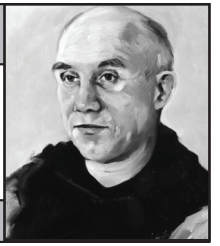
INTERNATIONAL THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

Vol. 33, No. 2 Fall, 2026



ITMS Conference Program Planned

The Twentieth General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society will take place at Iona University, New Rochelle, New York, June 17-20, 2027. The conference theme is "Thomas Merton and the Spirit of New York: Creativity, Connection and Commitment." Principal events of the conference have been approved by the Program Committee and announced by committee chair Judith Valente. The plenary speakers will be Adam Bucko, James Martin, SJ, Carrie Newcomer and Stephanie Paulsell; in addition ITMS President Paul Pynkoski will address the group, actor Douglas Hertler will present a dramatic production entitled "Thomas Merton and New York City" and a panel discussion on Merton and Poetry will feature contributions from Carolyn Forché, Angela Alaimo O'Donnell and Paul Quenon, OCSO. The conference will also include concurrent session presentations by thirty-five speakers, as well as eleven workshops, five guided prayer sessions and four special creative presentations.

Adam Bucko is an Episcopal priest, spiritual director and activist and a leading advocate for the renewal of Christian Contemplative Spirituality and the growing New Monastic movement. He was cofounder of the non-profit Reciprocity Foundation, working for 15 years with homeless youth in New York City, and currently serves as a director of the Center for Spiritual Imagination at the Cathedral of the Incarnation in New York. He is a member of the Community of the Incarnation, a new monastic community dedicated to democratizing the gifts of monastic spirituality and teaching contemplative spirituality, in the context of hearing and responding to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth. He is the author of *Let Your Heartbreak Be Your Guide: Lessons in Engaged Contemplation* (2022) and co-author of *Occupy Spirituality: A Radical Vision for a New Generation* (2013) and *The New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living* (2015).

James Martin, SJ is a Jesuit priest, editor-at-large of *America* magazine, consultor to the Vatican's Secretariat for Communications and founder of Outrreach, a support community for LGBTQ Catholics. His many books include *Becoming Who You Are: Insights on the True Self from Thomas Merton and Other Saints* (2006), *My Life with the Saints* (2006), *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything* (2010), *Between Heaven and Mirth* (2011), *Jesus: A Pilgrimage* (2014) and most recently the *New York Times* bestseller *Work in Progress: Confessions of a Busboy, Dishwasher, Caddy, Usher, Factory Worker, Bank Teller, Corporate Tool, and Priest* (2026). He has been a frequent commentator for national and international media, making appearances on all the major television networks, as well as in such diverse outlets as *The Colbert Report*, *Fresh Air*, *On Being*, *Fox & Friends*, *The PBS NewsHour*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Boston Globe*, as well as on the History Channel, the BBC and Vatican Radio.

Carrie Newcomer is an internationally acclaimed songwriter, recording artist, poet, activist and retreat facilitator. Her 21 nationally released albums include *A Great Wild Mercy* and *The Beautiful Not Yet*, and she is also author of three books of poetry and essays, including *Until Now: New Poems*. Her service as a cultural Ambassador to India, performing for Indian audiences, led to her interfaith hunger relief album *Everything Is Everywhere* with master of the Indian Classical

sarod Amjad Ali Khan. She has also toured Africa and the Middle East in support of health and hunger organizations and non-violent conflict resolution. She facilitates retreats on topics of songwriting, spirituality, personal growth, hope and resiliency, co-hosts *The Growing Edge Podcast* with acclaimed author Parker J. Palmer, and currently authors "A Gathering of Spirits," one of Substack's top five music offerings. Bestselling author Barbara Kingsolver has written of her: "She is more than a singer-songwriter. She's a poet, storyteller, snake-charmer, good neighbor, friend and lover, minister of the wide-eyed gospel of hope and grace."

Stephanie Paulsell is the Susan Shallcross Swartz Professor Emerita of the Practice of Christian Studies at Harvard Divinity School, where she taught for a quarter-century beginning in 2001, including for several years a seminar on Thomas Merton. She is the author of *Religion around Virginia Woolf* (2019), co-author of *The Practice of Wisdom: Five Quests* (2026), and co-editor of Toni Morrison, *Goodness and the Literary Imagination* (2019). She also contributed an essay to *Merton and the Protestant Tradition* (Fons Vitae, 2016), edited by her father, William O. Paulsell. An ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), she has served as a regular columnist for *The Christian Century* since 2007 and, with novelist René Steinke, writes the Substack column "Fresh Chapel," a forum on writing, art and the sacred.

Paul Pynkoski is the current President of the International Thomas Merton Society, having previously served as ITMS vice president. He is an active member of the Church of the Redeemer in Toronto, where he resides with his wife Tania Natale. He has coordinated literature discussions at the Common Table, a drop-in center for those who are vulnerable or homeless. He is a founding member of Voices for Peace, an ecumenical conference on peacemaking, and co-chairs the board of Sanctuary, a community that supports those struggling with homelessness and addiction. He has been a presenter at Merton gatherings in North America, Argentina and the UK and has contributed articles and reviews to *The Anglican*, *The Merton Annual*, *The Merton Seasonal* and *Orthodoxy in Dialogue*, with a particular interest in exploring through contemporary music and Merton's writing the intersection of spirituality, politics and the arts.

Douglas Hertler, also known professionally as Doug Lory, is an actor, playwright, retreat leader and New York City tour guide, who lives with his wife Alex in Queens, NY. He is a member of SAG-AFTRA and AEA, the two professional actors' unions in the U.S., and his career has included roles in television, film and theater. He is also an actor/educator at Fordham University School of Law where he works with student attorneys in both client interview simulations as well as trial law examinations, exploring the intangible components of interpersonal and group communication. As an NYC tour guide he has connected with tens of thousands of travelers for over 20 years, sharing the exciting, inspiring and sometimes tragic history of a city which counts the ethnic and religious diversity of the world as its citizenry. He holds a BA in Speech/ Communication/Theater from Monmouth University. He is a member of the International Thomas Merton Society as well as the American Teilhard Association. He has performed his one-person play *Merton and Me – A Living Trinity* throughout the country since 2018.

Carolyn Forché is Director of Readings and Talks at the Lannan Center for Poetics and Social Practice and University Professor in the Department of English at Georgetown University in Washington. She is author most recently of the poetry collection *In the Lateness of the World* (Penguin, 2020), a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, and the memoir *What You Have Heard Is True: A Memoir of Witness and Resistance* (Penguin Random House, 2019), a finalist for the National Book Award. She is also the author of four other books of poetry: *Gathering The Tribes* (1976), which received the Yale Younger Poets Award, *The Country Between Us* (1982), chosen as the Lamont Selection of the Academy of American Poets, *The Angel of History* (1995), which won the Los Angeles Times Book Award, and *Blue Hour* (2004), a finalist for the National

Book Critics Circle Award. She is also the editor of *Against Forgetting: Twentieth-Century Poetry of Witness* (W. W. Norton, 1993) and the coeditor of *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English, 1500-2001* (W. W. Norton, 2014). She has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the Lannan Foundation, and serves a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. She has been a human rights activist for more than three decades.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell is a writer, poet, scholar and professor at Fordham University in New York City where she has taught English, Creative Writing and American Catholic Studies since 2005, and where she also serves as Associate Director of the Curran Center for American Catholic Studies. She is a graduate of Pennsylvania State University and holds master's and doctoral degrees in English Language & Literature from the University of North Carolina. She is the author of 12 volumes of poetry, including most recently *The View from Childhood: New and Selected Poems* (2026) and *Dear Dante* (2024), and four volumes of prose including *Radical Ambivalence: Race in Flannery O'Connor* (2020), *Flannery O'Connor: Fiction Fired by Faith* (2015) and the memoir *Mortal Blessings* (2014). Her essays, poetry and reviews have appeared in numerous journals including *America*, *Commonweal*, *Spiritus* and *Christianity and Literature*, as well as *The Merton Annual* and *The Merton Seasonal*, which recently included her five poems on "Merton in Alaska" (Spring 2026).

Paul Quenon, OCSO has been a monk of the Abbey of Gethsemani for over 60 years, having entered the monastery in 1958 at the age of seventeen. His novitiate formation was under Thomas Merton. He studied at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and for a number of years taught and lived at a Cistercian monastery in Nigeria. He is a photographer and poet, whose work in both genres is available online at the Abbey of Gethsemani website (https://monks.org/monks-pages/br-paul). His latest book is *Where Time Its Silence Keeps: Poems from Gethsemani* (2026). Among his other books are *How to Be* (2021), a collection of letters with journalist Judith Valente on matters of mutual interest; his memoir *In Praise of the Useless Life* (2018), which received the Catholic Press award for memoirs, *A Matter of the Heart: A Monk's Journal 1970-2022* (2024), and the poetry volumes *Amounting to Nothing* (2018) and *Unquiet Vigil: New and Selected Poems* (2014), which received a "Best Spiritual Book of the Year" award from Spirituality and Practice and "Best Poetry Volume of the Year" recognition from Hearts and Minds Books. He has been a frequent presenter at Merton conferences, host to the biennial ITMS scholars retreats, friend and mentor to ITMS Daggy Scholars and convener of the ITMS chapter that meets regularly at the Abbey of Gethsemani.

Concurrent session presenters include: Kevin Ahern, Maria Barrera-Agarwal, Swasti Bhattacharyya & Bernadette McNary-Zak, John Dear, Lillian Doyle, Robert Ellsberg, Fady Ghattas, John Gillespie, Aaron Godlaski, David Golemboski, Sylvia Grevel, Martha Hennessy, Michael Holleran, Daniel P. Horan, Aaron Kerr, Alan Kolp, Daniel London, Thomas Malewitz, Michael N. McGregor, Mark C. Meade, Patrick F. O'Connell, David Odorisio, Anne R. Pearson, Paul M. Pearson, Sonia Petisco, Vincent Pizzuto, Julie Leininger Pycior, Joseph Q. Raab, Matthew Riddle, James Robinson, Ethan Strouse, Callie Tabor, Nicole T. Walters and Megan Way; workshops will be led by: Anne & Elizabeth Burkemper, Judith Emery, Cassidy Hall & Mike Petrow, Gary P. Hall & Paul Pynkoski, Carol & Gary Lenox, Xaio Ma, Ed Murphy, Paul Quenon, Sophfronia Scott, Mike Smoolca and Judith Valente; creative presentations will be offered by David Boye, Jacqueline Chew, Paul Jones and Regina Sara Ryan & Chris Pramuk; leaders of guided prayer sessions will be Michael Centore, Keith Jennings, Jeffrey Kiernan, Debra Vinci-Minogue and Nicole T. Walters.

The Program Committee includes: Judith Valente, (Chair), Vaughn J. Fayle, OFM (Site Coordinator), Anne Burkemper, Elizabeth Burkemper, Kathleen Deignan, CND, Daniel London, Mark C. Meade, Paul M. Pearson, Paul

Pynkoski (*ex officio*), Joseph Q. Raab, James Robinson, Michael Smoolca, Kathleen Tarr and Megan Way (*ex officio*).

Further information will be posted as it becomes available on the conference website: http://merton.org/2027. Registration will open December 1 and registration materials will be included in the Winter 2026 issue of *The Merton Seasonal*.

Shannon Fellowship Awarded

At its June 2026 meeting, the ITMS Board of Directors awarded a 2026-2027 Shannon Fellowship to Benjamin Crace for research on "Connecting East and West: Merton's Inner Synthesis of *Unio Mystica* and *Theosis*." The Shannon Fellowship program was established in 1997 in honor of the late Msgr. William H. Shannon, the founding president of the ITMS, to promote scholarship on Merton and his work. Up to five annual awards, of a maximum of $750 each, are granted to scholars for research on primary-source Merton materials at the Merton Center at Bellarmine University or other archival collections. This year's selection committee includes Paul M. Pearson (chair), Fiona Gardner and Joseph Raab.

The deadline for applications for Shannon Fellowships for 2027-2028 is March 15, 2027. Awards must be used between July 1, 2027 and July 31, 2028. Awards will be based on the quality of the proposal submitted and on the need for consulting archival materials at the site proposed. Applicants must be members of the ITMS; they may join the Society at the time of application by including a check for $25 (or $40 to include *The Merton Annual*), made out to "ITMS", along with their proposals. Current officers and Board members of the ITMS, as well as grant committee members, are not eligible for fellowships during their term of office. Fellowships may be granted a maximum of two times to any applicant.

Application for Shannon Fellowships must include the following:

- a detailed proposal of 500-750 words explaining the subject and goals of the applicant's research and the rationale for consulting primary sources at the Merton collection selected by the applicant; applicants are strongly encouraged to demonstrate in their application that they have consulted online finding aids for the Merton Center (http://www.merton.org/Research) or for other archival collections of Merton's work (a list of subjects of previous awardees can be found under "Previous Research Topics" on the web site);
- a biographical statement of 100-150 words providing pertinent educational, scholarly and/or professional information about the applicant;
- a letter of recommendation from a scholar familiar with the applicant's qualifications and research interests;
- a proposed expense budget: grants will cover costs of travel to and from collections; expenses for accommodations and food during time of research at archives; costs of photocopying;
- disclosure of any other sources of funding awarded or applied for, with amounts received or requested.

Successful applicants are required to submit an accurate expense account and a report summarizing the results of their research.

Applications are encouraged from established scholars, from researchers without academic affiliation, and from students and younger scholars, including those engaged in research for theses and dissertations.

Completed applications for fellowships should be sent to **Dr. Paul M. Pearson, Director, Thomas Merton Center, Bellarmine University, 2001 Newburg Road, Louisville, KY 40205; email: pmpearson@bellarmine.edu**.

The committee's recommendations will be presented at the June 2027 meeting of the ITMS Board of Directors, who will make the final decisions on awards, and results will be communicated to applicants shortly thereafter.

Full details are available on the ITMS web site at: http://merton.org/ITMS/fellows.aspx.

Daggy Scholarships Available

The International Thomas Merton Society will once again sponsor the Daggy Youth/Student Scholarship Program to make it possible for young persons to participate in the 2027 ITMS General Meeting. The program is named in honor

of the late Dr. Robert Daggy, founding member and second president of the ITMS and longtime director of the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University. Scholarships will be awarded to cover all costs (except transportation) of attendance at the Twentieth General Meeting of the ITMS, to be held June 17-20, 2027 at Iona University, New Rochelle, NY. The awards will also include one year's free membership in the ITMS. The scholarships are intended for first-time conference attendees under the age of forty. (Those under eighteen at the time of the conference must be accompanied by a parent or adult chaperone, whose registration will not be covered by the scholarship.)

An application form and further information can be found at: http://www.merton.org/ITMS/scholarships.aspx or by contacting Daggy.Scholarships@gmail.com. Required details include the age of the applicant, proof of educational status (if applicable), telephone number and email address (if available) and/or a return address, as well as a statement explaining why the applicant is interested in learning more about Thomas Merton and would benefit from attending the ITMS General Meeting. Applicants are firmly requested not to employ AI in developing their statements. Applicants will also provide contact information for a youth minister, campus minister, pastor, teacher or other qualified adult who has agreed to provide a recommendation, explaining in what capacity he/she knows the applicant and why the applicant should be considered as a qualified candidate for an ITMS scholarship. Completed applications must be submitted by April 1, 2027.

Any ITMS member who knows an eligible young person / student that would benefit from attending the 2027 General Meeting should encourage him or her to apply for a scholarship.

Russo Chapter Grants

Applications for the next funding cycle of the ITMS Russo Chapter Grants are currently being accepted. These grants honor the memory of Anthony (Tony) Russo (1941-2022), founder of the Greater Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky ITMS Chapter, longtime ITMS Chapters Coordinator, facilitator of more than a dozen annual retreats on Merton at the Abbey of Gethsemani and frequent conductor of Chapters Workshops at ITMS General Meetings. Grants to ITMS chapters and affiliates provide financial support, up to a maximum of $500 each, for chapter / affiliate events, including but not limited to inviting visiting speakers. They are funded through the generosity of his wife Josie.

Seven 2026-2027 Russo Grants were awarded, for: a mini-conference sponsored by the Atlanta ITMS chapter; guest speakers for two Indianapolis chapter meetings; conference assistance to assist with travel and accommodation expenses for a speaker from Spain at the biennial conference of the Thomas Merton Society of Great Britain and Ireland; a Merton retreat sponsored by the Chicago ITMS chapter; expenses for an invited speaker for the Gethsemani ITMS chapter; expenses for a retreat and exhibit of Merton's photographs sponsored by the North Central Connecticut ITMS chapter.

The deadline for the next round of grant applications is June 1, 2027. Applications must include a detailed proposal of the project for which the grant will be used, a statement of how the project will contribute to the work of the chapter, and a proposed expense budget, including disclosure of any other sources of funding awarded or applied for, with amounts received or requested. Applications will be reviewed by an appointed committee and approved by the ITMS Board. Awards must be used between July 1, 2027 and June 30, 2028. Following the event, award recipients are required to submit by July 31, 2028 an accurate expense account and a report on the implementation of the project. Completed applications for grants, or requests for further information, should be sent for forwarding to the committee chair to ITMS Resident Secretary Dr. Paul M. Pearson, International Thomas Merton Society, Bellarmine University, 2001 Newburg Road, Louisville, KY 40205; e-mail: merton@bellarmine.edu.

Sidney H. Griffith (1938–2026)

Sidney H. Griffith, retired professor of Early Christian Studies at the Catholic University of America, preeminent scholar of Arabic

Christianity, Syriac monasticism, medieval Christian-Muslim encounters and ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, and longtime member and contributor to the International Thomas Merton Society, died July 19, 2026 at the age of 87. He was born on December 16, 1938 in Gaithersburg, Maryland, where he attended school until 1952, when he began studies at John Carroll High School in Washington, DC. He subsequently joined the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity and attended the congregation's minor seminary in Alabama and major seminary in Monroe, Virginia. After being ordained a Catholic priest in 1965, he earned a master's degree in library science from the Catholic University of America, followed by a licentiate in sacred theology from the same university, and in 1978 he received his doctorate in Semitic and Egyptian Languages and Literatures from CUA with a dissertation on Syriac and Medieval Arabic. At this time he joined the CUA faculty where he remained until his retirement in 2014, becoming director of the university's Graduate Program in Early Christian Studies in 1984, and was promoted to Ordinary Professor in 2001. A former president of the North American Patristics Society (1986-88), the Byzantine Studies Conference (1990-91) and the American Oriental Society (2007-2008), he was also a fellow at the Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies in Washington and a visiting professor at a number of institutions, including the Institute for Advanced Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Princeton Theological Seminary and Georgetown University. He was a prolific researcher and widely recognized authority on Syriac Christianity and Christian Arab literature. He served on the advisory board of the journal *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, as co-editor of the series Early Christian Texts in Translation, as associate editor of the *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, consulting editor of *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, and a member of the editorial boards for *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* and for the *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* as well as an editor of *The Blackwell Dictionary of Early Christianity* (1999). His numerous scholarly works included studies of the Patristic writer St. Ephrem the Syrian, early Syriac asceticism, early Arabic Christian theology, and interreligious dialogue and spirituality. He was the author of over 130 articles and seven books, including *The Church in the Shadow of the Mosque: Christians and Muslims in the World of Islam* (2008), awarded the Albert C. Outler Prize for the best book on ecumenical church history by the American Society of Church History; *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (2002); *The Bible in Arabic* (2013); the bilingual volume *Yahyā ibn ʿAdī: The Reformation of Morals* (1992); and *A Treatise on the Veneration of the Holy Icons Written in Arabic by Theodore Abû Qurrah, Bishop of Harrān* (1997); his Marquette Lecture of 1997 was published as *Faith Adoring the Mystery: Reading the Bible with St. Ephraem the Syrian*. For more than a decade he was a member of the official Eastern Orthodox–Roman Catholic Dialogue and was a frequent participant in various forms of Christian–Muslim dialogue. In 2009, he received a Rumi Peace Award for his work in interfaith dialogue.

Fr. Griffith became a member of the International Thomas Merton Society in its early formative period, serving as the society treasurer from 1999 to 2003. He was a regular participant and speaker at numerous ITMS conferences, making presentations at the first General Meeting (1989): "Thomas Merton, Louis Massignon & the Challenge of Islam"; at GM 2 (1991): "Merton, Massignon & Mahatma Gandhi: Mysticism in Action"; at GM 3 (1993): "Christians & the Call to Islam: Reflections on Merton's Point of View"; at GM 5 (1997): "Thomas Merton, Louis Massignon and the Muslim Martyr al-Hallaj: The Way of Mystic Compassion"; at GM 6 (1999): "Thomas Merton and Abdul Aziz"; at GM 7 (2001): "Encountering John of the Cross: A Comparison of the Readings of Edith Stein & Thomas Merton"; at GM 10 (2007): "Mysticism, Sufism and Perennial Philosophy: Merton and the Associates and Disciples of Frithof Schuon." In 2009, at the ITMS Eleventh General

Meeting, his General Session dialogue was entitled "Merton and Islam: A Conversation with Merton's Correspondent and Friend, Herbert Mason"; he also participated in the General Session interfaith dialogue panel at the Fourteenth General Meeting (2015) with a presentation on "Merton's Model for a Continuing Muslim–Christian Conversation." His seminal articles "Thomas Merton, Louis Massignon and the Challenge of Islam" (reprinted from *The Merton Annual* 3 [1990]) and "'As One Spiritual Man to Another': The Merton-Abdul Aziz Correspondence" were included in the volume *Merton and Sufism: The Untold Story* (1999). His articles and reviews on Merton also appeared in *The Merton Seasonal*, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* and *Proceedings of the American Benedictine Academy Conventions*; he also wrote the Preface to Merton's novitiate conference volume *Pre-Benedictine Monasticism* (2006). His six-conference series entitled *Mystics, Muslims, and Merton* was issued on 3CDs and 2 DVDs by Now You Know Media in 2013. As his friend and fellow CUA graduate Christine Bochen sums up his scholarship and his life: "Sidney highlighted the fruitfulness of interreligious friendship in Merton's life and thought. This is not surprising for Sidney Griffith's own friendships reached across religions and cultures to foster dialogue and mutual understanding, most especially between Christians and Muslims. Colleagues, students and friends were blessed by his unlimited curiosity, wealth of knowledge, wisdom, kindness, humor, deep faith and ever-tender heart."

Wendell Berry (1934-2026)

Prolific author and social critic Wendell Berry, who corresponded with and visited Thomas Merton toward the end of the monk's life, died on August 31, 2026 at his home in Port Royal, Kentucky at the age of 92. He was born in Louisville on August 5, 1934, son of John Marshall Berry, a lawyer and tobacco farmer, and Virginia Erdman Perry, both of whose families had deep roots in Kentucky's rural Henry County. He was educated at Millersburg Military Institute and the University of Kentucky, receiving bachelor's and master's degrees in English in 1956 and 1957. In the latter year he married Tanya Amyx and in 1958 enrolled in Stanford University's Creative Writing Program as a Wallace Stegner Fellow, studying with Stegner in a celebrated group that also included authors Larry McMurtry, Robert Stone, Ernest Gaines, Tillie Olsen and Ken Kesey. He travelled in Italy and France on a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1961, and in 1962-1964 taught English at the Bronx campus of New York University. In 1964 he returned to Kentucky and began teaching creative writing at his alma mater. The following year he and his wife and their two children, Mary and Pryor, moved to Lane's Landing Farm in the town of Port Royal, where his mother had grown up, in Henry County, west of the Kentucky River, while continuing to teach at UK until 1977, later returning to the classroom from 1987 to 1993. For the rest of his life he combined literary work, mainly composed on a manual typewriter during daylight hours in a rustic cabin without electricity, with life as a working farmer on his 125 hillside acres. He was the author of more than fifty volumes of poetry, fiction and essays, becoming one of the most celebrated and influential advocates of environmental responsibility and opposition to an consumerist economy prioritizing profits over people and a soulless technological paradigm of exploitation of the natural world and disregard for the centrality of human community, based on the inherent dignity of every person. His activism extended to opposition to war, nuclear power and the death penalty and a commitment to a consistent life ethic. He was awarded the National Humanities Medal by President Barack Obama in 2011 and delivered the Jefferson Lecture the following year, He was also a 2013 Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and from 2014 until his death was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He was the recipient of the 2013 Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award and was inducted into the Kentucky Writers Hall of Fame in 2015, the first living author to be so honored. In 2011 the nonprofit Berry Center was established to put "Wendell Berry's writings to work by advocating for farmers, land-conserving

communities and healthy regional economies" and "for the purpose of bringing focus, knowledge and cohesiveness to the work of changing our ruinous industrial agriculture system into a system and culture that uses nature as the standard, accepts no permanent damage to the ecosphere, and takes into consideration human health in local communities."

In a 2004 interview with *Sojourners* magazine editor (and current ITMS Board member) Rose Marie Berger for a cover story on Berry, she asked about his contacts with Thomas Merton. Berry replied, "My connection with him was the photographer Ralph Eugene Meatyard, who has grown steadily in reputation since he died. Thomas Merton was interested in photography, and I guess that led him to Gene . . . . He had a very great gift. Merton could see that, and he made a friend of Gene. Gene and his wife Madelyn took Tanya and me down there twice." He went on to say that "Merton was a man who understood how to be a companion. He had a lot of humor, and I think he knew something about how to be happy or how to enjoy happiness when he had it. I liked him tremendously. He had a very lively countenance; a very bright, curious, amused eye. When we went down there the first time, he just dropped it out casually, and I think with great secret amusement, that he was thinking about joining an Indian tribe." He concluded his comments by remarking, "I think Merton was a profound Christian. Some people seem to think that when he went East he was abandoning his faith or his vocation. I don't think he was at all. His talks to religious groups in Alaska . . . on that last trip were wonderful. He just seemed to be moving deeper and deeper, which in some ways made it easier to connect across a variety of spiritual expressions. He had, I think, a very fortunate impulse to reach out to other religions. And we need to pay attention to that, because there are people now who would carry us right into a religious war. That's a big problem, I think." On his second trip to the monastery, on December 10, 1967, exactly a year before Merton's death, he brought poet Denise Levertov, who wished to meet Merton, who notes the visit in a journal entry on that day (*Other Side of the Mountain* 22). Merton and Berry exchanged nine letters between October 24, 1967 and August 6, 1968, four from Merton and five from Berry, in one of which he writes: "you are one of the few whose awareness of what I'm doing here would be of value to me." Much of the brief correspondence is taken up with Berry's contributions to *Monks Pond*, the literary magazine Merton edited during the last year of his life; three short poems are included in the second, summer, issue, and one more in the final winter issue (see *Monks Pond* 96, 215). Plans for a further visit did not work out due to Berry's travel dates, and of course Merton's unexpected death at the end of the year prevented any further contacts between the two remarkably like-minded authors. In two of the essays included in his volume *A Continuous Harmony*, Berry cites Merton as, in J. S. Porter's words, "a prophet of wholeness" (see "Thomas Merton & Wendell Berry: A Brief Study in Tone," *The Merton Seasonal* 17.2 [Spring 1992] 12-15): in "A Secular Pilgrimage" he quotes Merton's claim that the "new consciousness which isolated man in his own knowing mind and separates him from the world around him (which he does not know as it is in itself but only as it is in his mind) makes wisdom impossible because it severs the communion between subject and object, man and nature, upon which wisdom depends" (16), while the conclusion of "Discipline and Hope" refers to a conversation on one of Berry's visits to Gethsemani: "Asked one day why the Shakers, who expected the end of the world at any moment, were nevertheless consummate farms and craftsmen, Thomas Merton replied: 'When you expect the world to end at any moment, you know there is no need to hurry. You take your time, you do your work well'" (168) (a comment that Berry says in a Spring 2020 interview for *Orion* magazine that he's repeated many times). Wendell Berry was a featured speaker at the Seventh General Meeting of the International Thomas Merton Society at Bellarmine University in 2001, with a reading of his "Sabbath Poems" at the Sunday morning General Session bringing the conference to its close.

Merton Scholars Retreat

On June 26-28, 2026, the biennial Merton Scholars Retreat was held at the Abbey of Gethsemani. Thirty-seven people attended, including presenters at the ITMS Nineteenth General Meeting, family members and twelve 2025 Daggy Scholars. The schedule included participation in the liturgy of the hours and the Eucharist, a visit to Merton's hermitage with Br. Paul Quenon on Saturday morning, presentations by Christopher Pramuk on Saturday afternoon and Anne Pearson on Sunday morning. A social hour on Saturday evening provided further opportunity for discussion and community interaction.

ITMS Authors

Mary Frances Coady has recently published *As the Morning Rising* (Inanna Publications, 2026) [$22.95 paper], a novel set in the transitional period of the 1950s-60s, tracing the struggles of a progressive nun dismissed from her teaching position at a Catholic girls school because of fears that she was introducing a way of thinking to young nuns that would pull them away from traditional ideas and practices. Author Barry Webster writes: "Coady expertly brings us into a clandestine, mystery-filled world peopled by women struggling to find grace in the limits of duty-bound lives. *As the Morning Rising* deftly explores the effects of social change on a subculture few of us understand."

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The latest book from Paul Quenon, OCSO is *Where Time Its Silence Keeps: Poems from Gethsemani* (Monkfish, 2026) [$23.95 paper]. These poems reflect the rhythms of the author's monastic life of prayer, contemplation and work in the monastery kitchen, as well as the setting among the Kentucky knobs surrounding the abbey and the variety of creatures that live there. The book also includes a rare interview with the poet. Author Pico Iyer writes: "Brother Paul's delight in the world, and his gift for putting words to wonder, would make his old novice master Thomas Merton beam." Poet Norman Fischer adds: "Brother Paul writes wonderfully, spontaneously, variously, breathlessly of life lived at maximum intensity, in silence and gratitude. You may not be a monastic, but you will recognize – like a quiet echo inside – your own life in his." According to Spirituality and Practice.com: "Here we have the most important Catholic monk-poet of the last half-century; long ago Paul Quenon, OCSO picked up the pen his novice master, Thomas Merton, left when he died in 1968. . . . Highly recommended."

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James Robinson has written *Beyond Factory Farming: A Contemplative-Prophetic Approach to Food* (Orbis, 2026) [$26.00 paper], which weaves together religious, scientific and culinary wisdom for relationships with food, meals and other people, asking such questions as: how can our meals re-root us in the soils of creation? and how can our foodways uproot and replace the desecrating system of factory farming? Theologian Elizabeth Johnson writes: "What a vitally important book! By turns lyrical, fierce, and ultimately inspiring, it sheds light on U.S. eating practices with deep spiritual insight. Far from an in-your-face rant, its peaceable tone opens a door that invites the reader to enter and be persuaded while its critique comes wrapped with a pluralism of alternatives. Warning: read it and be changed the next time you sit down to eat."

Tuesdays with Merton Series

On September 8, Marcela Raggio spoke on "A Dimension of Life and Experience: On the Poetry of Thomas Merton and His Latin American Poetic Network" and on October 13, Eric Martin gave a presentation on "Merton's Relevance for Contemporary Antifascists" as part of the Tuesdays with Merton webinar series, sponsored by the Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University and co-sponsored by the Bernardin Center at Catholic Theological Union. Upcoming presentations include D. Brendan Johnson and Calvin Gross: "The Other Side of the Mountain: Thomas Merton's Wisdom for the End of Life" on November 10: Gary P. Hall: "Thomas Merton and Advent" on December 8; Sylvia Grevel will speak on January 12, 2027 and Marjorie Corbman on February 9. On March 16, the annual Fourth and Walnut Lecture will be given

by Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, DC. The programs take place on the second Tuesday of each month on Zoom at 7 p.m. EDT/EST. For further information go to http://merton.org/TWM; to register for the webinars follow the highlighted "Register Here" link. Previous Tuesdays with Merton presentations are available on the ITMS YouTube channel and as audio podcasts.

Rome Conference on Science and Faith

A conference entitled "The Convergences of Science and Faith" will be held December 11-12, 2026 at the Palazzo Cardinal Cesi in Rome, sponsored by the Contemplative Network and the Scientific and Medical Network This hybrid conference (in-person and online) will feature presentations by sixteen distinguished scientists and contemplative clergy of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions, including psychotherapist and spiritual director James Finley, former novice at the Abbey of Gethsemani under Thomas Merton and author of *Merton's Palace of Nowhere* and other works of contemplative spirituality. Other speakers include Peter Cardinal Turkson, Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences; Laurence Freeman, OSB, director of the World Community for Christian Meditation; cosmologist Dr. Bernard Carr, former doctoral student of Stephen Hawking; Dr. Jennifer Wiseman, senior scientist on the Hubble Space Telescope; and Dr. Federico Faggin, inventor of the microprocessor, as well as Christian mystics, Jewish Kabbalists and Islamic Sufi contemplative prayer leaders. The International Thomas Merton Society is a supporting affiliate for the conference. For further information and registration materials for in-person or remote participation, contact: www.faith-science.org.

Merton Sightings and Soundings

On September 10, the Theo Von podcast had Bishop Robert Barron as a guest, who at one point discusses his experience working at a bookstore in his youth and being captivated and inspired by Thomas Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Bishop Barron also offers a brief biography of Merton on the podcast.

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On a recent episode of *Jeopardy*, the "answer" was: "In 1939 Thomas Merton opened the Bible to Luke 1:20 and read 'Behold you shall be' this & he decided to become a Trappist monk." The "question" of course was: "What is 'silent'?"

Merton Happenings

On May 14-17, a Mindful Dialogue Symposium entitled "Where Interfaith, Ecology and Education Meet" took place at Sankt-Wenzeslaus-Stift Meeting Center in Markersdorf, Germany, coordinated by ITMS international advisors Dominiek Lootens, Marcela Raggio and Cristobal Serran-Pagan y Fuentes, with the participation of ITMS President Paul Pynkoski. The International Thomas Merton Society, along with the Centre for Dialogue at the Catholic City Church, Frankfurt am Main, the Strategy and Development Department of the Catholic Diocese of Limburg and the German Catholic Fonds, was a partner organization and financial supporter for the conference, which brought together a broad interreligious representation of Christian, Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist, Daoist and indigenous participants, both in person and online, from fourteen countires on four continents, with contemplative, artistic, interdisciplinary and dialogical formats. Participants included speakers affiliated with five different Merton-related groups. Presentations featuring the work of Thomas Merton included: Cristobal Serran-Pagan y Fuentes: "Thomas Merton's Engagement with Muslims: Insights for Dialogue with Muslims Today" (keynote); Cristobal Wilfredo Benitez: "A Visio Divina – Photography as a Contemplative Exploration in the Life of Thomas Merton"; Juan Carlos Ramos Hendez: "Contemplative Power: Thomas Merton, poética-profética ante la persecución religiosa" (online); Marcela Raggio: "The Legacy of Thomas Merton and Pope Francis: Ecology and the Literary Education"; John Gillespie: "The Sacred Ecology of Vision: Inscape, Incarnation and Nature in Thomas Merton and Gerard Manley Hopkins" (online); Jung Eun Sophia Park: "Thomas Merton and Cross-Cultural Spiritual Direction: To Construct a Borderland" (keynote).

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On April 27, Thomas Malowitz presented a paper entitled "Borges, Merton and Generative OpenAI: Using Analogies of Babel to Make Sense of Algorithmic Madness and Technological Absurdity" in the "Writing & AI: Rhetoric after Truth: Populism and Digital Persecution" Panel at the annual College English Association Conference in Charlotte, NC.

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On May 29-31, Mark C. Meade led a retreat entitled "Finding Ourselves and Losing Ourselves in Art with Thomas Merton" at the Nazareth Retreat Center in Nazareth, KY, a program that included a visit to the Abbey of Gethsemani and to Thomas Merton's hermitage.

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On June 9, Thomas Malewitz led a workshop for teachers entitled "Thomas Merton and Christian Humanism: Responding to the Technological Age" for the Archdiocese of Louisville Summer Institute at the Maloney Center in Louisville, KY.

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The Catholic Seminar Series sponsored by the Chautauqua Catholic Community during the Summer 2026 season at the Chautauqua Institution, Chautauqua, NY featured two presentations on Thomas Merton. On July 10, Sophfronia Scott spoke on "Anam Cara: Thomas Merton and Pursuing Relationships that Enlighten Our Lives"; on August 14, Christine M. Bochen gave a presentation entitled "'Already One': Thomas Merton's Way to Unity."

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On August 7-9, Carol Lenox and Judith Valente directed a retreat entitled "Searching for Home: Thomas Merton and Thomas Berry in Conversation" at the Prairiewoods Ecological Spirituality Center in Hiawatha, IA.

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On August 15, Jim Robinson led a Day of Reflection on "Contemplative and Ethical Eating" at the Center at Mariandale, Ossening, NY.

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On September 12, Fr. Michael Holleran and Paul Pearson led a day conference entitled "Action and Contemplation: How Contemplative Prayer and Our Spiritual Life Blossoms into Outer Works and Service for Others" at the Candler School of Theology, Emory University in Atlanta, GA.

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On September 23-27, Douglas Hertler performed his play *Merton and Me: A Living Trinity* as part of the program on "Prophetic Perspectives: Propelling Mindful Masculinity" sponsored by Illuman New Mexico at the Hummingbird Music Camp in Jemez, NM.

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On October 15, the Second Annual Martha Buser, OSU lecture featured British author Catherine Coldstream in a presentation entitled "The Search for Balance: Contemplation and Action" at the Cralle Theater, Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY.

Upcoming Events

On October 26, Fernando Beltrán will give a lecture entitled "Orar la vida y vivir la oración: Aproximación a la vida y las obras de Thomas Merton" ("Praying Life and Living Prayer") at the Parish church of La Santísima Trinidad and La Sagrada Familia in Salamanca, Spain.

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On November 2, Bonnie Thurston will teach a one-day course entitled "Rising Up out of the Centre: Thomas Merton on Prayer and Contemplation" at Sarum College, Salisbury, UK.

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On November 13-15, Michael Higgins will direct a retreat at the retreat house of the Anglican Sisterhood of St. John the Divine in Toronto, to be focused on insights from Thomas Merton for this critical moment. His focus will be on the dynamics of power ("A Letter to Pablo Antonio Cuadra concerning Giants"); the corruption of language (*The Tower of Babel*); and the anti-humanism of a technologistic paradigm (*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*), which "make him the go-to spiritual guide in our time of turmoil, confusion and global fear."

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On December 12, Daniel P. Horan will lead a day of reflection entitled "Becoming the Stories

We Tell," held in person at The Meditatio Centre in West London, also available online. The recording of the day will be made available to all those who register.

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During the Spring 2027 semester, Richard Putz will teach a 10-week adult education course entitled "A Spoke in the Wheel: Thomas Merton, the Medium, and the Cost of Conscience" at the Forever Learning Institute in South Bend, IN.

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On January 20, 2027, Kathleen Tarr will serve as curator and presenter for a special Poetry Parley event on "The Poetry of Thomas Merton" at the Organic Oasis in Anchorage, Alaska. Following a brief talk to introduce Merton's "poetic" biography she and a select group of Alaskan writers will share some of Merton's most well-known poems.

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On February 22, the twenty-first annual Thomas Merton Black History Month Lecture will feature a presentation by poet and scholar Angela Alaimo O'Donnell at Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY at 7.00 p.m. – free and open to the public.

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On February 12-14, Douglas Hertler will perform his play *Merton and Me: A Living Trinity* at the Genesis Spiritual Center, Westfield, MA.

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On February 18, Douglas Hertler will perform his play *Merton and Me: A Living Trinity* at St. Monica's Church in New York City.

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On March 6, Douglas Hertler will perform his play *Merton and Me: A Living Trinity* at Daylesford Abbey, Paoli, PA.

Chapter and Affiliate News

On October 18, the Chicago ITMS Chapter sponsored a day of recollection held in the chapter room of St. Procopius Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Lisle, IL on the theme: "Together unto Everlasting Life: Thomas Merton's Embrace of the Rule of St. Benedict." Merton Center Director Paul Pearson will give two presentations, entitled "Dancing with St. Benedict: Thomas Merton's Embrace of the Rule of St. Benedict" and "This Day Will Not Come Again: Thomas Merton and the Vow of Stability."

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On September 24, the Corpus Christi (NYC) Thomas Merton Society Chapter opened its 2026-27 season at Corpus Christi Church in Manhattan, an observance of the Season of Creation with a presentation entitled: "Taize: Prayer for the Earth," an evening of music with Readings from Thomas Merton, meditation and song, led by Liam Myers. On November 14, Carl McColman will lead a day of recollection for the chapter on "Contemplative Wisdom in the Life of Thomas Merton" at Corpus Christi Church. For further information on chapter programs call 212- 666-9350 or email: info@thomasmertonnyc.org.

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Recent meetings of the Indianapolis ITMS Chapter included presentations by Judith Valente: "The Italian Soul: What We Can Learn from Italy about Living More Soulfully, Joyfully and Mindfully" on April 16; Paul Pearson: "Thomas Merton and the Shakers" on May 21; Elizabeth Anne Stewart: "Unlocking Epiphany Moments" on July 16; Gregory Shufelt: "The Hoosier Voter, Turnout, Gerrymandering, Election Integrity and Other Voting Issues" on August 20; Katy Schluge and Jon Richardson: "Shared Experiences of Working at a Catholic Worker House" on September 17. On October 15, members of the chapter took a trip to the Pleasant Hill Shaker Village in Harrodsburg KY. On November 19 the chapter will host Gordon Oyer, speaking on "Relating to Place as Property with Merton as Guide." For further information contact chapter coordinator Mark Hudson at markchudson@gmail.com or at 317-414-4205.

Send all Merton-related news to:
Pat O'Connell
Box 3219
Gannon University
Erie, PA 16541
oconnell001@gannon.edu
The ITMS Newsletter is also available online at:
www.merton.org/ITMS