

Tending the Holy

Patricia Carter



Pat Carter is the single mom of an adolescent son, Josh. She is a graphic designer working part time for a religious order of women, as well as developing her own business.

Pat has served on the parish council, RENEW core team and the liturgy committee in her parish. She participates in the Bridges Program in St. Louis first as a directee, now as a guide, and mentor to guides.

She has been a member of Sodality/CLC since her sophomore year of high school (a while ago) and has held several national leadership roles including office manager and regional rep and is past-president of NCLC. She is currently the webmaster for NCLC's web site and is the layout editor for HARVEST.

** This chant was composed for Spiritual Directors International in April 1992 by Suzanne Toolan, RSM*

The theme of the Spiritual Directors International Conference held in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 25-27, Crossing Borders — Building Bridges, seemed to be especially appropriate at this point in our history. This was the first time the conference had been held outside the U.S. and the first time it incorporated fully non-Christian faith traditions. The focus was on discovering the common elements and understanding the differences in our common call to journey with those who desire to open themselves to the Other however that is experienced.

My experience of this Spiritual Directors International Conference can be summed up in one word — profound. This was my first experience attending an SDI Conference and my first experience of a more than casual encounter with those of non-Christian faith traditions. The words of the song that was sung throughout the weekend, especially at the beginning of plenary sessions, sum up the atmosphere of the weekend:

*Sacred the calling.
Awesome, indeed the entrustment.
Tending the holy,
Tending the holy.**

There was a sense of sacredness, tending the holy in each other during the conference. We came together — Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Sufi, Aboriginal (Native American), Hindu and others to celebrate our traditions and share insights into how the Divine touches us. There was a sense of openness and warmth among all the participants. The sense of tending the holy was not confined to those attending the conference, but to the entire world. In fact, the decision to continue with the conference after WHO put out the SARS advisory, was based in large part on being with the marginalized (in this case the people of Toronto), supporting a hotel which was in the process of being sold to the University of Toronto and so many of its staff would soon be out of work and taking a stand against the atmosphere of fear that seems to be pervading the world at this time.

Tending the holy... When I think of the word tending, I think of a mother tending her children, a gardener tending the garden, a shepherd tending his flock, someone tending a fire. It implies attention and tenderness. When we tend to something we give it care, but we also give it space to grow and flourish. Too much care can smother a fire or a child. How often have I killed a plant by over watering it! There is a delicate balance between too much and too little. Parents struggle with this balance through all the phases of the child's maturing. When we tend to something we realize that there is something sacred operating in the relationship and our part in the dance is to create the environment in which the other can respond more fully to the Holy. In the context of spiritual direction this dance is truly sacred and the entrustment awesome as the directee invites us to join them on this most intimate of journey with the Holy.

The theme of Crossing Borders—Building Bridges was embodied in the plenary sessions, the liturgical celebrations, and the various workshops. There were three plenary sessions which were composed of a panel of a Catholic priest, woman from the United Church of Canada, a woman Jewish rabbi, and a woman Buddhist guide. At the first session this group was joined by an Anglican/Cree Indian, at the second session by a Hindu, and at the third by a Sufi. Each session focused on a particular aspect of spiritual companionship and how it was practiced in the various faith traditions.

The liturgical celebrations included a celebration of the beginning of the Jewish Shabbat (Sabbath) at Friday evening dinner and the closing of Shabbat on Saturday evening, Lectio Divina, Taizé Chants, Aboriginal prayers to the four directions, and dance.

The workshops included topics such as: the Retreat Goes to the Parish, spiritual direction in cross-cultural situations, the Jewish perspective on spiritual direction, interfaith reconciliation and Buddhism, among many others. A workshop of particular interest to CLCers was given by Lois and Kuruvila Zachariah on Ignatian Exercises and Ecology/Cosmology which was based on the recently published issue of *Progressio* (Supplement #57), *Twenty-four Spiritual Exercises for the New Story of the Universal Communion* which they authored with John English, S.J. (See related article on next page.)



It was delightful to see other CLCers there also. I had met with Maria Grimminger in Detroit and then we took the train from Windsor to Toronto, and I knew the Zachariahs would be there. But it was wonderful to also find Renee O'Brien and Joan Lanahan from Omaha, and Peter and Barbara Peloso from the Canadian CLC. And a great surprise to meet Myree Harris, RSJ, who is a CLCer from Australia! So CLC also crossed borders at this gathering. We celebrated at lunch together as a group on Saturday.

As I reflect on this experience, I realize that there is much to still unpack. But some things I already know I will carry with me. One is simply the overall environment that I spoke of at the beginning of this article, that of tending the holy in each other and in the world. There was a sense of experiencing a bit of the kingdom.

Another is how at the essence of all the faith traditions is a basic respect for others, the Golden Rule. This was exemplified at the workshop I attended on interfaith reconciliation at which the presenter handed out a list of the Golden Rule as expressed by thirteen different faith traditions. It also came out very clearly in the panelists' explanations of their faith traditions. This raised a question in my mind: if peace-making is an important component of all these traditions, why is the world in such a mess? Perhaps the better question though, is: How can we within our various faith traditions be agents of peace-making around the world? It seems that we made a small, but significant step toward that at this gathering.

I also came to more deeply appreciate my Ignatian heritage. For many non-Christian faith traditions, spiritual direction is a relatively new practice especially in the a more formalized way. They look to the Christian tradition which has a much longer history in companioning others for some guidance. Within the Christian tradition, the Ignatian Exercises seem to offer a more developed articulation of that role. The heart of Ignatian Spirituality is encountering God in all things and discerning the movements of the heart that draw us closer to or further from that encounter. And while the context for Ignatius is within the relationship with Jesus Christ, it describes the human experience of encountering the Holy. An example of this was the woman, Gretchen Newmark, M.A., RD, who gave the workshop on Building a Bridge to Buddhism. While she is thoroughly immersed in her Buddhist tradition and has her Buddhist teacher, her spiritual director is a Jesuit.

As I reflect on this experience in light of my own CLC commitment, I am reminded that the work we are about as CLC is holy. Whether we are spiritual directors, group guides, parents, workers in the workplace, members of our civic and church communities, our General Principles call us "to bring the Gospel of salvation to all people and to serve individual persons and society by opening hearts to conversion and struggling to change oppressive structures." (GP 8) We are called to tend the holy in all the situations of our daily life. This is the mission we are called to as individuals and as apostolic communities that share our responsibility for mission by discerning, sending, supporting and evaluating.

*CLCers who participated in the SDI Conference:
Standing (left to right): Peter Peloso, Joan Lanahan, Maria Grimminger, Renee O'Brien, Myree Harris, RSJ, Pat Carter, Kuruvila Zachariah.
Seated: Lois Zachariah, Barbara Peloso.*

How can we within our various faith traditions be agents of peace-making around the world?