



Timothy Hursley

# SEEKING SILENCE

## A Reality With Wings



The world in spring is replete with lessons on Hope. Everywhere we look, the pinks, yellows, and violets of early spring flowers rouse the hopeful and creative energies that often lie dormant in the winter months. As a working musician, I find the months of January and February to be a quiet respite after the frenzy of November weddings and December holiday events. I often do my “spring” cleaning early. I play piano just for fun. This year, I completely rearranged one room to make a home office.

Before I am ready to release my quiet days of sitting, puttering around, and casually coaxing music from the piano, the March wind and rains come, things heat up, and it’s time to “spring forward” into activity! I feel a bio-rhythmic resistance to this change and fear what I am not-yet-ready-for. I am conscious during this transition of the interplay between the interior stillness cultivated in the winter and the vigorous, expressive, often chaotic energy the spring embodies.

Many lean on Hope to help move them through life’s transitional times. For many who deal with the Winter Blues, the simple hope that spring will come again is comforting. The famous line “Hope springs eternal in the human breast,” from Pope’s *An Essay on Man*, continues with the less-quoted qualification, “Man never is, but always to be blessed.” The final tenet affirmed in the Nicene Creed of Christian worship expresses hope for the “life of the world to come.” For many, just the idea that something better is coming helps to make the present more livable.

In the silence of meditation, however, we are met with life in the present, not the world to come. In that silence, we sift through memories, regrets, and resentments as well as fantasies, fears, and hopes for the future. It is no wonder so many of us experience bewilderment in meditation; just being in the present with ourselves is hard work!

Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön in the classic *When Things Fall Apart* offers a different Hope practice: abandon it altogether. Chödrön’s tradition is one that looks deeply into the nature of reality, and we would do well to consider how our practice of hope might distract us from reality. When we use hope to avoid seeing the present or letting go of the past, we perpetuate suffering. Last February, I began a new musical project full of hope, but every night when I sat down at the piano, nothing came. After three weeks of staring at the keyboard, I returned to my meditation practice, and what it revealed was something all my wishin’ and hopin’ couldn’t: I needed to grieve a relationship I had ended 7 months previous. My hope for creative inspiration was getting me nowhere because the



reality of my grief needed acknowledging. I had to release the old before the new could come forth.

Perhaps rather than abandoning hope altogether, I suggest marrying it with Acceptance. More than hope for the future, a joyful, open-hearted acceptance of What-Is affords me the kind of peace and assurance I need to create and to live gracefully, particularly through transition times. It is wonderful to dream, to cast vision — without it, we perish — yet with Acceptance as part of our Hope practice, we get a reality with wings!

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**Arkansas House of Prayer is an interfaith haven, set apart in nature, dedicated to contemplative prayer, meditation, and quiet where all are welcome.**

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## New Life, New Leadership

Spring and summer both seem to come on suddenly. The bare trees of spring have a hint of green one day, and then a big rain pushes an overnight display of chartreuse leaves to greet us the next. In summer, plants that appear to be dormant in the dirt very quickly become a riot of intense color. This season at the House of Prayer is filled with the blooming of amazing new leadership. The sudden new life of spring and the fullness of the summer have come all at once.

We have just hired Sister Deborah Troillett to be our new Executive Director. She will begin July 1, 2018. Sister Deborah is a visionary, a seasoned administrator, an experienced fund raiser, and a strategic planner. Many of you know her from her role of leading the flourishing of Mount St. Mary Academy where she served for many years. Others of you know that for the last 6 years she has had an international leadership position with her religious order the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. In that position, she helped lead and govern a community of thousands of Catholic women religious. She has recently returned to Little Rock.



Paul Fetters

In addition to her accomplishments listed above, Sister Deborah is a long-term practitioner of Contemplative Prayer, and this steady practice of silence affects her presence. When Sister Deborah joins a meeting, you notice her modesty, her leadership skills, and her laughter; but more than this, you sense that you are in the presence of someone walking in profound relationship with the Divine. Her deepest longing about this ministry is to move out into the world and to connect people with silence and with the House of Prayer.

Sister Deborah is a visionary leader whose personal energy field conveys love. Her heart for all the world's religions, her capacity for sacred silence, and her many years of interfaith leadership experience combine to bring us a rare, unexpected, and delightful opportunity. Our hearts are full of hope and joy. Come meet Sister Deborah and join us in welcoming the color and the fragrance of her unique gifts.

Stay tuned for our next issue to learn about our new administrator, Stephanie Fox, another delightful surprise and tremendous gift.

The Rev. Susan Sims Smith

### A Reality With Wings *Continued from first page*

My teacher in guiding us through meditation is fond of the phrase, "Notice the moment after exhale that gives rise to the next breath." That moment is where we find our hope, in every breath cycle. This is a very deep form of trust. It is usually hidden or unconscious until we are guided to it by the teacher. Nevertheless, at the end of every breath, in the silence and stillness in between breaths, there is a tiny interval of Hope: the moment that gives rise to the next breath. Hope as a manifestation of deep trust is the kind that really can allow us to take flight while remaining grounded, as we return to our practice and to reality day by day, breath by breath.

John Willis

## Labyrinth Completion In Late Spring



The installation of a labyrinth in the peaceful woods surrounding the Arkansas House of Prayer will offer our community an additional tool for opening awareness of the sacred. In contrast to still, silent meditation within the walls of the House of Prayer, the focus of meditation in walking the labyrinth is movement—awareness of the body and its surroundings. Walking the labyrinth can bring a sense of connection, intuitive wisdom, balance, and access to the best of ourselves and who we are meant to be.

"The labyrinth has been an amazing spiritual tool for me. I had a heart-opening experience the first time I walked it. Every walk, no matter where, something is revealed to me," said Helen Porter, long-time supporter of the House of Prayer.

Marked with a stone reading, "May you find peace in the garden," the path to the House of Prayer's labyrinth begins on the far edge of the entrance patio, taking visitors on a short stroll through the forest. Designed by Danny Townsend of Perfect Places and made possible by a generous donation, the 36-foot-wide labyrinth is surrounded by newly planted trees that, when mature, will completely screen it from neighboring houses. Two benches nearby provide a spot for rest and prayer before, or after, the walk. Our labyrinth will be completed late in the spring.



Design of the Arkansas House of Prayer's labyrinth. We will feature photos of our completed project in the next issue.

Labyrinths have been significant in the religious traditions of many cultures for more than 4,000 years. Like Stonehenge and the pyramids, labyrinths are geometric forms that define sacred space, and they may be thought of as symbols of our spiritual journey, the twists and turns of life leading to God where we are strengthened and renewed. Though sometimes mistaken for a maze with dead ends and trick turns, the single path is continuous, leading to the center of a labyrinth and back out again. One's mind can relax in following the path.

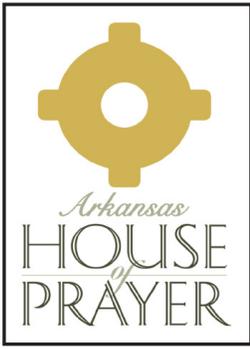
"My favorites are the ones in nature. There is something special for me about the connection of earth and spirit," Porter said. "I think next to the beautiful House of Prayer is the perfect place; body, mind, and spirit coming together."

The Rev. Cindy Fribourgh

## The House of Prayer Community

If you use the House of Prayer or appreciate its existence, you are a part of the House of Prayer Community. Many definitions of "community" refer to a community's common interests, such as joint ownership or participation, or a common social, economic, or political interest. Our common ownership or economic interest in the House of Prayer means that each of us should, as we are able, contribute to the well being of this unique resource. The House of Prayer is a common good, and it needs your volunteer and/or financial support. To volunteer, please visit our website at [www.arkansashouseofprayer.org](http://www.arkansashouseofprayer.org) or contact the administrator at [info@arkansashouseofprayer.org](mailto:info@arkansashouseofprayer.org). To financially support the House of Prayer, please visit our website, contact the administrator, or send your contribution to Arkansas House of Prayer, Episcopal Diocese of Arkansas, P.O. Box 164717, Little Rock, AR 72216. I hope you will join me in supporting this important resource. Thank you for being a part of our community!

G. Richard Smith, MD



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# Hail and Farewell

As the daughter of a military officer, I have childhood memories of my parents getting dressed up once per month to attend “Hail and Farewell” dinners. These were customary events in the ever changing military landscape where new commanding officers were welcomed and departing staff were celebrated. In that spirit, I bid hail and farewell to our executive directors. After service to the Arkansas House of Prayer since its inception, John Willis exited the role of executive director this January to pursue his musical career full time. I’m pleased that John will continue his work with the annual “Love Thy Neighbor” event in September. John’s creativity, loyalty, and faithful leadership were celebrated at a small gathering in January hosted by founder Rev. Susan Sims Smith. On that evening we welcomed interim executive director Rachel Hale. Rachel brings with her a wealth of knowledge in journalism, peacebuilding, and program management. She has done an outstanding job of jumping right in, all while maintaining her career in translational research at UAMS! It has been a pleasure to work with her and I hope she continues to share her time and talents with our mission after passing the torch to our permanent executive director, Sister Deborah Troillett.

Dr. Christie Beck

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