Kirstin Vander Giessen-Reitsma
Writing from Your Watershed

We all write from a situated perspective. That perspective is shaped not just by a timeline of personal events, but by the places where we live - the water that we drink. This workshop will explore how the geographical image of a watershed can help unfold our imaginations as gifting and receiving artists within our local ecosystems. Sparked by samples of photography, poetry, and prose from the editorial staff of the brand new Topology Magazine, participants will have time to write and share from the unique places where they find themselves.

Rev. Anna Woofenden is the founding pastor of The Garden Church in San Pedro, California. Gathered around an urban garden rather than inside a church building, The Garden Church’s motto is “feed and be fed.” Anna received her Masters of Divinity from the Earlham School of Religion, a Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies from the Swedenborgian House of Studies, and is an ordained minister in the Swedenborgian Church of North America. Anna has a passion for spirituality, justice, beauty, compassion, and community and is driven by a calling to re-imagine church.

Ministers like to approach liturgy like movie directors – we want to write the script, cast all the parts, make sure everyone knows their lines, and watch the show unfold as planned. Being pastor of The Garden Church has taught me to let go of all that. We create new words of liturgy – “This is God’s table … all you need to be to eat here is hungry” – but you never know what you’re going to encounter when you worship outside, by the street. Instead of controlling the show, you become the improv director. Worship suddenly includes the homeless man hovering around the edges, the child who approaches the communion table with mouth open like a baby bird. The liturgy provides a vessel for all that happens within it – but it takes the attention of a writer to see how God is shaping the storyline. In this workshop, we will focus on writing prompts that tune into this practice of paying attention, to the container that liturgy can offer, and to the movements of the Divine Improviser.

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is a senior contributing editor at CrossCurrents journal in New York. He speaks and writes in the areas of theopoetics, narrative theology, public theology, cultural studies, and peacemaking.

**Workshops**

When we read other writers’ work – whether as lover, friend, editor, workshop participant, or, as for many writers, part- or full-time writing teacher – we often struggle over how to be honestly critical without causing more pain than necessary. As the editor of the Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing, Phil Christman oversees a staff of volunteers who offer substantive feedback to every would-be contributor – several hundred critiques, written to an inherently vulnerable group, every year. Participants in this workshop will practice the useful art of careful, discerning, but kind critique, and consider its application to their own working and writing lives.

Phil Christman is an instructor at the University of Michigan and the editor of the Michigan Review of Prisoner Creative Writing. He holds an MA in English literature from Marquette University and an MFA in Fiction writing from the University of South Carolina. Before coming to Michigan, he taught English composition at North Carolina Central University and served as Writing Coordinator at MRAFF, a summer program that prepares outstanding minority undergrads for graduate school in the humanities. Christman’s own work has appeared or is forthcoming in Paste, Asembla, Feminist Formations, Books & Culture, Identity Theory, The Periphery, and other places.

**Words matter. In prayer and writing. In this workshop we’ll explore what the language we use in our writing reveals – about our beliefs in God, about our self-understanding, and about our imagined readers. Is our language safe? Edgy? Authentic? Dangerous? How does it reflect our sense of call to writing as ministry? Bring some of your writing samples with you – especially ones you wouldn’t mind sharing with the other workshop participants.**

J. Brent Bill is a Quaker minister, retreat leader, photographer, and writer. His books include Holy Silence, Finding God in the Verbs (with Jennie Ibeling) and the soon to be released Life Lessons from a Bad Quaker: A Humble Stumble Toward Simplicity and Grace. An ESR graduate, Brent lives with his wife Nancy on Ploughshares Farm southwest of Indianapolis.

**For the spiritually minded, the community organizer, the peacemaker, and the contemplative, poetry is a potent tool for awakening. This workshop focuses on methods of composition (creating, fostering creativity) and reading that are designed to bring out the best in you, a piece of writing which nurtures meaningful practice and work. Inspired by a few well-known authors, we’ll write in ways that open up our creativity, then begin to think about what to do with the results.**

**Diane Hartery’s work has appeared in Memoria, Revolver, Kiting the Buddha, The Los Angeles Review, Confrontation, Softblow, and elsewhere. His books include Making Manifests: On Poetry,活性, and the Kingdom at Hand, a 28-devotional guide of meditations and writing exercises in poetry, as well as two forthcoming books of poems, These Incarnates (Carolyn Hacker Books, 2015) and Our Father in the Year of the Wolf (WordFarm 2016). He teaches English at Campbellsville University and lives in Louisville with his wife and children.**