

### **Spirituality of Thomas Merton**

Professor Michael Higgins of the University of Waterloo offered this seminar. The venue for this seminar was the Kitchener Public Library, where approximately 35 people were in attendance. Thomas Merton has been the single most influential American Catholic spiritual author of the twentieth century. Merton knew God personally and he wrote theology from his own contemplative experience. According to Merton, "Contemplation transforms our consciousness and forces us to see reality in a new and totally different light. It gives a sense of oneness not only with God but with the whole of reality that exists only because it is grounded in God." In this talk, Professor Higgins gave us an account of the personality of Thomas Merton and his spirituality.

### **Gardens: A Reflection of Spiritual Beauty**

Jaellayna Palmer offered this seminar at the University of Waterloo, and approximately 15 people were in attendance. The importance of gardens and physical beauty in the world's religions is introduced and then visually presented through a series of slides showing the recent transformation of Mt. Carmel in Haifa, Israel, the world headquarters for the Baha'i Faith. Jaellayna personally served as a volunteer at the Bahai headquarters for eight years. She studies gardens as a reflection of God's beauty. She has visited gardens and holy places in nearly 40 countries.

### **Noticing Spirituality**

Jack Paleczny offered this seminar at the University of Waterloo to an audience of approximately 25. Jack's work as hospital chaplain privileged him to have patients share their life stories with him. He developed a framework of understanding their spirituality, whether it was presented in religious language or otherwise. As he noticed personal qualities, connections and questions, he reflected them back to the people who generally appreciated being understood. Consequent spiritual assessment enabled Jack to develop a plan of spiritual care, which he shares with other caregivers so they too could appreciate and support the spiritual journey of the patients. In his seminar, Jack shared with us his experience and his framework of spiritual understanding. This seminar was also promoted in all the local hospital and care facilities. Many caregivers were in attendance.