



# THE MARK

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The Church of Conscious Harmony  
A Contemplative Christian Community

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# The Power of Wish

by Tim Cook

The flat plains just outside Kansas City, Kansas were once home to Native American tribes that for centuries had roamed and hunted there. Later they were transformed into fertile farm land that supported many generations of isolated families that lived off the land. One of those farms was eventually swallowed up by the ever growing need for bedroom communities for the burgeoning K.C. metro area. So, in 1987, a field that had until recently been flush with row upon row of sorghum, sprouted row upon row of duplexes. They rose out of the ground in a treeless crowd, each identical to its neighbor, much like the previous crop of sorghum.

I'm a tree lover and this was just about the last place I would ever have expected to be living. But we were serving a church in Kansas City and the Overland Park schools were reputed to be the best in the area. Erik, our son, had two years of schooling left and it was important for us to provide him the best we could find. So here we were, living right smack dab in the middle of the suburban sameness that I had been avoiding my whole life.

Additionally, the folks in the

church we were serving proved to be not especially interested in sharing the kind of spiritual life of daily practice that Barb and I found so deeply rewarding in our own lives. They were happy with just a Sunday service and weren't looking for much else. So we felt a bit disconnected and longed for more community and the company of people who, like us, wished to live lives that centered around our relationship with God.

## **Let's Start Our Own Church**

We still had important connections in Austin that we had made during the time we pastored in the small church south of the river. And I was flying down here once a month to continue studies of the Work with a group of friends with whom I had been sharing the Work ideas for several years. After nearly a year of this, it became obvious to us that we were just not cut out for the kind of denominational church work we'd been involved in, and also that we missed Austin dearly. In sharing that feeling with Bill Browder, who, with his wife Margaret, had been hosting my monthly visits, he

responded with, "Let's start our own church." Bill had been a successful businessman before his retirement and his enthusiastic, can-do attitude was encouraging. So Barb and I spent a couple of months praying and listening for guidance. That led us to consult one of our valued and trusted spiritual teachers who knew us as well as the group in Austin. She said simply, "Your friends are in Austin, and that's where you need to be." So we decided that we would follow our guidance and place our welfare firmly on the rock of faith and give it a try for five years. We put out an offering to our friends to join in a five year experiment in Christian community and 24 of them said yes; they'd like to try it, too.

That meant, of course, that we would need a mission statement to guide us and keep us moving and growing in the direction we wanted to go. So there in the bedroom that served as my office in that 3/2, duplicate duplex in Overland Park, Kansas, I sat down in front of my Macintosh 512 computer and prayed for the help I needed to write the founding document of the kind of church that we would like to be a part of. Here is what I wrote:

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## **The Church of Conscious Harmony Mission Statement**

The Church Of Conscious Harmony exists for the sole purpose of facilitating the spiritual journey for people who want to make God-devotion the center of their lives while living in the ordinary world without the aid of monastery walls. Our aim is to provide the focus, the teaching and the community support required for individuals to grow in self-awareness from the illusion of separate and separative existence to the fully enlightened experience of conscious union with the Living God.

Toward that end, we maintain within the Church The Tenth Man School, a school of transformative spiritual psychology and practice. Our basic teaching stands on two legs: (1) the traditional Christian contemplative practices of silent meditation and active prayer, and (2) the esoteric Christian school of the Work of G.I. Gurdjieff. Though we are firmly founded on these teachings, we are not limited by them or to them. We are free to reach deeply into all religious and spiritual traditions for insight, wisdom and inspiration; using these gifts to illumine our own religious roots and to enliven our spiritual practice.

Though we necessarily employ dogma, theology and ritual, the Church uses these tools solely as a means of assisting individuals to attain personal experiences of God's presence and activity in their lives. We encourage all people who worship or

study in the Church and The Tenth Man School to engage in intentional daily spiritual practice and study, realizing these to be absolutely essential requirements for becoming aware of and receptive to God's Transforming Grace.

We also encourage loving service to our human family through The Order of Compassionate Service, a vehicle through which we reach out with inspiration, care and transformative teaching to the imprisoned and the dying. Ultimately, the Church is a community of individuals who acknowledge their absolute dependence on God and who simply wish to learn to receive and to express genuine love for God and humanity.

Membership in the Church is a declaration of intentional relationship to the Divine Mystery that is God and to His creation, our brother man. It is a formal expression of a personal hunger to practice and grow in this relationship and to live deeper in communion with God and our fellow man every day. Each member of the Church shall endeavor to live in accordance with principles of Truth as taught by Jesus Christ and shall further the work of this Church and ministry through his or her active interest, sincerity, devotion, goodwill, prayer, service, time, effort, attention, financial support, love and affection.

*continued on page 4*

*The Power of Wish continued from page 3*

We already had everything we needed right then — a hunger for God and a community of practice, a system of spiritual psychology, 24 friends, our mission statement, our prayers, faith, and God’s inspiration and guidance. We didn’t know how or when God would respond to our prayers to manifest this great wish, but in faith we were certain that He would. We knew that if we had these hungers that there must be others like us who longed for the same things and shared our values. We were looking for you, waiting for you, and through God’s grace we have found each other.

During the 21 years since those words of our mission statement were written, our community has shared countless miracles as we have grown together, deeper and deeper in God’s love. The Spirit our community shares is an awe-inspiring wonder to be a part of. Now, none of this was physically present when those words were written, but all of it was present in Spirit through faith. Our experience is the very expression of faith that Paul referred to when he wrote in his letter to the Hebrews:

*“Faith is being sure of what we hope for. It is being certain of what we do not see. That is what the people of long ago were praised for. We have faith. So we understand that everything was made when God commanded it. That’s why we believe that what we see was not made out of what could be seen.”* (Heb. 11:1-3 NIV)

We expected a community and we expected a life of shared contemplative practice, but our infinitely gracious and generous Father has blessed us with far more than we could have ever imagined. Just look! We worship and study in a church home so beautiful and inspiring that it can scarcely be described. It stands on 12 ½ acres of perfect land in just the right location.

But the greatest blessing, the most unexpected, the most astonishing, the most appreciated of all, is the blessed presence of our Abba, Fr. Thomas Keating, and his teaching.

The Work, on which our community was founded, teaches that *“The universe is response to request,”* and *“Wish is the most powerful thing.”* That man back in 1987, who was writing our mission statement in that barren Kansas duplex, counted on it. ☸

## April Calendar

Visit [conscioussharmony.org](http://conscioussharmony.org)  
for a complete listing of events

### Special Events

Redirecting Children’s Behavior  
begins April 14 6:30-9:30pm  
Call the office to register.

Introduction to Centering Prayer  
April 19 8:30am-4pm  
6 follow up classes  
Tuesdays 7:30-9pm

Annual Meeting of  
The Board of Directors & Church Members  
April 20 Following the Sunday service

5-Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
led by Tim Cook  
April 23-27  
Call the office to register.

One-Day Centering Prayer Retreat  
April 26 8:30am-4pm  
\$15. Bring a potluck dish to share.

Adult Baptism Class  
begins April 26 11:30am-1pm  
Call the office to register

Lessons in Truth  
Wednesdays 7:30pm  
12 week class continues

### Monthly

Tuesday Enrichment 7:30-8:30 pm  
Sacred Chanting April 1  
Gurdjieff Music April 15

### Weekly

Prayer Circle  
Wednesdays 9:15 am

Contemplative Knitting Circle  
Wednesdays 10:30 am-12 noon

Contemplative Lunch  
Wednesdays 12 noon

Mid-Week Communion Service  
Wednesdays 6-7 pm

*Living Time* by Maurice Nicoll  
taught by Tim Cook  
last class April 10 7:30-9 pm

Introduction to the Work Class  
resumes Thursday April 17 7:30pm

### Daily

Weekday Centering Prayer Service  
M-F 7-7:35 am in Theosis Chapel

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# Water to Drink

by Barbara Cook

In John's Gospel, Jesus makes us an offering:

*"....those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life". (John 4:14-15 RSV)*

In his book, *The Better Part*, Fr. Thomas Keating tells us:

*"We drink from his living spring together when we gather in community contemplative practice. As we pray together we believe that Christ is in the center of the circle imparting to each the special graces each one needs. The participants are, so to speak, pooling their silence so that everyone gathered there can drink from this marvelous well of living water that rises up from the center. Silence in this context is liturgy of an exalted kind. We do not say or do anything; but we share in a special kind of action that might be called alert receptivity, simply opening and consenting to God's presence and action within us."*

This Lent I was very aware of that living water as I gathered with my spiritual community for prayer in our circle of intention. I felt increased gratitude for Centering Prayer, knowing at an even deeper level that it is the prayer that gives me access to that water. I was also given the knowledge that we are all joined with Christ in the Paschal Mystery of the passion, death, and resurrection. In the circle I feel myself dying to my false self and rising with Christ.

All who have experienced sitting in a Centering Prayer circle will know just what I mean. I invite those of you who have yet to share that experience to come to the well and join us during this year of celebration and blessing.

In *Open Mind, Open Heart*, Fr. Thomas reminds us: "We open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing - closer than consciousness itself. Contemplative prayer is

a process of interior purification leading, if we consent, to divine union."

In our circle, in our spiritual community that has been deepening for 20 years, we can surrender together to the attraction to be still, to be loved, just to be. Centering Prayer not only transforms us, it also blesses the whole world by allowing more God into the earth. Christ has endless water for all, so come let us drink together. ☺

## Save The Date

Join your community  
in a celebration of our church  
in its 20<sup>th</sup> year of existence.

Food and fun for all,  
and games for the children.

Live music, and more....

July 5-6, 2008



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# A Dagger In the Heart

by Chetan Makan

## 2008: A Year Acceptable to the Lord

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Writing this article in this Year Acceptable to the Lord has been a direct confrontation with the false self. I've spent countless hours so far and each draft has been returned for my "lack of vulnerability." One afternoon, I repressed my frustration by going to the store for a pack of cigarettes. The Lebanese woman at the counter looked at me oddly and said, "What's wrong with your beard? You have a bald head and a beard... No beer today?" Evidently, she didn't approve of something about me, and I left the store feeling slightly hurt. Upon returning home I smoked a cigarette to avoid feeling my frustration with writing this article and my inability to open my heart. Afterwards, I opened Father Keating's Lenten companion,

*Journey to Center*, in preparation for my evening prayer. Surprisingly, the reading was on "Sheer Vulnerability" and the passage was from Isaiah 50:6-7.

*I gave my back  
to those who struck me,  
and my cheeks to those who  
pulled out the beard;  
I did not hide my face from  
insult and spitting.  
The Lord God helps me;  
therefore I have not  
been disgraced;  
therefore I have set my face  
like flint,  
and I know that  
I shall not be put to shame.*

I was struck by the synchronicity between my struggle with the article, the reading, and my experience with the woman at the store-

-especially the pulling of the beards.

I remembered the time I dropped out of college. I was taking a class on European Music and Culture in my fourth year and chose to write a paper on Handel's opera, *The Messiah*. Being Hindu I wasn't too familiar with Christianity, which made the assignment a daunting task. I purchased a CD of *The Messiah*, listened to it closely, and fell in love with its beauty. I checked out some books, tried to understand the commentary, interviewed a chaplain, and gave my heart to writing the paper. After turning it in I eagerly awaited its return. When I got the paper back I turned to the last page and discovered that I'd earned a D. In his comments my professor said I made a "half-hearted attempt." I felt

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so hurt that I stopped going to all my classes, failed the semester, plunged into deeper and deeper self-destructiveness, and eventually left for Europe, India, and Nepal.

India was a homecoming for me. Even though I was born in South Africa, I was Indian and my grandparents were there.

At the age of 22 my mind felt shattered into a million pieces. Upon arriving in Delhi I was compelled to stop using drugs and instead to open to the palpable presence of the Spirit that is India. My traveling companion and I moved around mostly by third class train and bus, going from Delhi to Rajasthan to Gujarat to Goa to Kerala to Karnataka and back to Delhi before flying off to Nepal. It was in India that Spirit reached me through literature, a sacred friendship, and incessant prayer. It was there that I had an unmistakable experience of God's boundless love for me. I went to India to find my roots and search for God. Little did I know that it was really God who was searching for me.

When I was around five years old and living in South Africa I attended a pre-school in someone's home. There

was a girl there who was a big bully. One day we sat against a wall having our lunch. My mom had packed gingerbread cake for my dessert. And guess who wanted it? When she asked me for my cake I politely told her, "No." The bully used foul language that hurt me, and I felt so hurt that I ran away from school and headed for home. Upon nearing the house I knew that trouble could be looming. My mom had a terrible temper. I sat against a tree in our neighbor's yard and finished eating my lunch. Then suddenly, our neighbor begin calling my name saying, "Chettu, Chettu, why aren't you at school?" I gathered my things, entered our yard, and crawled along the side of the house so as not to be seen. I looked through my parent's window and saw my mom combing her hair. When I reached the backyard I headed straight for the doghouse where my mom later found me. At the age of five the repressive apparatus was already going full swing.

A year later I entered public school. In South Africa, we attended English School during the day and Gujarati School in the afternoon. I didn't like Gujarati School because the teacher was very mean. One day, my mom was building a garden. As my brother and I

walked to school we found a large mound of dirt. A cardboard box was nearby. Overjoyed, we filled the box with dirt and dragged it back home. We arrived in anticipation of her happiness, but instead were met with an explosion of anger for not going to school...and I felt a dagger in my heart. I don't remember anything else about that moment except for sitting on the floor, waiting for my dad to come home to deliver further punishment. When he arrived from work my dad gave us both a box of Smarties, our favorite chocolate candy. Unlike our mom, our dad used punishment for only the worst transgressions. Just how could a father be upset with his sons for acting out of unconditional love?

Two other experiences stand out with respect to the repressive apparatus. One day I was playing on a seesaw with a schoolmate at the park near our house. I went up and she went down; she went up and I went down. On and on it went until the neighborhood bully arrived. He pulled me off the seesaw and kicked me in the groin and I fell to the ground

crying. When I could finally stand I staggered home but didn't tell anyone what happened. Another time, I was at our neighbor's house. They had a swing with heavy welded iron seats. As we were playing I was struck on the head by the seat and fell to the ground. When I could stand I staggered home and fell fast asleep underneath my parent's nightstand. Why was I so afraid of letting someone know that I was hurt?

Adolescence was even more painful. My family managed a modest motel in Central Texas during the 1980s recession. Times were hard. By now I had developed energy centers for affection and esteem, security and survival, and power and control with an added emphasis on the sensation energy center. The false self was firmly in place and I believed that God had abandoned us. During adolescence I gave no thought to God. As my sexual energy began emerging I believed that sex and relationship was the answer to all my problems and the more I desired a relationship the more I was met with rejection. Once again, I repressed my pain into the unconscious. Sweets didn't work anymore. So I began using alcohol and drugs to

avoid feeling the pain that had its origins in my early childhood.

At the Lenten Retreat this year the Divine Therapist brought my wounds out of the unconscious through the extended periods of silence. I saw the recurrence of *the wound* and my mechanical reaction of shutting down manifesting in early childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. I saw that I repressed the rage that I couldn't bear to feel as a child and turned to sweets, alcohol, and drugs to avoid feeling the pain of rejection and separation from God.

And I received another great gift at the Lenten Retreat. I saw my mom's explosive anger in light of her own traumatic wound. It wasn't her fault that someone broke into the house and assaulted my grandmother. The day my mom returned from school to find her mother brutally beaten is the moment the dagger went through her heart. And it is still there. Christ, the Divine Therapist, is healing my wounds. Centering Prayer is His therapy. I wish my mom would also give God a chance to heal her false self, and to take the dagger out of her heart. ☸

## Browse the Bookstore

*Open Monday-Friday*

*8:30 am - 3:30 pm*

*Sunday 9:00 - 10:00 am*

*11:30 am - 12:30 pm*



*Things Hidden*

By Richard Rohr

*The Inner Journey*

The Christian Tradition

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Mark Nepo

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## The Second Line of Work

One of the objects of this Work, this teaching, is to observe oneself. Self-observation is a method of self-change. This Work teaches that a man, a woman, can change. Why? The Work teaches that everyone is created in such a way that they can change. We are created as self-changing beings. We can change—not anyhow, but in a definite direction. The Work says we are created as self-developing organisms—like seeds. A seed can remain a seed, but it is a self-developing organism. Can we understand this? Is it clear? Is a seed capable of some definite development? This Work, the Gospels, and all esoteric teaching, is older than history. How, then, can we put ourselves in the right conditions in order to change? A seed must be planted to develop, and have the right food, air and light. So it is with us, if we become planted in the ground of esoteric teaching. This is not a fanciful

idea. It is not an idealistic idea. It is not a pious idea. It is not a sentimental idea. It is a fact. Given the right conditions, a man, a woman, can begin to undergo what he and what she were originally created for. We were *not* created merely to live in life. Life does not develop a man or a woman finally. It is the first and necessary experience. But it only goes so far—that is, to the formation of Personality. Here it stops and nothing more happens. The man, the woman, having attained to this first, this necessary, development of the Personality—namely, of the profession, the craft, the business, the labour, the civilian duty, the good householder—remain then undeveloped any further in the sense of esoteric teaching. The man, the woman, having attained to such life-positions, to such successes, to such situations, then begin to die. They have become “equal to life”. It must be said that many do not get as far as that.

However this is the first task—the life-task. A man, a woman, must learn, must get to know, something definite in life before anything else is possible. They must be good at something, know something, be able to do something. That is why, in this Work, it is said that a man or a woman must start from the level of good householder. This Work is not for useless people, or people who live on the being and vitality of others. Such are not at the level of good householder. The Work can only begin with people who have reached a certain attainment in life and in life-experiences and who are not evil or criminal or pathological or perverted. The Work is not for the riff-raff of life, the people who are a nuisance and a burden to others, or for those who expect something for nothing. It is for responsible people - for people who understand the difference between chaos and order and see clearly that

certain things must be done, however they feel personally. There is a Work-definition of 'good householder' in the supreme sense of this stage—namely, a person who does what is necessary in life but does not believe in life. This is a curious phrase and is worth reflecting upon all one's life—for many god householders believe in life, and believe that sooner or later life will become much better than it is now. They believe in progress, in spite of things as they are. But

this impulse, this idea, really is one that takes a wrong and outward direction. Progress is possible—and here esoteric teaching, this second education, comes in. A man, a woman, can progress in themselves. They can undergo a definite development by giving up what they have come to think they are. This is where self observation starts. 

(Volume 2, *Psychological Commentaries on the Teaching of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky*, by Maurice Nicoll)

### Guidelines for Christian Life, Growth and Transformation

Fr. Thomas Keating, in his seminal work *Open Mind, Open Heart*, lists 42 principles underlying the Christian spiritual journey. Fr. Keating asks that these principles be read according to the method of *lectio divina*. One principle will appear in these pages each month.



#### 4<sup>th</sup> Guideline:

The term *original sin* is a way of describing the human condition, which is the universal experience of coming to full reflective self-consciousness without the certitude of personal union with God. This gives rise to our intimate sense of incompleteness, dividedness, isolation, and guilt.



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## The Holy Sacrament of Baptism

Brother and sisters: We are indeed buried with Him through Baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with Him through a death like His, we shall also be united with Him in the Resurrection.

We know that our old self was crucified with Him  
... Then, we have died with Christ and  
we shall also live with Him.

ROMANS 6: 4-6, 8

Baptism is done to us. It is the sheer gift of God.  
Eternal life begins in us. We are the sons and daughters of God,  
incorporated into Christ's body. His spirit dwells in us.  
All our sins are forgiven. The darkness of our ignorance and weakness  
of our will are being healed. And if anything is lacking to us,  
Christ, who is interceding for us at the right hand  
of the Father, will give us that too.

Christ is ours by Baptism.  
It only remains for us to become what we are  
and to enjoy what we possess.

Thomas Keating, *Awakenings*

Adult Baptism will be celebrated  
on Sunday afternoon May 18.  
Preparatory classes:  
Four Saturdays, 11:30 A.M.-1:00 P.M.,  
beginning April 26

Call the office to register 512.347.9673



## The Grace of the Resurrection

All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord,  
are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory,  
as from the Lord who is the Spirit.  
2 Corinthians 3: 18

By taking away the sins of the world and transforming sin itself  
into unconditional love, Jesus reveals God's will to share  
the divine life with us to the fullest possible extent,  
making us insofar as possible, equal to Himself.  
Among the Greek Fathers, this is called 'divinization.'  
The Resurrection opens for us ... a totally new life.  
It is the decisive and determining moment in human history.  
As a result, divine union as an abiding state of consciousness  
is now accessible to every human being.  
Thomas Keating, *Manifesting God*

I will give you a new heart  
and place a new  
spirit  
within you.  
*from the Canticle of Ezekiel 36:26*



\*Bible: New Revised Standard Version

*from Psalm 68, Psalms for Praying*

A new dawn is rising;  
great will be the understanding  
of those who know Love;  
The darkness of ignorance will  
be overcome!  
The nations will be united in  
their diversity,  
living in harmony and with  
integrity –  
Like the wings of a dove  
covered with silver,  
its pinions with gold.  
Then will fear be no more,  
love will reign in every heart!

A mighty throng will awaken,  
millions upon millions,  
to the Beloved who dwells within.  
They will hear with the heart's ear,  
with their heart's eye will they see.  
Even many who knew not Love  
will come into the Light.

Blessed be the Beloved,  
who daily bears us up;  
the Comforter who leads us  
to wholeness.  
The Beloved calls us to new life,  
and guides our feet away  
from darkness.

Yes, the Beloved will empower us  
with love,  
as we face the fears within.  
Love ever whispers, "I will break  
down the walls of illusion,  
I will shatter the fears that bind,  
that you may walk in a new dawn,  
that you may dance with light hearts  
and spread peace  
throughout the earth."