



Whale Spouts

*inspiration & information
to nurture spiritual vitality in everyday living*

A monthly newsletter of Belly of the Whale
Spiritual Direction & Retreat Ministries LLC

December 2014

Advent Blessings to you!

Let's celebrate Advent! I am often saddened by the way Advent gets lost in the shuffle as we sprint toward Christmas Day. It is all too easy to get swept up in the consumer culture and frantic pace of the season. So, this year, I encourage you to give yourself a pre-Christmas gift – the gift of Advent!

This newsletter offers a few suggestions that might help simplify your Holy-days. Keep the traditions that bring you true joy. Reconsider the traditions that feel more like obligations than celebrations. Invite the silence, the wonder and the peace of the season to fill your spirit.

May we have eyes to see and ears to hear the presence of Christ at the heart of our Christmas preparations. A blessed Advent to you and yours...

Peace and joy,
Sharon Seyfarth Garner
Director

Advent Speed Bumps

The race to December 25th has begun. This year, I choose not to join the race. I choose to slow myself down with a few carefully placed "Advent Speed Bumps" on my road to Bethlehem. I choose to wait with bated breath, to linger with friends, to savor the flavors, to bask in the candlelight, to listen deeply in the silent night. I invite you to do the same. Consider a few of these Advent Speed Bumps that might help you to slow down and keep Christ's peace at the heart of your journey toward Christmas.

Light candles: 'Tis the season of dwindling daylight. Light up the darkness with candles anywhere and everywhere – you can even use the battery kind if you are worried about safety. Have a candlelight breakfast, light advent candles all week long, take a picture of a candle and use it as a screen saver on your phone or computer. Fill your day with the warm glow of candlelight.

Procrastinate: Give yourself permission to send your yearly greetings AFTER Christmas. Groundhogs Day, Valentine's Day or even Easter greetings can be a lovely surprise to family & friends. This "new tradition" can help you to savor the process without the pressure of a self-imposed deadline.

Give alternative Christmas gifts: Rather than spending hours on-line or in-line, consider giving a charitable gift in honor of someone you love. Research a cause or topic that is meaningful to that person and make a donation in their name.

Read Christmas stories: Whether you have young children or not, pull out some favorite Christmas storybooks and read them aloud. Read slowly, gaze at the beautiful illustrations and reclaim a bit of childhood wonder along the way.



Our mission

is to nurture spiritual vitality
in everyday living through
personal spiritual direction
& small group retreats.

Our name

is a reminder that, just as Jonah
encountered God in the
"belly of the whale,"
we also long for
a safe space
to encounter God –
space where we can
express our spiritual longings,
ask the challenging questions and
nurture a genuine relationship with God.

Spiritual Direction and Spiritual Formation Retreats

provide just this sort of safe space
-amidst our often stormy and busy lives-
to nurture a deeper and more meaningful
relationship with God.

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FAQ

What is a simple Advent celebration?

Advent is a kaleidoscope of breathless wonder, joyful anticipation and heavy-hearted longing in a world pregnant with the potential for peace. Even in the midst of pain, Advent reminds us that peace can come; **Perfect Love will be born anew!** Advent is an invitation to actively participate in the emergence of that

Perfect Love. Put yourself into the story. Imagine the sights, sounds, tastes, smells and even the emotions of those who were a part of that journey to Bethlehem. Each week, consider the experience of different characters along the way. Walk tenderly in their shoes and dare to imagine the story from a new perspective. To live fully in Perfect Love, we must learn to walk tenderly in the shoes of another and dare to imagine life from a new perspective. This year, embrace the Advent journey and be the peace you wish to see born into the world this Christmas.



Week 1: Be Mary and Joseph

~ own the confusion of not knowing what the future will hold, yet be immersed in the mystery of the journey.



Week 2: Be the Inn Keeper

- acknowledge the frustration of not knowing where to set the boundaries, yet choose radical hospitality.



Week 3: Be the Shepherds

~ embrace the fear of not knowing the meaning of holiness, yet move forward to seek the Light.



Week 4: Be Yourself

~ accept the discomfort of not knowing what it all means, yet open your heart so that Christ may be born anew!

Christmas Day:

Sing boldly with the angels and proclaim "Glory to God." Partner courageously with the shepherds and go to the place where goodness has been born. Stand in solidarity with Joseph and encourage those who labor. Breathe deeply with Mary and ponder the miracle of birth. Celebrate the wondrous ways that Perfect Love is born in our world today and every day.

Hallelujah!



With deep gratitude to Sharon Vandegrift for the weekly reflections. (www.btglifecoaching.com/seasonal-blessings)

Spring Sneak Peek 2015

spiritual renewal retreats

Step away from the noise of daily demands and into the sacred silence of a quiet guided retreat.

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Meet daily with a spiritual director who will guide you through meditation, prayer & discernment of the still small voice deep within.

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Tentative 2015 dates:

March 9-10

March 17-18

Location: River's Edge Retreat Center
Cleveland, Ohio

Cost: \$150 (includes lodging, meals & daily spiritual direction)

creative pray-dates

(prayer workshops)

Enjoy hands-on prayer activities that you will make and take.

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Gift yourself with an opportunity to experience God's presence in new and creative ways.

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Tentative 2015 dates:

February 1 (Pottery)

March 1

May 3 (Poetry)

Location: Belly of the Whale Office
@ University Circle UMC
Time: 1:00 - 3:00pm
Cost: \$20/session

Please let me know if you would like additional information about these preliminary dates.

Listen to yourself and in that quietude
you might hear the voice of God.

Maya Angelou