

# Welcoming Our New Abbot, Priest and Postulants, Spring 2021

**Alison Hine (Abbot)** was raised in an intellectual, scientific, atheist family in



Geneva, Switzerland. Her father was one of the founding scientists at CERN. She obtained a degree in zoology from Cambridge University (1971). After some field work in Kenya and further academic studies in Canada, she settled in Ann Arbor, Michigan where she obtained a Master's degree in Social Work from the University of Michigan. She practiced as a psychotherapist for 35 years and began offering spiritual direction in 2005. She has a grown son and Turkish daughter-in-law. She lives with her partner, Murray, of 15 years. She loves BBC TV series, classical music, all manner of art and creativity to be found on the Web and growing orchids in her living room.

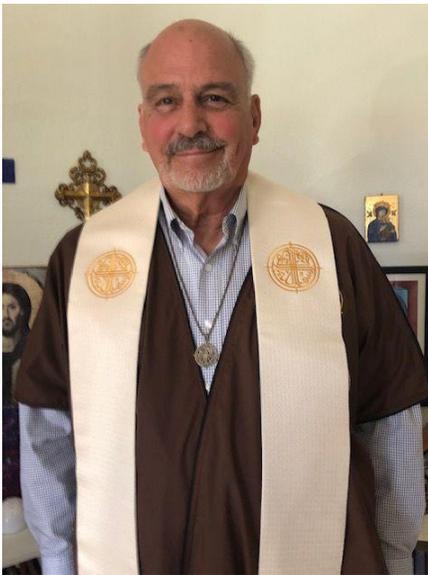
Her spiritual search began 25 years ago with a friend's astonished question. "How have you managed to get this far without God?" From this point her hunger for spiritual practice was unrelenting. After stops in some peculiar way stations, she became deeply immersed in Vajrayana Buddhism. Despite being drawn to this path, it did not bear fruit. In 2000 Alison discovered the Diamond Approach, a spiritual path rooted in the wisdom on Buddhism, Sufism and Depth Psychology. She continues to be a member of this mystery school. In 2009 she was drawn to a Christmas service in a small Episcopal Church in Ann Arbor, Michigan. To her great surprise this led to a deep study of Christian mysticism and theology. To this day the Christian path and the Diamond Approach sit synergistically alongside each other.

Since then she has been teaching the practice of Presence under the auspices of her church, the fruits of a cross pollination of these threads of practice and teaching. In 2014 Alison met Lynn at a School of Wisdom. This meeting resulted in a one of a kind collaboration and with his support she created digital illuminations of the "Luminous Gospels". She took vows as a monk at the Annual Gathering in February 2015.

In 2015 Alison took on the leadership of restoring a small house dedicated to silence, contemplation and spiritual practice on the property of her Episcopal church. The doors opened in May 2016. Over the last few years, a wisdom community has emerged and now gathers in this intimate sacred space.

Her collaboration with Lynn Bauman continues and now includes digital illuminations of some of the great mystical poetry in the Abrahamic traditions. At the annual gathering in February 2017 Alison was ordained as priest.

Since Alison's ordination as a Priest, especially during the year of Covid lockdown, her work has expanded through virtual teaching to a wider audience on Zoom. She reflects deeply on the existential social and ecological crises of our times and how, as contemplatives and monks, we are called to serve in our world in turmoil. Alison continues to create digital imagery that calls us into clear seeing of the challenges we face; to touch the wisdom of the ancients; and to listen and feel the bubbling of spirit and beauty that is rising up to meet us in these times of trial. Her collaboration with Lynn Bauman continues unabated. She was consecrated an Abbot in the Oriental Orthodox Order of the West in March 2021.



**Gary O'Conner (Priest)** was born in 1944 to a farming family in upstate New York where they lived until he was 14. The family moved to a farm in Lamar County, Texas, in 1959, and Gary has lived there since then except for time in the Air Force and college at the University of Texas where he graduated with special honors in botany in 1967. While at UT, he served as President of the Inter-Co-op Council, was selected as a Cactus Goodfellow, an Outstanding Student and was inducted into the Friar Society. After graduation he returned to Lamar County to farm with his father and grandfather until he sold the farm in 2005. In 1979 he became an insurance agent to supplement income from the farm and then formed an independent agency in 1986 which continued until 2007 when the agency merged with one of the oldest agencies in Texas.

Gary and Emily were married in 1983 and formed a “blended” family with four daughters and, so far, ten grandchildren.

In addition to farming and insurance, Gary is active in the community. He was a founding board member of Lamar County Human Resources Council (Meals on Wheels) and served as either President or Vice President for over 40 years. He and Emily are long time members of Paris Community Theater, and Gary currently serves as treasurer. He has been an active Rotarian for over 30 years. They are both Texas Master Naturalists and are board members of the local chapter. Gary is in his 3<sup>rd</sup> term as Lamar County Democratic Party Chair and served two terms on the State Democratic Party Executive Committee. Gary is treasurer for HomeStay, a local program that repairs homes for low-income seniors and handicapped folks so they can remain in their homes. After selling the farm, Gary and Emily bought 140 acres of rolling, wooded property near Powderly where they built a home, are restoring native vegetation and maintain the property as a nature preserve. They are inveterate travelers and have visited every continent at least once.

Gary was reared as a Methodist and remained active in that church until 1980 when he moved to the more progressive local Disciples of Christ Church where he met Emily, served as Sunday School teacher, Elder and Board Chair. He has had a lifelong interest in world wisdom traditions following a mystical experience during college. Emily and Gary were first introduced to Lynn Bauman about 2005 and became a Monk in the OOOW in 2006. They parted ways with the Disciples Church in 2007 and formed a contemplative group in Lamar County which, along with a group which Lynn teaches here, the Dallas Priory and other OOOW activities, provide the spiritual sustenance and group support we cherish.



**Nancy Ogilvie (Postulant)** grew up in a home where her mom was a homemaker and devoted member of the United Church of Christ and her father, a brilliant, world-renowned scholar in fluid hydrodynamics, never went to church. She was born in the Washington, DC area, and by the time she was fourteen, she had also lived in San Diego, Berkeley, and London, with time back in the DC area in

between each. After 3-1/2 more years in DC following their return from London, the family moved to Ann Arbor, MI the summer between 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades for her. She attended Sunday school in all those places, and was confirmed in the First Congregational Church in Ann Arbor. Pilgrim Fellowship, the high school youth group there, was a crucial support in her transition to Ann Arbor at a difficult age to move.

She stayed in Ann Arbor for her freshman year of college, going to the University of Michigan School of Music as a music education major. During high school and college, she taught in the FCC Sunday School, conducted the children's choir for a year, and gave piano lessons to students in a program for families who would not have been able to afford music lessons. By the end of her freshman year, it was clear that music was avocation rather than vocation for her, and she returned to the DC area, which she had always considered to be home. In that transition, she decided the UCC's very intellectual approach to faith wasn't meeting her needs, and she became an agnostic.

Since that early time, the Divine has led her on a long and meandering spiritual journey, incorporating a few years each in ethical humanism and the Pathwork, a return to the church for almost 10 years, becoming a Wiccan priestess (10 years) and a Science of Mind/New Thought practitioner (since 2007, based on the work of Ernest Holmes), additional wandering in the desert, and finally into the Order as a postulant. Her explicitly spiritual journey has been complemented by a 35-year career journey in organizational change and adult learning, mostly focused on leadership and management training and team building. She has held leadership positions in nearly every organization she's belonged to, whether professional or voluntary.

Here are some of the pivotal points in her spiritual journey:

After her return to Christianity, she began attending week-end silent retreats with her mom, hosted by an Episcopal Monastery in the Boston area. She did two led by a gay Episcopal priest named John Fortunato, and in spiritual direction during the second, he commented on how he'd only heard her talk about women in her life and asked if she'd ever questioned her sexual identity. Her jaw dropped – she had been married to a man once, and active in a very heterosexual singles group for years, so she was totally clueless. That began a tumultuous exploration of her truth. Six months later, after a lot of internal reflection and prayer and not breathing a word to another soul, she began praying for someone to talk with about her sexual identity.

A week later, she was having lunch with a new work colleague named Cari. While they were waiting for dessert, Cari looked her directly in the eye and said, "I'm lesbian, and my intuition tells me you are too." Another jaw-dropping moment... and that led to an invitation to visit at the Metropolitan Community Church of DC, a denomination that was ministering particularly to LGBTQ people who had not been welcomed in mainstream denominations. She cried through her first service because Spirit was moving so tangibly through the congregation, and she had never been so moved in church. At MCC, she learned to cultivate a personal, heart-based relationship with Christ, and she came out fully in the arms of a loving and nurturing congregation. Cari later started a weekly Bible study group that made scripture come alive in ways that it never had in the UCC, and that group was her spiritual family through her coming out process.

Another high point of her spiritual journey was spending a year at Matthew Fox's Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality in Oakland, CA. In her mid-40's, she lived in the dorm in the Oakland hills with fellow students in the program, going to class together, eating in the cafeteria together (which had amazingly good food), looking out over the San Francisco Bay and the city itself at stunning sunsets. She immersed herself in studying creation spirituality, feminist awakening, eco-psychology and eco-feminism, new sciences, cosmology - and art as meditation, where the focus was on using creativity as a form of self-exploration and self-expression. She refers to this year as her "semi-planned, mid-life transition" – and it was transformative. She had expected to return to her (female) partner in DC when she completed the program, but she had changed too much for the partnership to survive, and she chose to stay in the Bay Area.

Another milestone along the way, during her time as a Wiccan priestess, was a women's trip to Malta in 2006, led by singer-songwriter and ritualist, Jennifer Berezan and archaeologist Joan Marler. Malta has the oldest megalithic stone structures in the world, predating Stonehenge and the Egyptian pyramids, and they are presumed to have been pre-patriarchal Goddess temples. We had unusual access to the temples as a group, and in one ritual, Nancy had a clear knowing that she had been one of the priestesses leading the original dedication ritual of that temple around 4500BC. In another, the group processed in the early morning dark into a temple that is aligned for the sunrise on the fall equinox, waiting for the first rays of sunlight to fall down the center aisle and onto the main altar.

Nancy is thrilled to be a postulant in the Order, and eternally grateful to Susan King who invited her to the Michigan Wisdom School in June 2019. She fell in love with the Small House community, Alison Hine and Lynn Bauman then. It was the Order Gathering last year where she fell in love with the Order community and first considered joining. And the rest is history...



**Michelle Ackar (Postulant).** Michelle lives in Grand Junction, CO and discovered the OOW through the website. No bio is currently available.