



## From the Director:

Dear Friends of Shem Center,

With Shem Center's programs postponed or canceled, finding new ways to continue our mission has been a challenge since physical distancing during the pandemic has become necessary. Shem Center searches for ways to continue to be a presence in today's world bringing a message of radical inclusiveness, respect, understanding, civility, kindness and justice for all, including creation itself.

This our wide reaching and ambitious vision appears on the scene today as exactly what our suffering world needs. From well over a half million Covid-19 deaths, over 600 children, some under the age of 5, separated from their families at the border, the undoing of years of work on environmental justice, violence fed by easy access to handguns, the denial of voting rights, contempt for democracy, lying that replaces clearly observable facts, and a host of other words and actions assault us daily.

We are being called today to really see the consequences of our actions toward each other. Even if the spiritual and moral questions we face are ignored, common sense at least calls for cooperation with Covid-19 protocols from science and medicine. These will be in place for some time even as effective vaccines show promise of helping change the infection and death rate. How strange it is that some consider saving lives by wearing masks, social distancing and washing hands takes away one's "freedom."

We have become numb to the appalling number of pandemic deaths due to leader incompetence and selfishness with daily statistics now matching and even exceeding those of World War II. New leadership in our country is now addressing this long neglected tragedy of over a half million deaths and millions more infected by the virus. Evil has been given the freedom to circulate unchecked among us to an alarming degree. These are contentious and dangerous times. A divided country will surely continue to plague us. At the same time the inspiring presence of the first responders and service providers daily risk their lives on our behalf. These are the saints who walk among us, caring for the sick and dying and all who suffer from the consequences of this pandemic.

The pages that follow give an account of Shem Center during the past year. Our challenges, hopes, dreams, victories and disappointments are all part of our narrative in which you have a place. Thank you for your continued friendship and support for the the mission of Shem Center. I have been heartened by the ongoing interest and financial support that have continued from you our loyal friends. We will continue to offer ways to engage the universal values found in the wisdom traditions of the world's religions and spiritual paths.

With respect and gratitude,

Joseph Kilikevics, OP,  
Director



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*We are bound together in what Dr. Martin Luther King called a "mutual garment of destiny."*

*May we live within this bond with forgiveness and love to heal our divisions.*

## **Covet 19** **Reflections** *a liminal time of safely distancing*

### **Liminal Space**

The need to survive the pandemic as a time of isolation and physical distancing, our time together and many other choices taken for granted have become a thing of the past and we are left longing for their return. That unknown day of safely shaking hands and hugging friends cannot be soon enough, but fear arises with every increase in numbers of virus victims and deaths. Uncertainty, denial and lack of competent national leadership remains. The question we will surely ask each other is, "What did you do during the time when life as we knew it was shut down?"

The term "liminal space" is appropriate, something we considered in some depth during Shem Center retreats. Richard Rohr's explorations about the subject were a resource used in naming this "threshold of uncertainty, a doorway between, a place without answers, meaning or closure." We did some significant work reflecting together upon this common experience of disruption, risk and danger. We now find ourselves standing together in the threshold between our past and the unknown future. We won't be able to say that life as we knew it has returned.

### **Pandemic**

The corona virus merged with the powerful demonstrations in response to the long lived pandemic of racism has marked our days and nights with how we as a people either react or respond. As weeks of marching protestors turned into months our streets filled with insistence upon justice for all people made history in ways that cannot be ignored.

The prospect of continuing the mission of Shem Center in ways other than gathering people for retreats challenges me to learn how to gather people via computer and to redesign the Shem Center web site. Retreats have had to be canceled and a well planned annual Shem Center gala concert postponed with the hope of offering it when it is safe to do so. It was to be a presentation of the music of St. Hildegard of Bingen, 12th century abbess, mystic, poet and woman of wisdom and courage who challenged the clergy of her own time to much needed reform. Her music is exquisite and I was fortunate to find singers well versed in it to present the concert. These and other Shem Center programs remain on hold as we search for ways to continue our mission of interfaith inclusiveness and respect.

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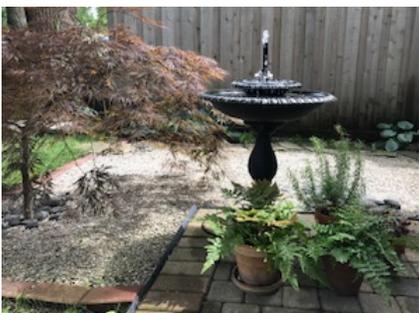
## **Continuing Education**

In June I took an on-line course in the four Gospels at Catholic Theological Union titled, "Gospel Portraits of Jesus." taught by Don Senior, CP, a Sacred Scripture. scholar and author. On-line learning has become common and while I found this course on the four Gospels engaging, I missed interaction with other students. This new way to teach and learn seems a far cry from having the opportunity to connect with others.

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## **Shem Center Zen Meditation Garden**

Time and attention to gardening in the Shem Center front and back yards brought me to work I love. The "veriditas," or greening power Hildegard of Bingen speaks of is there to enjoy. The small Zen style meditation garden is maturing now with ferns, Hostas and small ground cover plants that are merging with its flagstone path. I enjoy watching the many birds who visit the water basin and fountain. Of the variety of species that come, the sweet little sparrows are my favorites. A drink and a bath happen quickly and they are off to do the next thing God gives them to do, be sparrows. At this writing the Milkweed patch has already attracted a few Monarch Butterflies. I think they are scouts who carry a message to the others whose inner promptings bring them to the place I provide for them to pause during their 3,000 mile journey between North America and Mexico.



## Angels Unaware

a sculpture in  
St. Peter's Square



Canadian sculptor  
Timothy P. Schmalz  
poses next to his  
sculpture, 'Angels  
Unaware.' Credit:  
Daniel Ibanez/CNA.

News that deserves attention is often hijacked by the disconcerting, disquieting and dismaying White House. Here's something we missed that offers an antidote to the lack of civility that has plagued us. It is a story about a significant work of art now on display in St. Peter's Square in the Vatican.

A 20 foot tall bronze sculpture depicting some 140 migrants and refugees from different countries and periods of history. The life sized figures, women, men, and children are crowded together on a boat, their facial expressions revealing "the joys, the hopes, but also the tragic sorrow of leaving one's home and one's loved ones. . . ." says the Canadian artist, Timothy Schmalz who was given the commission to create the sculpture by the Vatican Office of Migrants and Refugees. One can make out Jews fleeing Nazi Germany as well as figures depicting contemporary events that blend together in a history of exile and separation.

The artist speaks of being inspired by Hebrews 13:2, "Do not neglect hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware." One can see angel wings emerging from deep within the crowd of people on the boat. Timothy Schmalz also did "Homeless Jesus" a bronze sculpture of Jesus dressed as a homeless man asleep on a park bench.

I am reminded of the argument sometimes voiced by critics of the expensive and priceless art found in the Vatican, paid for with funds that could have better served the needs of the world's hungry. My response is one that acknowledges that the poor of this world also need their spirits fed with beauty, especially beauty that is free for the public to view and enjoy. While the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel expresses something from an artist of another time, "Angels Unaware" has a message for us all today. "The person who approaches the piece can identify with these human images, with these spiritual wings in the center." says the artist.

Pope Francis has asked European leaders to take in as many refugees as possible. A little known fact is the the Catholic Church through the Vatican is the largest charitable organization in the world. The treasury of the Vatican was almost completely drained after World War I so as to help victims and refugees of the conflict.

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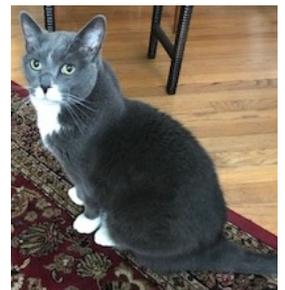
## New Book by Matthew Fox

My friend Matt Fox launched an on line course titled, "Aquinas, Timeless Insights for Thriving in Challenging Times." His new book, *The Tao of Thomas Aquinas* is a handbook containing straightforward and useful references that I imagine being carried around in backpacks by activists of any age. Often letting Aquinas speak for himself, Matt brings both his respect for Aquinas and his lineage and Matt's own scholarship and insights from his years as my Dominican brother. Here's one quote from Aquinas: "The proper objects of the heart are truth and justice." This book is a treasure worth having to access a "fierce wisdom needed for hard times." I also highly recommend following Matt's "Daily Meditations" found at: <https://dailymeditationswithmatthewfox.org/about-matthew-fox/>

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## Louie, Meditation Partner

Pet parenting my cat, Louie brings me great enjoyment. I brought him home with me the day my younger brother, John died five years ago. He named him after Louie Aparicio, the Chicago White Sox shortstop of the 1950's. Louie is a handsome dark grey short hair cat, symmetrically marked with white paws, neck and underbelly. His vet assures me me that sleeping some 18 hours a day is normal for cats! I've learned that animals who befriend us have an amazing capacity to communicate, feel, remember, be affectionate and welcoming to strangers. Louie is also a great meditation partner for me.



## “Veriditas” The Greening Power Life

Sunday, April 26th 2020, the Shem Center garden displayed blooming quince, wild violets and a variety of daffodils and hyacinths. The green of newly sprouted grass provided the background for the pair of cardinals who took up residence in the back yard several years ago and never left. It was to be the day of our annual Shem Center gala concert.



This year’s annual gala concert titled, “Creation, a Symphony of Joy” was to be our celebration of the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. We planned on presenting the medieval sacred music composed by Abbess Hildegard of Bingen, Saint, Mystic and Doctor of the Church. “Veriditas” is the Latin word Hildegard used to express “the greening power of creation.” As a 12th century woman of significant spiritual depth and creativity, Hildegard’s music appropriately expresses the spirit of the eco-justice movement of our own time. Because of the social distancing in place in the country to help protect us against the deadly coronavirus, the concert could not take place. Three women from Grand Rapids, Michigan, “The Hildegard Singers” whose beautifully trained voices were to present this music have agreed to do the concert whenever it can be rescheduled.

During the week following the postponed concert, the virus pandemic had infected over three million people and killed over three hundred thousand. As this narrative

merges with that of Shem Center and with the lives of people all over the world, what becomes evident is that life will be different from now on. The stories of courageous first responders risk their own lives daily in caring for the infected, often without protective gear and the families of loved ones who die without them at their side speak to a grossly inadequate response to this emergency. The obvious political factors involved are easy to see. Something is very wrong, unjust, destructive and evil, adding to the fear and anxiety of a novel and unpredictable virus. Corporate greed along with lies and misinformation increase the suffering of the people of the world. Unable to gather socially or even to pray and worship together, we are left with the loneliness that accompanies isolation. The selfishness and lack of common sense shown by those who promote ending the needed physical distancing adds to the distress.



As of today, over 65 million worldwide have died from this virus. The delay in responding to the warnings of the medical experts who were aware of menacing dangers has become a significant part of the story. This shocking fact is a call to make the choices that keep us and all others we come in contact with safe and in good health. My remarks are a choice to not remain silent in the midst of this tragedy. Life itself is infinitely more valuable than all other concerns. I am deeply moved not only by the first responders who daily face danger to themselves but also those who provide basic services such as cleaning and sanitizing, food preparation and delivery and refuse pick up. The basic goodness of people is so evident and is a source of hope to us who long for a better world that is safe for everyone. Yet rent and mortgage assistance, food insecurity and medical needs have yet to be adequately met. “Creation is a symphony of joy,” sings Hildegard. May this symphony embrace us beyond our pain and grief.

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*The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things.*

— Pope Francis, Laudato Si

## Regarding Earth Day, 2020

Since the beginnings of observing Earth Day 50 years ago, a result of decades of work by environmental groups and responded to with bipartisan cooperation, great strides have been made in addressing the threats to life on earth for human and all other forms of life. The establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency by President Nixon and the Clean Air Act that followed are indications of the success the eco-justice movement has been. Also included in this impressive history is the Encyclical, "Laudato Si" by Pope Francis, a significant document that provides both guidance and a wealth of spirit filled reflection on creation as blessing and a source of Divine revelation for all people.

In the past four years President Trump has undone decades of progress in environmental rules, many put in place by President Obama. His disdain and clearly expressed contempt for his predecessor's legacy has undone the hard work of Americans who have worked hard toward our having a better and safer world for generations yet to be born. To quote a great sage of the environment, Thomas Berry, a teacher I was privileged to have while studying with Matthew Fox some years ago said, "The earth is keeping an accurate account of what humans are doing to it." From the extinction of a million species of life due to human behaviors to the pollution of our waters, land and air we re-enter the crisis that motivated us 50 years ago when Earth Day was established to be observed annually.

To quote Thomas Berry once again, this from his memorable talk I heard at the Chicago 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions; "The human species and the natural world will go into the future together, or both will experience disaster on the way." We are living in the future Thomas spoke about. It seems to me that all other matters pale in the face of this one.

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## Time to Wake Up

### "You Want a Confederate Monument? My Body Is a Confederate Monument"

Opinion from Caroline Randall Williams, poet. — June 26, 2020

NASHVILLE — *I have rape-colored skin. My light-brown-blackness is a living testament to the rules, the practices, the causes of the Old South. If there are those who want to remember the legacy of the Confederacy, if they want monuments, well, then, my body is a monument. My skin is a monument.*

*Dead Confederates are honored all over this country — with cartoonish private statues, solemn public monuments and even in the names of United States Army bases. It fortifies and heartens me to witness the protests against this practice and the growing clamor from serious, nonpartisan public servants to redress it. But there are still those — like President Trump and the Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell — who cannot understand the difference between rewriting and reframing the past. I say it is not a matter of "airbrushing" history, but of adding a new perspective.*

*Among the apologists for the Southern cause and for its monuments, there are those who dismiss the hardships of the past. They imagine a world of benevolent masters, and speak with misty eyes of gentility and honor and the land. They deny plantation rape, or explain it away, or question the degree of frequency with which it occurred. To those people it is my privilege to say, I am proof. I am proof that whatever else the South might have been, or might believe itself to be, it was and is a space whose prosperity and sense of romance and nostalgia were built upon the grievous exploitation of black life.*





*What I mean by public virtue is primarily about solidarity with others, as opposed to an exclusive concern with my "inner life." As different part of the Body of Christ, we each have strengths and gifts that are needed by the entire body. We are called by the Spirit to use these gifts that are needed by the entire body... to use these gifts in service and love for our hurting world and not just for our private sense of "holiness."*

—Richard Rohr, OFM

*We should always have three friends in our lives - none who walks ahead who we look up to and follow; one who walks beside us, who is with us every step of our journey; and then, one who we reach back for and bring along after we've cleared the way.*

—Michelle Obama



## **Shem Center Financial Report**

The Shem Center Board of Directors has chosen to change our annual financial report from a June / July fiscal year to a January / December calendar year. The financial part part of this Annual Report will be posted in mid January, 2021 on our website, currently in the process of being redesigned. The address will remain

**[www.shemcenter.org](http://www.shemcenter.org)**

In the meantime I can report that we remain solvent even as financial stress has taken over the lives of so many people. Our donors have continued to support Shem Center even though we had to cancel our annual gala concert, as well as all in-person retreats. Spiritual Direction has continued on Zoom and our first Zoom retreat day, the Advent Bread Baking / Aramaic Jesus Retreat scheduled for December 12th registered some 80 participants, far more than we could accommodate on this retreat were it held at Shem Center. You have continued to support Shem Center knowing that we are also

Your tax-exempt donations in any amount are received with gratitude and are spent wisely to maintain our mission. You may now conveniently send your donations by way of PayPal.

Go to the PayPal home page, and select "Send Money, Pay on Line. . ." then "Send a Request" at the top of the page. Using this Shem Center e-mail address, enter the amount of your donation. It will go directly into the Shem Center PayPal account.

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Please also use this e-mail address above, to let us know, that your have made a contribution.

If you prefer, send a check to our mailing address.

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## **Selections from the Shem Center 2020 Journal**

February 2, 2020, Sunday, 1:00pm, Arlington Heights Library, "Tatazome" Japanese tea ceremony and luncheon celebrating the New Year. A peaceful gathering of good people involved in the study of the tea ceremony, Special guest, Council Naoya Kishj from the Consulate-General of Japan.

February, 7, 2020, Saturday, 10am to 4:00pm at Shem Center, Aramaic Words of Jesus Lenten retreat.  
May 28, 2020, Thursday, 100,000 Americans have died from covid-19.

June 8-12, 2020, CTU audited summer course taught via Zoom by Don Senior, CP, "Gospel Portraits of Jesus,"

June 19, 2020, Sr. Maureen Sauer, SNDdeN died. A dear friend and choir director at St. Catherine of Siena / St. Lucy Parish for 22 years. I was a member of this choir. It never occurred to her that we couldn't sing Mozart's music, and so we did, beautifully. Sr. Maureen brought the choir to perform at the Shem Center gala concerts a number of times.

July 12, 2020, Shem Center Zen meditation garden with newly installed wind chimes, splashing fountains, Monarch Butterfly way station, a variety of song birds, flowers and a firefly display at dusk.

July 13, 2020-, Monday, over 135,000 coronavirus deaths in the country, by far the highest numbers of any country in the world.

November 3, 2020, Joe Biden is elected President, and the world rejoices.



November 16, 2020, Sister Melanie Roetker, OP died. She was a Dominican Sister of Springfield, Illinois, a dear friend of many years who encouraged me during the beginning years of Shem Center, joyful and warmly welcoming to everyone. She invited me to give retreats at their retreat center in Riverton, Illinois.

November 18, 2020, Sister Lioba Hanley, OSB, A Benedictine Sister of Perpetual Adoration of Clyde, Missouri died. A deeply spiritual woman of prayer, and a faithful friend. Our friendship dated from grade school days. She gave Shem Center the Buddhist gong she and some of the nuns had used in Zen meditation. I sound it daily, sending her a blessing.

November 22, 2020, John Greven died - a friend and member of the men's support group I meet with twice a month. John was a larger than life guy, Peace Corp Volunteer, barbershop quartet tenor, storyteller, jokester and a man of courage and compassion.

December 9, 2020, over 300,000 coronavirus deaths to date.

December 12, 2020, Advent Bread Baking /Aramaic Words of Jesus Retreat via Zoom with Neil Douglas-Klotz, friend and research author of the Aramaic words of Jesus, who joined us on Zoom from Scotland. Technical help from Terry Kinsey. Emory Mead, registrar.

Spiritual Direction appointments continued throughout the year via Zoom.

Weekly classes continued for "Chanoyu," The Japanese Tea Ceremony via Zoom, with Tea Master, S Sense Joyce Kubose.

The four close friends whose recent deaths I mention are a testament to how much my life has been blessed with the companionship of extraordinary people. They rest in the Lord now as I grieve their loss.

*Photos by Joseph Kilikevica*

