

PrairieFire

A Program of Spiritual Renewal & Formation

Prairie Fire As Metaphor

A healthy prairie, one of the most complex, yet balanced, ecosystems on earth, is a place where hundreds of plants and animals exist together harmoniously. The perennials, native to the prairie, grow deep, hold water, crowd out weeds, and help to improve the soil by providing nutrients and innate beauty to the land.

Before the appearance of humans, lightning, wind, and herds of grazing nomadic, hoofed herbivores managed the prairie. However, in modern times, we have turned to managing the prairie through the use of a controlled burn. The fire eliminates weeds not native to the prairie that have become invasive, choking out healthy, flowering perennials. The process of the prairie fire clears the way for seeds that have long lain dormant to come to life, to germinate, and to grow. The variety and lushness of the new, spring growth will be two to threefold from the previous year. Only native perennials that have been the basis for a healthy prairie for eons will survive the prairie fire.

Like the prairie, the human being is a complex system. Weeds within the human condition can disturb our natural spiritual balance: fear, anger, or worry about our family systems, professional and work demands, societal expectations, cultural conditioning, the state of the world. These constrict the awareness of our innate spiritual nature that flowers in knowledge of its oneness with God. In the life journey, it is necessary to periodically "burn away" that which blocks the growth of the deeper seed of the Divine Presence – the growth that restores natural balance and invites us to renewal, flowering, freedom, and a joyful life.

PrairieFire: The Program

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

At some point in our lives, something often happens to jar us into a state of awakening and to make us question the wisdom of living out of this ordinary psychological awareness. This jarring can take many forms. Perhaps we find we don't like who we've become or the values out of which we've been living. We may find that the job, the house, the possessions,

the lifestyle that were supposed to make us happy, don't. There may be a deep loneliness; a persistent depression in which we function, but do so with a lack of joy and peace. Perhaps we have an inner sense that something is just not right, that something important is lacking in our lives. Maybe a crisis, a loss or a betrayal has shaken the foundation of our lives in ways we have never experienced.

As prairie fires clear and restore, there are life circumstances that clear our perspective and restore our spirits. These can be spontaneous--the result of a life crisis – or they can be deliberately set in motion, like a “controlled burn.” Whether spontaneously suffered or intentionally chosen, it is often through such events that the seed of Divine Presence within us powerfully draws us from the lure of the outer into new awareness of our inner spiritual being - and deeper still, into awareness of that Presence in whose image each of us is created. This process is how authentic healing happens, and where, just as the prairie recovers or heals following a prairie fire, new life springs forth.

PrairieFire, a two year program of spiritual renewal, deepening and formation, will provide a safe and sacred environment to allow the clearing of our inner terrain in order to promote new growth. In the safety of a community that provides support, resources and containment, we will explore our ways of thinking, our notions about God, and the “deadly attitudes” (attachments, aversions, judgments, competition, expectations) that keep us from knowing the truth of our divine natures in our ordinary lives.

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

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

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Vision

To create an intentional community of peers within which participants will recognize and connect with the Divine Presence within themselves and others and begin living each day in faith with a renewed sense of dedication to the holiness of life.

Focus

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

Goals & Objectives

- To build a community within which participants will find the safety and structure needed to nurture and revitalize their souls
- To provide participants with a clear understanding and grounding in the Christian contemplative tradition
- To facilitate the development and use of personal spiritual practices to deepen one's relationship with Divine Presence
- To enable a discernment process that leads each participant to a new way of being in the world that is characterized by contemplative, non-reactive, prayerful listening and the expression of one's true self.

Program Components

- Monthly gatherings for two years from September through June
 - Didactic sessions with prior readings assigned
 - Small group spiritual direction
 - Experiential exercises with time for quiet personal reflection
 - Community building
- Course requirements
 - Monthly individual spiritual direction
 - One 2 – 3 day directed spiritual retreat
 - Regular reflection and integration papers based on assigned readings

Participants are expected to faithfully engage in all aspects of the program

Course Outline

Year I

Year II

September	An Invitation to Renewal. Seeking God. Desire and Longing. Building Spiritual Community. Introduction to Group Spiritual Direction	Exploring a Rule for Life. Revisiting Prayer and Community
October	The Christian Contemplative Tradition as a Path of Renewal. An Overview of Christian Mysticism. Kataphatic and Apophatic Prayer. The Ancient Practice of Lectio Divina.	The Rule of Benedict: Modern Application for the Practice of an Ancient Wisdom
November	Thoughts Matter: What Desert Wisdom Teaches Us. The Eight Deadly Thoughts and Seven Deadly Attitudes. The Method of Centering Prayer.	Obstacles to Spiritual Growth: Resistance, Defenses, Afflictive Emotional States
December	The Stages of the Spiritual Journey. Centering Prayer and Contemplative Prayer & Contemplative Living.	Suffering, Death and Rebirth: The Seasons of Life and of the Spiritual Journey
January	A Contemporary Mystic: The Message of Thomas Merton for Today's Spiritual Seeker.	Incarnated Spirituality: Honoring the Language of the Body
February	Psychological Perspectives on the Human Condition: Toward an Integration of Psyche and Spirit.	Adult Development and Spiritual Intelligence
March	Listening for the Heartbeat of God. Practicing the Sacred Art of Listening.	The Unconscious Mind and Spirituality: Symbols and Dreams
April	Discernment: Listening for Divine Will. Discernment of Spirits. Discernment in Daily Life.	The Spirituality of Creative Expression
May	The Way of Letting Go and Surrender. Forgiveness as Spiritual Practice and a Path to Freedom	Work, Vocation and Service as Spiritual Paths
June	Renewal and Healing: The Transformative Journey	Graduation: Always We Begin Again

Meeting Schedule - We will meet the third Monday of the month (September – June)

8:00 - 8:30	Gathering and Refreshments
8:30 - 9:30	Opening prayer and checking-in
9:30 - 10:45	Didactic session I and discussion
10:45 - 11:00	Break
11:00 - 12:15	Didactic session II and discussion
12:15 - 1:00	Lunch in community
1:00 - 1:30	Large group processing
1:30 - 2:15	Practice of spiritual disciplines
2:15 - 2:30	Break
2:30 - 3:40	Group spiritual direction (small groups)
3:40 - 4:00	Closing reflection & prayer

Admission Requirements

- Obtain and submit an application, including three (3) references and a spiritual autobiography (*applications are due no later than July 1, 2010 but interested persons are encouraged to apply early since enrollment is limited.*)
- A personal interview with the co-directors of *PrairieFire*
- Rootedness within a religious tradition
- A commitment to going more broadly and deeply into one's spiritual life
- A commitment to enter individual spiritual direction

Cost

Application fee (non-refundable)	\$50
Tuition	\$1500/year
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$200 non-refundable deposit upon acceptance into the program as a down payment toward tuition for Years I & II • \$650 due September 1, 2010 and 2011 • \$750 due January 15, 2011 and 2011

The cost of books, individual spiritual direction, and the retreat will be the responsibility of each participant.

Spiritual Direction Practicum

The Institute for the Practice of Ministry, in collaboration with the Sophia Center at Mount St. Scholastica Monastery, offers a practicum for those who discern the call to serve as spiritual directors. After satisfactory completion of the practicum, the participant will obtain a certificate in spiritual direction.

Spiritual Directors' International defines spiritual direction as "the process of accompanying people on a spiritual journey. Spiritual direction exists in a context that emphasizes growing

closer to God (or the holy or a higher power)...Spiritual direction helps us to learn how to live in peace, with compassion, promoting justice as humble servants of that which lies beyond all names." (www.sdiworld.org)

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

Upon discernment of a call to this ministry, individuals will complete an application and will be accepted into the Spiritual Direction Practicum based upon:

- The successful completion of the two-year PrairieFire program that provides the necessary historical, theological, and spiritual background, as well as a basic knowledge of Christian contemplative practices
- Demonstrated listening and relationship skills and indications of spiritual growth as evidenced through participation in PrairieFire
- Recommendations by the PrairieFire team and the applicant's spiritual director
- Approval of the Director of Souljourners, an ecumenical program for spiritual formation offered through the Sophia Center and operated by the Benedictine Sisters of Mount St. Scholastic in Atchison, Kansas.

During the Spiritual Direction Practicum, participants will attend periodic programs at the Sophia Center and will provide monthly spiritual direction to individuals. They will meet monthly with a supervisor to review their work with directees and continue their own regular sessions of individual spiritual direction.

Co-Directors

Kathy Reardon

Kathy Reardon, R.N., M.S. integrates spiritual care, counseling, holistic health promotion, and gentle bodywork to support people facing such issues as: grief and loss; health crises and concerns; pain and suffering on any level of one's being; relationship wounds; spirituality and questions of faith; and important life transitional times.

Kathy has a Bachelor's degree in Nursing and a Master's degree in Counseling as well as a certificate in Spiritual Direction and certification as a Healing Touch Practitioner. She is experienced as a retreat facilitator and is commissioned to teach the Christian practice of silence known as Centering Prayer. She participates in Contemplative Outreach, a spiritual network of individuals and small faith communities committed to living the contemplative dimension of the gospels in everyday life through the practice of Centering Prayer.

As a teacher and workshop facilitator, Kathy presents programs on health, healing, and wholeness; prayer and spirituality; contemplative living; and adult spiritual formation. She finds great reward in companioning others who are seeking wholeness, wisdom, and spiritual growth regardless of the circumstances with which they are living. She sees the spiritual direction relationship as one of "tending the holy within," of reverencing the hunger and longing to find meaning and hope, and of discerning the call and movement of the Spirit in one's life.

Kathy enjoys membership in Spiritual Directors International, the American Holistic Nurses Association, Nurse Healer's-Professional Associates, Healing Touch International, and Associated Bodywork and Massage Professionals.

Kathy has been a staff member with Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center since 2001.

Kay Riley

Kay Riley, M.A. is a spiritual director and experienced teacher of spiritual formation programs in the Des Moines area. She holds a Master of Arts degree in Christian Spirituality with a specialty in Spiritual Direction from General Theological Seminary in New York City. Kay's Master's thesis was on the topic "Women's Spirituality: Two Effective Group Processes," and she has led both large and small groups in the processes the past 8 years.

From 2001 to 2006 Kay was the Lead Teacher for a formation and training program for spiritual directors at St. Joseph Educational Center/Creighton University in West Des Moines.

From 2003-2005 she was the Director of the Center for Spiritual Growth at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ in Des Moines where she directed a full range of adult education and spiritual growth programming.

Her areas of interest are in centering prayer, dream groups, 12-step spirituality, enneagram, women's spirituality, and group spiritual direction. Professionally, Kay enjoys membership in Spiritual Directors International, Contemplative Outreach and the Society for the Study of Christian Spirituality. She also enjoys cooking, playing the piano, and spending time with her grandchildren.

PRAIRIEFIRE FOUNDATIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY - RENEWAL AND FORMATION

Required texts:

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Year II: Chittister, Joan (1990) Wisdom Distilled from the Daily: Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today. HarperSanFrancisco.

(Choose one of the following)

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