

Welcoming Our New Abbot, Monks and Postulants, Spring 2021

Rev. Michael D. Sciretti, Jr., Ph.D. (Abbot).



Michael is pastor of The Center for Christian Spirituality in Houston, Texas, a ministry of Chapelwood United Methodist Church, where he has served since 2018. He is married to Rachel, who is Associate Pastor at The Center and Chapelwood. They have two daughters, Anastasia and Zoe, and one son, Nathanael. Michael has served churches in Texas and Virginia.

Michael grew up in Shreveport, Louisiana and was nurtured in two Southern Baptist churches during his childhood and adolescence. He felt a call to ministry at the age of 17 and attended East Texas Baptist University to pursue Christian Ministry ('98). After growing disillusioned with Christianity as he knew it at that time, he felt drawn to the contemplative dimension of Christianity and chose to attend George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University. During this time he and Rachel served churches in Waco, including the progressive Baptist congregation Lake Shore Baptist, where they were both ordained to ministry in 2005. After graduating from Truett in 2002, Michael attended the Epiphany Academy of Formative Spirituality in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he received his certification in spiritual formation and spiritual direction. In December 2009 he received a doctorate in historical studies through Baylor University's Religion Department, with an emphasis in the history of Christian spirituality. It was during his work on his doctorate that he came to know Abbot Lynn Bauman and the work of the Oriental Orthodox Order in the West. He became a monk in the early 2000s and was ordained a priest in February 2004. In 2022 he was consecrated as an Abbot.

Two of Michael's publications include *Entempling: Baptist Wisdom for Contemplative Prayer*, co-edited and compiled with fellow Abbot Blake Burleson and the chapter "The Christian Year: Practicing the High Priesthood of Believers" in *Gathering Together: Baptists at Work in Worship*. Michael, with Logan Jones, has also released an album of contemplative chants, *Epiphany Today: Between Two Worlds*. He has also helped produce the contemplative music album, *A Discerning Heart: Songs from The Center*, that features original music composed by Peter Johns for the weekly Contemplative Worship services at The Center.

Nancy Ogilvie (Monk). Nancy 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. Her family moved 8 times before she was in high school, and she went to Sunday school in all those places. She was confirmed in the First Congregational Church in Ann Arbor, where the high school youth group was a crucial support in her teen years.



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 (based on the work of Ernest Holmes). Then Susan King invited her to Wisdom School in the summer of 2019, and the rest is history!

Her explicitly spiritual journey has been complemented by a 35- year career journey in organizational change and adult learning, mostly focused on adult learning, 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 the Society of St. John the Evangelist, an Episcopal Order in the Boston area. She participated in 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. That prompted him to ask if she'd ever questioned her sexual identity. She was stunned, and immediately felt resonance with the question.

Several months later, a new friend invited her 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.

Another high point of her spiritual journey was spending a year at Matthew Fox's Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality in Oakland, CA. She refers to this year as her "semi-planned, midlife transition" – and it was transformative. Half the curriculum was focused on "art as meditation" classes, where the focus was on using art forms as a means of self-expression, and she learned about allowing her process to unfold instead of trying to plan and control it in advance.

Another milestone during her time as a Wiccan priestess was a women's trip to Malta in 2006. Malta has megalithic stone structures predating Stonehenge and the Egyptian pyramids, which are presumed to have been pre-patriarchal Goddess temples. In a ritual in one of the temples, 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.

In 2013, Nancy returned to Ann Arbor (from Santa Cruz, CA, a decision for which she and many friends have questioned her sanity) when her mom was diagnosed with a terminal illness. She was unable to locate a spiritual community that felt like home until that first Wisdom School in 2019, where she fell in love with the

Small House community, Lynn and Alison. And ultimately with the Order community.

At the beginning of her postulancy, Nancy would declare loudly to anyone who would listen that Yeshua was NOT going to be her Wisdom Teacher. But over the year, He began courting her, and her experience of taking her monk vows was of marrying Him. The first line of her rule of life reads, “Dance with me, Yeshua; I surrender to Your lead.” She is looking forward to the continuing dance with Him in the context of this Beloved community.



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

Eleanor Forfang-Brockman (Postulant) Eleanor Forfang-Brockman was born in a small town in Pennsylvania. She lives in Fort Worth, Texas, with her husband David (their faithful dog Noah, and their crippled parakeet Melody). She teaches English as a Second Language to adults at the local community college. She is an active Episcopalian in a surviving remnant of a liberal diocese in the Fort Worth region (that has just recently been adopted by the Diocese of Texas).



Her generally unchurched childhood was colored by her father’s love of nature and his artistic eye; her mother’s earnest spiritual seeking—which entered branches of Theosophy—and a few years in the Episcopal

Church. But due to high school encounters with well-meaning Christian fellow students, she decided that Christianity was a “false” religion.

A difficult spiritual passage at the age of 25 introduced Eleanor to Hinduism, Buddhist practice, Dom Bede Griffiths, and brought her back (in astonishment) to Christianity. She finally entered the Anglican School of Theology in Irving, Texas. After graduation, she moved in several directions (sometimes all at once), but never again found a community of seekers and practitioners that felt like home.

Eleanor has had the good fortune to have studied with Dr. Lynn Bauman (Anglican School); Dom Bede Griffiths (Satchitananda Ashram, Trichy, India); Sr. Pascaline Coff, O.S.B. (Osage Monastery, Sand Springs, OK); and to have been influenced by many she encountered through them.

She enjoys (not very successful) gardening and writing (after many years, she still somehow thinks of herself as a “currently unproductive” writer). As a lapsed master naturalist for the Cross Timbers region, Eleanor continues to study and advocate for native species.

Jessica Albert (Postulant). Jessica grew up in the Methodist church. As a child, she always felt like she had mistakenly been put in the wrong world, finding the surrounding culture baffling, and never felt like she quite belonged. This feeling has followed her through the years. She stuck with Christianity, but always questioned key pieces of its implementation. Jessica attended Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, majoring in chemical engineering. After college, she decided to part ways with Christianity, finding it to be at fault for numerous wrongs in the world. She experienced life as an agnostic for years. Throughout this time, there was always the tug of something else, but she just didn’t know what to do with it. After her first son was born, that tug became more insistent, so she dipped her toes into spiritual books, reading books by the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. She enjoyed these books and learned a lot personally, but yet still felt the pull of something else. A family member introduced her to Brian McClaren “Everything Must Change” and similar books of



this arena, and slowly her understanding shifted away from “Christianity is inherently flawed”, to “humans are inherently flawed, and not necessarily Christianity.” Jessica was a bit stuck at this point, unsure of where to go. At that moment in her life, she found a spiritual director. Her spiritual director was what she needed in many ways and most importantly, introduced her to the ministry of CAC and Richard Rohr. From there, Jessica did her first wisdom school (Cynthia Bourgeault’s on-line course) in the summer of 2019 and for the first time in her life, felt like she had found her place and her people. It was, and still is, a glorious feeling. From there, Jessica started a Gospel of Thomas group with fellow wisdom school attendees and attended a second on-line wisdom course, all of which continued to nurture her and help her grow. Jessica attends Faith Lutheran Church in Bellaire, Texas where she sneakily tries to incorporate what she’s learned in wisdom school into her classes.

Jessica is married to Matthew, has two boys (Nathan and Lincoln), and just adopted a new dog, Cody. She works at Lyondell Basell and spends her nights taking walks with her boys and reading. COVID introduced her to camping, as anything seemed better than being inside, and she loves this new tradition the family now has. Her boys play soccer, so most weekends are spent at the soccer field. Fun fact: Jessica played soccer and basketball in college and was inducted into the hall of fame. Another fun fact: She steadfastly believes that she exercised enough in the first half of her life to keep her healthy the second half.



Jessica is an avid reader and is always looking for wisdom-related books at Goodwill or the library “sell” pile and has amassed quite a collection. She finds it truly a miracle how there is always a book on her bookshelf waiting for her when she needs help.

These are the facts of her spiritual journey. But what is hard to convey is that this path has utterly transformed her life. Her body. Her mind. Her marriage. Everything. Oddly enough, her Type-A, overachiever-self has realized that her goals are not personal any longer but are instead a part of something far greater. It gives her much reassurance to not have to “do” things to be of value, but to just “be” who God meant for her to be. She is thrilled to join this group as a postulant and feels very strongly that she is where she needs to be.