Affinity Groups beginning June 2021

What is an Affinity Group?

An Affinity Group is one that gathers several times per year around a specific topic, learning goal or type of ministry work. The group is led by a topic expert who plans each gathering, resources the group and facilitates group conversations. A grant from the E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and a small portion of the Lilly Endowment grant funds of Together We Thrive cover a large portion of the cost of running the group, which allows us to offer these incredible opportunities for a reasonable fee.

Payment plans and scholarship suggestions are available; please contact the Program Director for additional information. Unless listed as Online Only, all groups will be held primarily online, with the hope of having at least one in-person session when it is safe to do so. If the minimum number of participants is not met for a group, that group will be postponed or cancelled.

Touched by Jesus: Playing with Prayer

Come get out of your often overly-serious and word-filled head by attending to the physicality of grace and praying with childlike playfulness. Rekindle desire, freedom, and trust through your whole body with deep breaths, simple movements, and creative formats. Remember yourself as beloved, listen to the One calling your name, and engage in supportive peer companionship as we focus on our experiences of personal prayer.

About the Facilitator
Br. Luke Ditewig enjoys ushering guests on retreat, walking along rivers, making snow angels, and arranging spaces with inviting beauty. He grew up in Orange County, California, studied in Boston and Princeton, served a parish in western Nebraska and a remote camp on a desert island before entering SSJE in 2009. The Society of St. John the Evangelist is an Episcopal monastic community in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The Brothers pray and teach others to pray including as they preach, host and guide retreats, and offer spiritual formation resources.

Group Sessions:
Quarterly on the last Wednesday of the month (June 2021 - May 2022)
Group Size: minimum 10, maximum 16 participants
Start Date: June 30, 2021
Cost: $295 (5 Sessions plus support between sessions)
To register for this affinity group, click here
Registration Deadline: Friday, June 18

Clergy Women Connections: Learning to balance, juggle and breathe

Got stress? Join this small group of female and people who identify as female clergy to explore the joys and manage the challenges of being in ministry. Although many denominations profess equality among all people, including clergy of different genders and identifications, female clergy and those who identify as female often experience pejorative treatment from peers, leaders and parishioners. Sessions will include strategies and tools for managing stress with an emphasis on peer mentoring. What will it take to gain a sense of improved balance in life while juggling multiple roles and expectations and breathing (at the same time)?

About the Facilitator
Barbara Cox holds a Master’s in Social Work from Salem State University and will receive a Master of Arts degree from Wartburg Theological Seminary (ELCA) in May 2021. She has been a military family member since birth, including a military spouse for 20 years, living overseas for 12 years, and in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, currently in upstate New York. Barbara enjoys travel, photography, scrapbooking, baking, reading and singing. She is a blogger and started a Bible study podcast during the pandemic.
**Group Sessions:** Every other month on Wednesday morning (June 2021, through May 2022)  
**Group Size:** minimum 6, maximum 20 participants  
**Start Date:** June 23, 2021  
**Cost:** $295 (6 sessions)  
To register for this affinity group, click [here](#).  
**Registration Deadline:** Friday, June 18

**The Rainbow Path – Small Group Experience for LGBTQIA+ Clergy**

This small group will provide an opportunity for members to share joys and challenges and to receive affirmation and support. We’ll also explore areas of common interest to deepen our understanding of ourselves and our community and build skills for ministry. Being part of the LGBTQIA+ community brings its own set of blessings and difficulties to ministry. This group will be safe space to explore it all - the good, the not-so-good, and everywhere in between.

**About the Facilitator** Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe is the author of *The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention* (Chalice Press, 2018), the pastor of Living Table United Church of Christ in Minneapolis, MN, and an adjunct faculty member of United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. She’s a favored conference presenter on topics related to the church and mental health, particularly suicide and congregations, and mental health in the LGBTQIA+ community. Previously, she served as clinical chaplain at a state psychiatric hospital where she worked with patients, staff, clergy, and faith communities to increase understanding and welcome of persons living with severe and persistent symptoms of mental illness. She also served on a State Suicide Prevention Council.

Since her ordination in 1992, Keefe has served in many different ministry settings. Keefe has graduate degrees from Princeton Theological Seminary and Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School (formerly Andover Newton Theological School), and is currently enrolled in a graduate certificate program in spiritual direction at St. Catherine University. She lives in West St. Paul, MN with her wife, and their dog Morgan and cat Sophie. She is also a painter and a poet, and her other published works are three in a series of theological poetry, which you can find out more on by visiting her website, [beachtheology.com](http://beachtheology.com).

**Group Sessions:** 4 sessions, quarterly beginning June 2021 through March 2022  
**Group Size:** minimum 5, maximum 15 participants  
**Start Date:** June 24, 2021  
**Cost:** $250  
To register for this affinity group, click [here](#).  
**Registration Deadline:** Friday, June 18.

**Tending the Holy Fires in One Another: Group Spiritual Direction**

In times such as these, it is easy, even for those engaged in professional ministry, to feel a little dry, a little lost, a little doubtful, and maybe more than a little bit burned out. But the coals of divine connection are still burning in you, gently and maybe not within easy reach. Sometimes we need companionship and new insights to blow new life into our dim coals, so we can see and be warmed by God’s enduring Presence.

In this offering of group spiritual direction, up to 6 people will come together with an experienced spiritual director to be companions and guides for one another. Our primary purpose in these confidential peer groups will be to listen for God’s Presence in the lives and stories of one another, applying the lens of theological reflection to everyday life, where God’s Emanuel-ness shines.

Following supportive guidelines around time and focus, the group will engage in sharing open-handed questions, curious reflections, and gentle encouragement as we look together for evidence of God’s Presence and Invitations in one another’s lives. Each 2-hour session will have time for sharing prayer requests and checking in as a group, and then, we will center our deep listening on one person at a time (2 per meeting). Tools we will engage along the way include silence, scripture, vocal prayer, guided imagery, and brief journal writing prompts. Enrolled participants will receive guidelines and more information before our first meeting.
About the Facilitator: Jennie Isbell Shinn, M.A., M.Div., is a bit obsessed with Incarnation, both as a religious detail, and as a primary to-do for life on Earth. To date, she has had a portfolio career that makes perfect sense if seen for its focus on helping others respond with- and in- their lives to the glimpses of the Holy each of us is given. Jennie is a massage therapist (since 2001), spiritual director (since 2008) and dream worker (since 1998). While in seminary, she tailored as many assignments as possible to redeeming the body in Christian theology and practice, and she’s still working at it. Her personal spiritual practices include poetry, prayer in many forms, silence, and wonder. Jennie is a member of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and sojourns with the United Church of Christ. She serves on the Coordinating Council of Spiritual Directors International, and is co-author of Finding God in the Verbs: Crafting a Fresh Language of Prayer.

Wednesday Afternoon Group:
Sessions: Monthly - 1st Wednesday of the month 2-4pm (June through November)
Group Size: minimum of 4, maximum of 6
Cost: $250 for 6 monthly sessions
Registration Deadline: Friday, May 28

Tuesday Morning Group
Sessions: Monthly - 3rd Tuesday of the month 9-11am (June through November)
Group Size: minimum of 4, maximum of 6
Cost: $250 for 6 monthly sessions
Registration Deadline: Friday, June 11th

To register for either of these groups, click here.

Group Spiritual Direction FAQ:
1. Can I register for the series and move between the two group times?
No. Part of the deepening process of these groups is to create the container of community that builds with sharing deeply over time. In any group context, a newcomer, even if familiar, “resets” the group formation process.

2. What sort of guidance will be provided by the spiritual director in these groups?
The task of running the group will change over the 6 months. As the group forms, there will be facilitation of a process that allows for sharing but not over-sharing such as would diminish the time set aside for the focus persons. There may be brief opening exercises provided to center the group around a spiritual practice or concept such as sabbath or forgiveness or prayer. The spiritual director will move the group through a process of reflection on the focus person’s sharing, engaging scripture, tradition, metaphor, and wonder.

3. I have never had a spiritual director. Is this for me?
Sure! For some people, a spiritual direction group is a first-stop on the path to entering a one-on-one spiritual direction relationship. For others, the group energy and group care is the most valuable aspect because of the sense of being held in a community of peers.

4. I have a spiritual director. Is this for me?
Sure! You may already know the value of having time set apart to bring theological reflection to bear on your life with God. Even so, a group may give some fresh life and wonder to your existing spiritual direction practice.

5. What about confidentiality?
The value of having a group of ordained and licensed clergy is that your peers in the group are likely to know intimately of the kinds of concerns you may carry without many places to share. The natural tenderness in a such a group will be reinforced by a commitment to both confidentiality and privacy. By confidentiality, we mean not sharing anything outside the confines of the group meeting that is not your own story. By privacy, we mean not discussing the content of the group meeting, even with others in the group outside of the group meeting. If someone wants to revisit a topic with another person, it is strongly recommended to seek permission with the other to re-engage the topic before presuming to do so.