



Introduction:

Our webinar today will consider some aspects of living well. Previous webinars have given a foundation on mental health in general. For this topic Thin Places/Thin Times I draw upon what appear on the surface as disparate elements but in fact are parts of the whole when considering wellness. Studies, including the Harvard Longitudinal Study on Happiness highlights relationships and connection as well as letting go as major elements to wellness. Other studies reinforce this, including Dr. Corwin's work. So the question is then – what helps us pay attention to, practice and nurture qualities of connection. I offer here a few that I believe are bedrocks for religious of all generations. The bedrocks are beyond one generation or another, they foster wellness for whatever life stage we find ourselves in.

We live in times where certainty is questions in all circles. Whereas there were religious styles that fostered structures to reinforce the common good, those of us today, even if we've lived years within those structures, now have had to create new structures to respond to our community changes as well as our Church, society and global community. Considering the common good is changing and needed to be reconsidered as we are more informed about our signs of the times. Our communities may have intergenerational conversation about the common. So the

question is – how with all this “goodness” do we draw upon the “common”. As religious we have continued opportunities “practice” how we can be diverse as well as rooted in the values of our faith. This process, as it is in our society, can sometimes be messy, often seemingly at odds. Our task however is to keep the overall opening for more understanding, more spirit filled dialogue, more focus on God’s ways.

Thin Places and Times

- ▶ Places/times where the 'veil' between this world and the eternal world is thin.
- ▶ Places/times where differences can be discerned .
- ▶ Kronos (measurable) Kairos (experience places and times emotionally - meaningful).

Why Thin Places/Thin Times

Thin places – “portals” open up in a deeper way. The past can be seen as given’s that continue to guide and inform but entering into thin places allows for more nuanced, increased depth of understanding. It allows for us to go places of understanding beyond where we’ve gone before.

Thin times – are special times where we are open for the first time, or once again, to an experience of wonder.

Both allow for uncertainty, to live “betwixt and between” where crossroads, past and present, light and dark are acknowledged and inform us as to our place and time. We have emplacement and displacement in our lives, all the while shifting because of our living, our learnings from our mentors and elders and what we’ve gleaned from our living on this planet.

Where did this particular topic come from?

Dissertation – topic intergenerational trauma for 2nd generation from N. Ireland. We are part of place and times – unique to us.

Ireland is a country that on the one hand is said to have too little history and on the other too much history. I think that can be our story as well. What gets us into

trouble is the need to make things either/or. Thin places and

It's an INVITATION to

To consider allowing the curtain to open between the past and present.

Discussion of the importance of entering into the "thin places and times" and allowing them to tumble into one another just as they are.

Objectives

- ▶ To explore culture, values, experiences so as to have a space where the past meets the present allowing for the future to unfold.
- ▶ To enter a space where we can be enriched by the past without the need to grasp it tightly or to disavow

It Has Been Told...

- ▶ Back in the sixteenth century.... A cabinet of Curiosities (Wonder)
- ▶ (Helen Macdonald, *Vesper Flights*)
- ▶ “The wonder these collections kindled came in part from the ways in which their disparate contents spoke to one another of their similarities and differences in form, their beauties and manifest obscurities.”

Each moment of our lives we are invited to create space for the divine in our world. This space offers us a sense of awe if we are open to seeing beyond the most obvious that knocks at our door. Wonder and awe help us to be connected where maybe we were only able to experience disconnection. A space of wonder as MacDonald says **‘Kindled in part from the ways in which their disparate contents spoke to one another of their similarities and differences in form, their beauties and manifest obscurities.’**

Song of the Sea

▶ <https://youtu.be/q6wVijh2n9g>

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Song of the Sea is an animated story connecting the past with the present, interweaving Irish myths about faeries and sea creatures. The film itself was created at specific places and times, that bonded people to the environment and to one another. The song of the sea is an attempt to connect the past where connections were made with the present that is individualistic and utilitarian.

It's an INVITATION to

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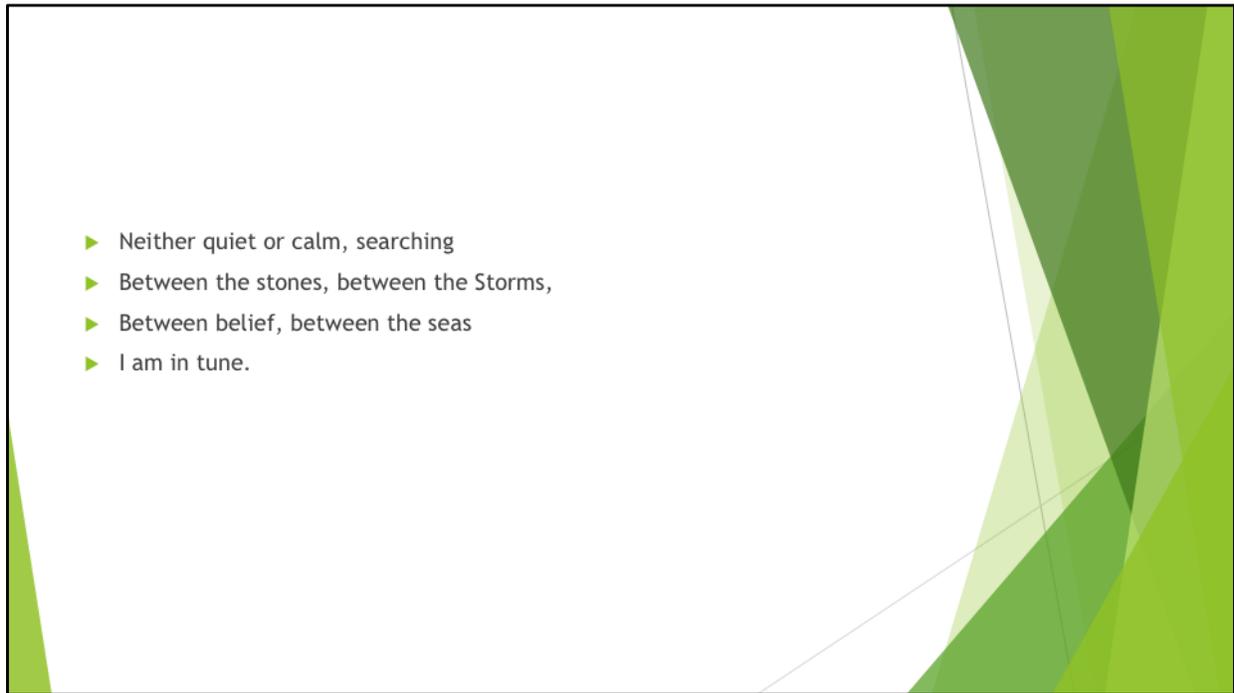
Discussion of the importance of entering into the "thin places and times" and allowing them to tumble into one another just as they are.

We live in a dualistic society- either this or that.

What happens though when we are really betwixt and between?

Song of the Sea Lyrics

- ▶ Between the here, Between the now.
- ▶ Between the North, Between the South.
- ▶ Between the West, Between the East.
- ▶ Between the time, Between the place
- ▶ From the Shell, the Song of the Sea.
- ▶ Neither quiet or calm, searching for love again.
- ▶ Between the winds, between the waves
- ▶ Between the sands, between the shores,
- ▶ From the Shell, the Song of the Sea



What is being in “tune’ look like? Feel like?

It is when we are aware of what unifies the spirit with all the betwixt and between, the ups and downs, the rights and the wrongs, the joy and the sorrow. As religious – I believe we have the opportunity to offer our faith – that the spirit is strong, God is in our midst, and our struggles in our communities, church, and a world where we experience division and polarization. Our gifts, if we lean into them, are works in progress that assist us in getting closer to knowing, for the first time or once again, that our place comes from our awareness that we are indeed the Beloved of God (H. Nowen) and as Linda Brink, in her 2022 book *The heavens are telling the glory of God: an emerging chapter for religious life science theology and mission we bring who we are as religious to this time in history, to what is needing to be shouted from the rooftops, where does our attention go?* In religious life, being “in tune” meant paying significant attention to structures in daily living, community, discipline, faithfulness to I obedience, commitment to prayer, and so much more. Each generation, and age, have expectations of what it means to be religious, and yet here we are at times being part of a community that may have very different styles of living the rule. I. But here we are, women and men religious who are indeed “works in progress.” We come with legacies that we can note were healthy and ways that, in

hindsight, were not as healthy and spiritually mature.
We live in a dualistic society that reinforces - either-or thinking.
What happens, though, when we are experiencing betwixt and between?
Our mental health suffers as we are drawn into the style of control and separation. Though often schooled in discernment, we are still attracted at times to the artificial separation of good/bad. We are, at times, prone to calm our anxieties by seeking solutions that are not necessarily reflective of our values but instead built on worry about our future. When we consider ourselves with the space of wonder, where the veil is opened, we can live with the fact that we sometimes grasp and pay attention to the golden calf that seeks our attention. We are human beings and are not made to be perfect, so this reality should not discourage us. Once again, I think of it as our religious life in common, practicing in our way, and living the ways God offers us, but practice doesn't mean there yet. As the saying is "don't let perfection be the enemy of the good"

There is no such thing as door # 9 3/4

► <https://youtu.be/x4hyAAV1kwQ>

Harry Potter is told that there is a platform 9 ¾ but the perceived authority says that's ridiculous. He doesn't see a door to that platform and the authorities say there is "no such thing as a door 9 ¾" and look at him if he's strange.

He encounters as he stands in bewilderment someone who does indeed go to platform 9 ¾.

Why Thin Places/Thin Times

Thin places – "portals" open up in a deeper way. The past can be seen as given's that continue to guide and inform but entering into thin places allows for more nuanced, increased depth of understanding. It allows for us to go places of understanding beyond where we've gone before.

Thin times – are special times where we are open for the first time, or once again, to an experience of wonder.

Both allow for uncertainty, displacement and then emplacement. We find there is indeed a door to platform 9 ¾. Our cognitive certainties can be tested in ways we can't even imagine. We may see how we've never seen before.

Where did this particular topic come from?

This topic came from my own consideration of embracing religious life within the

context of mental health. In particular I was able to draw upon my own study and research on the topic intergenerational trauma. I am not suggesting that we necessarily have trauma, though some may, it is more the intergenerational handing down of culture.

We are part of place and times – unique to us but also part of what has been. In my study I focused on Northern Ireland and the experience of their immigrant adult children.

Ireland is a country that on the one hand is said to have too little history and on the other too much history. I think that can be our story as well. What gets us into trouble is the need to make things either/or. Thin places and I grew up with a deep heritage that reinforced the belief that family and faith are important while at the same time with the clear message that people are separated into categories – those doing God’s work and those that weren’t. My Catholic parents came from Northern Ireland and grew as generations before them did into separating people for a reason. The frame of mind is intergenerational and every generation reinforces the bias. What we know now though is everyone suffers by displacing others. It creates moral injury for both sides and closes off the ability to see wonder... in the other. The Other is an enemy. At the same time, I grew up in a home where faith was priority and lived. Stories that were told included specific biases and bigotry as well as ones that depicted generosity and openness. Yes, thin times and places where openness to my heritage values, meanings... were offered and I need to discern what is needed now, in this time, in this place. Our religious communities are like that. Each generation needs to step into their place and time and pay attention to the roots of previous generations in ways that respond to the times.

Embracing Age Lessons- Anna I. Corwin

- ▶ Embrace Aging.
- ▶ Embrace Each Other.
- ▶ Value Being, Not Doing.
- ▶ Embrace All Persons.
- ▶ Language is Powerful.
- ▶ Letting Go.
- ▶ The Body is Social embedded in a meaningful social world.

I'd like to highlight Anna Corwin's work *Embracing Age: How Catholic Nuns Became Models of Aging Well* that was presented during this Pathways to Wellness webinar series. The lessons listed (p. 158-160) are valuable for all of us on the journey of living.

In my years in religious life, I've experienced us betwixt and between on many of these lessons she notes. I've experienced us having difficulty embracing aging and each other. I've noted at times we lean toward doing rather than 'being'. Our embracing all persons is a bit like Freud saying he likes all persons, it's the particular ones he has difficulty with. We've used language as a tool and it has been powerful to build up our communities and also to stifle difference.

A few points:

What Dr. Corwin points out is that repetition is helpful as we navigate our lives and Dr. Corwin's findings give us an understanding of what she notes as "natural life stage". I suggest she has added to the studies of social and psychological health of the human person in general not just specific to our aging process. **Her point is that the women she studied did not attain this because they were old, but because they lived years in what she notes as "kenotic practices" (152) i.e., disciples that make connections between living and dying. I suggest that this is what we now have come to understand and refer to as radical acceptance.**

So where does that leave those of us who have been living religious life post Vatican II major societal changes and those even younger coming to religious life in the past 15 years or so ? Repetition, practice, discipline and as Sr. Brink notes:
"Habituated cultural patterns shape the nun's attunements to the world"

PERSPECTIVE MATTERS



REFLECTION

- ▶ As you consider the roots of your community and religious life in general what do you experience as 'cultural models' that assist you today and you hope to draw upon in the future

Maria

- ▶ Importance of Family/Shared history
- ▶ Importance of Culture
- ▶ Importance of navigating “betwixt and between”
- ▶ Importance of Rootedness - “bone Memory” (Martin Shaw)
- ▶ Importance of story



Maria – a young adult immigrant who is betwixt and between living in 2 different cultures – her family culture and where she is living in the US. What is important – For Maria to see the “thin time and place” so she can gather richness from both her lived realities and not get into either/or thinking. It’s important for her to connect with her family heritage, legacy. Martin Shaw describes “bone memory” These are memories that provide meaning, rootedness as she transverse a very different style of life from her ancestors and even her own parents. She is enriched by the stories that assist her in understanding where she comes from. Her family then can provide an emotional container for her by sharing their cultural memories of their experiences, that is to say, the meanings they attribute to the joys and sorrows. This is an intergenerational legacy.

It is important that we develop the skills needed to communicate the fullness of the meaning of our lives. Religious have this opportunity to engage in profound encounters with one another where sharing is indeed sacred experiences.

I mentioned the word displacement – in Northern Ireland there was the spirit of displacement for the “other”. In our society displacement is whenever we label some as the “other” whether it be the colour of their skin, their education, employment, immigration status or economic “class”. It can also happen in our own communities where there are distinctions in how members are considered or not considered .

Emplacemenet – emplacement is a welcoming of the other. It is found when another person is given the time and place to share, to influence, to offer their gift to me and I'm receptive to that.

Opportunities to listen and to be engaged in storytelling offer us the opportunity to have encounters and connections.

How do we reflect the God in our world? By our actions, our engagement in the world are we beacons of hope. Do I reflect joy in my interactions with others even though very different than me? Do I even allow myself to be engaged with someone who is different, believes different than I do. All questions to bring to self evaluation.

What do we pay attention to in our traditions

- ▶ Cultural memory is how we understand our past.
- ▶ Cultural memory is found in the lives of our members, our community actions, legacy works, writing, partners and benefactors.
- ▶ Cultural identity is important for us to have our individual identity : I am a Sister of
- ▶ Dr. Corwin states “the body is embedded in a meaningful world”.
- ▶ Our cultural memory as a society may include: colonialism, imperialism, authoritarianism, racism,

I'd like to draw from **Cultural Memory** for what it is we pay attention to from our traditions.

What is cultural memory:

Cultural memory is how we/our communities understand the past intergenerationally. How do we pass these on? Text, oral traditions, stories, rites, symbols

Memory helps us to learn from the past and apply the knowledge to the present. Our identity memory is important, so to our cultural memory – this is the way of life to our specific groups. It is collective identity.

Where is cultural memory found – legacy works, museums, writings.

Note: cultural memory is the longest lasting form of memory – far outlives those present.

Why is it important: helps note shared experiences and therefore helps in understanding the values and norms of a group. Cultural identity is important for it helps us form shared identity – I am a member of SLW's...

Cultural memory is also important as we consider what Corwin says “The body is social embedded in a meaningful social world.

Cultural memory with colonialism, imperialism, authoritarianism, racism,..... Is attacked through polarization, where cultural identity is dismissed, destroyed...

In our lives what draws our attention – how do we discern what is congruent with our personal, religious and societal values? What is it in my life, in my community life that distract us and in so doing protects us from anxiety.

Language/Narrative

- ▶ It is in the telling that we remember.
- ▶ Long term memory - negative sticks whereas positive doesn't go to long term if not recollected.
- ▶ Telling our stories is very powerful - Corwin notes this saying language is power.

So the question now is how culture is reinforced and transferred "in the telling". I begin with what may seem quite obvious, but is good to reinforce that it is a bedrock for grounding.

Memory

There is much discussion about memory as new studies are uncovering aspects that are important. One is the work around long term memory. I draw upon the Harvard study, a longitudinal study that began in 1938 and is ongoing as of today.

Generations of people have been assessed frequently during this time. What was noted is that we are hard wired – some more than others – to concentrate on the negative about our experiences. Dr. Brene Brown, who is a researcher describes it as negative memories are like "velcro" – they are readily available in our memories to reinforce the negative. She states that good memories however do not remain in our long term memory unless we reinforce them by bringing them to mind often. She says these memories can be like "teflon" there one moment and gone the next. An example, a critique of one's work can remain in the long term memory while a compliment not so much so.

We are hard wired to protect ourselves and what we disavow and protect ourselves from most of all is anxiety. Long term memory helps us to to shut down quickly the thought of something that will disturb and helps us to avoid .

Here's the clincher, by having this capacity without building increased toleration for uncomfortable we not only narrow our thinking and options but we pass this on to others, including the next generations as well. Unresolved issues that we protect ourselves from close off so much of the meaning in our lives. A significant finding, in my Northern Ireland intergenerational study is that the next generation felt like their parents had no life before they immigrated. There was a reluctance often to tell of their experience, including what it took to emigrate in the first place. Many participants in the study described a feeling of living in a "vacuum" as to their roots. What then do they draw upon for the rootedness of their lives?

What is the main function of Cultural memory

- ▶ Mainly it is to learn from the experiences in the group that have reinforced the values, beliefs and to note the areas that may have been negative.
- ▶ This is called “remembering forward” (Aleida Assman)
- ▶ Cultural memory assists the culture to flourish, assists a people to adapt to changing times while retaining the values, charism...
- ▶ Cultural memory helps us live in thin times and places - grounded, tending to and passing on the learnings of our experiences.
- ▶ Bone Memory (Martin Shaw) - it's a deep knowing in the bones.

Remembering Forward – This is remembering in ways that are about informing the present and the future.

This frame allows us to have the portal of time/place open up beyond just the basics and considers the deeper meanings of our identity, my identity as an individual. I live very differently and have throughout my life in religious community than most of the other sisters. I came to my present community in my 30's and my earlier formation was rich and varied. I consider my religious community culture differently in many ways than my elders, and even those closer in age but who lived their early adult years in community. We have though common ground and this rootedness is found in the richness of our community through the years – it has to do with “bone memory” that cant necessarily easily be put into words.

What do we pay attention to from the past to pass on to next generations

- ▶ Reminiscing: these are enjoyable recollections of past events (sharing details of experiences on vacation for example - showing photo's) Past events in one's religious life that are personal memories.
- ▶ Nostalgia: Longing for the past. (often found in grief when there is a loss)
- ▶ "We make things holy by the kind of attention we give them" (Martin Shaw)
Or we recognize the holy in the kind of attention we give them (Marie McKenna)

Reminiscence for older adults is also integrative and important for reconciling the past and connecting one's experiences with emotion. It is often helpful to regain a sense of 'self-worth' when one is no longer engaged in the 'work of the past' Reminiscing helps connect a person's identity - link past to present.

NOTE: How do younger people experience Reminiscence – they note that the stories are about a person looking back. The younger person however is looking for tips, problem solving tools for their own experience. **They look for the meaning of our stories.**

Obsessive reminiscence – rumination of accessing the past from grief, stress, guilt. These are most often unresolved issues that become repetitive and are an attempt to solve so the memories aren't as painful.

Intergenerational Encounters

- ▶ Recollecting - What the meaning is of the experience that is being shared.
- ▶ Remembrance - connects to the cultural experiences as well.

We have opportunities to share the meaning of our lives with others in our communities. The thing is – sharing such as this is a skill and it goes beyond reminiscing – even though it includes reminiscing. These encounters open a portal for us to experience the other person and where they can experience us. It includes “bone memory”,

The Gates of Hope - Enter Joy (Victoria Safford)

- ▶ “Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope ... the place of truth-telling, about your own soul first of all and it’s condition.
- ▶ The place of resistance and defiance, the piece of ground from which you see the world both as it is and as it could be, As it will be
- ▶ The place from which you glimpse not only struggle but the joy of struggle. And we stand there, beckoning and calling, telling people what we are seeing asking people what they see.”

In my studies I became very aware that stories are often not when there has been hurt and pain connected to the story. There may be a reluctance to burden others with the pain, but in my practice I find that because the experiences before have not been shared there really aren’t the words to tell coherent story. I also find stories aren’t told often in our communities because there isn’t a level of trust that sharing will be received as in a sacred space. We have an opportunity to have communities where encounter is welcomed and encouraged.

Victoria Safford highlights that when we are able to acknowledge the struggle we often find joy. Unfortunately, there are few places where we can not only learn the skills necessary but have a sense that these rich encounters are welcome.

The importance of the prayer mat and the smokehole

- ▶ Martin Shaw tells the story in Siberian myth about a smoke hole.
- ▶ Shaw states we need both a prayer mat to be “timebound”. The prayer mat grounds us to what’s important - not to be forgotten and if forgotten recollected when there is a need.
- ▶ We also need a smokehole - an opening above for a sense of the “timeless”.
- ▶ Stories for Shaw that help us along the way are timebound. What opens it up though is the smoke hole where those stories become “timeless, the essential, the vital.
- ▶ Openness to both the timebound and timelessness create an environment where beauty can be experienced.

Martin Shaw (Smoke Hole)

Shaw tells the story from Siberian myth that if you want to hurt someone, you crawl into their tent and close the smoke hole.

Metaphorically closing the smoke hole disconnects the divine, the wonder, the beauty. Having only the mat focuses on the timebound without the awe, wonder and joy of the timeless.

Closing the smoke hole creates an environment where I’m left to myself, where there is a vacuum where much is relegated to the never to be experienced. The question then : How do we keep both the prayer mat and the smoke hole open in our communities and in our encounters with one another?

WHERE WE'VE BEEN

- ▶ We began with wonder of “disparate contents speaking to one another of their similarities and differences. To enter into thin places, thin times is an invitation curiosities/wonders. A place of discernment and sharing of meaning
- ▶ We continued with the story of Maria and the inclusion of cultural memory and the importance of listening and telling the stories - “Remembering forward. (Aleida Assman). We considered how stories of meaning are so significant.
- ▶ We considered paying attention to God’s on going gift to us. What we leave for those who come after us - the bone memory, the meaning of our experiences, even the difficult ones.

Where We've been

- ▶ We can hurt ourselves and others by not being grounded on the "prayer mat" and or closing the "smoke hole".
- ▶ I end with **JOY**. We live our lives grounded in the reality of God with us and we are offered ongoing touches of the divine. How then does that resonate in my daily life? Can other's see that the Sisters, Brothers, Priests of Resonate the belief that we are all God's children and "beloved".
- ▶ Can I continue to learn what it takes to have sacred encounters in my prayer life and in my connections to other's? Am I willing to try and share a bit more of myself to others in my community?

Closing Thoughts

- ▶ On going development/formation is imperative for healthy living. We find out more about ourselves, others, the nature around us continually. Being open to allow for our new found knowledge, or knowledge that was once there but forgotten to be considered is important for our ongoing mental, spiritual, emotional and social health.
- ▶ I also highlight from many studies - **encountering others is the major key to happiness, wellness.** It means that we have lives where we experience wonder, joy, confusion, sorrow.... and we have trusted others to share our lives with. Practice, Practice , Practice

Anthem (Leonard Cohen)

► The birds they sang
At the break of day
Start again
I heard them say
Don't dwell on what
Has passed away
Or what is yet to be.
Ah the wars they will
Be fought again
The holy dove
She will be caught again
Bought and sold
And bought again
The dove is never free.

**Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.**

REFLECTION

- ▶ As religious, we are asked to pay attention to the 'signs of the times' and be a positive presence where we can. How do I see myself moving to a stance of radical attention that leads to countercultural intention? What will this mean for thriving in religious life now and in the future?

Resources

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- ▶ Levine P. A. & Frederick A. (1997). *Waking the tiger : healing trauma : the innate capacity to transform overwhelming experiences*. North Atlantic Books.
- ▶ Levine P. A. & Maté Gabor. (2010). *In an unspoken voice : how the body releases trauma and restores goodness*. North Atlantic Books.
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- ▶ Ó Murchú Diarmuid. (2013). *God in the midst of change : wisdom for confusing times*. Orbis Books.
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- ▶ Waldinger, R., Schulz, M. (2023) *The Good Life: Lessons from the World's Longest Scientific Study of Happiness*. Simon & Schuster
- ▶ Who Moved My Cheese: <https://youtu.be/fTHcO3F8iU>

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- ▶ Feel free to contact me if you wish to have information on community shared encounters or any other aspect of this webinar.