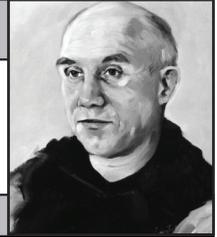


INTERNATIONAL THOMAS MERTON SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER

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Merton Center Audio Project Completed

The Thomas Merton Center at Bellarmine University has concluded a substantial project using new tools to transcribe its collection of Thomas Merton's audio recordings. In-person researchers at the Merton Center can now conduct full-text searches on the recordings' transcriptions. (An example is available at: <http://merton.org/audio>.) Upon finding that a recording contains a keyword, its text is synchronized with audio recordings, allowing the user to navigate to the exact position of the search term in the recording while the recording proceeds from the desired place in the text.

The 765 recordings now transcribed were digitally remastered 25 years ago from the source reel-to-reel audio tapes of Merton's lectures to novitiate classes and on other occasions. The tapes date from 1962 through the end of his term as novice master in August 1965, and include subsequent Sunday presentations to the monastic community as well as later private recordings, made during Merton's hermitage years, along with recordings of retreats given to religious communities and on travels through 1968. Each recording had been given a general title, sometimes not representative of the whole recording, and all were lacking detailed indexing of content. While a substantial but limited number of these recordings has been and continues to be commercially available, the full set of recordings has been accessible at the Merton Center only by requesting a CD surrogate of particular conferences, or in the last decade, through the digital collections kiosk. *The Merton Seasonal* and *The Merton Annual* have also provided some transcriptions of individual conferences or portions of conferences. Lengthier retreats have been published in books like *The Springs of Contemplation* and *Thomas Merton in*

California (the former being a part of the Center's recordings and new transcriptions, while the latter are not part of this project).

For many years, researchers and casual readers have inquired about the potential of transcribing the full set of recordings. Estimates of the cost of hiring human-generated transcripts have ranged from \$50,000 to \$60,000, rendering the project financially out of reach for the Merton Center unless another option could be found. In the Spring of 2025, Merton Center Assistant Director Mark C. Meade initiated a project using a free tool called Whisper, created by the company OpenAI. Though the use of many artificial intelligence (AI) tools, including most tools for audio transcription, require an internet-connected process, the Merton Center was able to run the Whisper transcription software offline, thus not exposing the text of Merton's conferences to "train" AI models and subsequently appear, with or without attribution, in use by generative AI algorithms. This process was much slower using standard computer terminals at the Merton Center rather than internet, cloud-based supercomputers. However, the adopted local method avoided other objections to employing large data centers, namely: the huge power expenditures consuming fossil fuels, the pollution therein generated, and the large amounts of water required. This slow process, requiring much less power in the tradeoff, was still fast compared to human labor. With local machines running day and night, the project transcribed over 450 hours of audio in under 50 days, generating 4.5 million words.

The question that then emerged was whether they were in fact the correct words. A check revealed that overwhelmingly, the answer was yes. Mark Meade estimates its accuracy at around 99% – a remarkable

achievement, but one that, even at a 1% rate, results in some 45,000 wrong words out of the 4.5 million. Another potential objection that might be raised is that of labor: how many jobs would be eliminated by this use of automation? Certainly, many hours of human labor, taking either much longer than 50 days or a very large army of transcribers commissioned, could have done the task. But in the case of the Merton Center, which in the past quarter century has had no budget with the capacity to afford hiring human transcribers, and with shrinking institutional budgets at universities generally, the situation, Meade notes, was not likely to improve. “The immense benefit to researchers seemed worth any tradeoffs,” he adds.

Though automation was labor-saving, it was by no means labor-eliminating. Many hours of training and setup on the software tools necessary for the transcription, and for the systems needed to make the synchronization with digital collections possible, were required. Each of the 765 transcription files went through layers of processing and had to be individually added to the digital collections after a process of editing. Despite the marvel of the accuracy of Whisper AI in picking up even the questions of novices off-microphone, there were inevitably many personal names, places and obscure monastic terms that the tool mis-transcribed. There were thus many human hours devoted to making corrections, a process that is still a work in progress. What exists at present is a very serviceable corpus for search and a basis for other uses, but any text used for publication will still require human quality-control. Though instructed to recognize English as the primary language of the recordings, the program still rendered Merton’s peppering of lectures with ecclesiastical Latin or the occasional phrase in French with surprising accuracy. The model most often failed when there was crosstalk in the room and, inevitably, when Latin prayers were hastily mumbled at the start or end of a novitiate lecture.

Meade commented on his awareness “of the irony of using a computer process to bring onto a page of text the words of Thomas Merton, a critic of technology if not a total luddite.” Perhaps Merton “would be uncomfortable with this automated

séance of sorts. He would no doubt have reservations about a positivist ‘faith’ in a future turned over to the supercomputers as has emerged in some corners of Silicon Valley and with AI technology creeping into schools, workplaces and homes.” While recognizing these dangers, Meade concludes: “On balance, I think Merton would challenge us to counter the false eschatology of those who blindly entrust our future to machine-generated outcomes with a true Christian eschatology, as when Merton cites Nicholas Berdyaev, leaving us with a question with ramifications far beyond this particular project: Can human wisdom guide good use of technology so that we can “be human in this most inhuman of ages [and] guard the image of man for it is the image of God” (see *Raids on the Unspeakable* 6).

Walter W. Chura (1944-2026)

Walter W. (Walt) Chura, longtime ITMS member and director of the Capital Region ITMS chapter in Albany, NY, died on January 18, 2026 at the age of 81 at Glenterra Assisted Living in Glendale, CA, where he had moved some years ago to be close to his two sons and their families. He was born April 17, 1944 in Troy, NY, son of Walter Chura and Bernice Tromblee Chura, of Watervliet, NY. He and his brothers attended elementary school at St. Patrick’s School in Watervliet, and Walt later graduated with a bachelor’s degree in English from Siena College in Loudonville in 1966, where he became a member of the Franciscan Third Order (often using the initials SFO following his name); he earned a master’s degree in English from Loyola University in Chicago as well as a master’s in Theology and Ministry from St. Bernard’s School of Theology and Ministry in Rochester, NY. He was a faculty member at Mercy High School in Albany, at Siena and at the College of Saint Rose in Albany. He was a frequent presenter for Catholic Diocese of Albany educational events and faith formation programs, and was a regular contributor to the diocesan newspaper *The Evangelist* as a columnist focusing on ecumenism. He was married for more than 53 years to Elizabeth (Betty Jane) DePalma Chura until her death in December 2020.

He was a founder of the non-profit Simple Gifts bookstore in Albany that focused particularly on

favorite authors such as St. Francis of Assisi, the Shakers, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton, and served as a center in the 1970s and '80s for discussion of the social teachings of the church. He was also a cofounder of the Emmaus Catholic Worker House in Albany. In addition to his role as coordinator of the Albany ITMS chapter, for thirteen years he directed "Merton in the Mountains" retreats at the Pyramid Life Center; he also served as chair of the ITMS Retreats Committee. According to his friend Fred Boehrer, "Merton's embrace of silence and his embrace of deep reflection about his own daily life and daily practice, I think that was something that Walt was drawn to. Thinking about how to live a holy life and be a follower of Jesus, how to be a disciple in our day and age and really thinking that way. Thinking through the theological lens and reflecting on his daily life is something that he really enjoyed."

For many years he was a regular presenter at ITMS General Meetings, speaking at seven conferences (4-9, 11) between 1995 and 2009 as well as giving a slide presentation on Merton's Manhattan at the Eighth General Meeting in 2003. He contributed seven articles and reviews to *The Merton Seasonal*, most notably his article "'Come, Little Children, Come to Zion': A Merton Letter to a Rector's Wife," 30:3 (Fall 2005) 12-16, which featured the text of a hitherto unknown October 25, 1948 letter to Mrs. Lester Riley, widow of the rector of Zion Church in Douglaston, Queens about whom Merton wrote in *The Seven Storey Mountain*, revealing as well the fact that there are actually two slightly different texts of that autobiography, since Merton, as a result of this correspondence, omitted Rev. Riley's name from later printings of the book.

Walt Chura is survived by his brothers David A. Chura of Leeds, MA and Dennis J. Chura of Watervliet, NY, his sons Jeremy and David Chura and their wives, and his granddaughters Joy and Everly, all of Monrovia, CA. A funeral Mass was held on January 30 at St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Waterford, NY, followed by burial at St. Mary's Cemetery in Waterford.

Father Robert Longobucco, the Vicar General for the Diocese of Albany, who first met Walt Chura

when he was a student at SUNY Albany and became a close collaborator in various ministries, said of him: "I had never met anyone like him and I haven't met anyone like him since. I think his enthusiasm for faith, for the truth and the people that he loved was unmatched. He lived his life seriously and he carried himself lightly."

Kilian McDonnell, OSB (1921-2025)

Kilian McDonnell, OSB, editor, ecumenist and poet, monk of St. John's Abbey in Collegetown, Minnesota and correspondent of Thomas Merton, died September 8, 2025, just short of his 104th birthday. Born in Great Falls, Montana on September 16, 1921, the fourth of eight children of Joseph and Anna (Averbach) McDonnell, William Perry McDonnell moved as an infant with his family to Velva, North Dakota, where he attended grade school and Velva High School, becoming an Eagle Scout and graduating in 1940. He began college at Saint John's University, Collegetown as a pre-divinity student, preparing for ordination for the Diocese of Fargo, North Dakota, but soon transferred to the Dominican novitiate at River Forest, Illinois. Forced by health problems to take a leave of absence from the novitiate, he obtained a temporary position as scouting program director at Saint Joseph's School for the Deaf in the Bronx, New York, but when he was not readmitted to the Dominicans due to fragile health, he became a novice at St. John's Abbey in August 1945, receiving the name of Kilian, and took vows as a professed monk one year later. After graduation from Saint John's University in 1947, he completed his education for priesthood at Saint John's Seminary, leading to ordination on June 7, 1952. After four years of parish work he began graduate theological studies at the University of Ottawa, receiving a licentiate in theology in 1960, then continued studies in German universities and received a doctorate from the University of Trier in 1963.

He subsequently served as professor of theology at Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary from 1964 to 1992. He was the founder the Collegetown Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research in 1967, serving as its director and then as president. After the Second Vatican Council, he

served as secretary of the national Presbyterian/Roman Catholic Consultation and as a member of national dialogues between Lutherans and Roman Catholics and between Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics. For twenty years Father Kilian was also a consultant to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on charismatic renewal. For fifteen years he served as consultant to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Vatican ecumenical office. Internationally, he served as co-chair of the internal consultation between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, as well as co-chair of the international dialogue between the Pentecostal churches and the Vatican and a member of the international Disciples/Roman Catholic dialogue. For his work in ecumenism, Father Kilian received the *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* award from Pope John Paul II (1983); the *Pax Christi* Award from Saint John's University, Collegetown (1984); the John Courtney Murray Award from the Catholic Theology Society of America (1993); an honorary doctorate from Loyola University, Chicago (1999); and the Society for Pentecostal Studies Lifetime Achievement Award (2004).

A prolific writer, Father Kilian authored or co-authored seventeen books and well over two hundred articles on ecclesiology, pneumatology, the Trinity, reformation theology and ecumenism; he edited the three-volume *Presence, Power, Praise: Documents on the Charismatic Renewal* (1980) and co-authored with George Montague *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (1991), published in seven languages. He also served as scripture editor for *Worship*, editor of *Sponsa Regis* and columnist for *Sign* magazine. In later life, he turned to writing poetry, including the volumes *Swift Lord, You Are Not* (2003), *Yahweh's Other Shoe* (2006), *God Drops and Loses Things* (2009), *Wrestling with God* (2011) and *Aggressive Mercy* (2014).

Fr. Kilian and Thomas Merton first met during Merton's 1956 visit to Collegetown, and Fr. Kilian subsequently visited Gethsemani a couple years later. They exchanged some four dozen letters between 1958 and 1963, largely concerned with

publishing projects for Liturgical Press and articles for *Sponsa Regis* during McDonnell's editorship. Eight of these are included in *The School of Charity*, and an additional one, dated March 1962, is Cold War Letter #59 and found in *Witness to Freedom* and the published *Cold War Letters* collection. An interview with Fr. Kilian about his religious life and his contacts with Merton, conducted by Victor Kramer on February 11, 2005, appears in *The Merton Annual 20* (2007) and is reprinted in volume 2 of the recent *Fons Vitae* anthology *Insights & Interviews*.

Father Kilian died on September 8, 2025, in the retirement center at Saint John's Abbey. He is survived by his brother Robert of Bellingham, WA, many nieces, nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews, and by his monastic community. A Mass of Christian Burial was celebrated at the Abbey Church on September 16 (the one-hundred-fourth anniversary of his birth), followed by interment in the Abbey Cemetery.

Judith Best, SSND (1940-2025)

Sister Judith (Mary Lourdes) Best, longtime member of the International Thomas Merton Society, died January 9, 2025 at the age of 84 at Trinity Woods assisted living facility in Milwaukee. Born February 19, 1940 in Peoria, Illinois, the third daughter of William and Edna Doran Best, she attended St. Bernard School in Peoria and St. Anthony's High School in Effingham, where she was taught by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, and joined that congregation in 1958, professing first vows in 1960 and final vows in 1966. She received a bachelor's degree in history from Notre Dame College in St. Louis in 1962 and a master's degree in theology from the University of Notre Dame in 1971. She taught in secondary schools of her order from 1962 to 1970 and again from 1991 through 1998. In the intervening years she was involved in various congregational positions and retreat and spiritual direction ministries, and was one of the founding members of the Center of Spiritual Development, located at Notre Dame Hall on the campus of St. Louis University. In August 1973, she participated in a march alongside striking United Farm Workers picketing for a just contract near

Fresno, California, was arrested along with Catholic Worker founder Dorothy Day and others, spending two weeks incarcerated at the Fresno County Industrial Farm. In later years she was a contributor to the *National Catholic Reporter* “Global Sisters Report,” writing about struggles and inequalities in American political life, and participated with Sr. Simone Campbell and others in the “Nuns on the Bus” tours, raising awareness throughout the country of the needs of the marginalized. Burial took place in the SSND cemetery in Elm Grove, Wisconsin on January 10, 2025; a memorial Mass was held at Trinity Woods on January 21 and a celebration of life gathering at the historic Sancta Maria in Ripa Chapel in Saint Louis on February 11.

ITMS Authors

Rose Marie Berger has edited *Light for the Way: Seeking Simplicity, Connection, and Repair in a Broken World* (Broadleaf, 2026) [\$25 paper; \$28.99 cloth], an anthology of articles from *Sojourners* magazine, for which she serves as senior editor, to commemorate the journal’s half-century of publication. Author Barbara Brown Taylor writes: “At the moment, I cannot think of a better tonic for the spirit than this new collection from *Sojourners*, which has been in the business of encouragement for as long as some of us have been alive. Whether you are ready for refreshment from some of your favorite authors or on the lookout for new sources of inspiration, you will find them here.”

Larry Culliford has recently written *Happy as Larry: A Psychiatrist’s Quest for Mental Health and Wellbeing* (New Generation Publishing, 2025), a spiritual autobiography (available on Amazon in both paperback and Kindle versions). The book is called “A milestone in human self-understanding” by Anthony Seldon and “A beacon of hope” by Philip Sykes.

Fiona Gardner’s most recent book is *Night Sea Journeying: Soul Recovery from Childhood Trauma* (Cascade, 2025) [\$23.00 paper], which explores the psycho-spiritual healing needed to recover from the damage caused by childhood trauma

and the soul recovery that will happen if we can allow it. Psychotherapist and priest Belinda West writes: “Fiona’s book is a powerful, unsentimental exploration of trauma’s impact on the soul. Through poetic storytelling, gospel imagery, and sea metaphors, she guides readers from brokenness to restoration. Her vignettes reveal Christ’s radical love for the traumatized while blending insights from psychotherapy and spiritual direction. Muscular yet grace-filled, this work offers professional, personal and spiritual wisdom, summoning the authentic, God-given self in those shaped by relational trauma.”

Michael W. Higgins has recently published *A Synod Diary: Sixty Days That Shook the Church* (Paulist, 2026) [\$38 cloth; \$22.95 paper], a personal perspective on the events and background of the Extraordinary Synod of 2021-2024. Raymond Lafontaine, episcopal vicar for the Archdiocese of Montreal, writes: “In this erudite yet accessible work, Dr. Higgins provides us with a most helpful prelude outlining the background to the 2021–2024 Synod of Bishops on the themes of communion, participation, and mission. His diary entries, from his vantage point as an ‘external observer’ to the discussions going on in the synod hall, provide helpful insights into the deeper implications of the Synod for the Catholic Church, especially moving forward from the legacy of Pope Francis into the Petrine ministry of Leo XIV. All in all, delightful and insightful in equal parts!”

Roger Lipsey has written *Eyes to See: Approaching the Spiritual in World Art* (Monkfish, 2026) [\$35.00 paper], a lavishly illustrated set of reflections on how the spiritual is present in art from ancient Egypt and the Mediterranean to medieval Europe and the Renaissance, India, the Far East, and the world of Islam. According to *Foreword Reviews*: “*Eyes to See* is a celebration of icons in art, finding beautiful connections across history, culture, and geography”; *Kirkus Reviews* adds: “The book makes a case for the ‘knowledge of the heart.’ It’s atypical for scholars to speak of love as an approach to their field of study, but the author rejects such constraints

to better pursue a fresh, affecting perspective: ‘May we all find, and find again, our secret eyes.’ . . . A refreshing, well-considered take on art.”

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Judith Valente has written *How to Be a Contemplative: Poems and Brief Reflections* (Kelsay Books, 2025) [\$20 paper], a collection of thirty poems with reflections on each, with an epigraph from Thomas Merton: “Here is an unspeakable secret: Paradise is all around us and we do not understand.” Poet Angela Alaimo O’Donnell writes: “Judith Valente’s collection is a meditative memoir, a wisdom book, a companion for dark nights and darker days – but most of all it is a love letter – to imagination, invisible meanings beneath visible things, and the power of poetry to make them visible to others.”

Fourth and Walnut Lecture

On March 17, at 7 p.m. EDT, noted journalist, author, and interviewer John Dickerson will be the featured speaker for the Second Annual Fourth & Walnut Lecture, entitled “Finding Thomas Merton on the Campaign Trail,” at Frazier Hall on the campus of Bellarmine University, Louisville, KY; the presentation will also be live-streamed as the featured Tuesdays with Merton event for March: to register for this virtual program see: <https://merton.org/TWM/default.aspx>. John Dickerson most recently served as co-anchor of the CBS Evening News and chief political analyst for CBS News. He spent 16 years at CBS, where he also served as senior national correspondent, contributor to CBS News Sunday Morning, and co-host of *CBS This Morning*. From 2015 to 2018, he moderated *Face the Nation* and served as the network’s chief Washington correspondent.

Tuesdays with Merton

Recent presentations on 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, include Jordan T. Jones: “Thomas Merton meets James Cone: A Conversation That Never Happened” on January 13, 2026 and Megan Way on “Economics and Merton: Developing the Negatives”

on February 10. Upcoming presentations include Byron D. Wratee: “The Sound of the Genuine ‘True Self’: Thomas Merton, Howard Thurman and Mystical Anthropology” on April 14 and Jessica Sun: “Rain and the Rhinoceros: Advent in Palestine and Journeying with Justice” on May 12. To register for the webinars go to: <http://merton.org/TWM/> and follow the highlighted “Register Here” link. Previous Tuesdays with Merton presentations are available on the ITMS YouTube channel and as audio podcasts.

Merton Sightings & Soundings

On February 4, Fr. James Martin, SJ discussed his new book *Work in Progress* on the CBS Late Show, in a segment entitled “Eventually You Have to Be Your True Self – Father James Martin on the Jobs That Helped Him Grow Up,” in which host Stephen Colbert and Fr. Martin gave particular attention to the influence of Thomas Merton on the latter’s vocational and spiritual journey. The interview, which garnered 248,226 views, is available on YouTube at: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=KAew7t6-rsM>.

Merton Varia

The doors to the bedrooms in which Thomas Merton and Robert Lax slept during the summer of 1939 at the cottage owned by Lax’s brother-in-law Benjie Marcus in the hills above Olean, New York (see *The Seven Storey Mountain* 239-46) have found a new home. The cottage itself has deteriorated over the decades to the point where it is no longer habitable and cannot be preserved, but Lax’s niece Marcia Marcus Kelly has donated these doors along with the mantel from the living room fireplace to Mt. Irenaeus, the St. Bonaventure University retreat center located in nearby Friendship, New York (named after Merton’s friend, the St. Bonaventure librarian Fr. Irenaeus Herscher, OFM). The directors of the center, Marcia Kelly reports, “hope to use the doors and cottage mantel in a new Lax–Merton room dedicated to conversation inspired by their lives and writing.”

Canadian Merton Society Dissolved

Due to personal and institutional changes, the Thomas Merton Society of Canada, headquartered

for the past 25 years in Vancouver, BC, has decided to bring the society's work and its existence to a conclusion; the non-profit organization was legally and formally dissolved as of December 31, 2025 by a vote of the society board. A celebration of the society's rich history took place in Vancouver on January 31, 2026, Thomas Merton's one-hundred-eleventh birthday. The extensive materials previously housed in the Thomas Merton Reading Room at the Vancouver School of Theology, containing virtually all of the published works by and about Thomas Merton, as well as an extensive audiovisual collection, has been transferred to the John M. Kelly Library of the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, which has had significant connections with Merton himself and with generations of Merton scholars. To mark the arrival of this collection of more than 500 items, on March 10 author and Merton scholar Michael W. Higgins, former ITMS president and currently the Basilian Distinguished Fellow of Contemporary Catholic Thought at St. Michael's, presented a lecture entitled "Merton for Our Time: A Model of Interculturality," followed by a reception.

Merton Happenings

On September 30, 2025, Aaron and Gretchen Kerr discussed their marriage in the context of their shared Marian devotion and recent re-engagement with Thomas Merton on a June 2022 visit to the Abbey of Gethsemani at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish "Sacred Saturday" gathering in Mercer, PA.

On November 11, Fr. Ronald Rolheiser delivered the Third Annual Merton Lecture at St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, entitled "Dark Nights of Faith – Christian Mystics, Militant Atheists, Good Friday, the Purity of Revelation, and How Atheists Have Done Us a Favor," hosted by the St. Mary's Spiritual Life Center.

On November 20, Hugh Turley gave a presentation on "Thomas Merton: Peacemaker – How He Lived, How He Died, and Why It Matters" at The Hermitage in Indianapolis, IN.

On November 22, Hugh Turley spoke about his books on the death of Thomas Merton at the annual Irish Book, Art and Music Festival, held at the Irish American Heritage Center in Chicago.

On November 24, the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Boston, Massachusetts featured a session on "Mysticism, Inter-Spirituality, and Multiple Religious Belonging," with David Odorisio presiding and presentations by Andrew Stone Porter on "Decolonizing Comparative Mysticism: Thomas Merton's Non-Orientalist Interspirituality" and Swasti Bhattacharyya and Bernadette McNary-Zak on "The *Bhagavad Gita*, Vinoba Bhave, and Thomas Merton."

On February 23, 2026, Dr. Carolyn Medine of the University of Georgia presented the Twentieth Annual Thomas Merton Black History Month Lecture entitled "Thomas Merton and the Undecommons" at Bellarmine University, sponsored by the Bellarmine Thomas Merton Center. An audio recording of the presentation is available at: <https://merton.org/Medine.mp3>.

On February 28, Br. Paul Quenon led a session on Thomas Merton as novice master at the Passionist Earth and Spirit Center in Louisville, KY.

On March 16, Hugh Turley gave a presentation on "Thomas Merton, Who He Was, How He Died, and Why It Matters" at St. Anselm's Abbey School in Washington, DC.

Upcoming Events

On May 9, 2026, Michael Higgins will lead a study day on "Merton for Our Time: The Unquiet Questing Monk" at the University of Toronto; for further information see: <https://stmikes.utoronto.ca/program/smce4021-s26-merton-for-our-time-the-unquiet-questing-monk>.

On Saturday, May 30, 2026, a one-day conference entitled "The Hidden Ground of Love: Why Thomas

Merton Looked East to Find the West: Exploring the Universal Heart with Thomas Merton,” featuring Richard Putz and ITMS vice president Joseph Raab, will be held from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Shaffer Silveri Atrium – Parmer Hall, on the campus of Dominican University, River Forest, Illinois.

Chapter and Affiliate News

On January 18, 2026, the Chicago ITMS chapter’s first meeting of the new year featured a “town hall” discussion focused on “The Greatest Challenges We Face Today, through the lens of Thomas Merton,” facilitated by Richard Putz and Mike Brennan. At its February 15 meeting, the group heard a presentation by Richard Putz entitled “Taking Down Their Harps: The History of Black Catholics in the United States” (available online at: <https://allthingscyberspace.com/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/taking-down-the-harps-keynote-15-feb-2026-1.pdf>). On March 15, the meeting will feature Dr. Elizabeth-Anne Stewart speaking on “Unlocking Epiphany Moments.” On April 19, Jon Sweeney will discuss his latest book, *Experiencing God: 36 Ways according to Saint Francis of Assisi*, published to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis (October 3, 1226). For further information, contact chapter coordinator Mike Brennan at 773-447-3989; email: cc.itms@gmail.com.

The Indianapolis ITMS chapter now meets on the third Thursday of each month at 2:30 p.m. at All Saints Episcopal Church. At its January meeting Dr. Bill Kincaid spoke to the group on “Merton Belonging but Not Belonging”; in February, Vinny Donnelly gave a presentation entitled “Merton in Rome: Caesar vs. Martyrs”; the March meeting will feature a group study and discussion on “The General Dance,” the final chapter of Merton’s *New Seeds of Contemplation*. The April meeting will feature ITMS immediate past president Judith Valente speaking on “The Italian Soul: What We Can Learn from Italy About Living More Soulfully, Joyfully and Mindfully” while in May Paul M. Pearson, Director of the Thomas Merton Center, will give a presentation on “Thomas Merton and the Shakers.” For further information contact chapter

coordinator Mark Hudson at: markchudson@gmail.com.

On January 31, 2026, Kathleen Deignan, CND gave a presentation entitled “‘O Peace, Bless This Mad Place’: Discovering the Beatitudes of Thomas Merton” for the New York City ITMS Chapter at Corpus Christi Church in Manhattan. For further information contact info@thomasmertonnyc.org or call 212-666-9350.

On November 8, 2025, the Associazione Thomas Merton Italia cosponsored a program entitled “Thomas Merton e il Senso del Pellegrinaggio” (“Thomas Merton and the Sense of Pilgrimage”) hosted by Ezio Risatti and Flavio Baratto and featuring presentations by Mario Zaninelli and Cesare Bovinelli, in Torino, Italy. On November 29, the Associazione sponsored a day-long program entitled “Conoscersi per Riconoscersi: Thomas Merton la Pace tra Profezia e Diplomazia” (“Knowledge through Identification: Thomas Merton – Peace between Prophecy and Diplomacy”), featuring presentations by Andrea Avveduto, Mauro Garofalo and Carlo Cefaloni, held at the Domus Pacis – the historic Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli, in Assisi, Italy. A three-session series entitled “Thomas Merton – Un Profeta per il Nostro Tempo” (“Thomas Merton – A Prophet for Our Time”) was presented on February 19 and 26 and March 5 at the Santuario della Madonna del Lago in Bertinoro, Italy; the first two sessions were led by Gianni Tadolini and the third by Associazione president Mario Zaninelli. For further information see the Associazione website: <https://www.thomasmerton.eu>.

Send all Merton-related news to:

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The ITMS Newsletter is also available online at:

www.merton.org/ITMS