



# The Church of St. John the Evangelist, Kitchener

# ON EAGLE'S WINGS

February 18, 2024

Available online at [StJohn316.com/OEW](http://StJohn316.com/OEW)

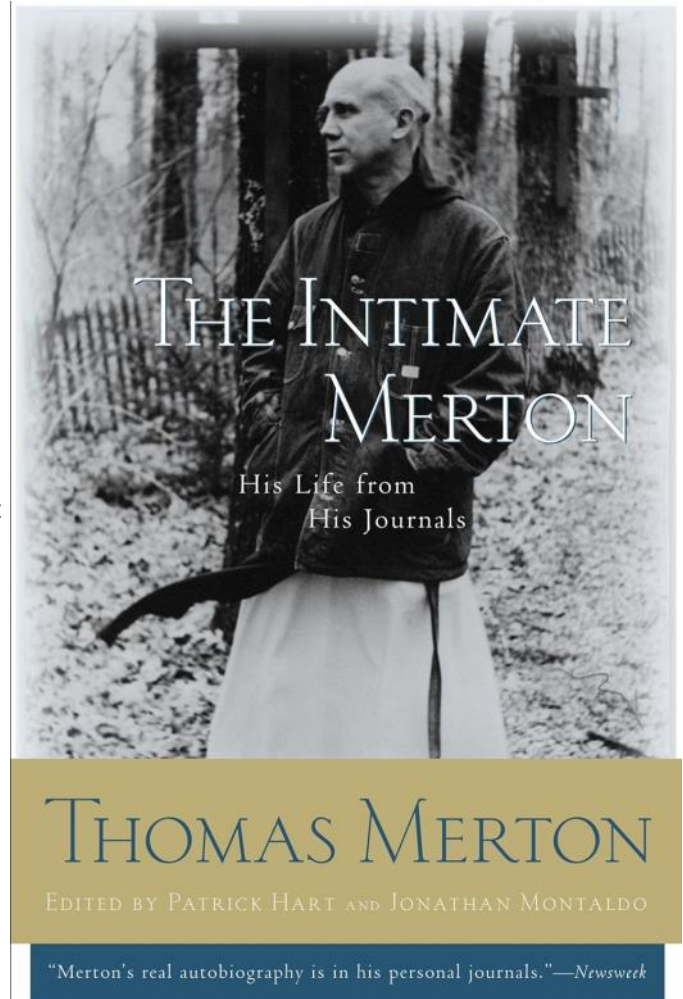
## Engaging the Life and Thought of Thomas Merton

Alicia Batten

Recently I had the good fortune to participate in a retreat at [Ignatius Loyola House](#) in Guelph that focused on the life and journals of Thomas Merton, OSCO (1915-1968). Merton was born in France to an American mother and New Zealander father, and grew up in France, England, and the United States. As a young man, he led a rather "raucous" lifestyle (he was kicked out of Cambridge University in the UK), but he eventually studied at Columbia University in New York City, where he converted to Roman Catholicism, and subsequently decided to become a Trappist monk. Not only did Merton opt for the austere life of the Trappists, he eventually convinced his abbot to allow him to live as a hermit in the forest near the Trappist Gethsemane Monastery in Kentucky. There Merton would walk, pray, and write all sorts of things, including journals, letters, essays, and books. His writing was voluminous, and he explored a great range of themes and ideas including some of the great mystical traditions found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam, as well as many aspects of Christian thought and spirituality. His observations often centred upon the glories and mysteries of the natural world as well as the political and social issues of the day (for example, he was a strong supporter of civil rights). He was, in many respects, a radical thinker. Our retreat leader was the Merton biographer and scholar Dr. Michael Higgins, who pointed out that Merton rarely had a thought that he didn't write down!

There may be members of St. John's who are familiar with some of Merton's books, including his early autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (Merton later distanced himself from this book, regretting some of the comments he made about Anglicanism!), *New Seeds of Contemplation*, or *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, but at the retreat we focused on his personal journals, which were not permitted to be published until twenty five years after his death. By reading these journals in tandem with a short biography of Merton by Dr. Higgins as well as the multiple lectures that Dr. Higgins provided each day, we were given a glimpse of the life and ever evolving thought of this intriguing monk. Here was a person on a lifelong spiritual quest and one of the most refreshing elements in the

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The next issue of On Eagle's Wings will be available on March 24th, 2024.

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journals was that they revealed just how human he was. From one day to another, Merton sometimes contradicted himself (as we all do), he never took himself too seriously, and he was often very funny. During some of the mealtimes we could eat and contemplate what we were learning in silence, while at other times we talked together, sharing our thoughts, and getting to know one another. It was an honour to share these days with a group of spiritual seekers at all ages and stages in life.

Loyola House offers retreats on a variety of topics related to spirituality. Although the community is Jesuit, it is open to people of all faiths or no faith. The food is healthy and delicious, the accommodations very comfortable, and the cost is very reasonable in order to be accessible to many. I heartily recommend that you check out this wonderful place, which is just next door in Guelph. And, if you have not already, try dipping into some of Merton's writings. As Anne Lamott writes on the back of his published journals, "A lot of my spiritual seeking began with Thomas Merton. He is an incredible source of light and comfort and humour. You meet a great spirit in this book."



Statue of Ignatius Loyola (with a scarf on!)

## Altar Guild Memorial Flowers for 2024

*Enid Emery*

I am in process of making up this year's list for the flower Memorials, and would like to invite any member of the congregation who wishes to remember family or friends or who has received a special blessing to consider putting flowers on the Altar. My contact numbers are: -519-896-0637 or e-mail: [davidemery@rogers.com](mailto:davidemery@rogers.com).



# Music at St. John's DTK and Irish Real Life—IRL Festival

*Karen MacLeod*

## March 17th 2 p.m. Concert— “Irish: then/now” Featuring Karen MacLeod and Friends

I love traditional Irish song, especially from the old world traditional communities in these countries. There are spiritual qualities that come from living close to the land that I value, and the melodies coming from these cultures are beautiful. Many of our hymn tunes come from traditional Irish melodies.

With the support of our music program and the Irish Real Life (IRL) Festival, friends and I are offering a one hour concert on St. Patrick's Day, Sunday March 17th.

“Irish: Then/Now” is a concert experience with music based on Irish texts from the middle ages (then) up to the 20th century (now), and have musical qualities that are both traditional (then) and contemporary (now). I'll be joined by flautist Bruce Gremo, pianist Olena Klyucharova, and playwright Ciaran Myers. The program has 3 parts to it—:

### Three Irish Folksongs for Voice and Flute (John Corigliano)

These are well-known folk songs explored in the exposed combination of solo flute and voice. The arrangements aren't 'traditional celtic' at all. This was the first work **flautist Bruce Gremo** and I read through a year ago. We liked it, so have been rehearsing many Thursdays before choir trying out different material. This is our first performance as the duo, “aire”!

### The Hermit Songs/Poetry from Pdraig O Tuama (Samuel Barber)

Barber took ten medieval Irish texts and created this evocative and quirky song cycle. The songs feature church bells (using the St. John's handbell set!), gossipy monks, storming seas, Heaven in a pub, and someone hunkered down in a dank Irish cave. I first came across The Hermit Songs doing conservatory studies and was accompanied in performance exams by **concert pianist Olena Klyucharova**. She's formerly from the Ukraine, has a piano studio in Waterloo, and will be joining us for this program.

Between The Hermit Songs will be poems by **Irish theologian and poet Pdraig O Tuama**. O Tuama was a long-time leader in a faith community dedicated to reconciliation after The Troubles in Ireland. As a Catholic gay man his poems float between the experience of being exiled... and yearning for safety and love. The poems will be read by my friend and neighbour Irish **playwright Ciaran Myers**.



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### **Three More Songs for Voice and Flute**

To complete the programme, Bruce and I will share a few more pieces from traditional sources. One I have previously recorded, and two are “in the works” especially for this concert.

We’d be delighted to see you there for this 1 hour long concert experience!

If you want more details, you can visit the facebook page for concerts here at St. John’s— [https://  
www.facebook.com/groups/895049218847214](https://www.facebook.com/groups/895049218847214)

And if you’d like to know more about the IRL Festival, visit them at [www.irishreallifekw.com](http://www.irishreallifekw.com).

See you on St, Patrick’s Day!