

[Spirituality](#)



Detail from the fresco "Allegory of Divine Wisdom" (1629-1633) by Andrea Sacchi (Wikimedia Commons/public domain)



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Every other Thursday evening at 7, I excuse myself from the family, go into my room, close the door, sit at the computer and sign into Zoom. Soon seven women's faces appear on the screen: our prayer group.

Since we began this gathering five years ago, it has become an anchor, a pathway, a network of friendship — and an opening for the Mystery of God.

Dare I say "it may be a new form of religious life," reiterating what Camaldolese Benedictine Fr. Michael Fish, of the New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur, California, said to me when I told him of our group. Indeed, it has offered a venue for us to find spiritual depth and community, a closeness and bonding that we have not found elsewhere.

Though we are members of Catholic parishes, and each has a personal spiritual practice, we have been seeking something more, and with others. Of the seven, one is single, four are married, three have children, one is a single mom and one is recently widowed. In our professional work, we are all involved in community building — including running a landscape architectural firm, mentoring challenged learners and serving meals to the hungry.

In early 2019 a bimonthly gathering of women in our parish sponsored a panel discussion on prayer. Afterward, some of the participants expressed an interest in a prayer group. I hosted a meeting in our home, and as we listened to one another, it was obvious each of us desired more depth and community.

Initially we met once a month in one another's homes for prayer and, yes, dessert. Then COVID-19 hit, so we began to meet twice a month on Zoom. While we now occasionally meet in person, we continue to find Zoom the most conducive to our needs and schedules.

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When we gather, we do a personal check-in first, sharing parts of our lives that are challenging or surprising. Then we begin our practice of *lectio divina* (divine reading), following the traditional threefold method. After concluding, we share intentions and close with a prayer.

"The level, the repetition and practice of *lectio*, always takes me deeper," said Peg.

"The wonder of *lectio* is that we all read the same phrases, but we see them differently," Andrea offered.

We became teachers to one another.

Our first months we explored John's Gospel 14-17 for depth and community, then found we all wanted something more approaching wisdom. After all, isn't Holy Wisdom personified as a woman in some Hebrew texts? And the Greek word for wisdom, "Sophia," is feminine, grammatically and in concept.

"We went on a blind date with Wisdom," said Concha, a prayer group member. "We didn't know what would come."

We learned that Wisdom was at God's side before the world began ([Proverbs 8:22](#)), then present in the creation of the universe, in the ordering of the sun, moon and stars ([Proverbs 8:30](#)). Month after month, we combed the Wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes and Sirach, and the Book of Wisdom.

We read that "Wisdom calls out at the street corners, raises her voice in the public square," ([Proverbs 1:20](#)), "is a tree of life to those who grasp her" ([3:18](#)) and is "mobile beyond all motion, she penetrates and pervades all things by reason of her purity ... she renews everything ... passing into holy souls from age to age, produces friends of God and prophets" ([Wisdom 7: 24-28](#)). Wisdom Woman, the "artisan of all" ([7:22](#), [8:6](#)), connects together God, humanity and the universe.

We have become acquainted with Wisdom, and will cherish and embrace her. After all, Wisdom "is found by those who seek her" ([Wisdom 6:12](#)) and works with and in us, both through our *lectio* practice and in the details of our lives. We learned this more intimately through Nan C. Merrill's [Psalms for Praying](#), a contemplative interpretation of the Book of Psalms.

Our group's courtship with Wisdom has cultivated a spiritual bond that extends beyond our prayer sessions. When one of our members, a frequent and strong swimmer, found the public pool closed during COVID, she bought a wet suit and dove into the waters of the San Francisco Bay. As she cut through the waves, with each stroke she named us alphabetically: Deborah, Ellen, Nancy ...

"I was drawing strength from all of you because I knew you gave me perseverance, faith in myself and strength," she said. "Each stroke was for all of you, as well."

At other times, when one of us has led a workshop or done anti-gun violence activism or visited the sick, I have smiled to myself and thought, "There goes a Wisdom woman."