

Wisdom Ways December Program Update

Wisdom Ways continues to make progress in program design, implementation, and assessment, keeping pace with our strategic goals for FY '25-26.

Programming Delivered Since Last Board Meeting

- Democracy and Christian Nationalism Lecture with Q&A online
- Labyrinth Walk & Workshop onsite at Learning in Style & Minneapolis Institute of Art
- Hedgerow Institute: Green Saints and Ecofeminist Theologians series onsite at Carondelet Center
- Advent Contemplative Retreat onsite at Carondelet Center
- Advent Lectio Divina series online (four-part series concluding on Dec. 22nd)

Insights from Participant Feedback

Wisdom Ways' Q2 Goals include "seeking and integrating feedback to inform the development of Q3-Q4 offerings." In line with this, we have revised our post-event participant survey and taken steps to increase rates of survey participation. Two Q2 offerings stood out for high survey response rates:

- Democracy and Christian Nationalism Lecture with Q&A online, and
- Advent Contemplative Retreat onsite at Carondelet Center

Data from these two surveys, analyzed together, indicate that Wisdom Ways is generally heading in the right direction with our programming matrix, in terms of both delivery format and content.

The **delivery format** (online or onsite) best suited to specific offerings was an area of discussion in the planning process for Q1-Q2, and is again in our planning for Q3-Q4. Decisions about program formats for Q1-Q2 were made using a combination of data from past seasons of Wisdom Ways' programming, staff experience in other contexts, intuition, and research. Research indicates that the public tends to prefer an online format for *educational* content, and an in-person format for *experiences*. In Q1-Q2, we offered both types of content in both delivery formats. While our sample size is small, participant feedback from the two above-mentioned surveys aligns with research:

- Following our Democracy and Christian Nationalism Lecture with Q&A online,
 - When asked what they found most meaningful about the program they attended, 100% of responses mentioned relevance to current events,

actionable information, and/or leaving with a better understanding of those who hold views different from their own.

- Following our Advent Contemplative Retreat onsite at Carondelet Center,
 - When asked what they found most meaningful about the program they attended, responses included the “welcoming environment,” “prayerful, contemplative atmosphere,” and variety of engaging activities. Participants also found meaning in their physical proximity to others and “shared experience of meditation and prayer,” even though this was a silent retreat with minimal interpersonal interaction.

Shifting focus to program **content**, results from the same pair of surveys provide evidence that Q1- Q2 *programming met or exceeded the expectations of Wisdom Ways’ established audience, while building engagement with a new audience:*

- Following our Advent Contemplative Retreat onsite at Carondelet Center,
 - The majority of attendees, and all survey respondents, had attended a previous Wisdom Ways event.
 - 100% reported being “somewhat” or “very interested” in attending a future Wisdom Ways event.
 - Responses to a survey question about topics they’d like to see addressed in future Wisdom Ways programming included, “Similar to THIS Year’s programming - content seems ‘deeper’ than in the last year or two.”
- Following our Democracy and Christian Nationalism Lecture with Q&A online,
 - 40% of survey respondents had never attended a Wisdom Ways event.
 - 90% reported being “somewhat” or “very interested” in attending a future Wisdom Ways event (with 10% neutral).
 - Responses to a survey question about the type of programs they’d like to see Wisdom Ways offer in the future named “spiritual activism,” “race relations,” ICE, DEI, and climate justice.

Spring 2026 Programming in Development

Our Q1 program design and Q2 evaluation work have informed the planning process for Wisdom Ways offerings in Q3-Q4. This programming is organized under three main categories:

1) Creative Rituals

- These offerings create space for participants to recognize, reflect on, and ritualize the spiritual aspects of life events. Participants are equipped to create meaningful rituals that build on received traditions and go beyond them.
- *Example: Lay persons who are active ritual leaders speak about what inspires and shapes their practice, share lessons they’ve learned along the way, and coach participants to experiment with ritual design.*

2) Contemplative Practices

- Recognizing the value of insight as one of many ways of knowing, we invite participants to learn about contemplative spiritual practices and cultivate communities of shared practice.
- *Examples: Buddhist sound bathing in a natural setting, and intuitive art-making at Starcell Studio.*

3) Seeing the Sacred in One Another

- These offerings cultivate the mutual understanding and empathy required to see the Sacred in one's neighbors and act accordingly. In the face of social injustice, participants cultivate hope, respond to ethical imperatives by taking action, and explore questions of meaning and purpose.
- *Example: Shared meals with integrated discussion of faith practices, environmental stewardship, and racial equity in food systems.*

Spring 2026 programming will share a theme with Soul Conference, discussed below. This continuity is intended to support audience development and retention over the coming months.

Save the Date for Soul Conference 2026!

Wisdom Ways will host a weekend conference for the public on June 6th-7th, 2026 in Saint Paul. This revives the tradition of the Soul Conference, which once took place annually, for a new era.

Our theme, "Stronger Together: Community and Resilience in a Changing Climate" brings together a diverse audience around the shared recognition that:

- The natural world is a place of profound spiritual experience and an ethical concern for many people of faith and religious "nones."
- Nature is a closed system: our choices impact the planet, other species, our fellow humans, and, ultimately, our own wellbeing.
- Embracing our interdependence is the key to sustained interest and effective action to build more just and resilient communities.

Participants will leave inspired, educated, and equipped with resources to take action alongside others in their community. In addition to this participant impact, Soul Conference will advance the mission of Wisdom Ways and Accola by building brand awareness and relationships with partner organizations.

Investing resources in this project leverages the skills of Wisdom Ways and Accola staff. Financially, it is projected to generate substantial net revenue through registration fees and sponsorship sales.