

Writing Workshops take to the Road

The Collegeville Institute will be offering four off-site writing workshops this fall in various locations around the country, including Kentucky, Massachusetts, Washington & Mississippi.

- ⇒ **Writing Spirit, Writing Faith** will explore the complexities of faith in today's world. Former workshop participant, **Mary Potter**, will lead this workshop to be held at the Whidbey Institute on Whidbey Island, WA.
- ⇒ **Mapping the Geography of Grace** is designed for clergy exploring the landscape of faith. It will be held at The Gray Conference Center in Canton, MS. Author **Robert Benson** will facilitate the week.
- ⇒ **Words that Sing II** aims to challenge pastors-writers to broaden and deepen their writing practice. In cooperation with the Massachusetts United Church of Christ, this workshop will be led by **Mary Nilsen**.
- ⇒ **The Writing Pastor** is designed for pastors and church leaders who are committed to the ways writing can be a spiritual practice. Former workshop participant, **Trisha Tull**, will lead this workshop to be held at Louisville Seminary, KY.

INSIDE
THE

COLLEGEVILLE INSTITUTE



FOR ECUMENICAL & CULTURAL RESEARCH

Volume 8, Issue II

June 24, 2014

Meet Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, writing workshop leader

We are excited to welcome back **Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove** to the Collegeville Institute in July to lead a new writing workshop—**Writing to Change the World**—designed for those interested in writing about issues of social change. Jonathan attended our *Writing and the Pastoral Life* writing workshop with Eugene Peterson in 2008.

Jonathan is a popular speaker and well-known peace and social justice activist. Along with Shane Claiborne, he founded the New Monastic movement which emphasizes an intentional life of prayer, seeking consensus, and engagement in the world. Jonathan and his wife, Leah, founded Rutba House, a Christian community that welcomes visitors, guests, neighbors, and strangers.



In addition, he serves as an associate pastor at St. John's Missionary Baptist Church in Durham, North Carolina. The author of more than a dozen books, his writings include *The Awakening of Hope*, *God's Economy: Redefining the Health and Wealth Gospel*, *The Wisdom of Stability*, and *Strangers at My Door*.

Jonathan says, "Collegeville has been a spiritual home for me since Abbot Timothy Kelly and the School of Theology reached out to our new monastic community in 2005. I'm deeply grateful for the many ways the Collegeville Institute encourages the writing life for people of faith. It's been a great space of learning for me, and I look forward to facilitating a new group of writers this summer."

We recently hired **Jan Schmitz** as the Collegeville Institute's Program and Office Assistant. Jan began her duties on March 6. Jan studied at Alexandria Vocational Technical Institute and comes to the Collegeville Institute with over 20 years of office experience including customer service and data base management. Jan will be working with both the academic year and summer programs, and will also offer guidance to the student worker staff. She lives in Cold Spring with her husband, Jim, and two children, TJ and Jolene. Jan says, "I'm grateful to be a part of the team and look forward to an exciting summer workshop season!"



2475 Ecumenical Drive · PO Box 2000 · Collegeville, MN · 56321 · www.CollegevilleInstitute.org · 320-363-3366

secure on-line giving available at: https://secure.touchnet.com/C20178_ustores/web/product_detail.jsp?

Aggressive Mercy

The Collegeville Institute is pleased to announce the upcoming release of Fr. Kilian McDonnell's 5th collection of poetry, **Aggressive Mercy** (Saint John's University Press, September 2014).

Fr. Kilian, founder and president of the Collegeville Institute, began writing poetry at the age of 75. A trained theologian, Fr. Kilian notes, "I have a major advantage over other poets, especially religious poets. As a theologian, I have at my command a body of technical, scholarly reflection not readily available to other poets."

Aggressive Mercy explores the depth, breadth, and in some cases, apparent absence, of God's mercy through the varied experiences of the many biblical characters about whom Fr. Kilian writes. "I have often written poems on Judas, a much maligned man, whom I experience as a man who loved Jesus but betrayed him because he saw that he would not establish a Jewish state. I believe that the logic of the gospel allows me to believe that Judas attained God after death. Think about it, why would the merciful God not gather the man he had chosen, loved and nurtured? God's mercy is aggressive."

About his poetry in general, Fr. Kilian says, "I do not write pious verse or inspirational verse. I write about biblical people—Adam, Eve, Moses, Deborah—who have big problems with God, with people around them. They made terrible mistakes. They also lie, steal, cheat, slander their neighbor, and fornicate. They're people like us. Their relationship with God or their neighbor is not an easy one."

Fr. Kilian notes that his poetry is a little edgy, even confrontational. "I intend my poems to be tough. I suspect that is one of the reasons why people buy my books. It's not because I'm such a great poet; rather it's because I treat these biblical characters like people in the real world, people like themselves and readers respond. They're interested in the Bible and they see their own struggles with God in these characters."

Acknowledging that his poetry has changed over the years, he notes, "My poems are shorter now. My lines are shorter. My stanzas are shorter. And I've learned that good poetry is highly concentrated. I can't have a wasted word. I have to work very carefully, and most especially I cut."



Musing, Fr. Kilian adds, "The supposition that the poet has an inspiration and this poem comes to him whole and he writes it down is not true, at least for me and I suspect not true for most poets. Writing poetry is 98% sweat and 2% inspiration – you get an idea for a poem, which is not the same as inspiration. For me inspiration comes in the process of writing. But it's

still hard work. After I've written a poem I may put it in a drawer and let it sit for five years. Then I go back and say, 'Oh no, that doesn't work at all, you can't do that.' So I revise again and again. For the sake of the poem, the poet has to be brave and cut favorite lines, even brilliant ones, which do not work. Cut them and use them in some subsequent poem."

When asked about the how his poetry intersects with his monastic vocation, Fr. Kilian says, "My prayer life feeds my poetry as do my monastic brothers. One of the monks said 'Kilian does not have enough to do. He writes poetry.' That became the title of a non-biblical poem."

"As a poet I'm not out to convert readers or make them better Christians," says Fr. Kilian.

"Communicating my experience of the biblical text is what I do; there's nothing beyond that. But, if I have written a good

poem and a reader recognizes something of religious significance in a poem and uses it for prayer or meditation, that's stupendous. It doesn't get better than this for me."



Fr. Kilian in the Butler Center