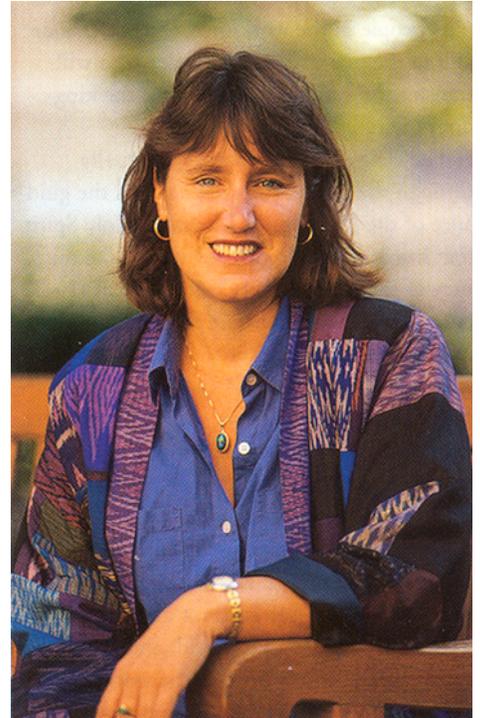


# Heart Matters

*Spirituality in everyday life*



Art by Dawn Manges



Christine Treanor is a spiritual director at the Basilica of Saint Mary.

By Marcia Jedd

**I**T WHISPERS in little hunches. It speaks to you in everyday matters or in times of great joy, pain or drama. A wave of peace when a loved one passes or the sense that things will be all right in the face of sudden illness or job loss. The still, small voice. These are all forms of faith, the presence of God, or Spirit.

On its face, spirituality might seem like an intangible that is all about the unseen. Yet, our individual spirituality can form the very bedrock of our faith, defining the lens through which we view the world. In a broad context, spirituality is defined as the state of being spiritual - that is, pertaining to spirit or soul, as distinguished from a physical nature.

"Spirituality is exploring how the spirit is present in life," says Christine Treanor, spiritual director at the Basilica. Treanor listens to parishioners who feel they need spiritual direction to find deeper meaning in relation to God in their lives. "People seek spiritual direction to sort out how God is present in their lives. Our conversations usually lead to a stronger commitment to pray," she says.

Treanor uses a variety of methods to guide parishioners on their spiritual paths, employing the tenets of Ignatian spirituality, which have an emphasis on spiritual movements.

"The assumption is we are constantly being

called by God into our fullness or wholeness, which is akin to the union with God," Treanor says. "In a broader perspective, it's about how to pray with what's going on in your life."

Prayers are really petitions to God with feeling. And it's that "feeling" part of spirituality that helps form a spiritual tradition or religion, says Anne King, a theologian who teaches at the University of St. Thomas. In King's view, feeling is one of three components to a genuine spiritual tradition. Doctrines and rules also must be present in a spiritual tradition, and King gives all three equal weight. These

Theologian Anne King teaches at the University of St. Thomas.

components all are found in an organized community of faith where common beliefs and rituals are practiced - whether church, synagogue, meditation center or other organization. Even without a community, the three elements also can shape an individual's valid spiritual tradition.

"Spirituality is never a means to an end, except the goal is to have an experience in being joined with the divine," King says. We get that experience of being joined with the divine through faith. Faith can be trust in God, a person or something else. While it's not always of a religious nature, faith is a universal feature of human living, recognizable in every form of religious practice and belief.

Paul Tillich, author of the 1950s classic *Dynamics of Faith* and other works, writes that faith is really about the values that have centering power in our lives. Tillich supported the notion that our real worship - our true devotion - directs itself toward the objects of our ultimate concern. That ultimate concern may center in our own ego or its extensions work, prestige and recognition, power and influence, wealth. Or it may be invested in family, school, nation or church. Often, love, sex and a loved partner might be the passionate center of one's ultimate concern.

Indeed, the roots of passion and faith lie in the heart. It might come as no surprise that the Hindu term for faith - *sraddha* - literally means "to set one's heart on." When the late mythologist Joseph Campbell coined the term "follow your bliss," he implied that we find bliss when we follow the intent of our heart. Other spiritual authors such as Deepak Chopra say that the divine unfolds when we follow our heart. Chopra speaks of a direct connection with the heart and our intents and desires. In *Journey into Healing*, Chopra writes that once a person begins a spiritual journey directed toward healing or becoming whole, the "ungodly world erected by the mind" can be allowed to transform into a higher reality - that is, toward the world of the heart.



In all these words, there is a sense of yearning or putting one's heart toward a goal. "In a monotheistic tradition, spirituality is a yearning for God," King says. The particular flavor of yearning and the forks of our spiritual paths are as unique as our DNA or fingerprints. These paths - whether found in day-to-day living or through more profound experiences involving revelation, insight, joy or even grief - can fit into various stages of the spiritual journey. As King presents the three classical stages of the mystical experience or spiritual journey, she's firm in stressing there's no goal or set path of progress. For example, some of us might not get out of the first stage of the three stages within our lifetime. These stages are:

- Purgation: known as purification or cleansing. A realization in the presence of God how far we fall short. A recognition of how far we have to go on our journey.
- Illumination: a hunger for learning about God through prayer, Scriptures, or meditation. A strong desire to learn in our heart, as well.
- Union: a union with God, never thought to be completely accomplished. Reaching a stage where God is intimately entwined with our life.

These stages are not rigid and consist of various degrees or graduations. They manifest in many ways: dreams, visions, music, attentive awareness, silence, tears, and those hunches and whispers.

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## FINDING YOUR CENTER

CONTEMPLATION guides us, whether we are content or weathering a crisis. Spiritual direction can be found from external sources or from within. Christine Treanor, spiritual director at the Basilica, provides parishioners with their own tools to use in life as a sounding board for a group that meets under her direction. For more than six years, the Spiritual Journey group has been a safe place to share one's spiritual path. The group prays together and often discusses important themes of the liturgical year. The group meets on the first and third Saturdays of the month from September to May from 9:30 to 11:00 A.M. in the rectory conference room. Anyone is welcome to drop in, and no advance sign-up is required.

Treanor says there is a wellspring of ways to seek our own wisdom. She urges us to ask not only for the "whys" behind a life event or situation, rather, "Ask, 'How is God present in this experience?'" and ask, "How is it bringing you toward greater fullness?" Treanor says. In addition to the more traditional silent prayers to God and oneself, low-voiced meditative chanting and journaling are effective methods to receive guidance. "Powerful ways to journal are to write down what provides you with life-giving energy as opposed to that which is draining, what calls you to love or away from love, grateful versus non-grateful, and importantly, what something is teaching you," she says. This practice draws from the Ignatian "Examen," which is an examination of conscience and can help us discern the movement of spirits in life.

Both Treanor and theologian Anne King also recommend basic meditation. King advises finding your center by sitting down for ten minutes and concentrating on a word, such as peace. "The idea is to go deep within yourself and become quiet because you can't listen until your brain stops roaming around," King says. After all, we have to catch those whispers.

—Marcia Jedd