

Earth Monastery Project Final Update by Nancy Wiens

YOUNG ADULT VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There are two key points of reference for vocational development, which we use at Kauai Sacred Day Walk. First is the lives of the young adults themselves and second is the rich literature on vocation in the Christian tradition. Years of teaching young adults and leading wilderness rites of passage guide us to notice the questions this generation of people, in this blend of island cultures, is carrying. In their lifetimes, in the simplest of terms, they have witnessed the collapse of the Twin Towers and of the fragile global economy. They live with the normalizing of government takeovers and the hottest years on the planet in 14 out of the last 15 years. Add that to the particulars of the complex, island cultures and class demographics. When we place these intense contexts alongside the wizened elders of Parker Palmer and Frederick Buechner, we attune to the midwifing of each young adult's personal calling. "True vocation join self and service, as Frederick Buechner asserts when he defines vocation as 'the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need.' Buechner's definition starts with the self and moves toward the needs of the world: it begins, wisely where vocation begins—not in what the world needs (which is everything), but in the nature of the human self, in what bring the self joy, the deep joy of knowing that we are here on earth to be the gifts that God created."¹ These two men's wisdom about the interaction of the inner and outer worlds meets Howard Thurman's sage luminosity, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." In the second half of 2014, the Abbey of the Arts' mission of transformative living through contemplative and expressive arts and, more specifically, the Earth Monastery Project's aim to nourish an earth-cherishing consciousness and to cultivate a vision of the earth as our primary monastery provided a mature partner for us at Kauai Sacred Day Walk to take on these challenges of vocational development with young adults on the islands of Hawaii.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION SESSIONS

Methodology—Organizing Principles for the Spiritual Formation

Responsible for the formation element, I approached this vocational development program through two lenses: the practice of Christian spiritual direction and the academic study of Christian Spirituality. Similar to the methodology of Grounded Field Theory, recently popularized by Brene Brown's work (*Daring Greatly, The Gifts of*

¹ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*, (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 16-7.

Imperfection, and *The Daring Way*™), my approach *begins* with the lived experiences of the young adults and then looks to the academic theories in the field to gain insights for exploring and understanding this life stage of spiritual development. Subsequently, those insights inform my exploration of spiritual formation with each program participant and aid in their vocational development.

During monthly meetings, the young adults would drop deeper into knowing of themselves and of God's ways with them, as they looked at dorm life, academic course challenges, new relationships, interactions with parents, social life explorations, and expressions of faith. Rooting in the wisdom of the Earth Monastery Project, I wanted to use the Monk Manifesto as a primary, common access point for each session with each young adult. It gave us common language to reference as potential navigation points amid the frenzied forces of their lives. The overarching movement is toward individuation at this point in their spiritual formation and general development—from parents, primarily, but also from the racial-ethnic cultural factors of extended family, church, local community, island of origin (if not from Hawaii), etc. A great majority of the time, we discovered places of connection with the Holy that could ripple out into the various arenas of their lives. I also often found them open to noticing when they were not attuning to God, as they yearned to shift the pattern or belief behind their behaviors. Other times, as with all of us, wounds or deep patterns of protection dissuaded the movement and flow with the Spirit.

Because the heart of the Day Walk happens in Nature, kinship with creation readily served as an opening to the Holy with each participant in any given session. Many people, much less young adults, do not know that they can encounter God in Nature. Most of our young adults do not have much, if any, experience of God in nature prior to the Day Walk. So, to have this access point in our hip pocket during experiences of desolation, or perceived absence of God, was a deep gift of the program follow up.

Specifically, four areas of research relate to their lived experience and fortify the vocational program. The commitments of the Monk Manifesto provide helpful points of reference to illustrate these four areas. First, the research of Marshall Rosenberg, Inbal Kashtan, and Miki Kashtan in the area of nonviolent communication and philosophy strongly correlates with the young adults' experience. Nonviolent communication begins with the assumption that every action is an attempt to meet one of the many universal needs that all humans share—an attempt that is neither good nor bad in and of itself, just more or less effective in its aim. Further, nonviolent communication distinguishes these attempts to meet the need from the needs themselves. For example, giving a hug is an attempt to meet a need for connection. But there are countless other ways to offer connection, some of which are far more effective and more appropriate than a hug, e.g. offering connection by reading a poem or silently accompanying a friend after open-heart surgery, or looking in the eyes while shaking hands with a client or parishioner. The young adults' experiences of individuating from familial and ethnic

communities of origin connected with insights of nonviolent communication, particularly related to the Manifesto commitments of hospitality, work, and conversion. Because each of those manifesto commitments benefits from freedom from right and wrong thinking and explores the natural blend of personal gifts and limitations, nonviolent communication's perspectives helped to build inner resources for individuating into adulthood.

Second, Brene Brown's work on living wholeheartedly speaks directly to the young adults' experiences of hospitality, community, work, and creative joy. Brown's research in shame and vulnerability led her to conclusions about creating patterns for life that support living wholeheartedly. While not focusing on specific practices, she identifies ways of seeing and making choices that either feed a life of shame and scarcity or a life of wholehearted connection, compassion, and courage. The young adults' journeys in college are all about creating the kind of life they want to live, personally and professionally, once they reach graduation. The ten guideposts from Brown's work offer them a glimpse of how their choices might play out and beckon them toward the building of inclusive hospitality, nourishing community, meaningful work, and creative joy.

The last two areas where the research correlates with their lived experience and sheds guiding light come from the study of Christian history and biblical spirituality. Many sessions focused on the manifesto commitments of silence and solitude, Sabbath, and kinship with creation. The general US culture's familiarity of 'hurry' as a life-style is hyper fulfilled in the college atmosphere. Silence and solitude, Sabbath, and kinship with creation pave a reliable route out of 'hurry.' Invitations to practice them fill the pages of scripture and the chronicles of the early Ammas and Abbas as well as the lives of those journeying on The Way over the life of Christianity. Many times in a session filled with anxiety and fear related to due dates and crammed calendars, a psalm or practice of St. Ignatius would provide a crevice for the Light to enter and reroute them back to God.

In all of these areas of research, there is a strong emphasis on practice, on becoming, on making small decisions time after time to effect a bigger-picture aim. An apt summary of the spiritual formation follow up blends the practical and theoretical: a nonviolent, wholehearted Christian life emerges in the present moment and the next present moment strung together overtime and in interdependent relationships of connection, compassion, and courage.

Participants' Self-Reflection

I developed a self-reflection tool for each of them to explore her/his current relationship to the Monk Manifesto commitments. I asked one of the participants to help me explore the language of it and rewrite it into words that felt more indigenous to the diverse cultures of the Day Walk population and age group. Few changes were made, but the rest of the participants knew of her involvement, which seemed to make it

more 'their own.' The questions I posed explore the meaning and value of each manifesto commitment to them, their self-evaluation about how alive each commitment is currently in their lives, and how they might be drawn to practicing it, given their daily life. The emphasis on daily practices and life-style habits, drawn from nonviolent communication, the wholeheartedness research, biblical spirituality, and Christian history is evident in this self-reflection.

Revised Version of the Manifesto

See following page

Monk Manifesto

1. I commit to seek moments of **silence and solitude** each day, to be open to hearing new voices, and to resist the culture of constant noise and stimulation.
2. I commit to radical acts of **hospitality** by welcoming the stranger both without and more importantly, within. I understand that when I create space in my heart for the hindered parts of myself, compassion thrives and I possess the ability to accept those parts in others.
3. I commit to cultivating **community** by discovering kindred spirits along life's path, individuals with whom I can share my deepest longings, and mentors who can offer guidance and wisdom for the journey.
4. I commit to developing my **relationship with nature** by discerning my use of energy and things, and letting go of what does not help nature flourish.
5. I commit to **work** with a grateful heart and use my gifts in meaningful ways.
6. I commit to restorative patterns of work and rest by observing **Sabbath** and resisting the culture of busyness that measures my worth by what I do.
7. I commit to a lifetime of continuous **conversion** and transformation, understanding that I am always on a journey filled with both gifts and limitations.
8. I commit to being a dancing monk, cultivating **creative joy** and allowing my body and "heart overflow with the inexpressible delights of love."

Self-Reflection Questions

1. What is your first response when you read the first commitment?
2. How important is it to you?
 - very supportive of my relationship with God and/or myself
 - somewhat valuable
 - not that significant
3. Given your day to day life, how drawn are you to practicing it?
 - strongly—I already know it is a key practice for me, and I am committed to continuing with it.
 - strongly—I sense it might support me because I have some experience with it or have heard about its helpfulness.
 - moderately—Seems like a good idea but not sure how.
 - moderately—I'd like to, but there is something in the way. (Describe in the comment box below)
 - not so much—Don't really connect with it.
4. Comments
(Repeat all questions for each of the 8 commitments)
5. Which of the 8 feel very alive for you today? Choose as many as you are drawn to.

The commitments that drew them the most were silence and solitude, community, and conversion. Hospitality and Sabbath felt the farthest from their reach, either because of not understanding it (unable to imagine what it would look like as a lived practice) or to find a way to fit it into their lives, or both. I used their responses to tailor my interactions with them in the follow up sessions. There was only one response of 'not so much,' and it was simply a lack of understanding of the meaning of conversion. Primarily, I found significant deterrents to living as a monk in the world: dorm life and young adult life-styles (fast pace, filling all awake time with activity, messages of not being enough by the culture of grades or consumer media, a belief that this part of their lives is about getting a good job, lack of healthy individuation as the norm, and lack of trusted and healthy mentors).

The Monk Manifesto commitments have become a counter-cultural point of reference for them at this formative time in their lives, spiritually, intellectually, psychologically, and mentally.

FINDING YOURSELF IN GOD RETREATS

The Rev. Dr. Phyllis Meighen, Founder of ReSource for Christian Spirituality, which offers the Kauai Sacred Day Walk, led the two retreats as a second dimension of the follow up to the Day Walk. She worked with a prior Day Walk participant to create the first retreat, and two of the participants, who had powerful encounters with God on the first retreat, asked to help create the second. This kind of synergy from one retreat

to the next is a key component in reaching this island community of young adults. We have learned that many are deeply embedded in family relationships and do not have interest in experiences away from family or close friends. They have not explored the more remote natural places of Kauai, even though it has been their island home since birth. Some have never spent a night away from home.

These retreats are central pieces in nurturing an earth-cherishing sensibility. Spending time in nature for contemplation or connection with God is almost unheard of in the youth and young adult population. Beyond the unfamiliarity, there is fear related to culturally embedded spiritual legends/stories and spiritual experiences that are interpreted fearfully. So, these retreats are very meaningful elements in moving toward the experiencing the earth as our monastery and a trusted place to encounter a Living, Loving God. Because nature is often easily experienced as a place to play for this population, the link between fun and experiences of God is a central bridge. Play supports the lessening of fear as well. The retreats explicitly bridge the God they recognize in scripture to the God they experience while praying/contemplating in nature.

The November retreat took place at the Keahua State Park and Arboretum, and in January, the group went to Maha`ulepu Nature Preserve, new places for nearly everyone who attended. Before leaving that retreat, the participants initiated a third to do the 88 Shrines Pilgrimage at Lawai International Center, again a place that only person had experienced. The participants are diverse in ethnic culture, age (18-32), and gender, some with prior exposure to Christianity and others not.

The spiritual practices in nature can be found in the Appendices. Their strength comes to the fore in the context of communal preparation for practicing them and a contemplative space for processing them afterward. More so, the biblical worldview that informs them is of each of us being the Beloved of God and part of God's blessed creation, companioned by God in all times and places, and invited through the movement of the Spirit to partner in manifesting the realm of God, in the way Jesus chose day in and day out to live it. Practicing these exercises within a community of folks who share this spirituality brings forth their creativity and increases their effectiveness.

WITNESSED SUCCESSES

One of the measures of success we are witnessing is the young adults sharing their experiences with others, as testaments to the impact of the program on them. Two examples illustrate that. The young woman, who founded the Kauai Sacred Day Walk, has become a lead recruiter for the program's ongoing offerings. From her college home on the mainland, she is active in her network of friends and acquaintances on the islands, sharing with them how the Day Walk and follow up sessions have impacted her college life and leadership as a dorm Community Advisor. For example, she cut up the Monk Manifesto commitments and put them all over the walls of the dorm bathrooms.

This young woman has been known to rearrange meetings with her boss to keep her follow up meetings in order to explore how God is moving in and guiding her life. You can see her comments about the significance of the follow up meetings in the Appendices. The peer relationships she nurtures are absolutely key for effecting involvement on the islands. We have found no other approach to be more inviting and successful in signing up participants for the Kauai Sacred Day Walk.

Second, for the 2014 Kauai Sacred Day Walk, we had a teenaged girl, who had already been tapped by her local church as a leader, ask to join us. Because she was underage, we initially declined for insurance reasons. But her perseverance encouraged us to creatively adjust some of the retreat practices so that she could participate with some adult (discreet and distant) presence. Since then, she has actively shared her experience with many inside the Christian tradition and others at school, even though that is a very challenging thing to do in the island subculture of high school. For example, she shared the Monk Manifesto with one girl, who has made it part of her daily meditation practice, folding it into a long-standing Buddhist meditation with chakras.

PRAYER PRACTICES FOR THE FINDING YOURSELF IN GOD RETREATS

See following pages. Each is authored by The Rev. Dr. Phyllis Meighen.

2. Now take your camera and go for a very quiet and leisurely walk in nature. With an open and receptive heart, simply photograph how the scripture is portrayed in what you see.
3. When you return, pause to give thanks for the time you have had with God.
4. Review your photos. Do they tell a story? Do they tell something about you or your life story? What has been revealed to you in your time with God?



Find Yourself in God

Saturday, January 17, 2015

Maha`ulepu, Kauai

**Resource for Christian Spirituality
and
Lihue Lutheran Church**

Find Yourself in God

A. Walking the Labyrinth at Momilani Kai

The labyrinth is an ancient form of walking prayer. A labyrinth has only one path which leads to the center, and its reverse, which leads out. The labyrinth helps us journey slowly and reflectively to the heart of God, there to rest and receive God's grace or guidance, and then to return to our lives spiritually renewed. There is no right or wrong way to walk the labyrinth. The act of walking quiets the mind and opens the heart to receive God.

1. **Setting Intention** - Before your spiritual walk, decide an intention for your time with God. It may be to ask God's guidance for a decision that's before you. It may be to ask for healing. It may be to express grief or sorrow, or to express gratitude. It may be to seek hope or courage or strength. It may be simply to slow down and release stress. It may be just as simple as spending uninterrupted, spacious time with God.
2. **Opening Prayer** - At the entrance of the labyrinth, pause. Offer your prayer intention for the spiritual walk you're about to take.
3. **Letting Go** - When you're ready, begin walking the path. It's a time for the mind to become quiet, to let go of worries or tasks to do. Without effort, just become present to your body and to the walking.
4. **Resting and Receiving** - When you arrive at the center, come to a place of quiet rest. Sit if you like, and rest in the presence of God for as long as seems good to you. Receive God's gifts for you.
5. **Returning** - When you're ready, begin the process of returning on the path you have walked. Be empowered by Spirit to have your actions and life transformed.
6. **Reflecting** - After you've completed the labyrinth, take some time to reflect on your experience. Consider writing your thoughts in your journal.

B. Expressing God's Creation through Haiku Poetry

You may wish to express your time with God in nature by composing a simple haiku poem. Haiku is a Japanese poetry form, yet it is more than a poem. Haiku is a way of seeing the essence of creation. By using just a few words, haiku captures a moment and creates a picture in the reader's mind. It is like a tiny window into a scene much larger than itself. Traditionally,

haiku is composed of three lines, where the first line is 5 syllables, the second line is 7 syllables, and the third line is 5 syllables. Here's an example:

That quenches my thirst
Ocean vast and beautiful
But she is salty _____

1. Just be with God in God's creation – Take your time—at least an hour. Walk and leisurely look around you. Pause and feel God's creation. Sit and listen quietly. Notice the subtleties of fragrances and smells. Drink in life.
2. When you feel complete in your experience, find a place to just sit and reflect. What comes up for you? What feelings or sensations arise in you? What images come to mind?
3. When your heart is open, when you're relaxed, take your journal and begin to compose a simple haiku that captures the essence of some part of your time with God in nature. Three lines: 5 syllables / 7 syllables/ 5 syllables.
4. Now just be with your haiku as God's gift to you.

C. Seeing God through the Lens of a Camera

Genesis 1:26-28 – God spoke: "Let us make human beings in our image, make them reflecting our nature so they can be responsible for the fish in the sea, the birds in the air, the cattle, and, yes, Earth itself, and every animal that moves on the face of Earth." God created human beings: he created them godlike, reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female. God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth." (The Message translation)

1. Read the biblical passage slowly—at least 3 times. What part of it resonates with you as you read it?