Hello and Happy New Year!

We here at UWM have been exclaiming with happy anticipation since the middle of December “we’ll launch that (insert initiative here) in January.” It is what we’ve been calling the “magical new year” wherein we take action as our plans unfold and activity picks up. We’ve released the old in burning bowl ceremonies in our churches and are given a new name to begin anew. But what of the symbolic quiet experience of that week between Christmas and the new year? Am I the only one that has ever felt I was in limbo that week? That time stood still? That I didn’t have anything to “do?”

What if we explored this kind of liminal space as spiritual and symbolic of our need to reflect, contemplate and even, dare I say it? Wait.

Sue Monk Kidd reflects on waiting in her book *When the Heart Waits: Spiritual Direction for Life’s Sacred Questions* — a book, incidentally, that our spiritual direction students are studying in their second quarter. She tells us, “There are some things that we simply must wait in silence to receive. We live our questions and wait for the knowing to happen. Like the tree, we wait for the sap to rise.” This reminds me of a Rilke quote I have carried with me since I was a teenager, “Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

Sue Monk Kidd challenges us to avoid what she calls “quickaholic” spirituality. Yes, miracles seem to happen in the blink of an eye, as if there were no unseen forces at work for us up until that point. But those forces, as those of us who have experienced miracles know, need room to find their way into our lives. And that happens in the patience of tuning toward the questions, emptying ourselves of the barriers to love, and waiting for those answers to come to us in the clarity of discernment.

Spiritual Direction is that place where we can come to feel secure with waiting for those moments of clarity and miracles to arise. It’s a space where both those just starting out on their spiritual journey and those who have mountains of spiritual experience can return to, for the experience of infinite deepening connection to Source.

In these “interesting” times, whether we’re religious or just spiritual, whether we’re believers or agnostics, it is this yearning toward that ground of true being that is calling us. It’s calling us to sit in the wonder and awe that our “quickaholic” culture can’t provide.

I lean on my spiritual director to help me wait for the call and answer of Spirit to guide me. As a spiritual director, I am guided by Spirit to assist others in an awareness of waiting that calls them into greater depths of soul satisfaction.

What if this is the year we learn the only thing to “do” is to wait in silence and contemplation and allow for Source to guide our actions and our words? Imagine the consequences of acting consistently and solely from soul centered guidance. The possibilities to flourish are endless.

So, from a place of “waiting” I wish you a Happy New Year. I hope you enjoy our inaugural Spiritual Direction newsletter. Please feel free to share with us your suggestions on the newsletter, inquire about spiritual direction certification or, reach out if you’d like to engage in spiritual direction. We’re here to serve you in love and light.
Life is difficult. With these words Scott Peck begins his classic book The Road Less Traveled. This title is taken from a line in a poem by Robert Frost. It often refers to the path followed by those who choose to live consciously and to find meaning in this life journey.

Wisdom teachers from many traditions remind us that the difficulties of life can be the raw materials from which our soul shapes its true destiny. In the East it is common for someone on the spiritual path to have a teacher or guru to guide him or her on the journey. In our Western do-it-yourself culture of independence we are wary of teachers and guides who purport to provide any wisdom for us.

Our path of supreme independence has served to break us free from the bonds of tradition and dogma, yet it has served us at a price. The price is that of chronic loneliness and isolation, so common in our culture. Our cultural myth is that of the lonely cowboy on horseback, blazing new trails, while conquering all obstacles and single-handedly carving out a new world for future generations.

In most traditional cultures there are those who guide others in the ways of wisdom. These guides are often known as the elders, the wise ones. Much of their wisdom comes from their own life experience, often hard-won. Yet much also comes from tribal and cultural wisdom and tradition handed down from generation to generation.

In the West we have no elders, as such. Our senior citizens are seen as over-the-hill and irrelevant to the mainstream culture. We have religions and religious leaders who may offer some wisdom, but all too often are more interested in perpetuating dogma or promoting a particular point of view. There is an unfulfilled spiritual need in the Western psyche.

In the West more people are now recognizing the need for a spiritual guide, an elder brother or sister who can walk with us and shed some light on our journey. In certain religious traditions—particularly the contemplative traditions—we have had the function of spiritual director, one who guides us in prayer life and our spiritual awakening. Outside of the formal religious traditions there are a growing number of individuals who are functioning as spiritual mentors and spiritual counselors for those who are on a spiritual journey.

Historically, most counseling has fallen into one of two general categories. A counselor may be one who gives advice and suggestions in matters legal, financial, educational, or relating to health issues. A counselor may also refer to one who functions in the arena of psychotherapy. Certainly there is a broad spectrum of approaches within the area of psychotherapy but most mainstream therapies steer clear of spiritual matters. In psychotherapy the approach is primarily working within the scope of an individual’s biographical history. Cognitive, emotive, and behavioral issues are typically the focus. Matters of spirituality and ultimate meaning may be acknowledged, but rarely are they the primary focus of the counseling sessions.

On the other hand, in recent decades there has risen a plethora of counseling which may be loosely referred to as New Age counseling. Astrologers, psychics, channelers, and diviners of all sorts are typically lumped into this category. While many people find these types of counselors to be helpful, they are generally not accepted as legitimate by either the psychotherapeutic or religious communities.

There exists for many today a deep need for spiritual guidance that does not have the agenda of a religious institution and goes beyond the relatively narrow confines of mainstream psychotherapy. Perhaps this is why so many New Age approaches have gained popularity. What is needed today is an approach to counseling which includes the best wisdom and knowledge of all of forms of counseling from all traditions.

I believe that within the New Thought movement lies the potential for a form of ministry which is not at present clearly formed. I give it the working title of Spiritual Mentoring. While this certainly is not be within the exclusive purview of the New Thought movement, I believe that this movement is one which embraces the best of all the aforementioned philosophies and practices.

New Thought synthesizes religion, psychology, the sciences, and cross-cultural spiritual wisdom, with leading edge theories and modern discoveries. Within this framework, prayer does not have to be separate from psychotherapy; religion does not have to separate from science; modern knowledge does not have to be separate from ancient wisdom. The effective spiritual mentor draws upon the best of each of these and synthesizes them into a framework that is relevant for the person being mentored.

And, the New Thought mentor practices the essential precepts of effective counseling: Who you are being is more important than anything you say; and how much you care is more important than anything you know. Listening with deep empathy is your most important function. Seeing the divine within the other is the greatest gift that you can give.

"Who you are being is more important than anything you say; and how much you care is more important than anything you know. Listening with deep empathy is your most important function. Seeing the divine within the other is the greatest gift that you can give."

¹ Likewise the spiritual mythology of The Hero as described brilliantly by Joseph Campbell depicts the spiritual pioneer as one on a solitary journey discovering new worlds for self and others. The Hero image is a powerful one and a very appropriate one, yet it must be balanced by a very basic truth and that is we cannot become completely whole in isolation. This true because in truth we are not isolated beings, we are intrinsically connected in many ways.

² In addition to the New Age counseling we have traditional religious counseling, which typically condemns the New Age approach, often dismisses the need for psychotherapy, and severs the answers to anyone’s problems to lie within the teachings or dogma of the particular religious institution.
That you were born and you will die.

That you will sometimes love enough and sometimes not.

That you will lie if only to yourself.

That you will get tired.

That you will learn most from the situations you did not choose.

That there will be some things that move you more than you can say.

That you will live that you must be loved.

That you will avoid questions most urgently in need of your attention.

That you began as the fusion of a sperm and an egg of two people who were once strangers and may well still be.

That life isn’t fair.

That life is sometimes good and sometimes even better than good.

That life is often not so good.

That life is real and if you can survive it, well, survive it well with love and art and meaning given where meaning’s scarce.

That you will learn to live with regret.

That you will learn to live with respect.

That the structures that constrict you may not be permanently constricting.

That you will probably be okay.

That you must accept change before you die but you will die anyway.

So you might as well live and you might as well love. 
You might as well love.
You might as well love.

(Spirituality quote: ‘The Facts of Life’, Padraig O Tuama, Sorry for Your Troubles?)