

PrairieFire

A Program of Spiritual Renewal & Formation

Prairie Fire as Metaphor

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

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

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

PrairieFire: The Program

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

At some point in our lives, something often happens to jar us into a state of awakening, making 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, or the lifestyle that were supposed to make us happy don't. There may be a deep loneliness or a

persistent depression in which we function 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, life circumstances 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, often such events powerfully draw us from the lure of the outer into new awareness of our inner spiritual being - and deeper still, into awareness of that Presence in whose image each of us is created. This process leads to authentic healing. Just as the prairie recovers or heals following a prairie fire, new life springs forth in us.

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

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

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

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Vision

To create an intentional community of peers within which participants will recognize and connect with the sacred 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 contemplative 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, characterized by contemplative, non-reactive, prayerful listening and emerging expressions of one's true self.

Program Components

- Day-long monthly gatherings for two years from September through June
 - Opening and closing circles of meditation, centering and personal sharing
 - Didactic sessions with prior readings assigned
 - Small group spiritual direction
 - Experiential exercises with time for quiet personal reflection
 - Community building with an emphasis on compassionate hospitality
- Course requirements
 - Monthly individual spiritual direction sessions (a list of spiritual directors is provided)
 - One 2 – 3 day directed spiritual retreat
 - Regular reflection and integration papers based on assigned readings (each paper submitted is returned with written comments)

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 Contemplative Listening	Prayer and Community. Misconceptions and New Understandings of a Challenging Concept – “Rule.” Exploring Monastic Values and a Personal Rule for Life.
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: Seeking “A Measured Life.” Applying an Ancient Wisdom to Contemporary Life.
November	A Contemporary Mystic: The Message of Thomas Merton for Today’s Spiritual Seeker	Incarnated Spirituality. Connecting Our Physical and Sacred Selves. Honoring the Language of the Body in Illness and in Health.
December	Listening for the Heartbeat of God. Contemplative Listening. The Call to Deepening Relationships with Self, Others, God, Nature, World, Cosmos.	The Seasons of Life and of the Spiritual Journey: Suffering, Death and Rebirth/New Life.
January	The Human Condition: Psychological and Spiritual Perspectives on the Development & Healing of the Self. Toward an Integration of Psyche & Spirit.	Obstacles to Spiritual Growth: Resistance, Afflictive Emotions, and the Seven Deadly Attitudes.
February	Discernment: Listening for Divine Will. Discernment of Spirits. Discernment in Daily Decision-Making.	Dreams, Symbols, and The Unconscious Mind in Spirituality.
March	Addiction, Codependency, and the Healing of the Soul. The Twelve Steps as a Spiritual Path. Discernment and Letting Go.	Creativity as Spiritual Expression and Practice.
April	The Way of Letting Go & Surrender. Forgiveness As Spiritual Practice and a Path to Spiritual Freedom.	Evil: A Process View
May	The Ancient Mystical Tradition and Its Integration in Contemporary Contemplative Practice and Living. Revisiting the Stages of the Spiritual Journey.	The Rubber Hits the Road. Contemplation and Action. Sharing Our Personal Rules for Life.
June	The Transformative Journey. Renewal and Healing	The Paths of Work, Vocation and Service. Graduation: Always We Begin Again.

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

Note: in January we meet on the fourth Monday due to the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday)

8:00 - 8:30	Gathering and Refreshments
8:30 - 9:30	Opening circle 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 contemplative listening & disciplines
2:15 - 2:30	Break
2:30 - 3:40	Small group spiritual direction
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, 2012, but interested persons are encouraged to apply early since enrollment is limited.*
- A personal interview with the leaders 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	\$1750/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 • \$825 due September 1, 2012 and 2013 • \$825 due January 15, 2013 and 2014

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

Spiritual Direction Practicum

PrairieFire, in collaboration with the Sophia Center at Mount St. Scholastica Monastery, offers a third-year practicum. This experience is designed for those who discern a call to serve as spiritual directors, and those who wish to deepen their skills of listening and discernment, as well as their own connection to the Divine in-dwelling. Participants will receive a certificate of completion after meeting all requirements.

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. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas.

During the Spiritual Direction Practicum, participants will attend a pre-practicum workshop, a three-day directed retreat and four overnight retreats. The overnight retreats provide extensive "practice" in offering spiritual direction and receiving supervision. They also offer an opportunity for personal reflection and social time with other students.

Participants will meet monthly with two volunteer directees they recruit, provide verbatims of one directee session for a monthly supervision session, write reflection papers based on supervision, and prepare a final reflection paper. They will continue to meet with their own spiritual director monthly.

Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas offers comfortable overnight accommodations and grounds for walking. Atchison is about three and one-half hours from Des Moines.

Leadership

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 is an experienced 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.

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

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.

Diane Glass companions men and women of diverse spiritual traditions as they discover who they truly are and what their heart most desires. Diane offers a sacred place for

individuals to explore their hopes, questions, joys, losses and concerns with the intent of developing a closer relationship to the divine.

An experienced teacher and facilitator, Diane has led numerous retreats for churches and groups. She co-founded Tending Your Inner Garden® in 2003 as a yearlong program for women interested in spiritual and creative growth. She publishes a Tending Year Inner Garden newsletter and blog that reaches a national audience.

Diane graduated from St. Joseph's Educational Center and Creighton University's program in spiritual direction. She completed the Internship in the Art of Supervision of Spiritual Directors at the Mercy Center in Burlingame, California. She facilitates the Spiritual Direction Practicum, an optional third year for *PrairieFire* graduates, in coordination with Mount St. Scholastica, a Benedictine monastery, in Atchison, Kansas.

Among her special interests are befriending the body in illness and in health, the creative arts as portals to spiritual transformation, the role of community in individual spiritual growth, development and growth of spiritual directors, and nature as an embodiment of the sacred. Diane is a member of Spiritual Directors' International.

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Required texts:

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Spiritual Group Process (Choose one of the following)

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