

**Reviews of *Embracing the Light: Reflections on God's Word*
By Mary Nelson Keithahn**

This is a little book of wisdom offered in an unassuming and humble spirit. Mary's rich and varied spiritual journey includes several strands of experience that come together beautifully in this well-structured and readable volume. She is a pastor nurtured in the Congregational tradition, but ecumenical in spirit. She is living a long and varied life full of international travel, yet rooted in the values and straight talk of the Midwestern heartland. In sharing her personal story, she draws upon national and international events over the last 70 years that have shaped our time. Finally, Mary is a poet – more specifically, a hymn writer – with the ability to say in a few well-chosen words what would take most of us many pages to articulate. Through Mary's story, we gain insight into our own faith journey.

C. Michael Hawn, D.M.A.

Professor of Church Music, and Director of the Sacred Music Program, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University

Mary's ability to weave sacred stories from scripture with stories from her life makes this book rich indeed.

Sr. Carol Rennie, OSB

Spiritual Director, Benedictine Center of St. Paul's Monastery

From the very first page of *Embracing the Light*, Mary Nelson Keithahn focuses on growth: growth and aspiration to be the best selves we can. Quoting George Rawson in her Preface (“We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind...”), Reverend Keithahn evokes the charge of Robert Browning – “Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for?”

Reframing Browning for a more gender neutral (and fluid) time, this message of aspiration and hope flows through the meditations she offers from the perspective of one with roots deep in the down-to-earth Midwest, but who has traveled widely and with an open heart to learn from a variety of spiritual traditions.

As an environmental lawyer and law teacher, I strongly relate to her stories about the Lakota people. Their “Circle of Love,” and belief that all creatures are interrelated – “the four-legged, the two-legged, those that fly and those that swim, even those that are inanimate like rocks and water” – remind us that what happens to one affects everyone. What a relevant message for us today, in a world of drowning islands and devastating storms.

Traveling with Reverend Keithahn through her prayerful journeys shed light on my own experience while sitting with the Buddhist monks at Angkor Wat. I didn't understand their language but I sensed the love that beat in their hearts and was moved by it. “Namaste,” they said. “The God in me recognizes the God in you. We are related.”

Embracing the Light is a refreshing way to read God's Word and share in the daily prayer she incorporates. It will enable you to soar on the wings of a mother and father eagle "teaching their young to fly by carrying them on their wings high into a draft of air." In her words, "what a beautiful picture this is of God as a supportive Teacher who enables us to use our abilities to develop new skills."

As Reverend Keithahn writes in the one of her daily prayers, "Thank you, God, for measuring us with eyes of love that see beyond who we are now to the persons we can become, with your help."

Robin L. Juni

Interim Dean of Students and Professorial Lecturer in Law, George Washington University Law School, Washington, D.C.

Embracing the Light offers dozens of charming vignettes, often personal to the author, that lead to fresh observations about scripture and God's nature. Rev. Keithahn includes both uplifting and painful, emotional reflections. General readers will find this book useful as a daily or seasonal devotional, or for particular occasions that call for faith exploration.

Embracing the Light would also be a great help in crafting or reading devotions for small group or church committee meetings. Since the author organizes her reflections by subject matter and by Christian calendar, it is very easy to find a thoughtful reflection very quickly. Many times I have felt the pressure to provide an interesting, but relatively short, devotion before starting a meeting. This book is tailor-made for that use and will keep me equipped for the foreseeable future!

Rev. Keithahn's love of hymns shines through in the book. She includes references to hymn lyrics in a large portion of her reflections. It is refreshing to dwell on those lyrics rather than just putting the hymnal right back into the pew after singing. Also worth noting are her several references to Swedish, Japanese, and other cultural traditions. Her discussions of the spiritual practices of the Lakota people of her South Dakota home are particularly interesting.

Douglas M. Rutherford

Lay Leader of the Saturday Seekers, Wayzata Community Church (United Church of Christ), Wayzata, Minnesota

These commonsense and thoughtful reflections on age-old questions of faith approach familiar scripture with a new twist, making each short essay a delight and surprise. Mary offers faith with intelligence. She isn't afraid to engage our minds as well as our emotions, and doesn't ask the reader to lay aside complex and critical thinking.

Mary brings to this familiar format her deep appreciation for and knowledge of hymnody, which enables faithful readers to sing their faith by encountering not only the scriptures but songs of

faith. Mary's use of hymns is refreshing, encouraging us to connect the hymns with the themes of Christian living while inviting us to get to know the people and the stories behind the hymns.

Each reflection is accompanied with a short and direct prayer that can be used in a variety of settings. There are some wonderful nuggets that caught my attention and engaged my imagination. I can't think of another time when I have been inspired to think of God as long underwear, and it is an image that has stuck in my mind.

This is a book that will find a prominent place on my desk where I will be able to reach it often, not just to read, but also to loan to others.

Rev. Ted Huffman

Pastor and Teacher, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Rapid City, South Dakota

Just reading the Table of Contents of Mary Nelson Keithahn's book gives us some idea of the breadth and variety of the topics she addresses in more than 130 essays. Then, when we read the essays, we see the humor, compassion, and understanding she brings to all subjects, even those that can be painful to talk about. She shares with us the joy she has found in God's love.

Lorraine Collins

Author and Journalist, Billings, Montana

"To the knights in the days of old..." "Follow, follow the gleam..." "Are ye able..." As I read Mary's reflection entitled "Never Doubt the Power of a Song," a flood of memories going back many decades washed over me. Her ability to frame memories with music is powerful indeed.

Alice Lyon

Longtime director of children's choirs in church, camp, and community settings, Billings, Montana