power, and essence,” adding how it is “an extremely beneficial thing to understanding this truth” (*ST* 49, 1575, probably Seville). The result is knowing how the soul “is not lowly, daughter. It is made in My image” (Ibid). Such knowledge corrects too small a sense of self. Such correction was liberating, healing, and empowering. As John Welch described this transformative self-knowledge, “Once Teresa knew who she was, fear fell away, and she was able to live with focused energy.”<sup>87</sup>

Teresa wrote about a time when she experienced the presence of the three Persons she carried inside her, and how despite the strains of life, she experienced so much Light. She said to God “Lord, give me some means by which I can put up with this life,” to which God replied, “Eat for Me and sleep for Me, and let everything you do be for Me, as though you no longer lived but I; for this is what St Paul was speaking of” (*ST* 51). Here we see Teresa “putting on” Christ, or engaging in Christ consciousness. In other words, she has an awareness of being oned with the Divine in ways akin to Jesus’ words “I and the Father are one.” Teresa describes this Christ consciousness when “in the company she always bears within her soul.” God seemed so oned and present inside her that she

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<sup>87</sup> John Welch, “False Selves and False Gods,” in *The Carmelite Way: An Ancient Path For Today’s Pilgrim* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1996), 43.

appropriates biblical words to describe her sense of union saying, “‘You are Christ, Son of the Living God.’ For God was thus living in my soul.”<sup>88</sup> This unitive consciousness marks Teresa’s second half of life including her living, working, loving, and serving from the Divine within; that is, from the inside out.

In the first half of Teresa’s life, her energies and sense of self were hampered and controlled by anxiety over being accepted and valued by others. As Rowan Williams notes, from her teen years to mid-life, she entered relationships she was ashamed of, and had a fragmented religious life due to a longing to be accepted by both “the conventionally worldly and the conventionally pious.”<sup>89</sup> Conversion for her involved discovering that she is desired as she is by God.<sup>90</sup> It involved allowing friendship with God to override all social honor which, ironically, would grant her greater social connectivity, relational skills, and thus healing in her communal life—a topic addressed later in this paper.

In the second half of her life after conversion, Teresa was still humanly capable of suffering concern over criticism from those within the Carmelite Order, as well from what she imagined as the entire society (*Life* 26). In other words, she acknowledged how difficult it is to let go of attachments to what others think. Yet the tight grip of this anxious attachment loosened tremendously. Amid gossip and negative feelings others held about her in both her house and throughout town, her awareness of the non-abandoning, companioning love and Presence of God inside her remained, regardless of a lack of popularity, acceptance, and social honor. The Lord said to her, “Why are you

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<sup>88</sup> In *ST* 49.

<sup>89</sup> Williams, 70.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

afraid? Do you not know that I am all-powerful?” She then senses being filled with a strength to undertake this social brokenness and other things which previously would have caused her great trial and suffering (*Life* 26.2). This is why Theresa said the Divine “give both the counsel and the cure” (*Life* 26.2).

Living from an increased awareness of being inter-connectively “oned” with indwelling Presence, as counseled by Teresa, results in an increase of rejuvenating power, comfort, and healing peace (*IC* 7.2.6). Yet such liberation happens when working in tandem with an awareness of one’s spiritual poverty.

## **C.2. Self-Knowledge of Spiritual Poverty Heals and Empowers**

Just as “putting on the mind of Christ” involves our humble claim of oneness with the Divine as our Deepest Self, it also involves what Jesus demonstrated as God’s loving embrace and oneness with all that is lost, outcast, and broken—not only in society, but inside us.

That said, the second fundamental truth Teresa holds concerning self-knowledge is of our spiritual poverty, that is, how awareness of our feebleness, failures, and limitations are not obstacles to loving intimacy with God. Instead, befriending our imperfections and weaknesses is the very stepping stone. As Teresa’s 19<sup>th</sup> c. Carmelite sister and admirer, Thérèse, The Little Flower of Lisieux, aptly put it,

*And suppose God wishes to have you as feeble and powerless as a child?  
Do you think that would be less worthy in God’s eyes? Consent to stumble,  
or even to fall at every step, to bear your cross feebly; love your weakness.  
Your soul will draw more profit from that than if, sustained by grace, you*



*vigorously performed heroic deeds which would fill your soul with self-satisfaction and pride.*<sup>91</sup>

Teresa of Avila learned to meet God in her poverty as Christ did, rather than avoiding, denying, suppressing or trying to rid herself of it. This acceptance of poverty is liberating and healing in the sense that she learns and, in turn, teaches how one can let go of the impossible task of trying to be perfect before perceiving oneself acceptable and beloved by God. Such acceptance of spiritual poverty is akin to the Carmelite Order's symbolic founder and patron, the prophet-hermit Elijah from the Book of Kings. Elijah goes out into the desert in order to be stripped of self-sufficiency. There he feels utter helplessness and dependency upon God, and thereby taps into resources and energies greater than his own. Like Elijah who, instead of dealing with feelings of inadequacy through over compensating attempts at power and control, or shrinking into the sin of self-loathing, Teresa advocates the spiritual wisdom offered of befriending one's feebleness. Through embrace of feebleness, one is opened to receive the healing balm of grace. This is why Teresa says the pain of seeing our faults is beneficial; it is a great mercy from God (IC3.2.2).<sup>92</sup>

In *Book of Her Life* Teresa tells how she identifies with Augustine's sense of poverty, and need for grace. She gravitates to his *Confessions* noting how his

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<sup>91</sup>Translation by Ida Freiderike Gorre, *The Hidden Face* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, Inc.1959), 331. Cited by Vilma Seelaus in "Transformation and Divine Union in the Carmelite Tradition," in *Carmelite Prayer: A Tradition for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2003), 151.

<sup>92</sup> Teresa stands in the stream of Carmelite spirituality founded upon the twin aims of the prophet-hermit Elijah. Though Teresa spoke in terms of mystical union with the Divine expanding from the soul—that is, from an interior place far deeper than the heart (IC 4.2.5.), her message is in line with *The Institution of the First Monks'* take on Elijah's twin aims: First, having a holy heart through one's own effort yet aided by God's grace. And second, savoring God's presence in one's heart and mind as a gift freely bestowed by God. See Leopold Glueckert, O.Carm., *Desert Springs in the City: A Concise History of the Carmelites*, (Carmelite Media, 2012), 37.

conversion<sup>93</sup> assisted with her own (*Life* 9.7-9). Surely the following passage by Augustine in which he spoke of becoming conscious of both his poverty and of God's presence within, resonated with Teresa's own self-knowledge from which she received transformative healing:

*I have learned to love you late! You were within me and I was in the world outside myself. I searched for you outside myself and, disfigured as I was, I fell upon the lovely things of your creation. You were with me, but I was not with you. The beautiful things of this world kept me far from you and yet, if they had not been in you, they would have had no being at all. You called me; you cried allowed to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight. You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and now I gasp for your sweet [fragrance]. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love of your peace.*<sup>94</sup>

Teresa speaks of interior prayer as being like the opening of a door to receive God's grace (*Life* 8.9). In other words, if one does not willingly relinquish and open one's being, grace cannot enter. Still, despite this claim, she struggles as so many people do with surrender. Learning that she is filled, befriended, and loved by God as she is, flaws and all, helps her see that that her initial failure to be good at mental prayer, as well as her inability to be good at discursive prayer,<sup>95</sup> is ironically, the gateway to grace. As with contemporary twelve-step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous, Teresa realizes that she needs to embrace her spiritual poverty. Then everything is able to shift. It is then that her being, in and beyond formal times of mental or interior prayer, opens to

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<sup>93</sup> Augustine, *Saint Augustine: Confessions* VIII,12, Translated by R.S. Pine-Coffin, (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 177-178.

<sup>94</sup> Augustine, *Ibid* X 27, 231.

<sup>95</sup> Discursive prayer is active prayer initiated by our images, reason, and the like. This is Stage Two in the prayer progression recommended in Teresa's day by Francisco de Osuna.

receive consolation from the love of Him who lived inside her all along including amid her trials, dryness, and weakness (*Life* 22.11).

### **C.3. Teresa's Practical Advice on Interior of Prayer and the Way of Self-Surrender**

As noted, Teresa's spiritual counsel on interior or mental prayer is like the intimate sharing of old friends or lovers who take time to be with one another throughout the day (*Life* 8.5). But how is one to proceed in this prayer practice, especially as a beginner? Teresa offers sage advice to help one persevere instead of quit (*IC*2.10). Though interior prayer will cultivate an interior calm, she advises not thinking about such consolation at the beginning stage, or a person will never be satisfied (*IC*2.7). She also advises not trying to recollect oneself through force but only gentleness (*IC*2.10). She adds how it is impossible to stop thoughts from swirling (*IC*4.1.9). One must let the mill-clapper keep on clacking (*IC* 4.1.13).

Even persons who are advanced in interior prayer still have worries and other thoughts that block awareness of oneness with the Divine. No one can constantly sustain this unitive "I and the Father are one" consciousness as Jesus did. Describing these worries and other thoughts as poisonous creatures, Teresa explains it is normal to experience them banding together and seeping back in to take their revenge for the times the soul is not under their control (*IC* 4.4.1).

During contemplative prayer, our fear-based aversions and grasping desires are clearly visible. Instead of always settling into a state of inner calm and peace, we see our restless thoughts. We see when we are "hooked" by thoughts and feelings like anger, sadness, jealousy, melancholy, vain glory, and all the other temptations named by the

Desert Abbas and Ammas, which bite in and hold on like many a poisonous reptile. To this, Teresa advises not becoming discouraged or quitting. Using the humorous analogy between awareness of our unpleasant thoughts and the challenge of having to live with difficult people, she says we are to persevere in our interior spiritual practice. Doing so helps cultivate an inner calm which will actually assist in healing, transformative ways amid life in community:

*What hope can we have of finding rest outside ourselves if we cannot be at rest within? We have so many great and true friends and relatives (which are our faculties) with whom we must always live, even though we may not want to.... Well, believe me, if we don't obtain and have peace in our own house we'll not find it outside (IC2.9).*

Teresa asks her readers to consider how the soul remains completely joined or oned with God's indwelling Presence even when the mind wanders around the outskirts of the castle "suffering from a thousand wild and poisonous beasts, and meriting by this suffering" (IC4.1.9). No matter what trials and fatigue one undergoes, be it during formal contemplative prayer or while in the midst of everyday life activities, the companioning friendship of the Divine constantly abides within one's being (IC4.1.10; 4.2.10-11). Like rain falling into a river, or a stream into an ocean, union with the Divine can never be divided (IC4.2.4).

Teresa assures her readers that they will be able to hear "a good shepherd, with a whistle so gentle" when caught up in "the exterior things in which they were estranged from him" and thereby return to the interior of the castle (IC 4.3.2). Moreover, she asks them to persevere trusting in God's mercy and not themselves to bring them from one stage or dwelling place to another (IC2.9).

Another theme with contemporary relevance is Teresa's reminder that prayer is not about advising God about what God should do for us (*IC2.8*). Rather, "we are to strive to do what lies in our power" then open ourselves, as best we are able, to accept and conform to God's will and action in which lies our highest good (*IC2.8*). Still, without shock or self-righteous reproof, she pastorally acknowledges how difficult this is.

Our striving to do what is in our power during interior prayer, especially as a beginner, is akin to Teresa's metaphor of watering a garden by hauling buckets of water: Doing so takes effort and is tiring (*Life 11.9-10*). In time, though, one learns to not be frustrated by noisy, distracting thoughts or spiritual dryness (*Life 11.7,10*), and to relax the will. Teresa describes this as being akin to irrigating a garden through a water wheel and ditches (*Life 14-15*). Eventually, one learns to cooperate with grace. One does some of the work yet allows God to be the gardener. Doing so allows waters of grace to rise up into the garden of the soul like an underground spring (*Life 16*). Unlike previous experiences during prayer of quiet when the soul doesn't want to move or stir from the peace of "holy idleness," one realizes that she or he can engage in this prayer amid works of charity and business affairs (*Life 17.4*). In other words, unlike the biblical story in which Mary of Bethany prefers resting in Jesus' presence rather than serving like her sister, Martha, Teresa transforms this traditional metaphor for the contemplative life. In other words, Teresa speaks of our ability to be like Mary as one consciously "ones" with the Divine within amid Martha like service to others amid everyday life.

From analogies of the watered garden one learns how personal initiative is needed in order to welcome the loving and liberating action of God's in-flowing grace during interior prayer. This will involve an understanding of surrender as a co-operative

interdependent process. It is an interdependent process of welcoming, with open arms, the embrace of the Holy Lover whose tender mercies and presence breathes inside us—swelling our souls and hearts with love.

As Gerald May pointed out, for Teresa—as well as for St. John of the Cross—autonomous effort gives way to a greater sense of acceptance, willingness, and welcoming: “It feels more like a letting go and letting God but our own continuing yes remains active” to the dynamism of this mysterious, cooperative relationship.<sup>96</sup> May wisely added how we often have to fail several times, become exhausted by our own efforts, and be brought to our knees by “incapacitating failure” before admitting we can’t go it alone.<sup>97</sup> It is then that God’s grace begins to flow like a spring. This grace softens willfulness. It causes an inner relaxing or letting go.<sup>98</sup>

Surrender is not a popular concept in U.S. culture. As May noted, surrender is antithetical to the Western ideal of self-sufficiency.<sup>99</sup> Even people interested in spirituality struggle with letting go of mastery just enough to make room for a little grace and mystery.<sup>100</sup> Part of the problem is that the concept of surrender gets misinterpreted with “giving up” and “giving in.” Many people have also known the pain of not standing up for themselves or others. As May notes, we cannot go around saying yes and surrendering to everyone and everything. Yet, the surrender of which Teresa speaks is not about spinelessness. It is not about being a passive doormat for others. Quite the opposite. The spiritual path of surrender is about healing, liberation, and empowerment.

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<sup>96</sup> May, 79-80.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Gerald May, *Will and Spirit* (New York: HarperOne, 1982), 3-4.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 4.

Unlike other forms of surrender, spiritual surrender—including the form of which Teresa speaks—is like May’s metaphor of swimming in the ocean: we give ourselves over to the waves. We relax the sinew of our being in order to float and let the strength of the waves bear us up.<sup>101</sup> We willingly tap into a life force energy or Spirit greater than our own to buoy us amid the storm tossed seas of life.

#### **C.4. Interior Prayer for Social Healing and Loving Service**

Teresa lists multiple healing consequences of interior prayer for life in community and loving service amid the demands and difficulties of daily life. For example, in the *Seventh Dwelling Places*, she describes how this prayer decreases ones worry over what might happen in the present or future to the point that one develops an inner peace, even amid persecution (*IC 7.3.5*). Moreover, there is little hostile feeling or desire for retaliation toward those who make one’s life difficult (*ibid*). The soul even develops compassion for one’s oppressor. The person who is well seasoned in interior prayer is even able to take on trials of those she or he struggles to love, in order to help free them (*ibid*). That is because this person is more compassionately aware of how the struggles of others are akin to one’s own. An increased sense of solidarity, mutuality, oneness, or communion ensues. The result is a dynamism between God as the mysterious and eternal “Beyond Within” shining in, through, and between all beings in a humbling *communio* of love.

Attachments, including to the need for being appreciated, honored, or esteemed by others, are loosened. They are replaced with a desire for solitude, for serving God, and for being occupied in activity that benefits others (*IC 7.3.6*). All concern is in showing

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*.

God honor and love; prayer, spiritual union, and various forms of devotion become a means for engaging in acts of service (*IC* 7.4.7). Though we are weak, or perhaps because we acknowledge our weakness, God grants us power to engage in these acts of loving service even though doing so may at times seem burdensome (*ibid*):

*This is what I want us to strive for, my Sisters; and let us desire and be occupied in prayer not for the sake of our enjoyment but so as to have this strength to serve (IC 7.4.12).*

For Teresa, such prayer occurs not only during times set aside for contemplation but in the midst of action (*Life* 11.13; 17.4). In other words, the inner gentle gesture of surrender before the indwelling Presence can and should occur in the midst of everyday life activities, loving service, and other encounters. As Barbara Bowe puts it when describing the biblical foundations of spirituality, this is about attunement to the Spirit filled dimension in the midst of everyday life.<sup>102</sup>

For the over-stretched, compassion fatigued, social justice, and service orientated people I know, Teresa's understanding of contemplation offers healing wisdom. Just as contemporary neuro-scientists who study the effects of meditation on the brain know, Teresa's experiential wisdom teaches her that the more one engages in contemplative practices, the more one is able to be present to adversity or suffering without being debilitated and undone. Living, working, and serving from the Divine center fortifies in ways that protect against burnout—from the “over care” tendencies of trying at all times to do and be all, for all.

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<sup>102</sup> Barbara Bowes, “What is Spirituality?” in *Biblical Foundations of Spirituality: Touching a Finger to the Flame* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 11.



As Teresa knew, there is no need to “save the world before bedtime”—a slogan used by female heroes of a modern popular children’s cartoon. Instead, Teresa’s slogan for engaging in communal healing and loving service might be:

*You need not be desiring to benefit the whole world...concentrate on those who are in your company (IC 7.4.14).*

Or, perhaps Teresa’s slogan for prayerful service and social healing would be this:

*The Lord doesn’t look so much at the greatness of our works as at the love with which they are done (IC. 7.4.15).<sup>103</sup>*

It has already been said that Teresa spoke of the need for being both Mary (representing contemplative prayer, repose, and peace before God’s indwelling presence) and Martha (representing action and loving service). Teresa describe this Mary/Martha dynamic this way:

*Believe me. Martha and Mary must join together in order to show hospitality to the Lord and have him always present and not host him badly by failing to give him something to eat. How would Mary, always seated at his feet, provide him with food if her sister did not help her (IC 7.4.12)?*

The reverse also holds: how would Martha have the strength to serve and ease her restless worry if not finding rest amid her labors? Teresa writes:

*Once you get used to enjoying this castle, you will find rest in all things, even those involving much labor, for you will have the hope of returning to the castle which no one can take from you (IC Epilogue 2).*

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<sup>103</sup> These words are echoed in St. Thérèse, “The Little Flower” of Lisieux who, though she wanted to engage in heroics as a warrior, priest, apostle, doctor of the church, and martyr, in the end realizes that love comprises all vocations. She chooses a life of littleness as she cries out, “My vocation is love!” See *Story of a Soul: The Autobiography of St. Thérèse of Lisieux*, third edition, translated by John Clark O.C.D. (Washington D.C.: ICS Publications, 1996), 192 and 194.

Teresa embodied this Mary-joined-with-Martha approach of which she counsels. As evidence, consider her having enough calm and centeredness to write the *Interior Castle* in a very short time, all while her external world rocked in the tumult of the Spanish Inquisition, and amid a letter writing campaign to liberate her friend John of the Cross who had been kidnapped and imprisoned due to political conflict within the Carmelite Order. Moreover, as Vilma Seelus notes, with Divine indwelling as the “coordinating center” of prayer and activity amid everyday life, Teresa was able to spend years on “the tough roads of Spain founding monasteries, dealing with law suits, coping with difficult benefactors, and with interpersonal problems of the nuns.”<sup>104</sup> Indeed, being “united with the Strong One” in a “union of spirit with spirit” fortifies one for facing the lack of calm in the world where we are called to serve (*IC* 7.4.10). As Teresa put it:

*I have already told you that the calm these souls have interiorly is for the sake of their having much less calm exteriorly and [for] much less desire to have exterior calm (IC 7.4.10).*<sup>105</sup>

Interior prayer is thus for far more than personal inner peace and transformative healing. The purpose of interior prayer is for being a channel or instrument of healing peace and transformative love in the world. It entails being a calming presence of peace for others. The “fire of love” kindled from interior union with the Divine helps awaken virtues in others (*IC* 7.4.14). “Such service will not be small but very great and pleasing to the Lord (*ibid*).” Still, note that the “fire of love” which enkindles others is not the result of overcoming one’s feebleness through heroic virtues. Instead, awareness of one’s weakness, failures, and limitations is the virtue necessary for this fiery empowerment.

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<sup>104</sup> Seelus, *ibid*, 154.

<sup>105</sup> Thérèse of Lisieux continues Teresa’s understanding of Mary united with Martha. She states that it is not Martha’s works that Jesus finds at fault. “It is only the *restlessness* of His ardent hostess that He willed to correct.” *Story of a Soul*, 258.

With such self-knowledge, and with the Mary and Martha parts of ourselves joined, we are transformed in such a way that even the most ordinary of activities and encounters are opportunities to prayerfully live, love, work, and serve as instruments of God's healing peace. A comment by one of the participants in the seven-week Deep Abiding interior prayer dissertation project offers this example on how that is so:

*I am Martha...always Martha. Task master, checking off the list, focused on what needs to get done and the next thing to follow. [My daughter] in her ADHD way bounds into my regime without noticing my focus, without excusing herself, without any consideration of others. My return to within has been used several times during these "crashing" moments. It has allowed me to step back, breathe, and provide her with those moments of attention she so desperately needs. I am more calm means she is more calm. Can my Martha-moments get smoothed into a Mary moment? I hope. I believe. I have seen it happen.*

A final note before concluding. Gillian Ahlgren wisely notes how Teresa's insights into the dynamism of the Trinitarian relationship and our sacred anthropology is itself symbolized in her treatment of Mary and Martha. Ahlgren sees Teresa's use of Mary as far more than representing our contemplation and Martha our loving service and action. She suggests that in Teresa's use of these biblical women to represent life in the Spirit, "Mary may be seen as representing God's permanent *indwelling* in creation, while Martha connotes God's creative, redemptive and renewing *activity* in the world."<sup>106</sup> Hence our participation in the ongoing Incarnation through small acts of loving kindness, service, and presence.<sup>107</sup> Or, as noted previously in regard to Thomas Keating's understanding of Christian contemplative mysticism,

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<sup>106</sup> Gillian Ahlgren, *Entering Teresa of Avila's Interior Castle*, (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 115.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

*If one is truly transformed one can walk down the street, drink a cup of tea or shake hands with somebody and be pouring divine life into the world.*<sup>108</sup>

In conclusion, Teresa's counsel is that by using interior prayer in order to connect with the "Someone in the interior depths" and to drink from "those divine breasts where it seems God is always sustaining the soul" (7.2.6), the soul is stilled, comforted, and granted peace (IC 7.2.6). Awareness of this peace may come and go. Yet, the metaphysical flow of God's indwelling tender mercy and redeeming action is always there waiting to be tapped, for the Presence is permanently inside us—even when our minds anxiously roam outside the castle walls. The outflow of this metaphysical inner Presence, peace, transformative healing, and empowerment is not for the sake of self alone. It is for self-transcendence. In ways akin to St. Paul's "when I am weak, I am strong," (2 Cor. 12:9-11), one accesses this metaphysical unceasing flow from the interior depths of one's soul through the willing and welcoming inner gentle gesture of surrender into God's loving, indwelling embrace. The result is our participation in the creative, redemptive activity of the Trinity in the world.<sup>109</sup> Thus, interior prayer liberates, heals, transforms, and empowers us as individuals and communities to participate in the ongoing Incarnation.<sup>110</sup> Even amid our brokenness—or perhaps *because* of our awareness of our weakness *and* sacred anthropology—we open ourselves to willingly cooperate with the Eternal dwelling in, yet also beyond us, as ones divinized to manifest God's energies, Light, love, and healing peace.

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<sup>108</sup> Keating, 25.

<sup>109</sup> See Ahlgren, 119.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 120.

### **Chapter III. MEDICAL AND OTHER SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE OF THE HEALING BENEFITS OF BELIEF, INTENTION, AND MEDITATION/INTERIOR PRAYER**

There is medical and other scientific evidence concerning the healing benefits of belief and intention. Moreover, there continues to be a growing body of evidence as well as ongoing theoretical research pointing to not only the psycho-physiological but psychosocial benefits of contemplative practices such as heart-focused compassion meditation/interior prayer. This chapter explores some of these scientific findings as supporting evidence for the Deep Abiding research project on the use of heart focused meditation/interior prayer for the purpose of both personal and communal healing.<sup>111</sup>

#### **A. The Relaxation Response and Mind-Body Connection**

Dr. Herbert Benson is affiliated with Harvard Medical School, Deaconess Hospital, and their Mind/Body Medical Institute. For over forty years, Benson has been a lead researcher on the psychophysiological effects of meditation and contemplative prayer. Benson's research is deemed authoritative within conventional Western medicine circles. His research is also well respected among those in integrative or complementary medicine who combine conventional Western and non-mainstream approaches.

As a cardiologist back in the 1970s, Benson scientifically established the mind-body connection after speculating that stress was causing his patients to have elevated blood pressure. He began testing his theory by using a model for stress-induced hypertension that involved trying to raise and lower the blood pressure of squirrel

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<sup>111</sup> Note that large scale scientific studies on whether distant prayer assists in the healing of ill patients have rendered conflicting and inconclusive findings. Uncontrollable variables and other design flaws in these studies are said to be the cause. For an overview of these studies and explanation of design flaws, see Lynne McTaggart, *The Intention Experiment*, pp. 83-98.

monkeys. Students who were aware of Benson's project suggested that instead of trying to stress out monkeys he should observe their own human ability to lower blood pressure through the use of Transcendental Meditation (T.M.). Sure enough, these students were not only able to lower their blood pressure. They could lower their heart and breath rates, metabolism, and brain activity. Moreover, as a group, the T.M. practitioners tended to have lower overall blood pressure as a health benefit of regular meditation. Initially, Benson did not want his research to be associated with T.M. because Western society considered it counter-cultural. But he finally decided to study T.M.. This research launched Benson's groundbreaking, definitive research on the mind-body connection, including the psycho-physiological impact of contemplative practices.<sup>112</sup> His research was carried out in the very room where the famous Harvard physiologist, Walter Cannon, discovered the "fight or flight" response sixty years prior.<sup>113</sup>

When under stress, the "fight or flight" response activates as a means of survival, a trait handed down to us from our early ancestors. When experiencing stress, the sympathetic nervous system releases hormones, adrenaline and nonadrenaline, which in turn activate the rest of the body to prepare for battle or flee from harm. In other words, anxious thoughts and feelings trigger the raising of blood pressure, breath rate, metabolism, brain wave frequency and intensity, and increases blood flow to arm and leg muscles by an average of 300 to 400% as one prepares to fight or flee from a real or imagined threat.<sup>114</sup> When stress repeatedly occurs, the fight or flight mode is continually

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<sup>112</sup> I acknowledge the contributions of multi-decade, systematic research conducted by scientists affiliated with Maharishi University located in Fairfield, Iowa. Reference to their research occurs later in this chapter.

<sup>113</sup> Benson with Miriam Klipper, *The Relaxation Response*, (NY: Harper, 2001), xvii.

<sup>114</sup> Herbert Benson and Marg Stark, *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief* (NY: A Fireside Book, Simon and Schuster, 1997), 128.

activated to a point where permanent hypertension may result. Sustained high blood pressure, strained and enlarged hearts, blockages in arteries, and the bursting of blood vessels resulting in strokes are possible outcomes. Other outcomes included increases in depression, anger, hostility, and the lowering of pain thresholds.<sup>115</sup>

Yet Benson's studies with the meditators revealed the flip side of this mind/body connection. His research established how humans have the innate capacity to trigger what he called *the relaxation response*.<sup>116</sup> Benson describes the *relaxation response* as a "bodily reaction brought on by relaxation and meditative techniques that anyone can employ to strip away destructive inner stresses."<sup>117</sup> This response involves the calming of the sympathetic nervous system's fight or flight mode by the parasympathetic nervous system. The body downshifts so that heart beat and pumping of blood need not occur so quickly. Breathing slows and deepens. Metabolic rate drops, muscles relax, and organs have a chance to not produce responses at such high speeds. Brain waves slow to mood enhancing levels associated with pleasure, and the body's energy sources are restored.<sup>118</sup>

Benson found that only two steps were needed for eliciting this *relaxation response*. When these steps are followed, physiological shifts are immediate averaging a decrease by 10 to 17% within the first three minutes.<sup>119</sup> The cumulative effect of regularly eliciting the *relaxation response* is the reversal of stress-invoked wear and tear on the body, as well as eliciting a long list of health benefits. These benefits range from reduced experience of depression, anxiety, and hostility, to increased self-esteem in high

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *The Relaxation Response* (NY: William Morrow, 1975).

<sup>117</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Beyond the Relaxation Response* (NY: Berkley Books, 1984), 24.

<sup>118</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Timeless Healing*, 132-133.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 133.

school sophomores. Seventy-five percent of patients with sleep onset insomnia became normal sleepers.<sup>120</sup>

As for the two step process for eliciting the *relaxation response*, Benson derived a formula that modified the method taught by Transcendental Meditation, though it is also found in other traditions such as 4<sup>th</sup> c. CE Christian Desert Abbas and Ammas. With Benson's program, participants were allowed to select their own word or other focal point (a sacred or secular word or phrase, sound, image, or a muscular activity). Step one of the formula is the repetition of this focal point as needed. It could be the breath or a single word or phrase like "Sh'ma Yisrael," "Our Father who art in heaven," "Ishai Allah," "Full of Grace," "Om,"<sup>121</sup> or a compelling secular words like peace, love, and calm. Step two is a passive, "Oh well," disregard for intruding thoughts when they arise. In other words, when one notices being hooked by an intruding thought, feeling, or story line running through one's mind, without self-reproach, one gently brings awareness back to the focal point.<sup>122</sup> While initially, Benson advocated being seated in a quiet place during this practice, his research eventually established how *the relaxation response* could also be elicited in the midst of daily life activities such as walking, jogging, and knitting.

Benson and other researchers eventually realized that having each person select a focal point associated with a comforting, positive emotion, such as unconditional love and tenderness mattered. Selecting a word, image, or sound with a personally comforting meaning helped change patterns in the nervous system, reduce adrenaline rush when

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<sup>120</sup> For an amassed list of evidence by the Mind/Body Institute see *Timeless Healing*, 146.

<sup>121</sup> Note that Vedic tradition understands "Om," the Gayatri Mantra, chanting of divine names or japas, and other meditative foci as involving far more than the recitation of words; these chants are said to release an energy vibration which impacts the mind, body, spirit, and world. .

<sup>122</sup> Fr. Thomas Keating's Centering Prayer uses a similar method.



anxious, and the production of the stress hormone cortisol. Benson coined this calming effect *remembered wellness*. His example of *remembered wellness* was of an anxious patient who chose as her focal point the Spanish blessing her mother said to her and her siblings before they left for school each morning: “*Jesu Christo ayudame, ampárame y curame.*”<sup>123</sup>

Joan Borysenko, a respected scientist, meditation instructor, and student of Benson’s during those initial Harvard Medical School meditation studies, cites a healing moment in the life of behaviorist Ivan Pavlov as an example of *remembered wellness*.<sup>124</sup> When Pavlov lay dying of an infectious disease, he sent his assistant to the river to fetch a pail of warm mud. Pavlov placed his hands in the warm mud and began to play with it like a child. Several hours later, his fever broke and he began his healing recovery. When asked to explain what happened, Pavlov said that he had fond childhood memories of his mother doing the laundry in the river while telling him stories as he played in the mud. Pavlov hypothesized that if he could relive that peaceful moment of his life, it might be able to help restore his body to homeostasis or inner balance.

## **B. The Healing Benefits of Belief**

Benson noticed how 80% of his patients were selecting a prayer phrase or religious word as their focal point in order to elicit the healing benefits of the *relaxation response*. Moreover, 25% of his patients reported that they felt “more spiritual” as a result of eliciting *the relaxation response*.<sup>125</sup> Yet Benson noticed another aspect of belief. For decades, Benson has argued that the “placebo effect” should be embraced and

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<sup>123</sup> “Jesus Christ, help me, protect me, and cure me.” For this example and Benson’s full description of “remembered wellness” see *Timeless Healing*, 19-22, 25-46.

<sup>124</sup> Joan Borysenko, *The Beginner’s Guide to Meditation* [Audio CD], January 15, 2006.

<sup>125</sup> \_\_\_\_, *Timeless Healing*, 152.

further explored as a positive healing outcome rather than glossed over or treated pejoratively by medical researchers.

In *The Biology of Belief*, Bruce Lipton raises the same issue. Lipton celebrates what he calls *the belief effect* (instead of the placebo effect), arguing, as does Benson, that our perceptions and beliefs, whether accurate or inaccurate, impact our behavior and bodies.<sup>126</sup> Lipton gives several examples of this including a Baylor School of Medicine study involving three sets of patients all of whom believed they had received knee surgery.<sup>127</sup> A third of the patients unknowingly received a “fake” knee surgery, yet this placebo group improved as much as the other two groups.<sup>128</sup> He also cites a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services report (Horgan, 1999) which found that half of severely depressed patients taking anti-depressants improved versus thirty-two percent taking a placebo.<sup>129</sup> Examples Benson cites for *the belief effect* include his leading a team of scientists to the Himalayas in order study Tibetan monks who, through entering a meditative state, could warm their unclothed bodies, and dry wet sheets placed upon their bodies, while sitting out in freezing cold temperatures of winter.<sup>130</sup>

Note how these scientists are not saying that one has to have a particular belief or specifically religious faith. Nor are they simplistically saying that a positive attitude leads to cure. Likewise I want to avoid the irresponsible, painful, and morally dubious declaration that if a person becomes ill, injured, or has difficulty with recovery, they must

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<sup>126</sup> Bruce H. Lipton, *The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter & Miracles*, (New York: Hay House, 2008), 107.

<sup>127</sup> Moseley et al. “A Controlled Trial of Arthroscopic Surgery for Osteoarthritis of the Knee,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 347:81-88, July 11, 2002.

<sup>128</sup> Lipton, 110.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. See John Horgan, “Placebo Nation,” *The New York Times*, March 21, 1999.

<sup>130</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Beyond the Relaxation Response*, 47-61.

not be believing, perceiving, or trying hard enough. What Benson *is* saying is that the relaxation response, and how one perceives or believes, can have physiologically healing effects in many though not all cases, including when the relaxation response and what one believes are combined. Benson holds that this is true regardless of whether the belief is in a power outside oneself, or belief that one's body has the ability to heal itself.<sup>131</sup>

To illustrate what can happen when the relaxation response and power of belief combine, Benson has studied Tibetan Buddhists who turn to meditation in order to “tune in” to the healing energies of the universe in order to assist in the healing of others.<sup>132</sup> In this Tibetan tradition—though also in other indigenous cultures, and increasingly in complementary medicine modalities such as Healing Touch and Reiki used in the West – spiritual healers enter a meditative state in order to be a conduit of life force energy into the one in need of healing. As will be described in a later section, such healers “thin” the boundaries of perceived separation between self, others, and life force energy or Spirit during the meditative process. They self-empty, becoming like a hose through which water flows, so that healing energies can be sent through them to the one in need of healing. Benson holds that regardless of theological or philosophical details and differences, these energy healers, as well as all who engage in various meditation and contemplative prayer modalities, are eliciting the relaxation response as part of their method.

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 101.

### C. Mediation, Prayer, and the Brain

Benson's enduring enthusiasm for meditation, including his work with Tibetan monks, sparked an entire genre of research at university research labs across the nation and world.<sup>133</sup> From Princeton, University of Wisconsin-Madison, to University of California-Davis and beyond, neuroscientists began studying not only the brains of Tibetan Buddhist monks, but they also started examining the brains of people praying the rosary and Protestants in prayerful concentration. They have been studying the brains of Qigong masters, shamans, reiki practitioners, and other energy healers. They've been studying the brains of Zen, mindfulness,<sup>134</sup> and compassion meditation practitioners, and of college students beginners.

While this chapter does not attempt to summarize this growing field within neuroscience, there are several noteworthy findings for the Deep Abiding study. First, this research has dismantled previously held assumptions about human brain development ending when reaching a certain age. That theory has been replaced with neuroplasticity. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines neuroplasticity as the "capacity of neurons and neural networks in the brain to change their connections and behavior in response to new information, sensory stimulation, development, damage, or dysfunction." Ample scientific research has demonstrated that meditation and related contemplative practices reorganize the brain's cellular or neural networks so that unhealthy or maladaptive patterns related to fight or flight mode are overridden by healthier neural

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<sup>133</sup> Lynne McTaggart, *The Intention Experiment*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 72-81.

<sup>134</sup> Space constraints are such that I cannot delve into, yet want to make mention of, Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Stress Reduction program used by pain clinics and hospitals across the country. See John Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, (New York: Delta Book, Bantam Dell, 1990).

architecture. In other words, a new baseline or norm occurs. This does not mean that a person no longer experiences stressful situations. What it does mean is that a person has cultivated greater physical, mental, and emotional resiliency as the new normal. He or she can more quickly and easily access and return to a state of stability.

Other scientific research relevant to the Deep Abiding project involves studies on compassion meditation. Richard Davidson and Antoine Lutz created a study involving highly trained Tibetan monks who engaged in a compassion meditation practice called Tonglen. Tonglen involves an outward focused “sending” of loving kindness to all living beings. Davidson and Lutz found that the brains of these monks had higher gamma wave activity and greater increases in left frontal lobe activity, when compared with the brains of untrained meditators.<sup>135</sup> This heightened state is said to produce “permanent emotional improvement by activating the left anterior portion of the brain—the portion most associated with joy. In other words, these monks had conditioned their brains to tune in to happiness most of the time.”<sup>136</sup>

Still, Davidson’s research at UW-Madison later proved how meditation also alters the brainwave patterns of new practitioners using mindfulness meditation for as little as eight weeks.<sup>137</sup> These beginners were able to activate the “‘happy thoughts’ part of the brain and enhance immune function.”<sup>138</sup> From this finding, Davidson concluded that neural registration of an emotion is a highly plastic skill that can be learned by certain

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<sup>135</sup> Lynne McTaggart, *The Bond: Connecting Through The Space Between Us* (NY: Free Press, 2011), 172.

<sup>136</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ *Intention Experiment*, 71.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

thoughts over time. Additional compassion meditation studies involving students also demonstrated how meditation can condition the brain to be more empathic.<sup>139</sup>

University of Pennsylvania's Eugene d'Aquili and Andrew Newberg also conducted research on compassion meditation relevant to the Cornell College Deep Abiding study. Aquili and Newberg discovered that practitioners of compassion meditation "thin" the area of the brain which calculates spatial orientation of where one's own body and sense of being as a separate "I" ends and the world begins.<sup>140</sup> Hence there is an expanded sense of oneness or unitive consciousness.

From these and other research studies, we see how—like an athlete conditioning and transforming her body—people engaged in compassion meditation and other contemplative practices can rewire their brains not only for greater stress reduction, peace, and joy, but for increased empathy and heightened awareness of oneness with all life.

In a 2012 lecture entitled *Inside Compassion: Edge States, Contemplative Interventions, Neuroscience*, Zen Buddhist teacher, Roshi Joan Halifax, spoke at the Library of Congress on professional, family, and other caregivers of ill people who are harmed physically and/or emotionally by empathy and the act of care giving.<sup>141</sup> In other words, these care providers experience secondary or vicarious trauma, also known as empathic over-arousal. Halifax offered numerous insights on this topic, based on

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<sup>139</sup> \_\_\_\_ *The Bond*, 172-173.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid*, 174.

<sup>141</sup> I thank WTU director Sr. Ann McLaughlin for directing me to this lecture, "Inside Compassion: Edge States, Contemplative Interventions, Neuroscience," as aired on Krista Tippett's radio show/podcast *On Being* January 2013, <http://www.onbeing.org/program/feature/inside-compassion-edge-states-contemplative-interventions-neuroscience/4984>.

scientific studies involving the brains of meditators. She spoke of the neural architecture resulting from meditation enabling practitioners to be compassionately present to the suffering of others in ways that kept them from being debilitated or undone. This finding is relevant, in that one of the desired outcomes of the Deep Abiding project was seeing whether heart-focused compassion meditation/interior prayer could help increase resilience and wellbeing among participants whose high levels of empathy and service to others sometimes results in over-care or burn-out.

#### **D. Energy, Healing Intention, and Interconnectivity of Living Beings**

During one of the Deep Abiding learning sessions, the sensor of a monitoring device was attached to the ear lobe of one of the Cornell College student participants. This device enabled participants to observe coherence—a state of synchronization between heart rate, brain waves, and the autonomic nervous system when shifting attention and intention through heart-centered meditation/interior prayer of the heart.<sup>142</sup> Yet, what I could not scientifically demonstrate for them was whether anything was happening on an energetic level. When participants use heart-centered compassion meditation/interior prayer, which includes awareness of indwelling life force energy/Spirit to ‘send’ healing intention throughout their own beings and on to others, what if anything was happening? Scientists like Gary Schwartz offer both scientific evidence and theoretical research to answer this question.

Gary Schwartz is professor of psychology, medicine, neurology, psychiatry, and surgery at the University of Arizona and director of its Laboratory for Advances in

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<sup>142</sup> This emWave2 monitor device was created by scientists at HeartMath, whose research will be a focus later in this chapter.

Consciousness and Health. Schwartz' research points to energy fields connecting us with everything. His research findings include the ability of master healers to effect the invisible light or biophoton emissions from plants. He has also studied the hands of master healers through the use of magnetic field meters, the result of which showed registered increases of biophoton emissions during periods when they consciously intended the 'sending' of energy.<sup>143</sup> In terms of photographing light emitted from the hands of healers, Schwartz along with Katy Creath concluded that "the intention of healing creates waves of light that pass from the healer to subject."<sup>144</sup>

Relevant for potential outcomes of the Deep Abiding program is research Schwartz and colleagues conducted on 14 reiki energy healers. The scientists found that these spiritual healers reported feeling better physically, emotionally, and otherwise *after* sending compassionate, healing intention to others:<sup>145</sup>

*Giving was as good as getting for these senders. Other research showed a similar result. The act of healing and perhaps the healing context were themselves healing. Healing someone else also healed the healer.*<sup>146</sup>

Examples of other energy and intention-related research includes the water crystals studies of Japanese scientist Masaru Emoto. Emoto claims to have carried out hundreds of studies which suggest that molecules of water are affected by our thoughts and feelings.<sup>147</sup> There is also the German biophysicist, Fritz Popp, whose pioneer research on photon emissions generated from every living organism, including human beings, has contributed to an emerging, holistic picture of life based on quantum

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<sup>143</sup>Gary Schwartz, *The Energy Healing Experiments: Science Reveals Our Natural Power to Heal*, (NY: Atria Books, Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2007), 103-128.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Lynne McTaggart, *Intention Experiment*, 95.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>147</sup> Masaru Emoto, *The Hidden Messages in Water*, (Hillsboro, Oregon: Beyond Words Publishing, 2004).



physics.<sup>148</sup> Originally vilified for his theories, Popp is now recognized by the German government and internationally for his work pointing to faint light rays, rather than biochemistry, as the communication system and “master tuning fork” of every living being.<sup>149</sup> Popp’s theoretical research also suggests these emissions of light communicate between living beings. He hypothesizes that these emissions may explain phenomena such as schools of fish or flocks of birds creating instantaneous shifts in direction.<sup>150</sup>

But what about this kind of interconnectivity occurring between human beings? What might the implications of this speculative research be in terms of focused intention for the purpose of social healing? If there is interconnectivity occurring on some group consciousness and/or energetic level, how might focused intention and a collective thought, such as a group at Cornell College sending out compassionate and healing intention, impact a designated community?

For several decades The Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) laboratory has carried out experiments which Roger Nelson describes as offering solid empirical evidence that people interact directly with each other beyond physical barriers and separation.<sup>151</sup> The purpose of these experiments has been to determine whether group consciousness exists, be it through an energetic level as what Schwartz spoke of, or some other means.

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<sup>148</sup> Marco Bischof, “A Tribute to Fritz-Albert Popp on the Occasion of His 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday,” *Indian Journal of Experimental Biology*, vol. 46, May 2008, 267-272.

<sup>149</sup> McTaggart, 27-28.

<sup>150</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *The Field: The Quest For the Secret Force of the Universe* (NY: Harper, 2008), 53-54.

<sup>151</sup> Roger Nelson, “Gathering of Global Mind,” 2002, noosphere.princeton.edu, accessed January 10, 2014.

Their research began with a laboratory experiment conducted with people sitting near a Random Number Generator device (RNG machine) without being physically connected to it. Nelson describes these machines as “an electric equivalent of high speed coin flippers [that] work with measurement of ‘white noise’ like random static between radio stations.”<sup>152</sup> The participants “communed” with the device by sending the wish for it to produce a higher or lower score than it would by chance. Accumulated research showed faint though consistent evidence that the “noisiness” of the random sequence was changed with disorder being slightly reduced by the wishes sent by participants.<sup>153</sup> These scientists also tested pairs of people; the pairs who were intensively involved with each other created six times the order on the machine than those without a close personal or work relationship.<sup>154</sup> Moreover, when the RNG machines were run at events when audiences shared emotionally charged peak attention (i.e. during the climax of a humor conference, a worship service, and the Academy Awards), in most instances disorder was reduced on the Random Number Generator machine.

In 1997 PEAR director Dean Radin launched what is known as the Global Consciousness Project. The goal of this project has been “to determine whether, and if so to what extent, human consciousness—that is, our minds’ awareness of the world in which we exist—can synchronize and act coherently.”<sup>155</sup> Fifty RNG machines were placed around the world. All of these machines were connected to one computer in order

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<sup>152</sup> See , “Gathering of Global Mind” for a scientific explanation of this technology and research method.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ *Intention Experiment*, 179.

<sup>155</sup> Patrick J. Kiger, “9/11 and Global Consciousness” posted by David Braun of National Geographic on *National Geographic News Watch*, Sept 6, 2011 (<http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2011/09/06/9-11-and-global-consciousness/>).

to see if global events with great emotional impact resulted in a more ordered, less random numerical pattern. As the Global Consciousness Project website explains,

*When human consciousness becomes coherent and synchronized, the behavior of random systems may change. Quantum event based random number generators (RNGs) produce completely unpredictable sequences of zeroes and ones. But when a great event synchronizes the feelings of millions of people, our network of RNGs becomes subtly structured. The probability is less than one in a hundred billion that the effect is due to chance. The evidence suggests an emerging noosphere, or the unifying field of consciousness described by sages in all cultures.*<sup>156</sup>

By 2006, these scientists studied 205 top news events including coverage of Princess Diana's death, Olympic Opening Ceremonies, and when the planes crashed into the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001.<sup>157</sup> These researchers found that when people reacted with great sadness or joy to a major event, the machines created meaningful order out of random patterns. The more intense the emotional reaction, the greater order registered on the random generator machines, with the highest order occurring on 9/11.<sup>158</sup>

These studies suggest the power of group *attention*. Yet, do they say anything about the power of group *intention*? Maharishi University has systematically engaged in this research with over 50 group healing intention meditation experiments said to have generated measurable, positive effect on society. Twenty-two of those studies have involved the use of meditation to lower crime rates in various cities across the country. *The Maharishi theory* holds the following: as Evan Finkelstein explains, during this meditation modality, one's awareness aligns and identifies "with its own unbounded

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<sup>156</sup> Roger Nelson, "The Global Consciousness Project Meaningful Correlations in Random Data," <http://noosphere.princeton.edu/>

<sup>157</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, *Intention Experiment*, 179-181 and *The Field*, 201-205.

<sup>158</sup> <http://noosphere.princeton.edu/>

source in a state of Transcendental Consciousness.”<sup>159</sup> This source is the unified or unbounded field from which all forces and matter arises and which connects all things. According to Finkelstein, “It is the ability to function while in Transcendental Consciousness that enlivens that unified field and spreads its harmonizing and unifying influence to individuals and to their surroundings.”<sup>160</sup> The theory is that when the square root of 1% of a town, nation, or world population practice Transcendental Meditation at the same time, this coherence of people decreases crime and accident rates for that area. Hospital admissions and suicide rates also lower. Meanwhile, prosperity and morale are said to increase.<sup>161</sup>

Their 1993 group healing intention project focusing on Washington D.C. showed violent crime rates fell, and the study was able to demonstrate how this decrease was due to no other factor, such as increased police efforts.<sup>162</sup> The crime rate rose as soon as the meditators ended their participation in this project. As science journalist Lynne McTaggart noted concerning skeptics of this and other Maharishi research on group intention, “the TM evidence is so abundant and the studies are so thorough that it is difficult to dismiss them.”<sup>163</sup> She adds how these studies withstand the rigor and scrutiny of publication in peer-review scientific journals.

Inspired by her work with scientists like Schwartz, Popp, and Nelson when translating their research findings into lay person accessible language, McTaggart went

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<sup>159</sup> Evan Finkelstein, *Universal Principles of Life Expressed in Maharishi Vedic Science, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, A Dissertation submitted to Maharishi University, June 2005, 385.

<sup>160</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, 386.

<sup>161</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, 383.

<sup>162</sup> J. Hagelin, et al., “Effects of group practice of the Transcendental Meditation program on preventing violent crime in Washington D.C.: Results of the National Demonstration Project, June-July 1993,” *Social Indicators Research*, 1999; 47(2): 153-201.

<sup>163</sup> McTaggart, *Intention Experiment* 183-184.

on to collaborate with several scientists on new intention experiments. One was called “The 9/11 Peace Intention Experiment September 11-18, 2011.” In this experiment, which began September 11th and ran for eight days, Dr. Salah Al-Rashed and his community of tens of thousands of Arabs throughout the Gulf States joined participants in the West in sending healing intention to two southern provinces in Afghanistan, Helmand and Kandahar. Using carefully designed assessment instruments including the use of RNG machines to verify evidence, the results of this study suggest violence in these regions lowered during the period in which the group healing intention experiment occurred.<sup>164</sup>

The above named theoretical research on both energy fields and the use of intention points to all that exists as being inter-connectively one. This research brings to mind Einstein’s 1950 letter published in *The New York Times* in which he spoke of the delusion of our separateness, and how “striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion...and peace of mind.”<sup>165</sup> Of course mystics, Buddhists, and Native peoples grounded in earth-based spiritual traditions have been speaking of this illusion of separateness for thousands of years. With these compatible scientific and spiritual perspectives, perhaps Schwartz is correct when he speculates how energy and the use of conscious intention may be the bridge between science, spirituality, and healing in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>164</sup>“The 9/11 Peace Intention Experiment September 11-18, 2011.”  
[www.theintentionexperimnt.com](http://www.theintentionexperimnt.com).

<sup>165</sup> See page 1 of this dissertation.

## **E. Psychophysical and Psychosocial Research on Heart Focused Meditation/Prayer**

The Institute of HeartMath is a non-profit organization recognized internationally for research on psychophysiology, neurocardiology, and biophysics.<sup>166</sup> This includes studies on heart-brain interactions and the physiology of optimal health and performance. HeartMath frequently works in collaboration with workplace, educational, and military settings, as well as universities and other research centers. They also explore the electrophysiology of intuition and operate a project called the Global Coherence Initiative. This project includes science-based research on the impact of thousands of people around the world sending out heart focused compassionate intention in ways similar to those described in the Maharishi and 9/11 Peace Intention experiments. Consulted by the likes of NASA and the U.S. Navy, the Global Coherence Initiative also includes studies on the influence of the earth's magnetic field upon brain and nervous system activity.

*[We] believe the Global Coherence Monitoring System can facilitate a better understanding of the mutual interactions between humans and our global environment. Far more important, however, is enlisting the collaboration of individuals and groups of people in establishing and amplifying coherent out-going fields which interact with planetary fields, thus helping establish global coherence.<sup>167</sup>*

Central to HeartMath research is what they call heart intelligence. Just as spiritual wisdom traditions and related practices throughout history have focused on the heart center, so these scientists advocate a heart-focused practice for creating personal and social wellness.

Earlier in this chapter, reference was made to the HeartMath monitoring device

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<sup>166</sup> For various research paper abstracts and other material see [www.heartmath.org/research/research-home/research-center-home.html](http://www.heartmath.org/research/research-home/research-center-home.html).

<sup>167</sup> The Global Coherence Initiative, <http://www.glcoherence.org/monitoring-system/about-system.html>

used to measure coherence—a state of synchronization between heart rate, brain waves, and the autonomic nervous system when shifting attention and intention to heart-centered meditation/interior prayer of the heart. The technique HeartMath researchers advocate for achieving the psycho-physiological, psychosocial, and spiritual benefits of this coherent state involves three steps. These steps are very similar to those advocated by Benson though with these three heart foci:

- Heart Focus – Attention focused around the heart center.
- Heart Breathing – Breathing slowly, deeply, and without force as if one’s breath is flowing in and out through the back and front of the heart center.
- Heart Feeling –While maintaining heart focus and heart breathing, one activates a positive feeling<sup>168</sup> like love or appreciation.<sup>169</sup>

Described as a state of both relaxation yet also revitalization, this heart-focused coherent state has numerous mental, physical, and emotional benefits. These include maintaining emotional clarity in the midst of chaos, raising anti-aging DHEA hormone levels, immediately lowering stress hormones, reversing energy depletion levels.<sup>170</sup>

Centering Prayer guru Cynthia Bourgeault is among those extending gratitude to HeartMath for their scientific contributions related to the benefits of contemplative prayer.<sup>171</sup>

HeartMath founder, Doc Childre, and executive vice president, Howard Martin, speak of “consciousness and biology (or what some would call spirit and matter)” coming

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<sup>168</sup> Benson would refer to this Heart Feeling step as “remembered wellness.”

<sup>169</sup> emWave2 Practice Plan, Heart Math (Boulder Creek, CA: Quantum Intech, Inc., 2011), 5.

<sup>170</sup> See Doc Childre and Howard Martin with Donna Beech, *The Heartmath Solution*, (NY: HarperOne, 1999), 3-23; 89-101.

<sup>171</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, *HeartMath*, transcribed from the recording of a live retreat titled "An Introduction to Centering Prayer," in Auckland, New Zealand, in October 2009. <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/ecourses/centeringprayer/HeartMath.pdf>

together. They also speak of qualities of spirit in the physiological coherence process this way:

*Based on HeartMath findings indicating that coherence starts in the heart rhythms and is then communicated to the brain and body, it is our theory that the heart is the major conduit through which spirit enters the human system. The qualities of spirit—love, compassion, care, appreciation, tolerance, and patience—all create increased coherence and order in the heart rhythm patterns. Anger, frustration, anxiety, fear, worry, and hostility all create incoherence and disorder in the heart rhythm patterns.*<sup>172</sup>

More than just a focusing device, when “heart feelings” or “qualities of spirit” create order in the heart rhythm patterns, the heart communicates with the brain and the rest of the body in three ways: *neurologically* through the transmission of nerve impulses, *biochemically* through hormones and neurotransmitters, and *biophysically* through pressure waves.<sup>173</sup> HeartMath researchers point to growing evidence which suggests the heart may also influence and communicate with the brain and body *energetically* through electromagnetic field interactions. They aren’t only talking about brain-heart interaction within an individual but also among people. Using the analogy of a cell phone and radio stations transmitting information via an electromagnetic field, they propose that similar information transfer happens via the electromagnetic field produced by the heart:

*The heart’s electromagnetic field is by far the most powerful produced by the body; it’s approximately five thousand times greater in strength than the field produced by the brain, for example. The heart’s field not only permeates every cell in the body but also radiates outside of us; it can measure up to eight to ten feet away with sensitive detectors outside of us called magnetometers.*<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Childre and Martin, 261.

<sup>173</sup> Childre and Martin, 28-29.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 33.



Their evidence suggests that the human heart is something of an antenna creating resonance with other people. Moreover, they theorize that the heart's neurotransmitters register both good and bad information just like the brain. They also claim that these neurotransmitters in the heart pick up information seconds *before* the brain is able to do so.<sup>175</sup> All of these findings are rather remarkable, given how many mystical traditions understand the heart as the communication center between self, others, and for many traditions the Divine. As was noted in the opening chapter, numerous mystical traditions refer to the Divine dwelling in the cave or shrine of the heart. Examples includes Orthodox Christianity's Prayer of the Heart, Tibetan Buddhism's Tonglen practice, and the chakra energy system of Hinduism, all.

This heart intelligence may explain the phenomena of group coherence including when using heart-focused meditation or interior prayer for social healing. Just as HeartMath researchers speak of coherent systems within the human body, they speak of group coherence in which there is "synchronized and harmonious order in relationships between and among people."<sup>176</sup> Dr. McCraty points to a growing body of evidence which suggests that "an energetic field is formed between individuals in groups through which communication among all the group members occurs simultaneously. In other words, there is a group 'field' connecting members."<sup>177</sup>

McCraty also points to research confirming his theory that when a person has entered a state of coherence "the heart radiates a more coherent electromagnetic signal into the environ-ment that can be detected by nearby animals [and] the nervous systems

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<sup>175</sup> McTaggart, *Intention Experiment*, p.55.

<sup>176</sup> Rollin McCraty, "Coherence: Bridging Personal, Social, and Global Health," *Alternative Therapies*, Jul/Aug 2010, Vol. 16, no. 4,20.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

of other people.”<sup>178</sup> An example of supporting evidence for this hypothesis involves a study in which untrained participants entered heart rhythm synchronization matching that of seasoned participants when seated in close proximity.<sup>179</sup> Such research has spawned the use of the HeartMath heart-focused technique among athletic teams, corporations like Motorola, police departments, schools, and beyond for not only personal but communal cohesiveness, healing, and wellness.

#### **F. Learning from Spiritual Healers: Being A Healing Presence**

Toward the beginning of the dissertation, it was acknowledged that this research project cannot measure whether heart-focused compassion meditation/interior prayer contributes to communal healing on some kind of energetic level. It has pointed to both scientific evidence and theoretical research, which speaks to this phenomena, including the power of focused attention and intention. Still, this dissertation has kept project assessment tangibly anchored in measuring whether or not participant attitudes toward others including two communities underwent a positive transformation as a result of this spiritual practice. That said, it remains useful for people who want to be a healing presence for to learn from master healers in terms of what they do with their focused *attention* and *intention*. Here is some of the findings based on McTaggart’s research on these master healers:<sup>180</sup>

- They make a conscious choice to get out of the way. In other words, they willingly give up cognitive control of the process.
- They surrender the separate sense of self. They believe themselves be part of a larger whole, and allow themselves to become pure energy.

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>180</sup> McTaggart, *Intention Experiment*, 65-81.

- They engulf themselves in unconditional love as they connect with the patient/receiver.
- Though focusing intention on healing wholeness, they do not attempt to dictate outcomes.
- Though some healers see themselves as the source of healing energy, the strongest emissions and healing results are said to come from those who see themselves as being like a hose or channel through which a power beyond themselves flows.

In conclusion, there is much scientific evidence and ongoing theoretical research pointing to the power of belief and intention. This research also points to the psychophysical and psychosocial benefits of meditation/interior prayer generally, and heart-focused compassion meditation/interior prayer specifically, for both personal and communal healing. Such supporting evidence works in tandem with biblical and theological underpinnings of this research project. The stage is now set for exploring and better understanding the quantitative and qualitative research findings of the Deep Abiding program.

## Chapter IV. PROCEDURE AND RESEARCH METHOD

The Deep Abiding interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation program and research project took place on campus in Allee Chapel second semester of academic year 2012-2013. When seeking participants for this program and research project, the marketing language used in the College's newsletter (which goes out to on and off campus constituents) was as follows:

### Deep Abiding: Six-week<sup>181</sup> Meditation/Interior Prayer Program

Spiritual wisdom traditions speak of our need for inner surrender, and for cultivating an awareness which—like an antenna or little radio dial inside us—tunes us in to the deep abiding presence, healing action, and energies of the Divine coursing through us and all creation. In other words, one practices shifting from over-identification with anxious thoughts and feelings to a more inwardly relinquished, attuned alignment with the unbounded indwelling Spirit of the universe as one's Deepest, Truest Self.

The results are said to not only be inner peace, strength, and a more skillful relationship with fear. The results are also a more spacious, courageous, compassionate life stance, and transformative healing way of perceiving and relating to ourselves, our problems, others, God, and the world. This program seeks to cultivate these outcomes so we can pray, live, love, lead, and serve as instruments of healing peace.

When using this marketing language, I did not consider the extent to which it may bias or influence participants' perception of what they would later experience during the program. Then again, as will be noted in the methodology section below, the desire of educators is to influence student learning outcomes. Moreover, as the medical and scientific supporting evidence chapter (Chapter III) explained, scientists like Dr. Herbert Benson and Bruce Lipton who study the mind-body connection argue that the influence

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<sup>181</sup> Language was later changed to seven weeks in order to better address spring break issues.

of the placebo or “belief effect” should be embraced and studied further as a positive healing outcome rather than treated pejoratively by researchers.<sup>182</sup>

Requests to participate in the Deep Abiding program exceeded capacity by over 100%. With 59 requests to participate, the program size increased from 24 to 30 participants in an effort to honor the demand while keeping class and research size manageable.

**A. Composite Participant Profile:**

Of the 30 participants, 31% were age 18-23, 48% were age 24-59, and 21% were age 60-69. Selection was based on a combination of intentionally trying to create a demographic balance of age, gender, and student/faculty/staff and other campus community members while still trying to honor to the best of my ability a first-come-first-to-enroll system. Participants were split into two cohort groups that mixed Cornell College students (9), faculty/ staff (8), faculty/staff spouses or partners (4), as well as alumni and other Mt. Vernon area residents (9).

The baseline survey showed participants as highly diverse in terms of spiritual/religious identities and perspectives. There were participants self-identifying as atheist, agnostic, and exclusively anchored in their own traditions. There were also participants who identified as spiritual-but-not-religious, and religious but not part of a faith tradition or community. Others made a point of stating on the baseline survey how they are anchored in a faith tradition and/or community while embracing spiritual wisdom from other traditions. The question about religious or spiritual identity was left

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<sup>182</sup> See Chap III.B.

as an open field on the baseline survey rather than boxes to mark off; that decision was based on previous experience with Cornell people not wanting to be “boxed” into someone else’s categories.

Participants had the choice of attending Sunday or Tuesday afternoon learning and sharing sessions. We met for five learning and sharing sessions over a seven week period from February through March, 2013. Participants also committed to daily home work. A one and a half week spring break occurred in between the fourth and final session.

#### **A. Research Project Design Including Learning Sessions and Participant Homework:**

**Participants attended five learning and sharing sessions** (For detailed outline of each session see Appendix A). These sessions were as follows:

1. Orientation
2. Embodied Spirituality: Mind-Body-Spirit Practices and Psycho-Physiology
3. Being a Conduit of Healing: Psycho-Social Research and Its Implications
4. Contemplation-In-Action
5. Closing Session: Life Integration Reflection and Sharing

#### **Key topics covered in these sessions included the following:**

1. The prevalence of indwelling life force-Spirit in diverse Eastern and Western contemplative traditions and the prevalence of heart-centered spiritual practices.
2. The role of compassion-based contemplative wisdom in Christian Desert Fathers and later monastic traditions, contemporary contemplative psychology, as well as from Buddhist perspectives as taught by Pema Chödrön. Included were themes such as non-aggression toward one’s

struggles and those of others; befriending vulnerabilities and pain; and relinquishing the need to control. From Christian meditation, this includes Jesus demonstrating God's companioning embrace and oneness with all that is lost, broken, and forsaken, not only in society but inside ourselves.

3. Living from one's deepest self, or True Self, rather than from surface level self with its ego-mind grasping and aversions.
4. Individual and group mind-body-spirit practices which wove together healing modalities from acupressure, Eden Energy Medicine, hatha yoga, and walking meditation.<sup>183</sup>
5. Scientific studies on both the psycho-physiological and psycho-social healing effects of heart-focused meditation/interior prayer;
6. Use of a HeartMath Institute emWave2 monitor which showed participants how their heart rate, brain waves, and autonomic nervous system enter a state of stress reducing coherence within seconds of shifting awareness into heart-focused contemplative mode during either formal or informal practice mode;
7. A gazing exercise similar to those derived from the Buddhist practice of the Brahma-viharas and of the 13<sup>th</sup> c. Franciscan spiritual gazing advocated by St. Clare of Assisi;
8. Wisdom on contemplation-in-action, especially for the purpose of loving service and courageously leading from within amid times of strife. Examples from various leaders were used, with an emphasis on the life and wisdom of St. Teresa of Avila.

Before being part of this program and research, participants had to read about, and agree to engage in, two types of homework for a seven-week period. There was both a formal sitting version of this practice, and an informal on-the-go version which occurs while in the midst of everyday life activities and encounters.

### **The Formal Homework Practice (see a detailed description in Appendix B):**

The formal version of the interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation practice was partially based on the Institute of HeartMath's principles of heart-focus, heart breathing, and heart feeling. Doing so meant that their medical and other scientific

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<sup>183</sup> For sources see Appendix A.

evidence on compassion-based, heart-focused meditation/interior prayer could undergird my project (see Chapter III).<sup>184</sup> The heart-focused modality used as homework practice was similar to Tibetan Tonglen loving kindness meditation, and an interior prayer form used in healing touch and distant healing prayer as taught by Healing Touch Spiritual Ministry.<sup>185</sup> Participants agreed to engage in this formal version at least five times a week for a minimum of fifteen minutes.

The formal practice involved inwardly surrendering, softening, re-tuning, and re-identifying with indwelling Spirit or life force as one's Deeper Self. This was done through five heart-focused steps. These steps included heart-focus and heart-breathing. Participants had the option of consenting to being "breathed in" or "prayed in" by Breath of God or the universe. With awareness on the heart center, one breathes in smooth five counts for the inhalations and exhalations as if from the front and back of the heart center.

The process also involved awareness of heart-feeling. That is, an image, word or phrase, sound, or some other means of evoking an awareness of healing beauty, unconditional love and/or tender mercies<sup>186</sup> at a visceral, feeling level. Each participant selected his or her own heart feeling focal point. It could be of a seemingly sacred or secular nature, preferably based on an experience or what Dr. Herbert Benson of Harvard Medical School and founder of the Mind/Body Medical Institute calls "remembered

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<sup>184</sup> Heart-focus, heart-breathing, and heart-feeling create coherence between heart rate, brain waves, and the autonomic nervous system.

<sup>185</sup> Linda Smith, *Using Your Hands to Heal HTSM 103 Student Notebook* Fourth Edition. Arvada, CO: Institute of Spiritual Healing and Aromatherapy, 2011.

<sup>186</sup> The phrase "tender mercies" which runs throughout this dissertation has its roots in the biblical understanding of compassionate mercy as defined on pages 34-35.



wellness.”<sup>187</sup> It could be something or someone representing compassion and healing peace such as Mary Mother of God or Kuan Yin, Christ or Buddha, one’s grandparent, or one’s loyal, loving pet. It could be sacred or secular ranging from “Hail Mary, full of grace,” slowly paced with the in and out breath (inhale on “Hail Mary”; exhale on “full of grace,” or even better a single word to symbolize the phrase like “full” which could also signal awareness of oneself as being full of indwelling grace like Mary<sup>188</sup>). It could be a single word like “awe,” “om,” “flow,” “calm,” “love,” or “peace.” It could be the solace and healing beauty of an open, flowing field, ocean, or starry night. Or, it could simply be a sensation of being enveloped or bathed in warm light.

Participants consented to humbly emptying ego-mind so as to become like a hose or channel through which healing energies of compassion, peace, and wellness flow. Again, this process involves identification with indwelling Spirit or life force energy as their Deepest, Truest Self, and being breathed in and through by the universe and/or Sacred with each in and out breath. Participants also had the option of invoking the ancestors, angels, spirit guides and/or communion of saints to compassionately companion and assist with the sending of healing peace.

Participants were then invited to sense themselves being filled with an infusion of indwelling life force/Spirit flowing from the root of their being in the shrine of the heart, like pearl of light, then radiating into every cell of one’s body.<sup>189</sup> They were invited to “get out of the way” in order to send these energies of healing, compassion, peace, and

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<sup>187</sup> Herbert Benson and Marg Stark, *Timeless Healing: The Power and Biology of Belief*, (New York: Fireside Book, Simon & Schuster, 1996) 27-45.

<sup>188</sup> Thomas Keating and Contemplative Outreach recommend using a single word to symbolize the prayer phrase.

<sup>189</sup> Based on Pauline language of being “strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self....so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:16b-19).”

wellbeing from indwelling Spirit or life force, though the communication center of the heart, then to any internal or external place of discomfort they has experienced in the past day or so. They then sent this Breath/Spirit/Light or life force energy and compassion on to all who have ever experienced that same struggle.<sup>190</sup> While doing so, one has in mind a blueprint of the person filled and radiating with warm light, healing peace, wholeness, and ease. The sphere of healing expands as participants work as channels to send healing peace, tenderness, light, and wellbeing to a loved one, then to all who have ever shared their struggle. This process continues, expanding the healing, compassionate intention to the communities of Cornell College and Mount Vernon as our designated group care focus, then to all sentient beings before returning to self (Step-by-step details in Appendices B).

This wordless, prayerful approach to both personal and communal healing was not about trying to control outcomes. Also clarified was the difference between healing and cure. We spoke of a relinquished approach to both personal and communal healing involving a “Thy will be done” sensibility of asking for the highest good for all those named and unnamed. The formal practice ended with gratitude for the healing that has already begun, asking that this intention of healing compassion be sealed in Light and Love, and that one may consciously live the day as an instrument and channel of healing peace.

By sending healing, compassionate intention to all who have ever shared similar struggles, the intended outcome was that participants would developed a deeper

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<sup>190</sup> In numerous energy medicine systems of the body like that of Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism the heart is considered the communication center with other beings. For Hinduism, as it is for numerous Western and diverse indigenous traditions, the cave of the heart houses the imminent presence or Spirit of the Eternal.

solidarity, sense of oneness, and a *communio* of compassion with others, including those they judge, fear, or struggled to love. Perhaps this recognition of self in the other would be akin to the mystical experience Saint Francis of Assisi had of oneness with the leper and the crucifix of the wounded Christ amid the rubble remains of the abandoned church, Saint Damiano. Another hunch was that people who have difficulty receiving unconditional love and help—perhaps due to low self-worth, and/or a driven sense of needing to be in charge as giver rather than open receiver of grace—could not get to a place of healing peace until they sensed others who struggle had received healing peace. This was the case when recently using this modality with a female prisoner. After we were done praying, she brought up the topic of how it was only after she sent out compassionate healing intention to loved ones, “enemies,” and others that she was able to reach still point in her mind state and embodied being. It was only then that she was able to sense herself being enveloped with tender mercy, light, and healing peace.

### **The Informal Practice:**

Participants were also assigned a second homework practice. An informal, contemplation-in-action practice was to be carried out every day while in the midst of daily activities and encounters. It is an abbreviated version of the formal practice used during the following occasions:

1. When wanting to prayerfully send healing and compassionate intention to others.
2. When wanting to be a calming, peaceful, healing presence.

3. When noticing the reminder wrist band.<sup>191</sup> Switch arms when doing so in order to help cultivate this spiritual practice as a habit and way of being.
4. When noticing a non life-giving thought pattern. The aim here was to see whether it is possible to gradually shift toward a more gracious, compassionate relationship with self, as well as to all who have ever had this same struggle.
5. When noticing one's body tensing or bracing.
6. When experiencing joy, wonder, and/or gratitude.

## **B. Research Assessment Tools and Method**

Assessment of intended outcomes included quantitative and qualitative methods.

Participants took a baseline survey before the program began. This baseline survey (Survey A) served as a control group for the research project. Participants then took a second survey (Survey B) upon completion of the program, and a third survey (Survey C) one month later (see Appendix C for Surveys A, B, and C). Survey comparisons made it possible to quantitatively measure whether changes occurred over time.

Two hand written qualitative instruments were also used. There was a questionnaire for an eye-gazing exercise taken during Session One (See Appendix D). Note that this data was collected but not analyzed because a) it was less germane, given how that exercise was a one-time introductory teachable moment, and b) I had sufficient data from the four other more relevant instruments. There was also a questionnaire concerning both personal and communal healing taken at the closing session (See Appendix E). In terms of personal healing, participants were asked what, if anything,

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<sup>191</sup> The reminder message on the band read: *Inwardly surrendering – softening – syncing – sending.*

shifted in their relationship with themselves, including any mildly discomforting thought they identified in writing at the start of the program (Appendix F).

### **C. Concerning Measurability of Communal Healing:**

Communal healing was defined in this project as healing relationships with others be they family, friends, co-workers, or community members. All participants were asked to include Cornell College, as well as the Mt. Vernon area community, as part of their daily interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation practice.

While I could not measure whether Cornell College and the Mount Vernon, Iowa community was impacted in healing ways on some spiritual energetic level as a result of our group care focus, I was able to gather measurable evidence on whether participants' feelings and attitudes toward the College and Mount Vernon changed over time. Also measurable was whether the program had any impact on communal healing in terms of participants' overall relationships with family, co-workers, and other forms of communal living.

In order to verify findings regarding the community healing experiments the same question about feelings/attitude toward Cornell and Mt. Vernon was asked four different ways in the baseline and follow up surveys to see if there was consistency of reporting. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence rounded out the study on communal healing by asking questions about day-to-day relationships with relatives, co-workers, or other aspects of communal life.

**D. Concerning Objectivity and The Self-Implicating Nature of This Research Project**

Given the above background information on Cornell and Mount Vernon, and given that I, as researcher, am a member of both communities, I acknowledge the self-implicating nature of my research. Therefore, let me respond to any concern about objectivity and explain the steps I have taken to ensure credibility of findings when gathering and interpreting research evidence.

First, while post-modern scholars and researchers make every effort to ensure objectivity when gathering and interpreting evidence, they also acknowledge that there has never been pure objectivity in academic fields such as history, sociology, religion, and biblical studies. Scholars and researchers in these and other fields have always approached what they are examining through an acknowledged or unacknowledged interpretive lens and thus a bias, which has been shaped by their social-historical context and hence way of viewing the world shaped from that life experience. Moreover, the academic field of spirituality, unlike theology, emphasizes the role of *experience*—not only ideas, thus potentially making evidence seem more slippery or difficult to nail down and interpret.

Second, it could also be argued that as the Deep Abiding program designer, instructor, and researcher, I am trying to influence the experiences of participants whose experience-based responses I am gathering as evidence. Regarding such concerns, I turn to University of California, Santa Barbara and past president of the American Academy of Religion, Ann Taves.<sup>192</sup> Taves notes that it is permissible for research observers—

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<sup>192</sup> Ann Taves, *Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 71; 83-86.

especially within teaching fields of higher education, to influence their subjects. She adds that to ensure bias does not creep into interpretation of evidence use of more than one assessment instrument should be included, as well as another set of eyes to help interpret data. I have done both of these things using multiple instruments and other sets of eyes. Moreover, I worked closely with my dissertation project committee and Cornell College's Department of Institutional Research to ensure design of the three quantitative surveys and the qualitative questionnaire were wisely crafted.

Medical doctor and researcher, Pat Foserelli, M.D. and D.Min., was especially helpful with this design, as was Becki Elkins and Elizabeth Jach in Institutional Research. The College's access to Qualtrics—a web-based survey software company, calculated data from participant responses to each survey. Statistician professor, Ann Cannon, Science librarian, Mary Iber, Consulting and Technical services librarian, Greg Cotton, and Spiritual Life Student Office Manager, Kim Boche, assisted with verification and/or analysis of my comparative survey data and/or analysis for the entire project. Quality assurance was also created by asking multiple versions of questions on the survey pertaining to a specific theme to ensure consistency of responses. Having participants answer the same survey questions over three different periods—a baseline survey (Survey A), a survey taken immediately following the program (Survey B), and one month after the program ended (Survey C) added a layer of more thorough investigation.

Finally, Taves argues that, in the academic field of spirituality, research credibility happens when participant experiences are placed in conversation with experiences a spiritual tradition emphasizes as important. In other words, the experience of participants is not to be looked at as evidence in and of itself. The example she gives

for this involves contemporary research on Buddhist meditation. She says the goal of Buddhist meditation cannot be reduced to private experiences of inner transformation, altered mind states, or mystical experience, no matter how special they are. Using the example of Chan monastic practices, Taves states how the goal is “practical mastery of Buddhahood—the ability to execute, day in and day out...liberated action and speech, and to pass that mastery onto one’s disciples;” the aim is not private, special experiences.<sup>193</sup>

That said, biblical as well as Franciscan and Carmelite traditions on indwelling Spirit and interior prayer have been used as conversation partners for interpreting evidence from research findings. If I have a bias, this selection from among the world’s great contemplative traditions would be it. This was a pragmatic decision. Though wisdom from other Eastern and Western contemplative traditions were included during Deep Abiding learning sessions and are not only part of my own spiritual life as well as my Chaplaincy and Spiritual Life offerings at Cornell, I am using these two Christian mystical traditions and biblical underpinning for the following reasons. First, it is unrealistic to attempt in these limited pages to include all world traditions which utilize contemplative healing through awareness of indwelling and “one-ing” life force/Spirit. Second, Session Four of the Deep Abiding program drew heavily from the life and writings of St. Teresa of Avila. That decision was partially based on my Carmelite-shaped spiritual reading, prayer life, pilgrimage, and resonance with St. Teresa’s struggles, wiring, and path to awareness of union with the Divine throughout the past decade of my life. Third, I trust the appeal of Pope Francis among Christians and non-

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 85.



Christians alike will deepen a desire to learn from the life wisdom of Franciscan Spirituality. In terms of anthropological evidence beyond these Christian mystical traditions, I draw support from the scientific research evidence named in Chapter III.

**E. Participant Wellness, Emotional Support, and Privacy**

A participant observer was present during sessions in the event that an emotionally difficult issue arose that was too overwhelming. All participants were also given names of support services before the first session in the event that such a need occurred. Participants completed informed consent IRB forms before enrolling in the program. Collected data has been kept private and confidential with documents being destroyed after completion and approval of the dissertation.

## CHAPTER V: RESEARCH PROJECT DATA ANALYSIS

### A. INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

This chapter analyzes research data gathered from the Deep Abiding seven-week program. The chapter begins with assessment findings and interpretive conclusions drawn from self-reported participant engagement levels in the program's assigned daily contemplative practice. Analysis then turns to findings specifically related to personal healing, and then to social or communal healing. The chapter ends with two additional assessment findings. The first additional finding involves awareness of indwelling life force energy or Spirit amid work and everyday life. The second finding involves consciousness of inter-connective oneness and a *communio* of love between others, self, creation, and life force energy or Spirit.

Because research credibility in the academic field of spirituality is deepened when participant experiences reflect major teachings of a spiritual tradition,<sup>194</sup> a question to keep in mind while looking at participant responses in this study is whether one can see reoccurring themes or patterns connecting with major themes from Franciscan and Carmelite spirituality as named in Chapter II . Whether data on outcomes from the research project directly reflect major themes of these two contemplative mystical traditions will be more fully established in the concluding chapter.

As was stated in the previous chapter, data was collected through quantitative and qualitative assessment instruments. Quantitative assessment occurred through three surveys which will be referred to throughout this chapter as Survey A, B, and C:

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<sup>194</sup> See reference to Ann Taves in the procedure and methods chapter of this dissertation.

**SURVEY A** = Pre-program baseline survey which also functioned as our control group

**SURVEY B** = Survey completed immediately following the program

**SURVEY C** = Survey completed one month after the program ended

**Qualitative data** was gleaned through repeating themes or patterns found in participant short answer reflections on a questionnaire. The questionnaire was completed during the last of five learning and sharing sessions.

**Here is a review of intended outcomes stated in the Introductory Chapter:**

- Participants cultivate a practice which opens them to both personal and communal healing.
- Participants find that the inner gentle gesture of surrender to indwelling life force energy or Spirit, while in the midst of everyday life activities and encounters, helps them work more skillfully and compassionately with fear and sadness amid the demands, discomforts, and difficulties of life.

Even if participants eventually dropped the fifteen or more minutes of formal practice five or more days a week, the intended outcome was that more than a few participants would continue using the informal contemplation-in-action practice amid daily life activities and encounters.

Finally, implicit, though not specified, within these intended outcomes were the following expectations: participants would learn to live, love, lead, and serve in transformative, healing ways from the inside out. They would do so by consenting to open their minds, bodies, and spirits to cooperate with the grace and flow of life force energy or Spirit working in and through them in loving, liberating, and empowering ways. Moreover, by learning to relax into the healing action of indwelling life force energy or Spirit, they would also be expanding awareness of inter-connective oneness with, and compassion for, other people, including those they may struggle to love. Pre-

and post-program assessment methods were used to measure whether there were increased reports of inter-connective awareness, not only inwardly in terms of a loving, healing, and empowering life force-Spirit, but outwardly with other people and all of creation.

## **B. PARTICIPANT INTEREST AND REPORTED ENGAGEMENT LEVELS**

**Participant interest in the seven week Deep Abiding program and research project exceeded capacity by over 100%.** Fifty-nine inquiries for what was originally designed as 24 participant slots were slimmed to a manageable 30. This intergenerational mix represented students, faculty, staff, faculty/staff life partners, and townspeople from diverse religious, secular, and spiritual-but-not religious backgrounds. This high level of interest, combined with 28 of 30 participants completing this multi-week program including all three assessment surveys, is the first of many indicators that these busy people found this program and its contemplative homework practice to be meaningful, beneficial, and doable.

**All 28 participants (100%) reported using the formal practice weekly, though commitment levels differed.** There were 10 participants (36%) who reported practicing at the requested five or more days a week level for fifteen or more minutes each session. Of the others, 13 participants (46%) reported doing so three to four days a week, and 5 (18%) reported doing so one to two days a week. **One month after the program, all but five of the participants (82%) were still using the formal practice.** I predicted fewer participants would remain this engaged one month after the program ended, due to their busy schedules and lack of group support.

Still, it is necessary to note that the frequency with which participants engaged in the formal practice waned in the time period between the end of the program and one month later when the third survey was taken. According to findings in Survey C, participants reporting they were still using the formal practice five or more days a week dropped from 10 (36%) to 4 (14%). Likewise for those reporting engaging in the formal practice three to four days a week, there was a drop from 13 (46%) to 8 (29%).

As for the typical length of time participants engaged in the formal homework practice throughout the multi-week program (again, the request was a minimum of fifteen minutes), twenty four participants reported the following durations of time on a questionnaire taken the last day they gathered for learning and sharing:

**Table 1. Duration of participant engagement in formal meditation practice**

<u>Average minutes per formal meditation/interior prayer session:</u>	<u># of participants:</u>
I didn't engage in the formal practice	0
1 to 5 minutes	2
6 to 10 minutes	2
11 to 15 minutes	8
16 to 20 minutes	11
over 20 minutes	1

**As for the informal contemplation-in-action practice which occurs while in the midst of everyday life activities and encounters, all but one person (96%) reported using this modality during the multi-week program. One month after the program ended, 100% of participants reported they were using this informal contemplation-in-action practice.**

### **C. INTERPRETIVE CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM PARTICIPANT ENGAGEMENT LEVELS**

To summarize findings thus far, the following forms of evidence support this research project's thesis statement and intended outcomes:

- 1. Initial interest in this program exceeded capacity by over 100%. Moreover, there was strong participant engagement in formal and informal homework practice, as well as a 100% return rate of on-line assessment instruments by the 28 participants, including one month after the program ended. All of this points to interest in, need for, and benefits of this program for our campus community.**
- 2. Ninety-six percent of participants reported using the contemplation-in-action practice which occurs while in the midst of everyday life activities and encounters during the seven week study. Moreover, 100% of participants reported doing so one month after the program ended. This suggests busy people find this practice not only beneficial but doable.**
- 3. One hundred percent of participants engaged in the formal contemplative practice during the program, and only 5 participants (18%) dropped it one month after the program ended; this suggests most participants find the formal practice beneficial and doable, even if only 1-2 times a week.**

Having examined data pertaining to engagement levels in the program, and knowing they offer evidence to support intended outcomes regarding this program being realistically doable by busy people, it is now time to shift attention directly to analysis of data addressing the use of this contemplative program for the purpose of personal healing.

## **D. PERSONAL HEALING**

This section begins with an overview of assessment findings concerning if and when participants turned to this contemplative practice in order to experience personal healing. Analysis then shifts to assessment findings concerning specific kinds of personal healing participants reported, as related to use of this contemplative program and practice. This later analysis is based on a comparison of pre- (Survey A) and post-program (Survey B and C) responses, as well as patterns or themes drawn from their written responses.

### **D.1. Whether and When Participants Used This Practice for Personal Healing**

**When the multi-week program ended, 27 of the 28 participants (96%) reported in Survey B that they were using the Deep Abiding program on a typical week for the purpose of personal healing.** Of participants responding to this survey question, 10 (36%) reported typically using this program five or more days a week for the purpose of personal healing. There were 15 (54%) participants indicating they were doing so three to four times a week; 2 (7%) reported doing so one to two days a week, and 1 (4%) reported never doing so during the program.

Responses to Survey C taken one month after the program ended showed decreases in the frequency with which people turned to this spiritual practice for personal healing. Those initial reports of 10 participants (36%) doing so five or more days a week dropped to 4 (15%), and the 15 (54%) doing so three to four times a week dropped to 10 (37%). The 2 people (7%) who initially reported in Survey A that they did so one to two times a week grew to 11 (41%), and the 1 person reporting they never turned to this

spiritual practice for personal healing grew to 2 (7%).<sup>195</sup> **Still, over all the evidence from Survey C taken one month after the program ended shows that 25 of 27 participants (93%) reported they were still using this practice for personal healing on a weekly basis, even if the frequency of doing so waned.**

What were the occasions when participants sought use of this practice for personal healing? **In terms of the contemplation-in-action informal version of the practice, Table 2 shows that 24 to 25 of participants (85 to 89%) reported using this practice when experiencing fear, disappointment, being unable to control a situation, or when experiencing uncomfortable, non-life-giving thoughts about oneself. The same number of participants was still using this practice for this healing purpose a month after the program ended.** Such consistency is yet another indicator suggesting this contemplative practice helps members of this community personally heal. Specifically, this indicator speaks to helping people relate more skillfully and compassionately to fear and sadness amid the demands, discomforts, and difficulties of life.

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<sup>195</sup> Note that one of the 28 participants failed to answer this question on the third survey.



**Table 2. Occasions when using the informal contemplation-in-action practice**

Answer	Survey B	Survey C
experiencing fear, disappointment, or unable to control a situation.	25 = 89%	25 = 89%
experiencing discomforting and non-life giving thoughts about myself.	24 = 86%	25 = 89%
in need of strength and courage.	22 = 79%	23 = 82%
in need of solace and healing.	20 = 71%	25 = 89%
having a pleasant experience.	17 = 61%	16 = 57%
needing to be prayerful but words aren't working, especially amid tiredness or sorrow.	17 = 61%	17 = 61%
needing to be prayerful amid uncertainty of belief and spiritual questioning.	13 = 46%	12 = 44%
I'm not engaging in this practice at all.	0	0

Another form of evidence comes from **the vast majority of participants reporting they used this contemplative practice when in need of strength and courage. There were 22 or 79% of participants indicating this was so by the end of the program. One month after the program ended, 23 (82%) still using this practice for cultivating strength and courage.**

Another indicator derives from participant reports of using this practice when in need of solace and healing. **At the time the program ended, 20 (71%) of participants said they were using the practice for solace and healing. That increased to 25 (89%) participants one month after the program ended.**

**Over half of participants—17 or 61%—reported using this practice when needing to be prayerful during times when words weren't working, especially amid tiredness and sorrow. The percentage for this evidence held steady over time when surveyed again a month after the program ended.**

Consistency over time was also seen in reports of **using this practice when needing to be prayerful amid uncertainty of belief and need to spiritually question. In Survey B taken immediately following the program, 13 or 46% of participants said they turned to this practice for this purpose. Twelve or 44% responded in this manner in Survey C one month after the program ended.**

Given the number of non-religious people participating in this study, this data may support the conclusion that some agnostics and atheists may still feel need to be “prayerful,” even if they do not have a theistic orientation. In other words, rather than understanding prayer as a flow of energy between a higher power, self, and other people or beings,<sup>196</sup> this data may suggest that people in this study who do not have a belief in God still have need for prayerful receiving and sending of healing intention and energies of love. Then again, even people with theistic sensibilities experience uncertainty of belief as well as the need to spiritually question. Either way, this data may be evidence that this program enables diversely religious and non-religious people to prayerfully sojourn through personal and communal struggles together.

It appears that **over half the participants engaged in interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation not only during times of discomfort and difficulty, but also during pleasant experiences.** In Survey B, 17 or 61% of the participants reported using this wordless “prayerful” awareness amid pleasant experiences. A month after the program ended, 16 or 57% of participants gave this response.

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<sup>196</sup> David Keller, an Episcopal priest and guide in contemplative spirituality, describes prayer as “a flow of energy between God and each human being” which transforms the way people see and related to others and the world. See David Keller, *Come and See: The Transformation of Personal Prayer* (Harrisberg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2009) ix.

The intended outcomes of this research study appear viable thus far. There are multiple pieces of evidence suggesting participants used interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation when in need of personal healing. The next section explores specific kinds of personal healing reported by participants based on survey comparisons over time, as well as participants' written reflections.

#### **D.2. Reported Types of Personal Healing—Quantitative Data:**

When comparing the initial Survey A baseline/control group responses with the Survey B responses taken upon completion of the program, there are numerous across the board indicators of personal healing. **There were 20% to 47% increases in participant responses of “Often” and “Almost Always” for these seven categories:**

- 1. The ability to recognize when one is over-identifying with a non-life giving anxious thought or feeling;**
- 2. The ability to accept and respond to fears, imperfections, or anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy;<sup>197</sup>**
- 3. The ability to experience spiritual solace and strength during times of sorrow, difficulty, or loneliness;**
- 4. The ability to experience one's being housing a peace, tender mercy, and strength greater than my own;**
- 5. The ability to experience self-surrender or relinquishment in life giving ways.**
- 6. Likewise, the ability to experience positive transformation, healing, and new life by loosening the tight grip of trying to remain in control.**

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<sup>197</sup> Working off of Ahlgren's understanding of mercy (page 37), the phrase “tender mercy” used here and elsewhere in this chapter means a compassionate relationship which transformatively comforts, nurtures, sustains, uplifts, heals and empowers.

**7. The ability to ask for help when in need.**

The following Tables show where these 20 to 47% increases in “Often” and “Almost Always” responses<sup>198</sup> specifically occurred in the survey comparisons:

**Table 3 I recognize when I am over-identifying with a non-life giving anxious thought or feeling**

“Often” and “Almost Always”:	Survey A: 16 or 7%	Survey B: 23 or 82%	Survey C: 21 or 75%
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**Table 4 I accept and respond to fears, imperfections, or anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy**

“Often” and “Almost Always”:	Survey A: 5 or 18%	Survey B: 16 or 57%	Survey C: 13 or 46%
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**Table 5 I experience spiritual solace and strength during times of sorrow, difficulty, or loneliness**

“Often” and “Almost Always”:	Survey A: 8 or 28%	Survey B: 14 or 50%	Survey C: 16 or 57%
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**Table 6 I experience my being as housing a peace, tender mercy, and strength greater than my own**

“Often” and “Almost Always”:	Survey A: 3 or 11%	Survey B: 6 or 58%	Survey C: 13 or 46%
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**Self-surrender or relinquishment:**

**Table 7 I experience self-surrender in healing, life giving ways**

“Often” and “Almost Always”:	Survey A: 4 or 14%	Survey B: 14 or 50%	Survey C: 10 = 36%
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<sup>198</sup> For complete data, including “Never” and “Sometimes” responses for Tables 3-9, see Appendix G.

**Table 8 I have experienced a time when loosening my tight grip of trying to remain in control led to positive transformation, healing, and new life.**

“Often” and “Almost Always”:	Survey A: 11 or 40%	Survey B: 17 or 61%	Survey C: 15 or 54%
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**Table 9 It’s hard for me to ask for help.**

“Often” and “Almost Always”	Survey A: 17 or 61% (7 said “Almost Always”)	Survey B: 11 or 40% (3 said “Almost Always”)	Survey C: 10 = 36% (0 said “Almost Always”)
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Increases in “Often” and “Almost Always” responses in Survey A and B

comparisons listed in Table 3-6 above can be summarized as follows:

- **There was an increase from 16 (57%) to 23 (82%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" recognizing when one has over-identified with a non-life giving anxious thought or feeling (Table 3).**
- **There was an increase from 5 (18%) to 16 (57%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" accepting and responding to fears, imperfections, or anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy (Table 4). Also of note from the full set of data on this question: The “Never” responses to the question about being able to accept fears, imperfections, and anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy dropped from 6 (21%) to 0 by the end of the program (See Table 4.1 in Appendix G).**
- **There was an increase from 8 (28%) to 14 (50%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" experiencing spiritual solace and strength during times of sorrow, difficulty, or loneliness (Table 5).**
- **There was an increase from 3 (11%) to 16 (58%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" experiencing ones being as housing a peace, tender mercy, and strength greater than ones own (Table 6).**

**EVIDENCE OF TRANSFORMATIVE HEALING FROM SURRENDER:**

The question about surrender was asked in a few different ways in order strengthen evidence of personal healing as a result of heart centered interior prayer/compassion meditation. Recall that the healing path of surrender was a key in the

theological underpinnings of this project as named in Chapter II in the section on St. Teresa's life and writings (see pages 49-53).

Survey A and B comparisons for Tables 7-9 show evidence which suggests transformative, personal healing occurred as a result of the interior prayer/compassion meditation emphasis upon surrender:

- **There was an increase from 4 (14%) to 15 (50%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" experiencing self-surrender in healing, life giving ways (Table 7).**
- **There was an increase from 11 (40%) to 17 (61%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" experiencing a time when loosening the tight grip of control led to positive transformation, healing, and new life (Table 8).**
- The ability to ask for help when in need—be it from a higher power, or from other people—rather than trying to face difficulties on one's own, can be difficult yet freeing in ways similar to loosening the tight grip of trying to remain in control. Therefore participants were asked about their ability to ask for help. Was that easy or difficult for them? In Survey A, 17 participants (61%) indicated that they “Often” or “Almost always” have difficulty asking for help when in need. While my hunch was that people tend to be hard on themselves, and also prefer to be in the role of the giver rather than receiver of aid, this finding was not surprising yet still unsettling.

It appears that the compassion meditation/interior prayer of the heart practice opened up these individuals' ability to ask for help when in need. **Responses of “Often” or “Almost Always” having difficulty asking for help dropped from 17 (61%) in Survey A to 11 (40%) in Survey B by the time the program ended (Table 9).**

In sum, Survey A and B comparisons of data in Tables 3-9 offer seven indicators or forms of evidence to support the project's thesis and intended outcomes.

But is there evidence that these seven sets of outcomes have staying power? In other words, do Survey A and C comparisons offer evidence to suggest that the Deep Abiding research project continued offering healing benefits one month after the program ended? The answer is yes. **Response comparisons between the “Often” and “Almost**

**Always” responses in Survey A and C show improvements by 18 to 35%. This evidence suggests the possibility that this transformation is sustainable over time as a result of having learned news of way of relating to the demands and difficulties of daily life. Here is a summary of evidence drawn from Survey A and Survey C comparisons:**

- **There was an increase from 16 (57%) to 21 (75%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" recognizing when one has over-identified with a non-life giving anxious thought or feeling (Table 3).**
- **There was an increase from 5 (18%) to 13 (46%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost "Always" accepting and responding to fears, imperfections, or anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy (Table 4).**
- **There was an increase from 8 (28%) to 16 (57%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" experiencing spiritual solace and strength during times of sorrow, difficulty, or loneliness (Table 5).**
- **There was an increase from 3 (11%) to 13 (46%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" experiencing one’s being as housing a peace, tender mercy, and strength greater than ones own (Table 6).**
- **There was an increase from 4 (14%) to 10 (36%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" experiencing self-surrender in healing, life giving ways (Table 7).**
- **There was an increase from 11 (40%) to 15 (54%) in participant reports of "Often" and "Almost Always" experiencing a time when loosening the tight grip of control led to positive transformation, healing, and new life (Table 8).**
- **There was a decrease from 17 (61%) to 10 (35%) in participant reports of “Often” and “Almost Always” finding it difficult to ask for help when in need (Table 9). In terms of only the “Almost Always” responses to this question, they dropped from 7 (25%) in Survey A to 0 (0%) one month after the program ended.**

Examined from another perspective, that is, in terms of how many “Never” responses changed over time, here is additional evidence of personal healing from Survey A and C comparisons (see Tables 3.1-9.1 in Appendix G):

- **Whereas 6 (21%) participants in Survey A reported never being able to accept or respond to fears, imperfections, or anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy, no one answered “never” in Survey C. In other words, one**

**month after the program 100% of participants sometimes, often, or almost always had this healing ability (See Table 4.1).**

- **Whereas 4 (14%) participants in Survey A reported that they had never experienced self-surrender in healing, life giving ways, 100% of participants reported in Survey C that they sometimes, often, or almost always have this healing experience (See Table 7.1).**
- **Whereas 5 (18%) of participants in Survey A reported that they had never experienced a time when loosening the tight grip of trying to remain in control led to positive transformation, healing, or new life, no one answered “Never” in Survey C. 100% of participants had sometimes, often, or almost always had this experience (See Table 8.1).**

### **Reported Increases in Physical Energy or Vitality:**

According to researchers at HeartMath Institute, meditation or interior prayer based on heart-focus, heart-breathing, and heart-feeling (unconditional love) is not so much a relaxing modality as it is revitalizing. This scientific claim is in keeping with remarks by Sts. Clare of Assisi and Teresa of Avila. Both referred to how interior prayer involved opening oneself to the loving, inner embrace of the Divine, which grants an empowering strength.

That said, I wanted to know whether this research would find the healing benefits of heart-focused meditation/interior prayer also resulting in increased physical energy levels. Self-reporting by Deep Abiding participants did just that. Participants were asked to mark a point on the computerized sliding scale indicating how they felt in terms of physical vitality levels in the past month (0 = low; 100 = high). Before the program began, the Qualtrics web-based survey software calculated that **our group profile was at a 55% physical energy or vitality level. By the end of the program, the group profile jumped to 71%. One month later, that level dipped back down to 65% yet**



**remained higher than initial self-reporting.** While I cannot pinpoint this increase as only being the result of the Deep Abiding program and not some other influence such as the shifting from winter to spring weather, these observations are duly noted.

**Table 10. Your physical energy or vitality level—the way you’ve usually felt in the past month—not just how you are feeling right now (scale: 0=low 100=high)**

Survey A: 54.9%	Survey B: 70.93%	Survey C: 65.21%
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A statistician colleague suggested that, for greater accuracy, I should compare each individual’s pre- and post-program profile by hand. Doing so still revealed increases in vitality levels. **In Survey B taken immediately following the program, 17 or 61% of participants self-reported a point on the scale 10 to 30 points higher than their baseline answer. Of those 17 participants, 10 (36%) gave answers that increased by at least 30 points, and 3 other participants gave answers that increased by approximately 20 points.** One month after the program ended, 18 of the 28 participants (64%) still reported increases in their physical energy level when compared to pre-program levels. Of these, there were 9 participants reporting 31-48 points higher on the scale compared to their own baseline reporting.

**D.3. More evidence of Personal Healing from Qualitative Data:**

Twenty-seven participants filled out a short answer questionnaire during the final learning and sharing session. First, they were asked whether the Deep Abiding program contributed in any way to personal healing wisdom, spiritual growth, or other related insights. That was to include, though not be limited to, a mildly uncomfortable habitual thought pattern or self-criticism participants identified at the start of the program.

**In response to the question about whether the program contributed to personal healing wisdom, spiritual growth, or other related insights, 25 of the 27 participants (93%) present for session five answered “yes.”** One participant answered “not sure,” and one other participant answered “sort of.” Participants were then asked to write an explanation of their answers. When looking for repeating themes or patterns of experiences, six categories stood out—categories which look similar to the spiritual wisdom teachings of Sts. Clare, Francis, and Teresa. Here are examples of responses for these six categories:

- **Increased ability to graciously forgive and accept with tender mercies their human limitations, vulnerabilities, fears and other discomforting thoughts and feelings (otherwise known as spiritual poverty):**

*I am often frustrated about many parts of myself, but during this program I have been more aware of these critical feelings and better at disarming them. I have not cried, except in reaction to a film, since [the] beginning of the program, when usually I would have cried once every 2 or 3 weeks out of feelings of low self-esteem and concern about classes.*

*I have always been much more forgiving and understanding of others than of myself. I feel like I'm starting to be a little softer in my own expectations for myself.*

*I allow myself more space to make mistakes and not be so critical of self. I'm more willing to give myself the same considerations I give friends.*

*I am now more aware of any negative thoughts, and am capable of talking myself out of being angry from those thoughts. I can calm myself down when I'm worried or stressed out. I have less mood swings. (Because of all these, I am happier around others & have better relationships w/ others.)*

*The concept of inner-surrender has helped me accept my past as the past and allow myself to be present with my feeling, specifically when talking and thinking about my mother.*

*This has in some ways brought more of those habitual issues to light...But more importantly a tool or “friend” to help deal with it and also the empowerment of dealing with it and self-mercy.*

*Becoming at peace with the way I am has helped me see what ambitions truly drive me. My actions sometimes surprised me but now I know why I originally did them.*

*...this loving attention helped me to consider how I manifest my character—the processes through which I become who I am—instead of considering only my behavior.*

*I recognize that who I am is not determined by a deadline or a mistake. I have more to offer, as a human being.*

- **Increased tranquility, inner peace, and ability to calm when in uncomfortable or difficult situations:**

*[It] introduced me to an alternative way to approach myself, and a more gentle perspective with which to see my life. Peace with discomfort.*

*When I get out of balance, I get back to peace and calm quicker. I am no longer “fixed” on what is a problem issue in my life.*

*I feel like I have given myself permission to breathe, to pause and to reflect. Even if it is only for a few seconds. This re-captured time has...brought inner peace into my life.*

*I found mini-meditation useful throughout the day to bounce me back from Seasonal Affective Disorder.*

*Greater hope & calm in the face of turmoil & doubts.*

*I was locked out of the house...homeless, yet at home everywhere in the presence of the Lord....*

- **Letting go or loosening the tight grip of trying to remain in control:**

*My relationship with myself has changed with this program. I am in a better position to be able to show myself compassion. I wanted to work on my perception that I had to be responsible for things and others. After concentrating attention, I was able to see this was actually control. I needed to loosen my*

*control or perceived control over happenings in my life. This is becoming a practice and is helping me allow more things to be—including myself.*

*I will use co-workers as an example. When harsh words have been spoken, I have been able to breathe and refocus, just enough to calm down and let go. The letting go part has been substantial. Prior to these sessions it would have been penned up for days, weeks.*

- **Increased patience with self:**

*I've found that I'm more patient with myself, and I take more time to just breathe. I forgive myself more often. I put things in perspective better.*

*I was able to practice patience with myself, and even comfort myself to some extent, through meditation and silence.*

- **Increased self-worth (also see evidence listed under first bullet point):**

*It has given me the courage to feel good about who I am (at least some of the time)...*

- **Healthy boundaries and ability to stand up for oneself [see similar category under communal healing]:**

*I...now have the courage to stand up for myself and stop putting everyone before me. I have cut myself away from a harmful relationship as well.*

#### **D.4. Interpretive Conclusions Pertaining to Personal Healing:**

From the data analysis named above, there is consistent evidence suggesting the Deep Abiding program and its contemplative practice grounded in an inner gentle gesture of surrender to, and cooperation with, indwelling life force-Spirit contributes to personal healing.

This evidence can be summarized as follows:

- 1. In Survey B, 27 of 28 participants (96%) reported that they were using the Deep Abiding program for personal healing (p. 97).**

**Twenty-five of 27 (93%) in Survey C reported they were still doing so on a weekly basis for personal healing one month after the program ended (p. 98).**

- 2. Participants cited seven occasions when they turn to this contemplative practice for personal healing (Table 2, pp. 99-101).**
- 3. There were seven questions asked of participants which resulted in consistent, across the board increases when comparing the Survey A baseline/pre-program responses with Survey B responses given immediately after the program ended (pp. 101-109). There was a 20%-47% increase in the number of people reporting “Often” and “Almost Always” for these topics:**
  - The ability to recognize when one is over-identifying with a non-life giving anxious thought or feeling;**
  - The ability to accept and respond to fears, imperfections, or anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy;**
  - The ability to experience spiritual solace and strength during times of sorrow, difficulty, or loneliness;**
  - The ability to experience one’s being housing a peace, tender mercy, and strength greater than one’s own.**
  - The ability to experience self-surrender or relinquishment in life giving ways.**
  - The ability to experience transformative healing and new life through loosening the tight grip of trying to remain in control.**
  - The ability to ask for help when in need.**
- 4. One month after the program ended, these seven indicators still showed signs of increases in the “Often and “Almost Always” categories by 18%-35% according to Survey A and C comparisons (pp. 104-106).**
- 5. Whereas some participants indicated in Survey A that they were a) never able to accept and respond to personal fears, imperfections, and**

**anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy;<sup>199</sup> b) never experience self-surrender and letting go of trying to control in healing, life giving ways; and c) almost always found it hard to ask for help when in need, 100% of participants reported being able to do all three things to some degree one month after the program ended (pp. 105-106).**

- 6. Evidence of increased physical energy or vitality levels in most participants when compared to the baseline survey (pp. 106-107).**
- 7. Hand written responses on a questionnaire revealed 25 of 27 participants reporting personal healing as a result of this program and its contemplative practices (the other two participants said “unsure” or “sort of”). From their explanations or examples, there were repeating themes or patterns of personal healing (107-109). As will be clarified in the concluding chapter, many of these themes are consistent with the wisdom of Christian contemplatives Sts. Clare, Francis, and Teresa:**
  - A humble, gentle acceptance of one’s spiritual poverty. In other words, a long, loving look at one’s life circumstances, human limitations, imperfections, pain, vulnerabilities, and failures with non-aggression and compassion. This includes the ability to recognize, accept, soften, and disarm with tender mercies one’s fears and other unpleasant non-life giving thoughts, feelings, self-criticisms, as well as ego-mind’s desire to be accepted and/or esteemed by others.**
  - Increased ability to surrender the need to remain in control. This is not giving up or giving in but a relaxing of ego-mind aversions and grasping in life giving, healing ways.**
  - Greater inner peace, solace, strength, and ability to calm when in uncomfortable or difficult situations.**
  - Increased ability to forgive and have patience with oneself.**
  - Increased self-love and self-worth.**
  - Increased ability to establish healthy boundaries in both pleasant and unpleasant relationships; includes the ability to stand up for oneself.**

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<sup>199</sup> See definition in fn 191.

As will be seen in the next section, much of the above evidence of outcomes pertaining to personal healing through compassion-based contemplative practice works in tandem with an awareness of mutuality and solidarity with others, and their own interior and exterior struggles. A *communio* of love between the individual, indwelling life force-Spirit, and others results from this heightened unitive consciousness—a claim that will become clearer as we turn to research on communal healing.

### **E. COMMUNAL HEALING**

Communal healing and social healing are terms used interchangeably throughout this project. Communal or social healing concerns healing relationships between lives that knowingly and unknowingly are linked one to the other. On the local human level, communal or social healing involves healing within relationships among family members, friends, co-workers, roommates, neighbors, and organization or community members on both an individual and collective scale. As was stated in the Introduction, though I was not able to measure whether communal healing happened on some energetic, spiritual level, I was able to report whether people's attitudes or feelings towards others changed from the period right before the program began to when the program ended.

As was done for the section on personal healing, the following analysis begins by looking at whether participants used interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation for the purpose communal or social healing. It explores participant reports of the occasions in which they turned to this contemplative practice in order to send healing, compassionate intention to others, or for some other form of communal healing. This

section analyzes data drawn from two community healing experiments: one involving Cornell College and another, the community of Mount Vernon, Iowa. It then looks at repeating themes or patterns drawn from written statements by participants who describe the kinds of communal healing and related insights they have acquired as a result of this spiritual program and practice. As with the above section on personal healing, one can listen for echoes of spiritual healing wisdom themes named by Sts. Francis and Clare of Assisi, and St. Teresa of Avila.

### **E.1. Evidence of Whether and When Participants Used Interior Prayer of Heart/Meditation for Communal Healing**

What were the occasions in which participants sought use of this practice for communal healing including outside their formal contemplative homework practice? As can be seen in Table 11 and will be spelled out below, participants reported using this spiritual practice for communal healing in a variety of circumstances.



**Table 11. I dip back into this practice amid daily life when (mark ALL that apply):**

Answer	Survey B	Survey C
Wanting to send healing, gratitude, respect, or compassionate intention to someone.	24 = 86%	23 = 85%
Wanting to be a healing presence.	24 = 86%	22 = 81%
Wanting to experience moments like hearing an ambulance, seeing someone struggle, or witnessing suffering in the news.	20 = 71%	16 = 59%
Wanting to send healing and compassionate intention to those who trouble me.	20 = 71%	19 = 70%
Wanting to send healing and compassionate intention to people passing by or in a public space (i.e. while in meetings, class, restaurants, the Commons, airports, or while walking on the Ped Mall).	11 = 39%	15 = 56%
I'm not engaging in this practice at all.	0 = 0%	0 = 0%

The following evidence can be drawn from Table 11 above:

- **First, according to survey results, 100% of participants reported that they were engaging in this practice. That includes responses given one month after the program ended.** These data, and the consistency of this data over time, in itself is key evidence suggesting participants found the program and its contemplative practice to be beneficial for communal or social healing.
- **Second, the vast majority of participants (24 or 86%) reported on surveys taken at the end of the seven-week program that they were engaging in this practice for communal healing purposes by sending healing, gratitude, respect, or compassionate intention to others.**
- **Third, survey results showed this same response level in terms of people using the practice in order to be a healing presence for others**
- **Noteworthy is the percentage of participants in Survey B (20 or 71%) who used this practice to send healing, compassionate intention to those who trouble them.** Based on Survey B results and informal comments made during learning and sharing sessions, **it appears that this forgiving, gracious gesture of loving kindness was a natural outflow of**

**this contemplative practice.**

**One month after the program ended, only one less participant (19 or 70%) reported that he or she was sending healing, compassionate intention to those who trouble them.** Traditionally Tonglen loving kindness meditation includes sending healing, compassionate intention to people who upset them. Instructions for the Deep Abiding program did not specifically ask for this step because time was needed for participants to focus upon the two communal healing experiments involving Cornell College and Mount Vernon communities. Still, it is possible to conclude that Cornell/Mount Vernon served the role of someone or something that troubled or frustrated participants, though handwritten data suggests family members and other possibilities as well.

- **The same levels of engagement (20 or 71%) occurred when participants wanted to prayerfully send healing, compassion intention to someone or some situation in a state of duress, such as, hearing an ambulance or witnessing suffering on the evening news.**
- **Smaller numbers of participants (11 or 39% in Survey B and 15 or 56% in Survey C) reported using this practice when wanting to send healing, compassionate intention to people passing by, be it while walking on the campus Ped Mall or in other public settings.**

## **E.2. Quantitative Evidence from Two Communal Healing Experiments:**

All 28 participants were assigned the homework task of using the program's heart-based contemplative practice in order to send healing energies of love to Cornell College and to the greater Mt. Vernon Community area at least five days a week, as part of our group care focus.

In order to verify whether interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation helped heal relationship with Mt. Vernon and Cornell College communities, a survey question about attitudes or feelings toward these communities was posed in multiple different ways. The rationale was to capture possible consistencies or variations so as to strengthen research findings.

Responses for the Mt. Vernon healing experiment were only collected from 15 local, non-student area residents who have lived here since the Fall of 2010. The rationale was that these participants would likely have deeper understanding of this small town's adversities, as well as stronger emotions and relational attitudes toward the community, either positively or negatively. Likewise, responses for the Cornell College healing experiment were only given to Cornell students, faculty, staff, and faculty/staff partners or spouses for the same reason as the Mount Vernon experiment. Note that data on 3 of the 20 Cornell participants had to be removed from this analysis, due to their incomplete reporting for all five questions in all three surveys. That left data on 17 participants for the college-focused community healing experiment.

#### **E.2.a. Communal Experiment with the Mount Vernon Community:**

Survey A consistently shows how even before the Deep Abiding program began, most Mount Vernon area residents participating in this study reported "Often" or "Almost Always" having positive feelings towards the community of Mount Vernon. There were only 4 or 27% of participants reporting they "Often" or "Almost Always" experienced disappointment, sadness, or conflict with Mount Vernon—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as a city in the past six months. When asked about present, over all feelings toward Mount Vernon before the program began, 12 or 80% of participants answered "Positive" or "Very Positive."

These consistently high levels of positive feelings toward the Mount Vernon community before the Deep Abiding program began made gathering evidence of any changes which resulted from the contemplative practice difficult to decipher. In other

words, any increases in participant reports of positive feelings toward Mount Vernon drawn from Survey A and Survey B comparisons would be minimal. On the other hand, there are multiple, consistent, across the board increases of a positive relational nature.

Data drawn from all five forms of inquiry on participant attitudes or feelings toward Mount Vernon increased by the time the program ended (Tables 12-16).<sup>200</sup>

**Table 12. Since the Fall of 2010\* I’ve had positive feelings toward Mount Vernon—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as a city.**

	<u>Survey A</u>	<u>Survey B</u>	<u>Survey C</u>
Never	0 = 0%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%
Sometimes	4 = 27%	2 = 13%	2 = 13%
Often	7 = 47%	10 = 67%	9 = 60%
Almost Always	4 = 27%	3 = 20%	4 = 27%

**Table 13. Since Fall 2010\* I have experienced disappointment, sadness, or conflict with Mount Vernon—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as a city.**

	<u>Survey A</u>	<u>Survey B</u>	<u>Survey C</u>
Never	3 = 20%	1 = 6%	3 = 20%
Sometimes	8 = 53%	12 = 80%	11 = 73%
Often	4 = 27%	2 = 13%	1 = 6%
Almost Always	0 = 0%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%

**Table 14. Since the Fall of 2010\* I have experienced feelings of healing peace and compassion toward Mount Vernon—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as a city.**

	<u>Survey A</u>	<u>Survey B</u>	<u>Survey C</u>
Never	1 = 6%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%
Sometimes	8 = 53%	7 = 47%	6 = 40%
Often	5 = 33%	6 = 40%	7 = 47%
Almost Always	1 = 6%	2 = 13%	2 = 13%

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<sup>200</sup> Again, please note that data only includes non-student Mount Vernon area residents living here since the Fall of 2010. It also does not include data from people who failed to complete all five communal healing related questions in all three surveys.

**Table 15. At present, my overall feelings toward Mount Vernon—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as a city are best described as:**

	<u>Survey A</u>	<u>Survey B</u>	<u>Survey C</u>
Not Positive	0 = 0%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%
Somewhat	3 = 20%	0 = 0%	2 = 13%
Positive	8 = 53%	10 = 67%	10 = 66%
Positive Very Positive	4 = 27%	5 = 33%	3 = 20%

**Table 16. I prayerfully send healing peace and compassionate intention to Mount Vernon—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as a city.**

	<u>Survey A</u>	<u>Survey B</u>	<u>Survey C</u>
Never	4 = 27%	0 = 0%	2 = 13%
Sometimes	7 = 47%	5 = 33%	7 = 47%
Often	4 = 27%	7 = 47%	3 = 20%
Almost Always	0 = 0%	3 = 20%	3 = 20%

As can be seen, the most change in attitude tracked through comparisons of Survey A and Survey B is seen in the inquiry about overall feelings toward the community (Table 15). Original baseline responses showed 3 participants (20%) having “somewhat positive” feelings toward Mount Vernon before the program; by the time the program ended, all 15 or 100% of participants reported having “Positive” to “Very Positive” feelings toward the community. In the four other attitudinal inquiries, there were 2 additional participants reporting responses of a positive relational nature. When asked how often they experienced feelings of healing peace and compassion toward Mount Vernon, its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as a city (Table 14), there was an increase from 6 (40%) to 8 (53%) participants answering “Often” and “Almost Always.” When asked if they have had positive feelings toward Mount Vernon (Table 12), there was an increase from 11 (73%) to 13 (87%) answering “Often” or “Almost Always.” When asked about being disappointed, saddened, or in conflict with

Mount Vernon, its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as a city (Table 13), there was a drop from 4 (27%) to 2 (13%) answering “Often” or “Almost Always.” Finally, when asked how often participants send healing peace and compassionate intention to Mount Vernon, its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as a city (Table 16), there was an increase of 2 people (6 or 40% verses pre-program levels of 4 or 27%) still doing so “Often” or “Almost Always” a month after the program ended.<sup>201</sup> Moreover, there was a decrease of 2 participants reporting that they never engage in this practice.

To summarize, there were consistent, across the board increases of a positive relational nature in the Mount Vernon communal healing experiment. **At first the consistency of findings would appear to suggest intended outcomes occurred in the Mount Vernon community experiment on the use of interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation for the purpose of transformative communal healing. However, initially high levels of positive feelings toward the Mount Vernon community made for small scale before/after attitudinal changes of a positive nature. In other words, the numbers are small, thereby making generalizations tricky.**

#### **E.2.b. Communal or Social Healing Experiment with Cornell College**

Unlike the Mount Vernon communal healing experiment, fewer people went into the Cornell focused experiment with positive to very positive feelings toward Cornell due

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<sup>201</sup> Survey one and two comparisons show an increase from 4 (27%) to 10 (67%) of participants “Often” or “Almost Always” engaging in this practice however, because this practice was part of the programs homework practice such an increase is to be expected). All participants reported engaging in this practice in survey two.

to financial or other reasons. While one never wants there to be anything less than positive feelings towards a college, in this instance having fewer people with positive or very positive feelings in the base-line survey (Survey A) meant it would be easier to measure the degree to which there were any positive attitudinal changes as a result of this contemplative program.

As was previously mentioned, the inquiry about feelings or attitudes toward the college was asked multiple times in different ways in order to see if there would be consistent increases of a positive nature. If such consistencies occurred, there would be greater credibility or evidence to support the project's thesis statement and intended outcomes concerning the use of interior prayer/compassion meditation for communal healing.

**The following assessment reveals five out of five consistent sets of across the board increases in positive attitudes toward Cornell** when comparing participant responses to the baseline pre- program survey (Survey A) with the responses given at the end of the multi-week Deep Abiding program (Survey B). Tables 17-21 contain that data with an analysis and explanation of this evidence spelled out below.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Again, data analysis only included responses gathered from students, faculty, staff, and faculty/staff life partners. Moreover, anyone failing to complete all five communal healing related questions in all three surveys had their entire data set eliminated from survey comparison analysis.

**Table 17. In the past six months I've had positive feelings toward Cornell College—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as an institution.**

	<u>Survey A</u>	<u>Survey B</u>	<u>Survey C</u>
Never	0 = 0%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%
Sometimes	6 = 35%	4 = 24%	6 = 26%
Often	9 = 53%	9 = 53%	8 = 58%
Almost Always	2 = 12%	4 = 24%	3 = 16%

**Table 18. In the past six months I have experienced feelings of healing peace and compassion toward Cornell College—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as an institution.**

	<u>Survey A</u>	<u>Survey B</u>	<u>Survey C</u>
Never	4 = 24%	0 = 0%	1 = 5%
Sometimes	8 = 47%	7 = 41%	9 = 53%
Often	5 = 29%	7 = 41%	3 = 18%
Almost Always	0 = 0%	3 = 18%	4 = 24%

**Table 19. In the past six months I have experienced disappointment, sadness, or conflict with Cornell College—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as an institution.**

	<u>Survey A</u>	<u>Survey B</u>	<u>Survey C</u>
Never	1 = 6%	0 = 0%	2 = 12%
Sometimes	6 = 35%	9 = 53%	11 = 64%
Often	10 = 59%	7 = 41%	4 = 24%
Almost Always	0 = 0%	1 = 6%	0 = 0%

**Table 20. At present, my overall feelings toward Cornell College—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as an institution—are best described as:**

	<u>Survey A</u>	<u>Survey B</u>	<u>Survey C</u>
Not Positive	1 = 6%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%
Somewhat Pos.	7 = 41%	2 = 12%	3 = 18%
Positive	7 = 41%	10 = 59%	9 = 53%
Very Positive	2 = 12%	5 = 29%	5 = 29%



**Table 21. I prayerfully send healing peace and compassionate intention to Cornell College—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as an institution.**

	<u>Survey A</u>	<u>Survey B</u>	<u>Survey C</u>
Never	7 = 41%	1 = 6%	2 = 12%
Sometimes	7 = 41%	7 = 41%	9 = 53%
Often	3 = 18%	4 = 24%	4 = 24%
Almost Always	0 = 0%	5 = 29%	2 = 12%

**EIGHT FORMS OF QUANTITATIVE EVIDENCE:**

There are eight forms of quantitative evidence that communal healing occurred in the Cornell focused contemplative research study.

1. The first of the five inquiries in the pre- and post-program surveys (Tables 17-21) asked participants whether in the past six months they had positive feelings toward the College—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as an institution (Table 17). This was the weakest of the five inquiries in terms of measurable increases between Survey A and Survey B responses, but they were increases. **The “Often” and “Almost Always” responses to this question grew modestly from 11 (65%) in the Survey A pre-program inquiry to 13 or 77% in Survey B** taken at the time the program ended. Because this is a small increase, this data can serve as evidence if the other inquiries show consistent, as well as stronger, measurable increases in positive attitudes toward the college.
2. **When participants were asked how often they experienced feelings of healing peace and compassion toward Cornell College in the past six months, the “Often” and “Almost Always” responses doubled** (Table 18). The number of

participants giving these higher level responses of a positive relational nature grew from 5 (29%) of the 17 participants in the baseline survey to 10 (59%) by the end of program.

3. A third inquiry asked participants how often in the past six months had they experienced disappointment, sadness, or conflict with Cornell College—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as an institution (Table 19).

**Comparisons of Survey A and B show a 50% decrease over time in these feelings of disappointment, sadness, or conflict.** Whereas Survey A shows 10 or 59% of participants “Often” and “Almost Always” feeling disappointment, sadness, or conflict with the College, those figured decreased to 8 or 47% in Survey B then to only 4 or 24% in Survey C a month after the program ended.

4. Participants were asked how best to describe their present overall feelings toward Cornell College—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as an institution (Table 20). **Whereas 9 or 53% of participants answered “Positive” and “Very Positive” before the program began, Survey B shows 15 or 88% of participants reporting “Positive” and “Very Positive” feelings toward Cornell by the end of the program. According to Survey C, one month after the program ended there was little change. Overall positive feelings toward the College one month after the program held steady with 14 or 82% compared to Survey A’s baseline of 9 or 53% of participants reporting “Positive” and “Very Positive.”**

5. Because the prayerful sending of healing peace and compassionate intention to Cornell was part of the formal homework practice, it was predicted that the inquiry about this topic would naturally result in a dramatic increase in “Often” and “Almost Always” responses when comparing Survey A and Survey B. Because it was part of the homework practice, the tripling in the number of people (from 3 or 18% to 9 or 53%) who indicated they “Often” or “Almost Always” send healing, compassionate intention to Cornell should not be used as evidence of increased positive feelings toward the College. However, what was not predicted was Survey C’s finding on the number of people continuing to sending healing, compassionate intention to Cornell a month after the program ended (Table 21). Whereas 7 participants (41%) reported in the baseline survey (Survey A) that they never prayerfully sent healing peace and compassionate intention to Cornell, its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as an institution, only 2 people (12%) in Survey C reported they never do. **In other words, though they were not asked to do so, one month after the program ended, 88% of participants were still sending healing, compassionate intention to Cornell—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as an institution.**

Other Survey A and Survey C comparisons reveal additional evidence of increased positive feelings toward the College. In the first inquiry on both Survey A and Survey C (“In the past six months I’ve had positive feelings toward Cornell College...” with the answer choices of Never, Sometimes, Often, and Almost Always), 11 participants indicated “Often” or “Almost Always” experiencing positive feelings toward

Cornell in the past six months (Table 17). Yet this was the only inquiry of the five Survey A and Survey B comparisons which did not show increased positive feelings toward the College when comparing baseline and one month out post-program surveys. Here are those additional forms of evidence:

6. There were 7 participants (42%) in Survey C compared to the 5 (29%) in Survey A reporting “Often” or “Almost Always” experiencing feelings of healing peace and compassion toward Cornell in the past six months (Table 18).
7. **There were 4 participants (24%) in Survey C compared to the initial 10 (59%) in Survey A reporting “Often” or “Almost Always” experiencing disappointment, sadness, or conflict with Cornell in the past six months (Table 19).**
8. **There were 14 participants (82%) in Survey C compared to the initial 9 (53%) in Survey A reporting present, overall “Positive” and “Very Positive” feelings toward Cornell (Table 20).**

In summary, quantitative data suggests transformative communal healing through the use of interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation occurred in the Cornell College-focused experiment. **There were eight consistent increases of a positive relational nature in participant responses to inquiries regarding feelings or attitudes toward the College. We see this when comparing the pre-program base-line responses (Survey A) with survey responses taken immediately following the program (Survey B) and with responses given one month after the program ended (Survey C).**

### **E.3. Qualitative Evidence of Communal Healing:**

Participants filled out questionnaires during the final learning and sharing session.

**Of the 27 participants present, 100% indicated that the Deep Abiding program and its practice contributed to spiritual growth, healing wisdom, or other insights in terms of their relationships with others, be they family, co-workers, friends, or community members.**

Participants were then asked to give examples of their responses. Their written reflections resulted in the following repeating themes, categories, or patterns:

- **Helped me be a calming, peaceful, and positive influence on others:**

*...my friends who notice that I've been calmer & at peace regardless of difficult situations have become interested in meditation. I'm more positive & serving as a positive influence to my close friends.*

*I have a much better relationship with the person I have been "praying" for, and I am aware of how I can be a tranquil center of the family. (Not that often—but it is a possibility.) I can teach others to be like ducks and let the water just run off our backs.*

- **Healthier and happier relationships. Includes the ability to forgive and to extend gracious compassion, partly based on self-knowledge of one's own struggles and flaws. Also the unpredicted increased ability to establish healthier boundaries:**

*I could see my partner's temper more easily as temper, not as character or identity, and that helped me to forgive and not react.*

*I see where my thoughts turn negative and I've chosen to let those go and offer kindness instead. I'm more tolerant of the "quirk" of others these days (as well as my own.)*

*More so than before the program began, I notice the intentions of my loved ones rather than their outward actions. This helps me know that although they may be harsh or callous, they want the best for me.*

*One night when my girlfriend let a bunch of skeletons out of the closet, and this is usually unsettling for me. I have a tendency to try and empathize. But this time I was able to just be with her—which I think was more healthy for me and helpful to her.*

*[The program has] given me more patience for my family members, [and] more important,[it's] given me the strength to put myself first in many ways that I had never done before.*

- **Similar to the above, yet an increased understanding of, sense of mutuality with, and tender mercy toward others in such a way that one experiences a oneness, solidarity, or a *communio* of love. For some this includes an increased desire to serve:**

*I think a habit of self- and world- awareness, plus a little basic love, helped me to first recognize and then forgive myself, my partner, my world, our struggles and flaws.*

*Primarily how much more room for compassion and service and most importantly trusting in others there is in my life/habits. Also allowing us all to make mistakes with less judgment, more compassion/empathy.*

*I feel more aware that we all have so much richness in strife. In our group practice (and on MP3)<sup>203</sup> when Catherine's voice says "Send healing to all those who have ever endured this struggle" – it swamps me with a rush of compassion – and in practicality reminds me that certainly many have indeed struggled with the same.*

*...heart-centered meditation allows me to feel the unity between myself and others resulting in compassion through that realization.*

*I have been able to be more present in my interactions with others—Building acceptance and almost a curiosity toward my experiences with others. I have allowed myself—and try to continue to—remain open to potentialities. This was hindered I think by my 'control' as discussed above. I am better able at being a wise observer and then interactor in my world. It's pretty surreal.*

*I really found myself feeling more empathy rather than judgment through this process. I noticed that my heart felt lighter after meditating, and that also translated into being more patient and compassionate with others outside of the practice. I would check myself more frequently and stop myself from making judgments.*

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<sup>203</sup> An audio recording was not part of the original design of this program. A participant asked for it, so a voice recording was emailed to participants as an option.

*Besides helping me with my mother, I developed feelings of community with Mount Vernon people b/c of the group meditation.*

*By showing tender mercy to myself, I can now try to do the same towards others. I feel “kinder.”*

*I’m more patient with others. I have more energy and compassion to spend on them.*

*My relationship with my older sister has been strained for a very long time. Since beginning this program, I have felt more patient and more accepting. This has helped me to minimize the feelings of frustration that arise when I interact with my sister, and I’m sure it has been beneficial to that relationship. In addition, I have sent healing peace to all my family members during my meditations, which has put my feelings of love and consideration for them more at the forefront of my mind.*

*Also, the choice or ability to believe—or to suspend disbelief that our tender mercy energy can be “communicated” or transferred, to others we care for.*

#### **E.4. Interpretive Conclusions Pertaining to Communal Healing**

In summary, there are multiple and consistent quantitative forms of evidence as well as ample qualitative evidence which point to the thesis statement and intention outcomes of this study concerning the use of interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation for communal or social healing. This evidence includes the following:

- 1. Participant reports of turning to this contemplative practice in order to prayerfully assist with the healing wholeness of others, even when they are engaged in everyday life activities and encounters.**
- 2. Eight forms of evidence from the Cornell College community healing experiments.**
- 3. 100% of responses on a questionnaire indicated this program and its contemplative practice contributed to spiritual growth, healing wisdom, and other related insights pertaining to their relationships with others, be they family, co-workers, friends, or community members.**

**4. Repeating themes or patterns found in participant’s written reflections.**

These combined forms of evidence suggest that interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation may:

- **Help people be a calming, peaceful, and positive influence on others.**
- **Help people experience healing through forgiveness and the extending of gracious compassion to others, including those they may struggle to love**
- **Help cultivate healthier and happier relationships.**
- **Help increase the ability to establish healthy personal and social boundaries amid caring community.**
- **Provide increased understanding of, sense of mutuality with, and tender mercy toward others in such a way that one experiences a oneness, solidarity, or a *communio* of love.**

**F. AWARENESS OF INTER-CONNECTIVE ONENESS WITH INDWELLING SPIRIT AND ALL BEINGS**

Behind this project’s intended outcomes were several implied assumptions drawn from Christian mystical tradition including from the writings and lived experience of Sts. Francis, Clare, and Teresa of Avila. Inquiries related to these implied assumptions were included in the survey instruments. I wanted to know the following:

1. Is there evidence suggesting participants increased consciousness of, and cooperation with, the grace and flow of Indwelling Spirit amid everyday life activities and work?
2. Is there evidence suggesting participants not only cultivated a sense of inter-connective oneness or unitive consciousness between self and indwelling life force-Spirit but also with other people and creation? Did this awareness of interconnectivity deepen a sense of solidarity, mutuality, and a *communio* of



compassion between others, world, self, and the Sacred?

In order to measure whether participants were learning to be attentive and cooperative with the grace and flow of indwelling life force-Spirit amid their daily work and activities as a result of the Deep Abiding program, three questions of a related nature were asked on the pre-and post-program surveys (Tables 22, 23, and 24). As was stated in an earlier chapter, mind-body-spirit practices were used throughout Deep Abiding learning sessions and the informal homework practice in order to help cultivate this consciousness. Moreover, participants were taught St. Teresa of Avila's life wisdom and writings on this subject. Parallel insights were also shared from Bede Griffith's writings, the *Bhagavad Gita*, athletic experience of being in a relaxed state of "flow," what Taoism speaks of as *wu-wei* or effortless effort, and other inter-spiritual wisdom on letting God within do the work. Historic leaders such as Emperor Marcus Aurelius and Dag Hammarskjöld were also given as examples of leading from within (See Session 4: Contemplation-In-Action in Appendix A). Other teachings showed how an inner gesture of surrender to indwelling Spirit, while in the midst of activities and work, can infuse people with grace, power, courage, and the ability to avoid burnout (again, see Session 4, Appendix A).

#### **EVIDENCE OF CONSCIOUS COOPERATION WITH INDWELLING SPIRIT:**

What were the findings when looking at survey comparisons for these three questions?

As can be seen in the tables below, **the number of people indicating that they were "Often" or "Almost Always" attentive and cooperative with the grace and flow of**

**indwelling life force-Spirit amid their daily work and activities doubled by the time the program ended (i.e., comparing Survey A with B) (Tables 22, 23, and 24):**

**Table 22. I approach my everyday activities (i.e. cooking, walking, working) with an awareness of Spirit or life force energy working in and through my being.**

“Often” and “Almost Always”:	Survey A: 6 = 21%	Survey B: 12 = 43%	Survey C: 8 = 29%
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**Table 23. I experience a sense of oneness with the Sacred amid ordinary daily life activities.**

“Often” and “Almost Always”:	Survey A: 5 = 18%	Survey B: 11 = 39%	Survey C: 9 = 32%
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**Table 24. I have experienced being in a state of “flow”—a focused yet relaxed state amid my daily work and life.**

“Often” and “Almost Always”:	Survey A: 5 = 18%	Survey B: 13 = 47%	Survey C: 9 = 32%
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Note the following findings from the above named data:

- In the pre-program survey (Survey A), 4 people indicated they had never experienced a “flow” state amid daily life and work, and 7 people indicated never having approached their life activities which an awareness of Spirit or life force energy working in and through their being. **By the time the program ended (Survey B), 100% of participants reported having both experiences of this flow state and of approaching life activities with an awareness of life force energy working in and through their being.**
- **In Survey A and B comparisons, there was a decrease from 8 (29%) to 2 (7%) participants saying they never experience oneness with the Sacred amid ordinary daily activities.**
- Survey B and C comparisons showed decreases in the number of participants reporting that they were having these experiences of living and working from within one month after the program ended. Still, Survey A and C comparisons to all three questions show **higher more participants having these experiences of**

**working from within one month after the program ended than before the program began:**

1. Survey A and C comparisons show **an increase from 6 or 21% to 8 or 29% of participants reporting that they “Often” or “Almost Always” approached everyday activities and work with an awareness of Spirit or life force energy flowing in and through their being.** This is a modest increase. Still, this small increase is supplemented by the next to findings.
2. Survey A and C comparisons show **an increase from 5 or 18% to 9 or 32% of participants reporting that they “Often” or “Almost Always” sensed oneness with the Sacred amid ordinary daily life activities.**
3. Survey A and C comparisons show **an increase from 2 or 7% to 7 or 25% of participants reporting that they “Often “ or “Almost Always” experienced a “flow” state amid daily work and life.**

#### **EVIDENCE OF INCREASED AWARENESS OF INTERCONNECTIVE ONENESS:**

What about evidence suggesting participants cultivated interior awareness of indwelling life force energy or Spirit, resulting in an increased sense of oneness between self, others, world, and the Sacred? Moreover, did this heightened awareness of interconnectivity in turn lead to solidarity, mutuality, and a *communio* of compassion with other people and creation? Survey comparisons in Tables 25-28 below suggest this implied thesis project outcome did occur:

- **Survey A and B comparisons show an increase from 6 (21%) to 11 (40%) participants reporting that they “Often” or “Almost Always” experience a sense of oneness with others and creation in a way that words can’t convey (Table 25).**
- **Survey A and B comparisons show an increase from 8 (29%) to 17 (61%) participants reporting that they “Often” or “Almost Always” approach their relationships with others and their expressions of loving kindness with an awareness of Spirit or universal life force energy working in and through their being (Table 26).**

- The number of participants reporting that they “Never” approach encounters with other people and creation with awareness of the Sacred or universal life force dwelling in and through them decreased from 6 (22%) in Survey A to 0 in Survey B (Table 27).
- The number of people reporting that they “Never” approach their relationship with self using an awareness of Spirit or universal life force energy working in and through their being decreased from 5 (19%) to 0 (Table 28).

**Table 25. I have experienced a sense of oneness with others and creation in a way that words can’t convey.**

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	7 = 25%	2 = 7%	2 = 7%
Sometimes	15 = 54%	15 = 54%	14 = 52%
Often	6 = 21%	8 = 29%	9 = 33%
Almost Always	0 = 0%	3 = 11%	2 = 7%

**Table 26. I approach my relationships with others and my expressions of loving kindness with awareness of Spirit or universal life force energy working in and through my being.**

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	6 = 21%	1 = 4%	0 = 0%
Sometimes	14 = 50%	10 = 36%	10 = 37%
Often	7 = 25%	14 = 50%	14 = 52%
Almost Always	1 = 4%	3 = 11%	3 = 11%
			<i>short 1 response</i>

**Table 27. I approach my encounters with other people and creation with awareness of the Sacred or universal life force dwelling in and through them.**

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	6 = 22%	0 = 0%	2 = 7%
Sometimes	13 = 48%	14 = 50%	14 = 50%
Often	7 = 26%	11 = 39%	8 = 29%
Almost Always	1 = 4%	3 = 11%	4 = 14%
	<i>short 1 response</i>		

**Table 28. I approach my relationship with myself with an awareness of Spirit or universal life force energy working in and through my being.**

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	5 = 19%	0 = 0%	1 = 4%
Sometimes	12 = 46%	12 = 43%	10 = 36%
Often	7 = 27%	13 = 46 %	12 = 43%
Almost Always	2 = 8%	3 = 11%	5 = 18%
	<i>short 2 responses</i>		

Even one month following the program, all four statements named above resulted in increased “Often” and “Almost Always” responses when compared to pre-program levels. This consistency suggests more than a few participants may have cultivated unitive consciousness involving an inter-connective dynamism between indwelling life force energy or Spirit, the participant, other people, and other aspects of creation.

Three other survey question comparisons also suggest **evidence of increases in the number of participants reporting that they experienced being led by, and/or consciousness of being interconnected with, some larger mystery as a result of interior prayer of the heart-compassion meditation. This evidence is as follows:**

- One inquiry asked participants whether they experience meaningful coincidences defined as unusual, unexpected, and uncontrolled synchronicity of occurrences (Table 29). **There was an increase from 8 or 28% of participants (Survey A) to 12 or 43% of participants (both Survey B and C) reporting that they had these synchronicity experiences on a daily or weekly basis**
- **Whereas 8 or 30% of participants answered “Often” or “Almost Always” sensing their lives being influenced or guided by a spiritual force greater than themselves before the program began, in Survey B taken at the end of the program, 15 or 53% of participants gave this response (Table 30).** It should be noted, however, that one month after the program ended, there was a return to the initial response level.
- Finally, as was cited earlier under personal healing, by the time the program ended there was **an increase from the initial 3 (11%) to 16 (58%) participants reporting that they “Often” and “Almost Always” experience their physical being housing a peace, tender mercy, and strength greater than their own**

(Table 6, page 104). One month after the program ended, 13 participants (46%) were still giving this response.

**Table 29. I experience meaningful coincidences (unusual, unexpected and uncontrolled synchronicity of occurrences) in my life:**

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	1 = 4%	1 = 4%	1 = 4%
Once or twice in my lifetime	7 = 25%	9 = 32%	7 = 25%
Sometimes (about once a year)	12 = 43%	6 = 21%	8 = 29%
“Often” (on a weekly basis)	6 = 21%	8 = 29%	9 = 32%
“Almost Always” (on a daily basis):	2 = 7%	4 = 14%	3 = 11%

**Table 30. I’ve felt my life being influenced or guided by a spiritual force greater than myself.**

“Often” and “Almost always”:	Survey A: 8 = 30% <i>short 1 response</i>	Survey B: 15 = 53%	Survey C: 8 = 28%
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When taking into account the multiple forms of evidence from survey comparisons named above, it is safe to suggest that increased awareness of inter-connective oneness with indwelling Spirit and all living beings occurred as a result of this program.

## **G. Summary**

The consistency of all the above mentioned quantitative and qualitative data suggests intended outcomes of this research study occurred. Participant survey response comparisons between the pre-program/baseline survey (Survey A) and the surveys taken immediately following the program (Survey B) and one month later (Survey C) resulted in numerous quantitative sets of data, as well as two separate communal healing experiment sets of data, all of which show evidence of personal and communal healing, including while in the midst of everyday life activities and encounters. These findings

also include assessment data on implied assumptions about learning to live, love, work, and serve in transformative, healing ways from the inside out through increased awareness of—and cooperation with—the grace and flow of indwelling life force energy-Spirit, and how this awareness of inter-connective oneness results in a *communio* of love between others, self, creation, and the Sacred. Responses to the questionnaire taken during the final learning session, including participant written reflections, also supported all the above mentioned findings.

In summary, the Deep Abiding program—including its contemplation-in-action version of the practice occurring amid daily life activities and encounters—was realistically doable for busy people. The program and its contemplative practice helped most, if not all, participants work more skillfully and compassionately with discomforts amid the demands and difficulties of life. Participants learned about the inner gentle gesture of surrender to indwelling life force or Spirit for the self-transcending exterior purpose of loving and healing service. Moreover, participants increased compassion for others and self in transformative, healing, life-giving ways. They also cultivated an awareness of our inter-connective oneness in the dynamism shared by indwelling life force-Spirit, others, self, and all creation in a *communio* of love.

## Chapter VI. CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

*The Buddhists, as Gary Zukav points out in The Dancing Wu Li Masters, believe that the human who reaches a state of ‘enlightenment’ succeeds in transcending ordinary logical thought and perceives directly ‘the inexpressible nature of undifferentiated reality....[Moreover], according to mystics from around the world, each moment of enlightenment (grace/insight/Samadhi/satori) reveals that everything—all the separate parts of the universe—are manifestations of the same whole.’ ...[I]n the perception of reality as one unity, the phenomenon of enlightenment and the science of physics have much in common.*

~ Dr. Herbert Benson<sup>204</sup>

*Compassion changes everything. Compassion heals....Compassion draws together those who have been estranged or never even dreamed they were connected. Compassion pulls us out of ourselves and into the heart of another, placing us on holy ground where we instinctively take off our shoes and walk in reverence. Compassion springs out of vulnerability and triumphs in unity.*

*What if we could intentionally contribute to the fashioning of a field in which attitudes and speech and action flow out of the very best that human beings can be?....What kind of morphic resonance would that create? How would we change? How would the world change?*

~ Judy Cannato.<sup>205</sup>

### A. PROJECT SUMMARY

This project set out to explore whether heart-focused interior prayer/compassion meditation contributed to personal and communal healing. The intervention spoke of an inner, gentle gesture of surrender and awareness which—like an antenna or little radio dial inside us – tunes us to the deep abiding presence and healing action of indwelling life force energy or Spirit. This energy or Spirit is the same eternal life force of the universe dwelling in, yet also beyond, every being, linking all life as one. The interior prayer practice was intended to be used not only as a formal practice but also as a way of being amid everyday life activities and encounters. Intended outcomes were as follows:

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<sup>204</sup> Benson, *Beyond The Relaxation Response*, 23-24.

<sup>205</sup> Cannato, *Fields of Compassion: How the New Cosmology Is Transforming Spiritual Life*, 8.



- Participants would cultivate a practice which opens them to both personal and communal healing.
- Participants would find that the inner gentle gesture of surrender to indwelling life force energy or Spirit while in the midst of everyday life activity and encounters would help them work more skillfully and compassionately with fear and sadness amid the demands, discomforts, and difficulties of life.

Even if participants eventually dropped the fifteen or more minutes of formal practice five or more days a week, the intended outcome was that more than a few participants would continue using the informal “re-tuning” and “sending” contemplation-in-action practice amid daily life activities and encounters. Participants were free to interpret indwelling life force energy or Spirit as best fit their religious, secular, or spiritual-but-not-religious perspectives.

Implicit within the intended outcomes was the hypothesis that cultivating an interior awareness of indwelling Spirit or life force energy can increase exterior awareness of inter-connective oneness and mutuality with others. This would, in turn, deepen a *communio*<sup>206</sup> of compassion with other people and all creation.

Regardless of whether participants interpreted life force energy or Spirit embedded in and between all living beings as occurring on a quantum and/or metaphysical level—or only as a feel good metaphor-based focusing device clothed in the language of mystics—the desired outcome was that participants would expand their capacity for unitive consciousness and love. Included were quantitative and qualitative assessment methods to track whether that was so.

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<sup>206</sup> Once again, *communio* is a Latin phrase meaning mutual participation, sharing, community, and/or communion.

Finally, as was mentioned in Chapter IV, research credibility within the academic field of spirituality is enriched when reported participant experiences match key themes of the spiritual tradition/s related to the research project. **The following key spiritual themes from biblical, Franciscan, and Carmelite spiritualities were foundational to the project's intended outcomes:**

- Awareness and acceptance of one's poverty (weakness) heals and empowers.
- Acceptance of one's poverty happens through relinquishment or surrender. Surrender does not mean passively giving in. Surrender involves a co-operative interdependent relationship in which one welcomes with open arms the embrace of Inner Helper Spirit whose tender mercies and Presence swells the soul and heart with love.
- Awareness of being indwelt by life force energy or Spirit heals and empowers.
- Tender mercy (*misericordia*) amid awareness of one's poverty and surrender not only results in communion with indwelling Spirit who transforms, heals, liberates, and empowers. This tender mercy leads to recognition of self as kin to all who have ever known and struggled with their own poverty.
- This awareness leads to unitive consciousness, that is, an awareness of oneness, inter-dependency, and interconnectivity with all beings in a *communio of love*.
- Interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation puts one in touch with all that is named above. This form of prayer is not only a formal spiritual practice. It is a way of being, perceiving, loving, and serving amid everyday life activities and encounters.

## **B. SUMMARY OF INTERPRETIVE CONCLUSIONS**

This research project's working hypothesis and intended outcomes were supported by consistent, multiple forms of quantitative and qualitative evidence named in Chapter V. Participant responses of a quantitative nature were given through carefully prepared

surveys<sup>207</sup> through Qualtrics, the College's web-based data collection and analysis software. Participant responses to the pre-program baseline survey (Survey A) were compared with responses given on Survey B taken upon completion of the program. Survey comparisons were also made with Survey C taken one month after the program ended.

These survey comparisons along with qualitative data taken from written responses on a questionnaire resulted in these findings. Forty-six quantitative forms of data suggest personal and communal healing took place as a result of participation in the program. **This is beyond the evidence drawn from participant interest in the Deep Abiding program exceeding capacity by over 100%, and the 28 of 30 participants from highly diverse secular and spiritual perspectives sticking with the spiritual practices of this program to the very end.** Here now is a summary of evidence pertaining to Personal and Communal Healing:

### **B.1. Personal Healing**

- 1. The following forms of evidence come from data involving the occasions when participants said they used Deep Abiding practices for personal healing (See pages 106-109):**
  - a. During the program, 96% of participants (27 of 28) reported using the program for personal healing on a weekly basis.
  - b. One month after the program ended, 93% of participants (25 of 27) reported they were still using this program for personal healing, on a weekly basis, though frequency of doing so waned.

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<sup>207</sup> As previously mentioned, Cornell's Institutional Research Office, along with medical researcher and project reader, Dr. Fosarelli, advised me on how to craft sound assessment instruments for this project.

c. The version of the spiritual practice that occurs amid daily life was used for personal healing in a variety of contexts (Table 2). During the program 79% to 89% (22-25 of 28) of participants—and one month after the program 82% to 89% (23-25 of 28) of participants—turned this practice when experiencing the following (pp. 106-109):

- i. Fear, disappointment, or inability to control a situation (89% / 89%).\*
- ii. Discomforting, none-life giving thoughts about oneself (86% / 89%).\*
- iii. Need of strength and courage (79% / 82%).\*

Other reported occasions with less than 79%-89% include:

- i. When needing to be prayerful, but words aren't working, especially amid tiredness or sorrow (61% = 17 / 61% 17).\*
- ii. When needing to be prayerful amid uncertainty of belief and spiritual questioning (46% or 13 / 44% or 12).\*

## **2. Fifteen quantitative<sup>208</sup> and 25 qualitative forms of evidence suggest the Deep Abiding program contributes to personal healing.**

a. **Evidence based on survey comparisons include 20 to 47% increases in participants responses of “Often” and “Almost Always” for these seven categories by the time the seven week program ended (pp. 109-1114):**

- 1) The ability to recognize when one is over-identifying with a non-life giving anxious thought or feeling;
- 2) The ability to accept and respond to fears, imperfections, or anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy;
- 3) The ability to experience spiritual solace and strength during times of sorrow, difficulty, or loneliness;
- 4) The ability to experience one's being housing a peace, tender mercy, and strength greater than my own.

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<sup>208</sup> Includes the 8 items in Table 2 concerning occasions in which participants used the informal practice for personal healing.

\* The data within the parentheses on the left indicates Survey 2 responses. Data within the parentheses on the right is from Survey 3.

**Note that the next three forms of evidence related to surrender (pp. 111-112):**

- 5) The ability to experience self-surrender or relinquishment in life giving ways.
  - 6) Likewise, experiencing positive transformation, healing, and new life by loosening the tight grip of trying to remain in control.
  - 7) The ability to ask for help when in need.
- b. Physical vitality levels increased in keeping with HeartMath Institutes claim that heart-focused meditation/interior prayer is not only relaxing but revitalizing. In Survey B taken immediately following the program, 17 or 61% of participants self-reported a point on the scale 10 to 30 points higher than their baseline Survey A answers. Of those 17 participants, 10 (36%) gave answers that increased by at least 30 points, and 3 other participants gave answers that increased by approximately 20 points. (pp. 114-115).**
- c. On the written questionnaire taken at the end of the program, 25 of the 27 participants (93%) present indicated that the program contributed to personal healing wisdom, spiritual growth, or other related insights (p. 116).**
- d. When these survey responses are examined in tandem with the qualitative written responses, repeating themes pertaining to personal, transformative healing emerge (pp. 116-118). They are as follows:**
- 1) A humble, gentle acceptance of one's spiritual poverty. In other words, a long, loving look at one's life circumstances, human limitations, imperfections, pain, vulnerabilities, and failures with non-aggression and compassion. This also includes observing and accepting with tender mercies<sup>209</sup> one's fears and other unpleasant thoughts, feelings, self-criticisms, as well as ego-mind's desire to be accepted and/or esteemed by others.
  - 2) Increased ability to recognize, soften, and disarm over-identification with non-life giving thoughts and feelings.
  - 3) Increased ability to surrender the need to remain in control. This is not giving up or giving in but a relaxing of ego-mind aversions and grasping in life giving, transformative ways.

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<sup>209</sup> As previously noted, the phrase "tender mercy" used here and elsewhere in this chapter means a compassionate relationship which transformatively comforts, nurtures, sustains, uplifts, heals and empowers..

- 4) Greater inner peace, solace, strength, and calm amid difficulties.
- 5) Increased ability to forgive oneself.
- 6) Increased patience with oneself.
- 7) Increased ability to ask for help when in need.
- 8) Increased self-love and self-worth.
- 9) Increased ability to establish healthy boundaries in both pleasant and unpleasant relationships; includes the ability to stand up for oneself.
- 10) Increased physical vitality levels.

e. **Several of these themes relate to theological underpinning themes.** These themes are drawn from spiritual wisdom on Divine Indwelling as found in the Hebrew Scripture, the Christian New Testament, the lives and writings of Sts. Clare and Francis of Assisi, and the life and writings of St. Teresa of Avila:

- 1) Knowing oneself as indwelt by the Eternal grants a dignity, worth, and strength which heals and empowers.
- 2) Awareness and acceptance of one's poverty (weakness) heals, liberates, and empowers.
- 3) Awareness of tender mercy and being unconditionally loved heals, liberates, and empowers.
- 4) The gesture of surrender to indwelling Spirit as understood in co-operative, life giving ways heals, liberates, and empowers.

f. **Themes from the supporting medical and scientific theoretical knowledge (Chapter III) include:**

- 1) Dr. Benson's and HeartMath research on mind-body interconnectivity, including the psychophysiological benefits of belief and focused attention.
- 2) Dr. Benson and HeartMath researchers emphasize the role "heart-feeling" or "remember wellness" play in eliciting the psychophysiological healing benefits of meditation/contemplative prayer, especially the use of an image, word, or other focal point that speaks of unconditional love. This focused attention shifts the body out of fight or flight mode by eliciting the calming effects of

the parasympathetic nervous system. Heart rate, blood pressure, and stress hormones are reduced.

- 3) Neuroscientists tell us how continual meditation/contemplative prayer “rewires” the brain. Mind states associated with reduced feelings of stress and separation can become the new normal. Even when a person is not meditating, Richard Davidson’s research at UW-Madison shows beginning meditators are able to activate the “happy thoughts” part of the brain and enhance immune function in as little as eight weeks.
- 4) Research on compassion meditation shows increased ability of care providers to be present to the suffering of others without becoming debilitated or undone.

## **B.2. Communal Healing**

- 1. Surveys results show that 100% of participants used the interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation practice for the purpose of communal healing. One month after the program ended, 100% of participants were still reporting that they were engaging in this practice for the purpose of communal healing.**
- 2. Questionnaire results show that 100% of participants indicated that the Deep Abiding program and its spiritual practice contributed to spiritual growth, healing wisdom, and other insights in terms of their relationships with others—be they family, co-workers, friends, or community members.**
- 3. Five forms of evidence (Table. 11) indicate occasions when participants engaged in the interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation practice amid daily life encounters for this communal healing purpose (pp. 121-124).**
  - a. During the program 86% (24) of the participants—and one month after the program 81-85% (22-23) of participants—turned this practice when wanting to:
    - i. Send healing, gratitude, respect, or compassionate intention to someone (86%/85%).\*
    - ii. Be a healing presence (86%/81%).\*
  - b. During the program 71% (20) of the participants—and one month after the program 59-70% (16-19) of the participants—turned to this practice when:
    - i. Hearing an ambulance, seeing someone struggle, or witnessing suffering in the news (71%/59%).\*

- ii. Wanting to send healing and compassionate intention to those who trouble me (71%/70%).
  - c. While 39% (11) of the participants indicated at the end of the program that they used this practice to send healing and compassionate intention to people while in a public setting (i.e. while in meetings, class, Thomas Commons, airports, while walking, etc.), over half the participants (56% or 15) were doing so one month after the program ended.
- 4. Two communal healing intention experiments were also part of this research project. All participants were assigned the homework task of sending healing energies of love to Cornell College and to the greater Mt. Vernon Community area at least five days a week as part of our group care focus. When assessing data, participant responses were only included if the participant was part of that particular community (i.e. only Cornell students, employees, and employee spouses for the college focused experiment, and only non-student residents of the greater Mount Vernon community who have lived here since the Fall of 2010). In order to verify research findings, a survey question about attitudes or feelings toward these communities was posed in five differing ways (Tables 12-16 and 17-21 and pp. 126-134).

**Though initially high levels of positive feelings toward the Mount Vernon Community made it impossible to measure significant before/after attitudinal changes, there were multiple, consistent, across the board increases of a positive nature in the Mount Vernon communal healing experiment (pp. 125-128).**

**More significant shifts in attitude were measurable in the participant responses to the Cornell College healing intention experiment.** This was because participant responses in the baseline survey allowed for greater room for possible improvement (pp. 128-134).

**Survey A and B comparisons reveals five out of five consistent sets of across the board increases in positive attitudes toward Cornell (Tables 17-21 and pp. 129-133).**

**For example, participants who indicated that they had “Positive” to “Very Positive” overall feelings toward Cornell College jumped from a baseline pre-program level of 53% (9 out of 17) of participants to 88% (15 of 17. See Table 20 on p. 130). Moreover, when participants were asked how often they experience feelings of healing peace and compassion toward the College in the past six months, the “Often” and “Almost Always” responses doubled from 29% (5 out of 17) to 59% (10 out of 17. See Table 18 on p. 130).**



5. Participant written responses reveal social healing occurred. All participants filling out questionnaires indicated that the program and its spiritual practices improved relationships with family, co-workers, friends, and community members. When asked to explain how these themes occurred, they noted (pp. 135-137):
- a. **Being a calming, peaceful, and positive influence on others.**
  - b. **Helping people experience healing through forgiveness and the extending of gracious compassion to others, including those they may struggle to love**
  - c. **Helping cultivate healthier and happier relationships.**
  - d. **Helping increase the ability to establish healthy personal and social boundaries amid caring community.**
  - e. **Increased understanding of, sense of mutuality with, and tender mercy toward, others. This is an experience of oneness, solidarity, or a *communio* of love.**
  - f. **Finally, for some, this sense of *communio* included an increased desire to serve others.**

All of these research findings support the intended learning outcomes of the Deep Abiding research project. Data suggests that participants cultivated a spiritual practice which opened them to both personal and communal healing. Data also suggests that the gesture of surrender amid everyday life activity and encounters helps participants work more skillfully and compassionately with fear, sadness, and awareness of one's poverty (weakness), amid the demands, discomforts, and difficulties of life. Moreover, even if participants eventually dropped or decreased the frequency with which they engaged in the fifteen or more minutes of formal practice five or more days a week, 100% of participants continued using the "re-tuning" and "sending" practice amid daily life activities and encounters.

6. **Finally, the social healing themes found in participant responses have the added credibility of resonating with social healing themes found in the supporting biblical, Franciscan, and Carmelite spiritual traditions:**
- a. Ability to identify with all who have ever struggled with their own poverty (weakness).
  - b. A humbling awareness, combined with tender mercy toward self and others deepens awareness of oneness, inter-dependency, and interconnectivity with all beings in a *communio of love*. This

interconnectivity is itself the Sacred—the One Spirit or life source energy dwelling in the many, weaving all as one.

- c. Interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation can be a way of being and perceiving amid everyday life encounters with others. This includes a deepened desire to engage in loving service and action.

7. **These outcomes resonate with scientific theoretical knowledge and established evidence concerning social or communal healing. Examples include:**

- a. Studies of reiki energy healers reveals how the act of giving or sending healing energies and compassionate intention to others increases a sense of wellness not only in the receiver but the giver.
- b. Research on how meditation “thins” the area of the brain which calculates spatial orientation of where the self as a distinct physical being ends and the world begins.
- c. Research on psychophysiology, neurocardiology, and biophysics points to brain wave syncretism between people including the ability of a peaceful person to send calming thoughts to a recipient whose body registers this peace in measurable ways.<sup>210</sup> Empirical evidence by Dr. Rollin McCraty also suggests that the human heart has neurotransmitters as well as an electromagnetic field which communicates with the brain of self and others.
- d. Heart-Math’s scientific research on heart-focused meditation by corporations like Motorola, athletic teams, schools, and other organizations enhances group performance and cohesion. Also of note are studies by scientists affiliated with the Princeton Global Consciousness Project, Maharishi University, Noetic Science, HeartMath’s Global Coherence Initiative and beyond on the use of focused group intention to create entrainment or resonance for the purpose of healing peace.

**B.3. Awareness of Inter-connective Oneness With Indwelling Spirit and All Beings:**

It may appear as if the thesis and intended outcomes of this dissertation project have been fully established due to multiple and consistent forms of evidence. This is not the case, at least not without knowing the extent to which the project’s emphasis upon

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<sup>210</sup> Rollin McCraty, Raymond Trevor Bradley, and Dana Tomasino, “The Resonant Heart,” *Shift: At the Frontiers of Consciousness*, December 2004-Feb. 2005, p.17. See also Lynn McTaggart, *The Intention Experiment* (New York: Free Press, 2007), 51.

awareness of indwelling Spirit or life force energy, embedded in and between all living beings, contributed to the outcomes of this study.

Regardless of whether participants interpreted this indwelling life force Spirit as occurring on a quantum field and/or metaphysical level—or only as a metaphoric focusing device clothed in the language of mystics – did participants increase consciousness of indwelling Spirit? Did this sense of interconnectivity expand into a sense of loving communion between self, others, world, and the Sacred? Here are the results of those inquiries as revealed through survey comparisons:

1. **Increased consciousness of, and cooperation with, the grace and flow of Indwelling Spirit amid everyday life activities** (see pages 138-141). **Examples include:**
  - a. **Increased awareness of being indwelt amid activities.** “Often” and “Almost Always” responses in Survey A doubled in Survey B in answer to the question about how often one approached everyday activities (i.e. cooking, walking, working) with an awareness of Spirit/life force energy in and through ones being. This is an increase from 21% or 6 participant responses to 43% or 12 by the program’s end.
  - b. **Increased sense of oneness with the Sacred amid daily life.** In Survey A and B comparisons, “Often” and “Almost Always” responses more than doubled in answer to the question about experiencing a sense of oneness with the Sacred amid ordinary life activities. This is an increase from 18% or 5 participant responses to 39% or 11 by the time the program ended. Moreover, in Survey A and B comparisons, there was a decrease from 8 (29%) to 2 (7%) participants saying they never experience oneness with the Sacred amid ordinary daily activities.
  - c. **Increased experience of “flow” states.** “Often” and “Almost Always” responses more than doubled in answer to the question about experiencing a state of “flow”—a focused yet relaxed state amid daily work and life. This is an increase of 18% or 5 participants to 47% or 13 by the time the program ended.
2. **Evidence also suggests increased experiences of being led by, or entwined with, some larger mystery:**

- a. **Increased experiences of meaningful coincidences** (unusual, unexpected, and uncontrolled synchronicity of occurrences.). Participants indicating that they “Often” and “Almost Always” had these experiences rose from 28% (8) in Survey A to 43% (12) in both Survey B and C (Table 29, see p. 144).
  - b. **Increased sense of being influenced or guided by a spiritual force greater than self.** The “Often” to “Almost Always” responses rose from 30% (8) in Survey A to 53% (15) in Survey B by the end of the program (Table 30, p. 144).
  - c. As mentioned above, in Survey A and B comparisons there was a **47% increase in participants reporting how they the “Often” or “Almost Always” sensed of their being housing a peace, tender mercy, and strength greater than their own** (Table 6 and pp. 110).
3. **There was increased mystical awareness of inter-connective oneness with other people and creation** (See pages 141-144 for the following):
- a. **Increased reports of oneness with other people and creation in a way that words can’t convey.** “Often” and “Almost Always” responses increased from 21% (6) of participant responses in Survey A to 40% (11) by the time the program ended (Survey B). A month later, the number of “Often” and “Almost Always” responses remained almost doubled at 40% (11); (See Table 25).
- The number of participants reporting that they “Never” approach encounters with other people and creation with awareness of the Sacred or universal life force dwelling in and through them decreased from 6 (22%) in Survey A to 0 in Survey B (Table 27).
- b. **Increased reports of approaching relationships with others through an awareness of Spirit or universal life force energy working in and through their being.** “Often” and “Almost Always” responses to this category increased from 29% (8) to 61% (17). One month after the program ended, remained at similar increased levels (Table).
  - c. **Increased reports of approaching encounters with other people and creation with awareness of the Sacred or universal force dwelling in and through them.** “Often” and “Almost Always” responses increased from 30% (8) to 50% (14), and remained higher one month after the program ended (Table 27).
  - d. **Increased reports of approaching relationship with self via an awareness of Spirit or universal life force energy in and through one’s being.** “Often” and “Almost Always” responses for this topic increased

from 35% (9) to 57% (16). One month after the program ended, 61% (17) of participants gave this response (Table 28).

The number of people reporting that they “Never” approach their relationship with self using an awareness of Spirit or universal life force energy working in and through their being decreased from 5 (19%) to 0 (Table 28).

**Taken as a whole, there are thirteen sets of data suggesting increases in participant awareness of inter-connective oneness with indwelling Spirit and all living beings, additional evidence to support the project’s thesis and intended outcomes.**

Consistent evidence of increases throughout this research project point to the ability of heart-focused interior prayer/compassion meditation to assist with personal and communal healing. Still, it is helpful to remember St. Teresa’s wisdom regarding the abiding friendship and assistance of indwelling Spirit regardless of one’s own effort (*IC* 4.1.10; 4.2.10-11). One is indwelt by the Divine, even when the mind wanders around the outskirts of the castle “suffering from a thousand wild and poisonous beasts” (*IC* 4.1.9). The same principle holds regarding inter-connective oneness. It exists even when we are unaware. We do not cause it to happen. While we can awaken or cultivate an ever deepening awareness of indwelling life force energy Spirit and inter-connective oneness, these are not merit badges earned as the result of our goodness or efforts. Interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation awakens us to the oneness we have had with all beings, and the indwelling life force, all along.

### **C. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE USE**

The personal and communal healing benefits named above have been established. So what are the implications of the Deep Abiding program, especially for settings like

campus ministry wherein one chaplain serves and accompanies a spiritually diverse population along the healing journey?

**First**, while religious, secular, and spiritual-but-not religious perspectives can polarize a campus or society, outcomes from the Deep Abiding study confirm my working hypothesis that heart-focused compassion meditation/interior prayer allows religious, secular, and spiritual-but-not religious people to sojourn in healing ways through personal communal adversities together.

This program demonstrates how diversity does not necessitate removing spirituality and religion from the public square. *More* spiritual and inter-spiritual competency—not less—is an answer to diversity, and to ending ignorance, prejudice, and hate. This program is testament to how college chaplains and others can contribute to this competency and thus to social healing. By offering people diverse understandings of life force energy or Spirit, then offering secular and sacred options for experiencing this shared praxis, this program is nimble enough to enable diversely religious, secular, and spiritual-but-non-religious people to come together for personal and communal healing.

**Second**, as Eastern spiritual healing practices involving *chi* or energy, insights from quantum physics, and age-old mystical and monastic writings concerning indwelling Presence and inter-connective oneness continue to increase in popularity, so may programs like Deep Abiding . Whereas Morton Kelsey concluded several decades ago that spiritual healing was a topic of great embarrassment among highly educated Western Christians throughout modernity,<sup>211</sup> perhaps this notion is changing; perhaps it is

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<sup>211</sup> Morton Kelsey, *Psychology, Medicine & Christian Healing* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 6-25.

being replaced, especially as interest in integrative medicine and Eastern mind-body-spirit practices grows. Perhaps mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians can now publically speak of indwelling Spirit and the third member of the Trinity in ways Christians and non-Christians alike need not balk at when said in a non-imposing, non-exclusivist, comparative manner, alongside these other Eastern and scientific perspectives named above.

**Third**, perhaps the participant outcomes of this program are yet another example pointing to our evolutionary human becoming, wherein people are ready for an inclusive, global pneumatology. This is not to suggest doing away with the distinct gifts of our differing traditions and perspectives. Rather, borrowing theologians Sandra Schneiders and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's perspectives named in Chapter I, this more expansive pneumatology is about tapping our differing spiritual traditions in ways that assist the healing wholeness of self, society, and earth.

**Fourth**, this inter-spiritual program made room for Christians and non-Christians alike to learn from Christian mystical traditions associates with the likes of Sts. Clare, Francis, and Teresa. Few people have opportunity to know about these mystical traditions outside Roman Catholic contexts.

**Fifth**, this program demonstrates how people want spiritual tools and practices which are larger than personal satisfaction. Participants *chose* to be part of this program, and 28 of 30 persevered with a program that involved communal healing and thus an ultimate good larger than self. This ultimate good is what the original intention of meditation/interior prayer—and spirituality itself—is about.

The implications named above are particularly true for liberal arts college campuses, wherein cross-disciplinary learning, civic engagement, service, being in community amid differences, multi-cultural and inter-religious competency, and voluntary opportunities for spiritual exploration and expression are prized as part of the educational experience.

**What are other implications of this program beyond the liberal arts college context? First, from this and eighteen years of other college chaplaincy work, it has become clear to me that if mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches hope to attract young people and others who have already left, or are leaving, then they will need to offer programs like Deep Abiding wherein people can learn incarnational, *prayerful ways of being* amid everyday life activity and encounters, *as well as fill their thirst for inter-spiritual bridge building wisdom.*** Maxed out interest levels in the Deep Abiding program combined with a strong retention rate, and consistently strong results, attest to how young people and others want to learn how to pray and prayerfully live, including as Spirit-filled conduits of love and healing peace.

Many of the Deep Abiding participants appeared to be drawn to the healing peace and empowerment of collective and personal silence amid their over-stimulated lives in our hurried pace culture. It is not unusual for the Church to lose people to Eastern traditions because of the silent meditation and embodied contemplative practices like hatha yoga they offer. They are unaware of Christianity's deep well of incarnational, contemplative practices and related wisdom like that found in Sts. Clare, Francis, and Teresa because parishes fail to teach it. Clearly we need to do a better job of exposing people to the wisdom ways of Christian mystical, contemplative spirituality.



Young people and others are also seeking inter-spiritual wisdom and related ways of tapping into our inter-connective oneness amid differences in our pluralistic society. More than a few young people I know assume that in order to honor the faiths and perspectives of others they need to uproot themselves from a specifically Christian faith and community context; this despite Vatican II and other denominational statements concerning our need for interfaith understanding and appreciation. Deep is the hunger yet few are the offerings provided to young people and others by our churches for such learning encounters. The Deep Abiding program is one of many ways this can happen.

**Second**, this inter-spiritual healing program can be utilized in other communal settings. The possibilities include health and wellness centers, spiritual retreat centers, community healing programs sponsored by houses of worship or inter-faith associations, as well as correctional, rehab, and social service program offerings. Given outcomes such as increased self-worth and transforming resistance to asking for aid when in need, may make this program a resource not only for pastoral but also other human service settings. Evidence of participants increasing their ability to be more skillful with people and circumstances that frustrate them may also make this program a viable option for certain workplace settings.

Outcomes of this project may also suggest that this program could be of **use in the wake of community tragedies and conflicts**. Again, this study was carried out within two communities that have undergone adversities. While Deep Abiding would not be a stand-alone care response, this inter-spiritual compassion-based meditation/interior prayer program could be an option to complement other healing responses.

#### **D. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY:**

Deep Abiding will be an annual Cornell Chaplain & Spiritual Life Office offering. At this point in time, I am uncertain whether I will use it as ongoing research or only as a program offering. Regardless, I will still use the baseline, second survey, and questionnaire to assess the extent to which my office achieves its intended learning outcomes.

If this program was used for further research, here are possible areas of exploration:

1. Feelings of gratitude are said to elicit the same psychophysical and psychosocial healing benefits as feelings of compassion. Moreover, 61% of participants in the Deep Abiding study (17 of 28) indicated that they used the informal version of the practice when having pleasant experiences. Perhaps, there could be participant groups who use a gratitude-focused modality, or, have two groups – one for each focus, then compare findings.
2. By taking the baseline pre-program survey, the 28 participants who completed the Deep Abiding study served as their own control group. This method was deemed valid by both a faculty statistician colleague and medical researcher Dr. Fosarelli, whom I consulted when designing the surveys. Perhaps it would prove useful to include a separate control group, or, a control group in which participants attend the learning sessions but do not engage in the seven-week homework practice.
3. Group learning sessions enfolded energy medicine movements such as acupressure points, standing hatha yoga, Eden Medicine modalities, and walking meditation. These embodied spirituality movements were optional in terms of homework practice. Still, no assessment was done to determine the extent to which these movements cultivated awareness of, and co-operation with, indwelling life force energy or Spirit. Likewise, no assessment was taken in order to determine the extent to which these movements cultivated interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation *as a way of being* amid daily life activity. These inquiries could be added

to future surveys.

This topic raises another question: Should there should be a week in which participants have the option of using this movement-based practice instead of the seated compassion/interior prayer practice? They would be already asked to choose an ordinary daily activity like brushing teeth, but these do not work with energy centers of the body the way these other movements do.

### **Impact of Research Project On My Life**

This chapter ends by returning to a Christian understanding of all that has been named in this dissertation regarding indwelling life force Spirit and the use of interior prayer of the heart/*compassion meditation* as a way of being, living, and loving amid everyday life.

Earlier in Chapter II it was said that the Incarnation is not confined to the past; it is not finished. We participate in the ongoing Incarnation by living from an awareness of the indwelling presence and loving action of God’s energies inside us and all. Judy Cannato described it this way:

*[A]wakened to the recognition that through the presence of the risen Christ in us—the work of the Spirit in us—we are offered the possibility of being Christ in the world. All of us are invited and empowered to manifest this consciousness in the here and now just as Jesus did....Salvation, then in its fullest sense, is not about ‘me’ or a very small ‘we,’ but about the cosmos as a whole. It is about the entire cosmos in some mystery-filled way coming to an awareness of its own divinity in divinity.<sup>212</sup>*

By “putting on the mind of Christ”—by transforming our consciousness and learning to see through an Incarnational eye—we awaken to a dynamism and inter-connective oneness between the Infinite Life Source, other people, all of creation, and the cosmos.

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<sup>212</sup> Cannato, *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology Is Transforming Spiritual Life*, 56-57.

This is the same transformation of consciousness that Trappist monk and mystic Thomas Merton experienced in—of all places—the shopping district of Louisville, Kentucky. As Merton noted in his *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, on the corner of Fourth and Walnut,

*I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness... This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud... I have the immense joy of being man, a member of a race in which God Himself became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.*<sup>213</sup>

This beloved, well known passage embodies what I experienced throughout the Deep Abiding project as contemplative practice intersected with my awareness of the personal and communal sorrows experienced by the Cornell and Mount Vernon communities, and the healing life wisdom of Sts. Clare, Francis, and Teresa. That intersection, combined with the impact of the three consecutive suicides of my daughter's classmates upon my family, deepened my sense of solidarity with all who have ever experienced powerlessness to fix a situation.

Previously, I thought I had “arrived” at love and oneness with others. Yet such knowing only deepened as a result of this intersection between doctoral work on Franciscan and Carmelite spirituality, ministry within the Cornell and Mt. Vernon communities, the impact of these communities upon my family and personal life, and my

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<sup>213</sup> Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Double Day, 1996), 140-42.

own practice of interior prayer of the heart/compassion meditation. Like Merton with the busy Louisville shoppers, and St. Francis in his encounter with the leper, I humbly grew in healing ways through a *communio of love*, including with those whom I once feared, sensed separation, or struggled to love. An example includes entering into ongoing spiritual care and concern for a prisoner accused of child endangerment and murder after having served for five weeks as an alternate juror in that murder trial. I am not so sure whether I would have entered into such a relationship prior to this research project and lived experience.

But that is what happened, as well as a deepened compassion for all who are imprisoned in one way or another by things they know, unknown, done, or left undone. This includes deeper solidarity with all who have struggled to let go of sorrow, regret, bitterness, jealousy, true or false indictments imposed by self or others, fears, or an over sense of responsibility. In short, the Deep Abiding project transformed my inner and outer life. This project, my ministry context, and life experience these past four years of this doctorate, deepened my ability to embrace my spiritual poverty, relinquish, trust, and *receive* in co-participating ways tender mercies and a deeper awareness of oneness with God, humanity, and this fragile, beautiful Earth. This is the meaning of grace. This is also what it means to not lose the gaze: to keep an inner eye upon the Shrine of the Heart so one can more clearly perceive and love the world.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A. WEEKLY LEARNING SESSIONS

#### SESSION ONE: ORIENTATION TO DEEP ABIDING

- 1:00 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION
- Naming our busy, multi-tasking lives; Desert wisdom on silence and on watching/letting go of thoughts.<sup>214</sup>
- 1:10 EYE-GAZING EXERCISE [See Appendix D]
- 1:30 TEACHING SESSION
- Indwelling Spirit and Spirituality of the Heart from diverse cultural and religious traditions. Monastic wisdom on types of thoughts that hook us, and the role self-surrender and humility in interior Prayer of the Heart.<sup>215</sup>
- 1:45 IDENTIFYING YOUR CARE FOCUS FOR PERSONAL HEALING
- Participants choose a mildly discomfoting thought pattern in their relationship with self which they will work with throughout the multi-week program.
- 2:00 GROUP SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF INTERIOR PRAYER OF THE HEART.
- 2:20 EXPLAIN THE DEEP ABIDING PRACTICE PLAN [See Appendix B].
- CLOSING: Abbreviated version of Interior Prayer of the Heart, followed by mindful introductions of each other's names and why participating in this program. This is an opportunity to practice living, listening, and revering others from the divine center as we did with the eye-gazing exercise.
- EMAIL RESOURCES for further growth.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Funk, Mary Margaret. *Thoughts Matter: the Practice of Spiritual Life*. New York: Continuum, 1998, 9-25.

<sup>215</sup> Williams, Rowan. *Silence and Honey Cakes: The Wisdom of the Desert*, Oxford, England: Lion Hudson, 2004, 22-38.

<sup>216</sup> David Richo, *The Sacred Heart of the World: Restoring Mystical Devotion to Our Spiritual Life*. New York: Paulist Press, 2007, 11-17.

Jim Finley, "Breathing God," *Sounds True: Insights at the Edge* (Podcast accessed February 2013). [www.soundstrue.com/weeklywisdom/?source=podcast&p=3036&category=IATE&version=full](http://www.soundstrue.com/weeklywisdom/?source=podcast&p=3036&category=IATE&version=full).

## SESSION TWO: EMBODIED SPIRITUALITY

- 1:00            OPENING on mind, body, spirit interconnectivity.
1.     Visual Theology: Samples of embodied spirituality/divine indwelling.
  2.     Recovering biblical and sacramental perspective.
  3.     Integrative medical perspective. Psychophysiology—an interactive, unitive mind-body-spirit system.
  4.     Guided acupuncture with abbreviated Prayer of the Heart.
- 1:25            REFLECTION
- Embracing whatever arises during meditation, including one's struggles and fears, with tender mercy. Heightened compassion for, and oneness with, all who have ever struggled.<sup>217</sup>
- 1:35            GROUP SHARING: Insights from formal and informal practice.
- 1:50            PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGY: Mind-body-spirit coherence including use of HeartMath emWave 2 monitor device which measures heart rate variability (brain, heart, and autonomic nervous system coherence when activating) before and during Interior Prayer of the Heart. Demonstrate on a student.
- 2:10            PRAYER OF THE HEART AND BODY:  
Begin Interior Prayer of the Heart with energy medicine movements. Aim includes keeping partial awareness and centering within the shrine of the heart while the midst of activity.

EMAIL RESOURCES for further growth.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Pema Chödrön *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice in Difficult Times*. Boston: Shambala, 1997, 3-4.

Katherine Marie Dyckman and L. Patrick Carroll, *Inviting the Mystic Supporting the Prophet: an Introduction to Spiritual Direction* (NY: Paulist, 1981), 54.

<sup>218</sup> Institute of HeartMath, "Together in the Heart."  
<http://www.heartmath.org/templates/ihm/articles/landing/2013/together-in-the-heart/index.php?mtcCampaign=22841&mtcEmail=229995137> (accessed Feb. 20, 2013).

Mary Margaret Funk, *Tools Matter for Practices the Spiritual Life* (New York, NY: Continuum 2004), 54-56, 65-67, 93-97.

Joseph Molleur. "A Hindu Monk's Appreciation of Eastern Orthodoxy's Jesus Prayer: The 'Inner Senses' of Hearing, Seeing and Feeling in Comparative Perspective." In *Perceiving the Divine through the Human Body: Mystical Sensuality*. Edited by June McDaniel and Thomas Cattoi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 17-28.

### SESSION 3: BEING CONDUITS OF HEALING

*Hildegard of Bingen music as people arrive.*

- 1:00      OPENING: Group Coherence Prayer of Body and Heart Spiritual Practice Circle. Enfolds group practice method taught by HealingTouch Spiritual Ministry.<sup>219</sup>
- 1:30      VISUAL AND NARRATIVE LEARNING:
1.      Hildegard's Blue Man Illuminated Manuscript.
  2.      Translucent Man – fresco fragment of Macarius of Egypt representing theosis involving body, not only soul and spirit (1475-1500).<sup>220</sup>
  3.      Cannato story on healing beached whales through healing touch and calming presence.<sup>221</sup>
- 1:40      GOD'S ENERGIES, INTERCONNECTIVITY AND HEALING
1.      St. Paul's letters: "God is energon [energizing] in you –Phil 2:13.
  2.      Connectivity and coherence not only within the human body (covered last session) but the world as one inter-connective reality.
    - a.      Scientific research on the role of contemplative prayer/meditation to assist with healing of self, others, and communities including through heart focused sending of compassion and gratitude; the world as a unitive interactive organism.
    - b.      Both scientific research and diverse spiritual wisdom tradition on the heart as the communication center not only with the divine but for sending healing and compassionate intention to others.

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<sup>219</sup> For a description on this and other group practices see Linda Smith, *Using Your Hands to Heal HTSM 103 Student Notebook* Fourth Edition. Arvada, CO: Institute of Spiritual Healing and Aromatherapy, Inc, 2011.

<sup>220</sup> Solrunn Ness, *The Uncreated Light: an Iconographical Study of the Transfiguration in The Eastern Church*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 105-107.

<sup>221</sup> Judy Cannato, *Field of Compassion: How the New Cosmology Is Transforming Spiritual Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2010), 1-2.



- c. Examples of research studies on meditation to increase wellness of communities, reduce crime rates, etc.
- d. Scientific studies on spiritual or energy healing.
- e. Pastoral warning regarding the “you must have not prayed hard enough to cure yourself/others.”
- f. Richard Davidson’s compassion based meditation research.

1:50 REFLECTING ON OUR DAILY PRACTICE<sup>222</sup>

2:20 CLOSING with silence for sending healing, compassionate intention as well as gratitude for all that has been shared in group.

HOMEWORK: Keep up formal and informal practice. Pick one daily life activity to do mindfully. Continue sending healing light and love from heart.

EMAIL RESOURCES for optional further exploration and growth.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup>Pema Chödrön, *The Pema Chödrön Collection* (Audio) Sounds True, Inc.: Oct. 2004: 22:44-30:00.

<sup>223</sup> Cannato, 133-142.

Bede Griffiths, “Bhagavad-Gita,” in *The Cosmic Revelation: The Hindu Way to God* (Springfield, IL: Templegate, 1983), 99-102.

On the relationship between contemplation and actions, as well as helpful insights on the Chinese concept of *wu wei* or “active inactivity”, see Bede Griffiths, *River of Compassion: A Christian Commentary On The Bhagavad Gita* (Springfield, IL: Templegate Publishers 1987), 74-104, 273.

Ron Roth and Peter Occhiogrosso, *The Healing Path of Prayer: a Modern Mystic's Guide to Spiritual Power* (New York: Three Rivers Press), 1998.

Agnes Sanford, *The Healing Light*, revised edition (New York: Ballantine Books), 1983.

Russell Targ and Jane Katra, *Miracles of Mind: Exploring Nonlocal Consciousness and Spiritual Healing* (Novato, CA: New World Library 1999).

## SESSION 4: CONTEMPLATION-IN-ACTION: BEING A LIVING PRAYER

Note: This session occurs right before a one and a half week spring break including the College's Spring Break Service Trip which several participants including the directors are attending. Focus is on doing our work and service as a prayer from the inside out.

1:00 OPENING AND REVIEW of previous sessions

Examples of inner surrender for courage, strength, inner peace, and loving action; living, loving, and leading from the Divine within

- a. MLK Jr. on kitchen floor relinquishment testimony.<sup>224</sup>
- b. Jacque Lipschitz' Holocaust sculpture *Mother and Child*.<sup>225</sup>
- c. *Virgin of the Sign* icon
- d. Mother Teresa of Calcutta's embrace of her spiritual darkness and experience of spiritual poverty as meeting place with the Divine.<sup>226</sup>
- e. Dag Hammarskjöld's "Not I But God In Me;" Galatians 2:20.<sup>227</sup>
- f. Emperor Marcus on letting indwelling spirit lead.<sup>228</sup>
- g. Bede Griffiths on deepening Christian spiritual living via Hindu wisdom on divine indwelling: Amid your seeing, hearing, touching, walking breathing, talking, serving, relaxing let Spirit be the doer through you. Let everything come from this inner center of your being where Christ/life force/Spirit dwells in the heart.<sup>229</sup> Learning to serve and revere the divine in one's heart is to see, serve, and revere the divine in the heart of all beings.

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<sup>224</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "The Strength to Love," in *A Testament of Hope: the Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* ed. Edited by James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1991), 508-509.

<sup>225</sup> Jacques Lipchitz "Mother and Child" 1945, Israel Museum Art Garden, Jerusalem, Israel.

<sup>226</sup> Mother Teresa, *Mother Teresa: Come Be My Light: the Private Writings of the Saint of Calcutta* (San Francisco: Image, 2009), 214-216; 271-277.

<sup>227</sup> Hammarskjöld, Dag. *Markings*. (New York: Vintage, 2006), 90.

<sup>228</sup> Marcus Aurelius, *The Emperor's Handbook: A New Translation of the Meditations*, trans C. Scot Hicks and David V. Hicks (New York: Scribner, 2002), 35-36.

<sup>229</sup> Griffiths, 101.

1:20 WALKING MEDITATION AND GROUP PRAYER OF THE HEART

Practice living and moving from within.

1:35 TERESA OF AVILA: Wisdom for our personal and social transformative healing; for praying, living, loving, and leading from the inside out.

1. Her social-historical context, personality, struggles—and ours.
2. Her prayer and work life—and ours.
3. Her wandering mind—and ours. Inner surrender into the arms of love (IC4.3.2, 4.3.8). Connect with our interior Prayer of the Heart method.
4. Unity of contemplation and action.<sup>230</sup> Interior prayer for the sake of acquiring strength for service (IC 7.4.12 and 7.4.6.) and letting ourselves be led by Spirit. Mary and Martha joined together (IC 7.4.12-7.4.13). The aim: Not about doing great things but rather the love in which things are done (IC 7.4.15).
5. Connect Teresa and the contemplation-in-action tradition of personal and social transformation<sup>231</sup>/loving service with participant's lives.

1:55 SMALL GROUP SHARING

2:20 COMPASSION FATIGUE: Roshi Halifax's comments<sup>232</sup> and feminist warnings.

2:25 CLOSING

HOMEWORK:

Remind participants to practice over spring break. Bring to that time awareness of: 1) work and service done with prayerful intention; 2) Spirit/life force energy working through them, thus the inner gesture of surrender; 3) it's okay to have boundaries and the ability to say 'no;' and

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<sup>230</sup> Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 172-194.

<sup>231</sup> Philip Sheldrake, "Christian Spirituality as a Way of Living Publicly: A Dialectic of the Mystical and Prophetic," in Dreyer, Elizabeth A., and Mark S. Burrows, eds. *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 282-298.

<sup>232</sup> Roshe Halifax, "Compassion's Edge States," on radio program *On Being with Krista Tippett* January 10, 2013 <http://www.onbeing.org/program/compassions-edge-states/4980>

4) continue sending healing light and love from heart center while in the midst of daily life encounters.

## EMAIL RESOURCES

### **SESSION 5: FINAL SESSION – LIFE INTEGRATION**

- 1:00           GROUP SHARING of homework practice while we were apart.
- 1:15           GROUP REFLECTION: Participants thinking back to why they wanted to be in this program. Insights they discovered, explored, and experience since we began.
- 1:25           PRAYER OF HEART & BODY PRACTICE
- 1:40           WRITTEN REFLECTION USING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INSTRUMENT [APPENDIX E].
- Theology of the Heart reflection. Write for ten minutes. Then verbal sharing. Open this time by sharing Mary and Martha reflection that a participant wrote in Session Four about integrating the Mary and Martha parts of herself in healing ways while interacting with her daughter.
- 2:20           CLOSING CIRCLE

## **APPENDIX B. INTERIOR PRAYER OF THE HEART “HOMEWORK” PRACTICE<sup>233</sup>**

The following steps make up the 15 (or more) minutes of formal meditation practice. Do this practice 1 or 2 times a day, 5 or more days a week. Also dip back into an abbreviated, informal version of this practice using Steps 1-3 for re-tuning moments amid everyday life. Part or all of Step 4 may be used throughout the day. Consider observing set re-tuning moments throughout the day (i.e. upon waking and while falling asleep). Also re-tune at random moments when in need, or when noticing the mindfulness bracelet. Steps 1-3, and eventually parts of Step 4, can be sustained for long periods amid daily activities and encounters.

### **STEP 1: HEART FOCUS & HEART BREATHING<sup>234</sup>**

- Keep a relaxed yet focus awareness on your heart center.
- Breathe as if from the front and back of your heart. Do this to a count of 5 inhalations and 5 exhalations. Keep a natural, unforced, gentle rhythm, like peaceful ocean waves flowing in and out against the shore.
- Do so with an awareness of flowing inner ease as each breath infuses your being from the heart center with life force energy or Spirit/Breath of God breathing in and through you.

### **STEP 2: HEART FEELING**

- After a few rounds of Heart Focus and Heart Breathing (Step 1) recall at a feeling level unconditional love. You can use a sacred or secular image, word/short phrase, image of a spiritual guide (i.e. Mary or Kuan Yin), place, pet, sound, smell, or felt embrace that invokes remembered wellness for you. Let this tender mercy compassionately companion with you during the 15+ minutes of interior prayer of the heart practice, and anytime amid daily life when you are hooked by an anxious, non-life giving thought or feeling (doing so with Step 1 and 3).

### **STEP 3: SURRENDERED, SOFTENED, OPENED, & HUMBLE HEART**

- Consent to being breathed or prayed in. Relax ego’s willful over-efforting and dictating how things must be. Soften the tight grip of trying to control, achieve, or make something happen. Shift from thinking and action mode as you sink into heart and being mode. This is an inner gentle gesture of surrender and letting go,

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<sup>233</sup> For additional description see section beginning on page 89 of this dissertation.

<sup>234</sup> Though process description has been changed, Heart Focus, Heart Breathing, and Heart Feeling are foci taken from The Institute of HeartMath method which is described in the Supporting Scientific Evidence Chapter.

not to be confused with giving up or giving in. Inwardly and tenderly relinquishing, softening, relaxing, and opening to an indwelling life force or Spirit not only heals but renews and empowers.

- Re-align and “sync” with the Divine or life force energy as your Deepest Self. This is similar to getting to the deep, still, un-churned, peaceful water at the bottom of a lake rather than living at the surface level which can restlessly be tossed and blown about by life’s storms. Spiritual traditions East and West throughout history have spoken of the human body as housing the Holy or this Deepest Self. The heart center is a universal symbol for this inner sanctuary, shrine, or tabernacle wherein unbounded Spirit abides.
- Consent to being like a pliable, open hose through which life force/God’s healing energies, love, and Light flow. Or like a lamp plugged in to the power source in order to give off radiant Light.
- If desired, invoke the presence and assistance of your spirit guides, angels, ancestors, and communion of saints to compassionately companion with you.

#### STEP 4: SENDING HEALING AND COMPASSIONATE INTENTION

- *Prayerfully ask for the highest good, and that your being may be a conduit or channel through which healing Life force/God’s energies, love, and Light flow* (a “Thy will be done” approach rather than dictating outcomes to God and/or the universe). The following process then takes places beginning with self, then a loved one, then Cornell and Mount Vernon, then ending with self.
- **BEGIN WITH SELF:** Take a deep breath into the heart center as you breathe in Divine Breath-Spirit/life force into heart center from all directions. Hold this B/breath<sup>235</sup> for a few seconds then without force exhale thereby sending energies of love and light to flood every cell of your being.

Sense yourself being filled with an infusion of indwelling life force/Spirit flowing from the root of your being in the shrine of the heart, like pearl of light, then radiating into every cell of one’s body. As you do this you may quietly say or acknowledge, “The Light and healing peace be in me.” Or, “I am filled with healing peace, Light, and love.” Then simply breathe this healing and compassionate intention without trying to make something happen.

To any aspect of your life wherein you have experienced frustration or brokenness in the past few days, send healing, compassionate intention on the out B/breath to

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<sup>235</sup> Numerous cultures and languages use the same word to mean breath and to mean Spirit or Breath of God. This double meaning is signaled throughout this document by “B/breath.”

that circumstance saying “May I have tender mercy, peace, and ease.” Then on the out B/breath send that healing energy and intention to all who have ever had this same struggle.

- FOR LOVED ONE: Now focus on a loved one to whom you want to send healing and compassionate intention. Repeat process as before, sending on the out B/breath healing and compassionate intention to that person quietly saying “Be filled with healing peace, light, and love.” Then send to all who have ever had that struggle.
- FOR CORNELL & MT. VERNON: Repeat as before for the healing wholeness and well being of differing individuals and as an institution/city.
- [Though not part of this particular training program, an option is to prayerfully extend healing and compassionate intention to broken places in the world and to all sentient beings].
- End by returning to self as you did at the beginning of Step 4 for several breaths to ground you before ending. You may find that you are now so still and at peace-filled that you want to linger in heart focused breathing for an extended meditation.

#### STEP 5: CLOSING—GRATEFUL and LUMINOUS HEART

- Offering a gratitude such as this: “Thank you for this time of healing. May it be sealed in Light and Love. May I consciously live this day as an instrument of healing peace. Peace. Peace. Peace.”

## **APPENDIX C: DEEP ABIDING SURVEYS**

Participants accessed the following three surveys through carefully timed emails. Each email contained a link to the College's Qualtrics web-based survey software program. The baseline survey was completed by participants before they were allowed to participate in the program. The second survey was filled out upon completion of the seven week program. The third survey was filled out one month after the program ended.

### **SURVEY #1 - BASELINE SURVEY**

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Please relax with this. There are no wrong answers. Simply answer all statements, doing so with the first thing that comes to mind (don't over think this!). Click on your response from among the choices provided, even if you are not completely sure of the answer. Clicking on the arrow at the bottom right side of the page will advance you through the pages. Once the survey is complete you are all set for participating in the Deep Abiding program.

**BLOCK 1:** What is your interest in being part of this program on meditation/interior prayer? Please check all that apply.

- Increased interior peace, strength, and resilience amid life's demands and difficulties.
- Personal healing.
- As a way to send healing and compassionate intention to others amid their pain or suffering.
- As a way for me to be prayerful when words fail to help, especially amid tiredness or sorrow.
- Self-knowledge and examination.
- As a way to be prayerful amid my need to spiritually question and/or uncertainty of belief.
- To help increase my ability to see, revere, and love Spirit dwelling in all people and beings.
- To experience and love God more deeply.



On a typical week in the past month I have used mind-body-spirit practices such as meditation or quiet interior prayer, yoga, and conscious breathing to assist my own healing.<sup>236</sup>

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes (1-2 days a week)
- 2 - Often (3-4 days a week)
- 3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

On a typical week in the past month I have used mind-body-spirit practices such as meditation or quiet interior prayer, yoga, and conscious breathing in order to expand my awareness of oneness with the Sacred and/or others.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes (1-2 days a week)
- 2 - Often (3-4 days a week)
- 3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

Please answer this question by moving the slider to indicate the way you've USUALLY felt in the past month--not just how you are feeling right now. Again, there is no wrong answer.

[computer screen provides sliding scale that cannot print on Word which allow participants to indicate their physical energy or vitality]

BLOCK 2: For the next group of statements please mark the appropriate number:

0 - Never, 1 - Sometimes, 2 - Often, 3 - Almost always

I approach my everyday life activities (i.e. cooking, eating, walking, working) with awareness of Spirit or life force energy working in and through my being.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

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<sup>236</sup> This question was adapted, with permission from the Consciousness Quotient (CQ) Index developed by Paul Von Ward. See [http://www.vonward.com/images/CQ\\_QUESTIONNAIRE.pdf](http://www.vonward.com/images/CQ_QUESTIONNAIRE.pdf).

I approach my relationships with others and my expressions of loving kindness with awareness of Spirit or universal life force energy working in and through my being.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I approach my relationship with myself with an awareness of Spirit or universal life force energy working in and through my being.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I approach my encounters with other people and creation with awareness of the Sacred or universal life force dwelling in and through them.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I experience my being as housing a peace, tender mercy, and strength greater than just my own.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

**BLOCK 3:** For the following statements, mark the appropriate number:

Never (0) Sometimes (1) Often (2) Almost always (3)

I have experienced being in a state of “flow”—a focused yet relaxed state amid my daily work and life.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I have experienced a sense of oneness with others and creation in a way that words can't convey.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I experience a sense of oneness with the Sacred amid ordinary daily life activities.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I've felt my life being influenced or guided by a spiritual force greater than myself.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I've experience meaningful coincidences (unusual, unexpected, and uncontrolled synchronicity of occurrences) in my life.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Once or twice in my lifetime

- 2 - Sometimes (about once a year)
- 3 - Often (on a weekly basis)
- 4 - Almost always (on a daily basis)

It's hard for me to ask for help.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I recognize when I am over-identifying with an anxious thought or feeling that isn't life giving for me.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I accept and respond to my fears, imperfections, and anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 Almost always

I've experienced self-surrender in healing, life giving ways.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I've experienced spiritual solace and strength during a time of sorrow, discomfort, or loneliness.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

I've experienced a time when loosening my tight grip of trying to remain in control led to positive transformation, healing and new life.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always

**BLOCK 4:** Please read the following carefully. If you have NOT been a resident of the Mount Vernon/Lisbon area since the FALL OF 2010, please read the next paragraph but then skip over the five Mount Vernon statements and go straight to Cornell statements in

**BLOCK 5** (Cornell students: I know you live here; however if you are not from the Mount Vernon/Lisbon area you should also read the next paragraph but then skip ahead to Cornell statements in **BLOCK 5**).

In the past few years, the small town of Mount Vernon, Iowa experienced multiple tragedies and conflicts. These include: (1) Three suicides of high school age youth within a several month period, the first of which involved a young man seeking to end his life inside the school thus causing students, faculty, and staff to experience emergency lock-down inside the building; (2) the immediate traumatic impact of these three sequential suicides upon classmates and other youth, parents and relatives, teachers and administrators, critical incident responders, and others; and (3) ongoing care and concern for the wellbeing of impacted youth. Overlapping this tragedy were several other unrelated conflicts and sources of both personal and communal brokenness. Those include: (1) Public outcry over behavior of an elementary school principal toward his students; (2) conflicts involving school board governance; (3) intense newspaper editorial exchanges; and (4) differing opinions on issues like the highway by-pass and round-about.

Healing, wellness, and vitality of Mount Vernon and ALL its people are the focus of the next five questions. If you are a Mount Vernon or nearby Lisbon area resident, please respond to the following statements marking the appropriate number:

I prayerfully send healing peace and compassionate intention to Mount Vernon—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as a city.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

Since the FALL OF 2010 I've had positive feelings toward Mount Vernon—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as a city.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

Since the FALL OF 2010 I've experienced feelings of disappointment, sadness, or conflict with Mount Vernon—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, or/and as a city.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

Since the FALL OF 2010 I've experienced feelings of healing peace and compassion toward Mount Vernon—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, or/and as a city.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

AT PRESENT, my overall feelings toward Mount Vernon--its people as a whole, as differing individuals, or/and as a city are best described as:

- 0 - Not Positive
- 1 - Somewhat Positive
- 2 - Positive
- 3 - Very Positive

BLOCK 5: Please read this section carefully. If you are NOT currently a Cornell student, member of the faculty and staff, or a faculty/staff spouse, please read the next paragraph but then skip over the next five questions in this block and go straight to questions in

#### BLOCK 6.

Life within any college community involves not only joys but discomforts, demands, and difficulties. Individuals can experience relationship conflicts and disappointments as well as feelings of personal anxiety, self-doubt, over work, and even compassion fatigue amid concern for others. Given the economy this also includes financial frustrations and fears. As with other colleges across the country, financial strain can impact everything from student financial aid and departmental budgets to faculty/staff employee compensation packages. Meanwhile the College has undergone multiple paradigm shifts such as moving from a nine to eight term calendar with all the fears and uncertainty that change entailed. Healing, wellness, and vitality of Cornell as a campus community, individual members, and as an institution are the focus of the next few questions.

If you are Cornell student, faculty, staff, or faculty/staff spouse, please respond to the following statements marking the appropriate number:

I prayerfully send healing peace and compassionate intention to Cornell College— its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as an institution.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

In the past six months I've had positive feelings toward Cornell College— its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and/or as an institution.

- 0 - Never

- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

In the past six months I've experienced feelings of disappointment, sadness, or conflict with Cornell College— its people as a whole, as differing individuals, or/and as an institution.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

In the past six months I've experienced feelings of healing peace and compassion toward Cornell College—its people as a whole, as differing individuals, and as an institution.

- 0 - Never
- 1 - Sometimes
- 2 - Often
- 3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

AT PRESENT, my overall feelings toward Cornell College--its people as a whole, as differing individuals, or/and as an institution are best described as:

- 0 - Not Positive
- 1 - Somewhat Positive
- 2 - Positive
- 3 - Very Positive

BLOCK 6: Almost done! Please answer the following questions.

My age is:

- 18-23
- 24-29
- 30-39



- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70+

My gender is:

- Female
- Male

How do you identify with the Cornell College-Mt. Vernon/Lisbon area community?  
Choose all that apply

- Current Cornell Student
- Cornell Alumnus/a
- Current Cornell Faculty or Staff
- Spouse/partner of a Cornell Faculty or Staff member
- Resident of Mt. Vernon or nearby community

If you are not a Cornell student, have you lived in the Mount Vernon area community since the Fall of 2010?

- Yes
- No

At this time in my life I describe myself spirituality and/or religiously as:  
[open field answer box]

Briefly identify the spiritual, religious, and/or secular familial setting in which you were raised: [open field answer box]

Please enter your name so I don't pester you again about taking this survey. Your identity will remain confidential.

Thank you for taking time from your busy life to complete this base-line survey. I'm looking forward to working with you and others in this program. If you have any questions, or if after filling out this survey you are no longer interested in being part of

the Deep Abiding program, please let me know. [cquehl-engel@cornellcollege.edu](mailto:cquehl-engel@cornellcollege.edu) or 319-895-4402.

Peace,

Catherine Quehl-Engel

**SURVEY #2 - IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE PROGRAM**

Same questions as the Survey #1 with the exception of questions in Block 1 and Block 6.

**SURVEY #3 - FOLLUP UP SURVEY ONE MONTH AFTER PROGRAM**

Same questions as Survey #2, though Cornell and Mount Vernon communal healing experiment questions were asked in reference to the time period that occurred since the program ended, rather than since the Fall of 2010.

## APPENDIX D: EYE-GAZING EXERCISE

Purpose: Participants experience for themselves how this interior prayer practice impacts one's awareness or perception of self, others, and reality.

Instructions:

- Participants select a partner—someone they do not know well.
- Sit facing each other. Faces are intentionally at a slightly uncomfortable closeness, approximately one foot apart to heighten self-consciousness. Keep eyes focused only on the person's face without looking away for three minutes.
- Participants answer first question in handout. Verbal sharing of experience.
- Teach five minute version of prayer of the heart.
- Again sit facing partner as before. Fill out answers to question two in handout. Ask for examples of what that experience was like and how that compared.
- Participants willing to turn in their answer sheets anonymously do so.
- Instructor will discard sheets filled in by participants who have done this exercise, with me during a previous program over a year ago.

After experiencing the first eye-gazing exercise, participants answer the following question:

What thoughts/feelings about yourself, the other person, and/or this experience arose for you during this exercise?

After experiencing the second eye-gazing exercise participants answer the following:

How did this eye-gazing experience compare with the first experience?

In light of this before and after eye-gazing experience, how might using this meditation/interior prayer of the heart impact the way you perceive and relate to yourself and to the circumstances you face amid everyday life?

Participants indicate on their anonymous written response sheets whether they have experienced this eye-gazing exercise prior to this session.

## APPENDIX E: QUALITATIVE LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

The following learning outcomes assessment data collection will occur in the final weekly learning session of the program. During our closing circle participants will free-write answers to the following questions followed by listening to and honoring each other's experience. Participants only share verbally what they feel comfortable disclosing. Written statements are collected at the end of the session.

1. Did the six week Deep Abiding Interior Prayer of the Heart Program, both the spiritual practice as well as the learning sessions, contribute in any way to spiritual growth, healing wisdom, or other insights in terms of your relationship with yourself (Including though not limited to the mildly uncomfortable habitual thought pattern or self-criticism you identified at the start of the program)?

yes  no. Please explain your answer.

2. Did the six week Deep Abiding Interior Prayer of the Heart Program, both the spiritual practice as well as the learning sessions, contribute in any way to spiritual growth, healing wisdom, or other insights in terms of your relationship with others be they family, co-workers, friends, or community members?

yes  no. Please explain your answer.

3. Did the six week Deep Abiding Interior Prayer of the Heart Program, both the spiritual practice as well as the learning sessions, contribute in any way to spiritual growth, healing wisdom, or other insights in terms of your relationship with what you understand as the Sacred?

yes  no. Please explain your answer.

4. On a typical week since the Deep Abiding program began I have engaged in the formal Interior Prayer of the Heart practice of 15 (or more) minutes:

0 - Never (0 days a week)

1 - Sometimes (1-2 days a week)

2 - Often (3-4 days a week)

3 - Almost always (5 or more days a week)

On average roughly how many minutes did these sessions typically last?

0 - I didn't engage in the formal practice

1 - 1 to 5 minutes

- 2 - 6 to 10 minutes
- 3 - 11 to 15 minutes
- 4 - 16 to 20 minutes
- 5 - over 20 minutes

5. On a typical day since this program began, I "re-tuned" by engaging in the informal Interior Prayer of the Heart practice while in the midst of everyday life activities and encounters:

- 0 - Never (0 times a day)
- 1 - Sometimes (1-3 times a day)
- 2 - Often (4-9 times a day)
- 3 - Almost always (10 or more times a day)

6. How many of the weekly learning sessions did you miss?

7. I am likely to integrate some aspect of this practice into my daily life.

- Agree  Disagree

Please explain or describe your answer:

Thank you for being part of this program! Your feedback is important for research. Thank you in advance for also completing the on-line surveys that will be sent to you, the first arriving in your email inbox this week and second survey a month later.

## APPENDIX F: IDENTIFYING CARE FOCUS FOR PERSONAL HEALING

### **Exercise A:**

Reflect over your past two weeks. What were those experiences you found difficult and tested you to the limit? What is your normal response in this type of circumstance?

### **Exercise B:**

In terms of your relationship with yourself, name a *mildly* uncomfortable self-expectation, self-criticism, or other thought pattern that is non-life giving for you (don't select something too huge or overwhelming). Pick something that you are willing to practice tender mercy, inner surrender, and sending healing and compassionate intention to throughout the course of this program. It can be related to what you identified in Exercise A, or something entirely different.

What do you normally do with this negative emotions and fears?

**APPENDIX G: SEVEN FINDINGS PERTAINING TO PERSONAL HEALING**

Table 3.1 I recognize when I am over-identifying with an anxious thought or feeling that isn't life giving for me.

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	0 participants = 0%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%
Sometimes	12 = 43%	5 = 18%	7 = 25%
Often	14 = 50%	16 = 57%	15 = 54%
Almost Always	2 = 7%	7 = 25%	6 = 21%

Table 4.1 I accept and respond to my fears, imperfections, and anxious thoughts/feelings with tender mercy.

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	6 participants = 21%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%
Sometimes	17 = 61%	12 = 43%	15 = 54%
Often	5 = 18%	14 = 50%	9 = 32%
Almost Always	0 = 0%	2 = 7%	4 = 14%

Table 5.1 I've experienced spiritual solace and strength during a time of sorrow, discomfort, or loneliness.

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	2 participants = 7%	1 = 4%	1 = 4%
Sometimes	18 = 64%	13 = 46%	11 = 39%
Often	6 = 21%	10 = 36%	14 = 50%
Almost Always	2 = 7%	4 = 14%	2 = 7%

Table 6.1 I experience my being as housing a peace, tender mercy, and strength greater than my own.

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	10 participants = 37%	3 = 11%	1 = 4%
Sometimes	14 = 52%	9 = 32%	14 = 50%
Often	2 = 7%	8 = 29%	11 = 39%
Almost Always	1 = 4%	8 = 29%	2 = 7%

**Healing Forms of Self-surrender or Relinquishment:**

Table 7.1 I've experienced self-surrender in healing, life giving ways.

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	5 participants = 18%	0 = 0%	0 = 0%
Sometimes	19 = 68%	14 = 50%	18 = 64%
Often	4 = 14%	11 = 39%	7 = 25%
Almost Always	0 = 0%	3 = 11%	3 = 11%

Table 8.1 I've experience a time when loosening my tight grip of trying to remain in control led to positive transformation, healing, and new life.

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	5 participants = 18%	1 = 4%	0 = 0%
Sometimes	12 = 43%	10 = 36%	13 = 46%
Often	8 = 29%	12 = 43%	12 = 43%
Almost Always	3 = 11%	5 = 18%	3 = 11%



Table 9.1 It's hard for me to ask for help.

	<u>Survey A:</u>	<u>Survey B:</u>	<u>Survey C:</u>
Never	0 = 0%	1 = 4%	0 = 0%
Sometimes	11 = 39%	16 = 57%	17 = 64%
Often	10 = 36%	8 = 29%	10 = 36%
Almost Always	7 = 25%	3 = 11%	0 = 0%

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