

BLESS SOPHIA

***Worship, Ritual and Litany
of the Re-Imagining Community***

**BLESS SOPHIA:
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of the Re-Imagining Community**

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Editor**

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First edition June 19, 2003

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Cover art by Nancy Chinn

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The Re-Imagining Community is an ecumenical,
radical, feminist, Christian movement.
Together we pursue creative and relevant ways of
understanding feminist theology,
opening space for dialogue
in the church and in the world.
We are impassioned to participate in
Re-Imagining by our love and search for God,
justice, and a challenging, empowering, and inclusive church.

Of related interest;

Re-Membering and Re-Imagining

Edited by Nancy J. Berneking and Pamela Carter Joern

264 pages, 6" x 9", Paperback

ISBN 0-8298-1074-9

Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1995

This book is edited by members of the 1993 Re-Imagining Conference's steering committee. It provides an array of stories about the experience of the participants of the original Conference.

Bring the Feast: Songs from the Re-Imagining Community

Edited by Madelin Sue Martin

49 songs with a Topical Index, Ritual Use Index and Scriptural Index.

7" x 10", Paperback

ISBN 0-8298-1254-7

Cleveland, Ohio: The Pilgrim Press, 1998

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INTRODUCTION

by Sue Swanson

Madelin Sue Martin, the ‘midwife’ of the 1993 ritual, envisioned a Re-Imagining trilogy – three books that would be written to tell the story of the Re-Imagining Community. The first book, published in 1995, *Re-Membering and Re-Imagining*, edited by Nancy Berneking and Pamela Carter Joern, is a collection of stories and memories of the original RE-imagining Conference. The second book *Bring the Feast: Songs from the Re-Imagining Community*, edited by Madelin Sue Martin and published in 1998, is a collection of music used at the gatherings and worship services as well as new contributions and additions of global music.

This book, *Bless Sophia: Worship, Liturgy and Ritual of the Re-Imagining Community*, is the third book of the trilogy. It includes materials from our gatherings, quarterly worship services and quarterly publications as well as new contributions. This book comes at a time when the community will be completing its work in its present form. It represents the best of the work that the Re-Imagining Community has contributed to the liturgical renewal of the Christian church. It is important to preserve as much of our liturgical history as possible before the energy of the community disperses. We believe that future generations will see the Re-Imagining movement as a vital force for change in the church and will want to have these worship materials available for reference. It is our hope that churches, women’s groups, and educational institutions who are interested in incorporating elements and characteristics of the Re-Imagining style of worship will use this book to learn more about making their gatherings sensitive to the full humanity of women. This book suggests many ways to add elements of the Re-Imagining style to existing frameworks. It is designed to mentor and educate worship leaders. Some of the suggested changes are easy to make, e.g. adding time of silence and reflection to a worship service, but others may be harder to implement, e.g. changes in language. The important point is that this collection is designed to be used as a catalyst for change. Start with small steps and take enough time for the acceptance process.

One of Martin’s guiding Bible stories was the Samaritan Woman at the Well from John 4:1–42. This woman was marginalized by her race, class and sex. Yet, Jesus saw beyond her triple oppression and listened deeply to her story. She was transformed by her encounter with Jesus and had the courage to go back to her home

and tell the story. Re-Imagining provides a well of water where lonely or ostracized people can go to find community and draw living water. As Manley Olson says, “At the well we all are welcome.” At the well we meet Jesus who knows us, loves us and speaks to us even if we are not acceptable to the hierarchy of the church. As Miriam Therese Winter states,

“We hunger
and thirst
for that life-giving word
hidden
in our tradition.
We are ready to risk all
gladly
as we struggle now
to worship You
in spirit
and truth.”

Women who are isolated in rural communities or women whose gifts are rejected by their own faith community because of their liberal theologies or stands on social issues find a safe space to connect with like-minded people. It is a place where we are free to worship God, as we understand God, without feeling like we are trespassing on tradition and without fear of being chastised. However, it has not always been a safe place due to the presence of the media and denominational observers. Some people have paid a price for their association with Re-Imagining. Some must remain silent about their involvement in order to ensure continued employment.

When we gather as the Re-Imagining Community we become the church, the body of Christ. We come as a congregation to hear Sophia speak to us. The community made the decision that we would be a Christian organization and work within the Christian context. Our goal is to mainstream Christian feminist theologies so that they become part of the foundation of the church. It is exhausting work and there are impossible odds, but we cannot give up. We follow the encouraging words of Susan B. Anthony, who said, “Failure is impossible.” We are Christians who challenge the church to fully accept our gifts for ministry. We bring our disappointments and fears, but also, our hopes and dreams to our worship so that we may be strengthened for the continuing journey.

The sources for our worship come from feminist, womanist, mujerista and Asian/Pacific women as well as other global influences. As Martin states, “By singing songs from neighboring communities and varied cultures, our God expands and we stand in solidarity with people of faith throughout the world.” Our theology is constructed from the Christian Tradition, Process Theology, Ecofeminism, Liberation Theologies and many other influences which are stitched together like a patchwork quilt. Historically this is the way women have worked. They do not create from nothing but instead make a new creation out of the available pieces. If it were a completely new creation, no one would be able to recognize it or to relate to it.

We follow the strongest elements of the Christian tradition as we come together for worship and praise of God. According to Martin, those elements are:

1. People gather for praise.
2. People tell stories – the story of the Christian myth as handed to us, and the stories of the lived experiences of the gathered faith community.
3. The community celebrates by eating and drinking together.
4. The community is transformed and filled with courage to continue the work of the Gospel in the world.

We believe that our ritual work follows almost instinctually the work of worship that has been going on for centuries. The sounds, the sights, the smells, and the stories in these rituals are those more closely known by women. However, these have not always been a recognized part of the way in which we have given praise to God. Our principles require that we bring this into balance now and in the future.

For years prior to the original RE-Imagining Conference, feminist theologians had been discussing these new worship elements, with few problems from church hierarchy. According to Sally Hill, the originator of the 1993 events, “I thought it would be interesting to do it – not just talk about it. When people act on their convictions it gets to the nub of the matter. What we saw in the ritual on the stage gave life to the changes. It woke up our feelings.”

One of the guidelines of liturgical renewal is the participation of everyone present – these rituals are not spectator events. We are engaged in this together. Previous encounters with the Divine have been limited primarily to Word and ritual. In addition, we espouse full embodiment in the languages of music, dance, visual expression, and spontaneous prayers. We also encourage more intimate sharing at

the small community of individual talking circles. The first gatherings had two event coordinating committees. The Program Committee was largely concerned with the presentations and the intellectual “left-brain” agenda items. The Ritual Committee planned the environment, liturgy, music and movement and the “right-brain” artistic elements. We soon discovered that combining the program and ritual groups into one Flow Committee ensured better communication so that the whole experience of the gathering was ritualized. Ritual is threaded through everything we do. There is as little spoken direction from the leaders as possible. Rather than taking time to read them out loud, announcements are posted on message boards or found in newsletters. Introductions of speakers use stories about their lives rather than the professional credentials which are provided in the printed program. Presenters are blessed with the Sophia Blessing before they speak. Participants follow well-prepared, animated worship leaders who model the movement and song.

Worship becomes a complex integration of many languages, including rite, text, music, visual, movement, preaching, heart and intercession. Ritual is symbolic work that carries many layers of meaning. None of the symbol quality of these rituals is confined to one meaning. The varied elements of the ritual offer a rich palette of meaning for the community as we give praise and thanksgiving to Sophia. As Martin states, “The aim of worship is two-fold: glorification of the holy (praise to God) and sanctification of the human being (transformation). The liturgy is the work of the community and thus becomes a trinity composed of God, self and the community.”

Everything is carefully rehearsed but not controlled. According to Martin, “the more prepared we are, the more room there is for the Holy Spirit to work within the gathering.” However, this kind of flexibility can create problems. At the 1993 Gathering, there were too many activities planned for the first evening. The speakers ran overtime. People worked all day or traveled from great distances to come to the Gathering. After hours of activities they were too tired to complete the whole agenda. This resulted in cutting a great portion of the planned ritual, called “Holy Play.” Martin defines “Holy Play” as “highlighting some of the emotional contours of the human experience; forgiving, lamenting, laughing, and rejoicing – expressing our humanity at full stretch.” It was planned to be an essential part of the overall experience. Eliminating it was a very difficult decision to make. Another more positive use of flexibility occurred during the 1995 Gathering. We learned that

Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister had been assassinated while attending a peace rally in Tel Aviv. We shared spontaneous outpouring of prayer and remembrance, laying aside our own agenda to connect with the sorrow of the world.

The planning process for our gatherings is an important part of our theology. We value the networking and the connections that we make with each other when we attend meetings. Therefore, the meeting process is designed to deepen our relationships with one another as well as to conduct business.

The vision statement for the ritual of the 1993 Conference was:

We hope to gather and bolster
Our personal and collective courage
To stay in the struggle for transformation
Of oppressive structures everywhere,
In whatever shape or form they come,
And to be in solidarity with all
Who struggle for liberation around the globe.

The underlying attitudes for the original conference were:

- Whoever gathers has what we need.
- Our posture is that Godspirit provides. Trust that it will be enough.
- We bring all that we need into a prepared space, but prepared only with tables, some materials and a welcome receptivity to all the gifts that enter the space.
- Our comings and goings are like the “lean and mean” travel when we go camping in the boundary waters. We travel light, make and inhabit our space, and then leave with all that we brought.
- All are equal (we present no economic barrier to our small communities) – part of the justice of the reign of God.
- We gather for courage and vision which is exchanged and fortified through the encounters and relationships made and renewed at the conference events.
- Our approach to art is that it belongs to all, not simply to the elitist class of trained/cultured artists. We give tools, models, and encouragement to enter our artistic, expressive selves fully, in both an individual way and in a communal way. Our definition about art is that it is art when you make a ‘true mark’ – when you tell the truth visually, kinetically, or aurally.

We work toward a vision not a product. The process itself is artistic and creative. The method we use places the process and our relationships with one another as more important than the finished product. Our meetings begin with giving each person a time to check-in with the group about their personal life. At every meeting we ask someone to lead a nurturing activity which may be a ritual, song or time of theological reflection. We make all of our decisions by consensus. This process requires a time commitment and a letting go of doing business expediently. Meetings can become time-consuming because brainstorming and imaginings can at times seem unfocused. Throughout the entire planning process nothing is cast in stone and everything is available for change. We believe that the Holy Spirit cannot be controlled. It blows where it will. After a particularly challenging planning meeting in

February, 1993, Martin stated in her minutes, “My sense is that Spirit knew better what needed to be done than I/we did. I trust her and trust this process.”

The diagram of the Re-Imagining process on the next page demonstrates these ideas. There are no hierarchical boxes, just energy emanating from a central spiral. People’s unique talents spin out in interconnected rays. Everyone is free to contribute to every part of the process. The ritual takes on the characteristics of each contributor. We bring ourselves and all of our senses into the creative process and so the product reflects our authentic selves. As Carolyn Hendrixson said, “I don’t consciously try to preach a ‘feminist’ sermon; it is feminist because I speak in my own authentic voice as a woman.” The process is designed to be fluid and dynamic, fully collaborative, creative and consultative. To ensure that the rituals at the gathering will be truly integrated, beautiful, inclusive, etc., the process of their creation must reflect those same attitudes and procedures. Everyone is important to whole. Ideas, questions and critique are appropriate from any person or group in the dialogue. Dance people can suggest music. Text people can question structure. Vision keeping people can suggest an environment. Therefore, clarity and communication between everyone working on the gathering is very important.

Providing a welcoming atmosphere that will greet people as they enter the space is essential. We attempt to prepare people in advance by sending out information so that they know what to expect, what to bring and directions to the site. We provide nametags, but traditionally, in order to emphasize our equality, we do not use professional titles. We do not allow photography in the gathering space in order to protect the anonymity of those whose presence could be harmful to their career. If we ask participants to bring items for the ritual, we provide extra supplies for those who forgot or who were unable to bring the items with them. We provide refreshments for our gathering time. Sometimes apples or apple juice or honey flavored treats are offered to remind us of our Re-Imagining symbols.

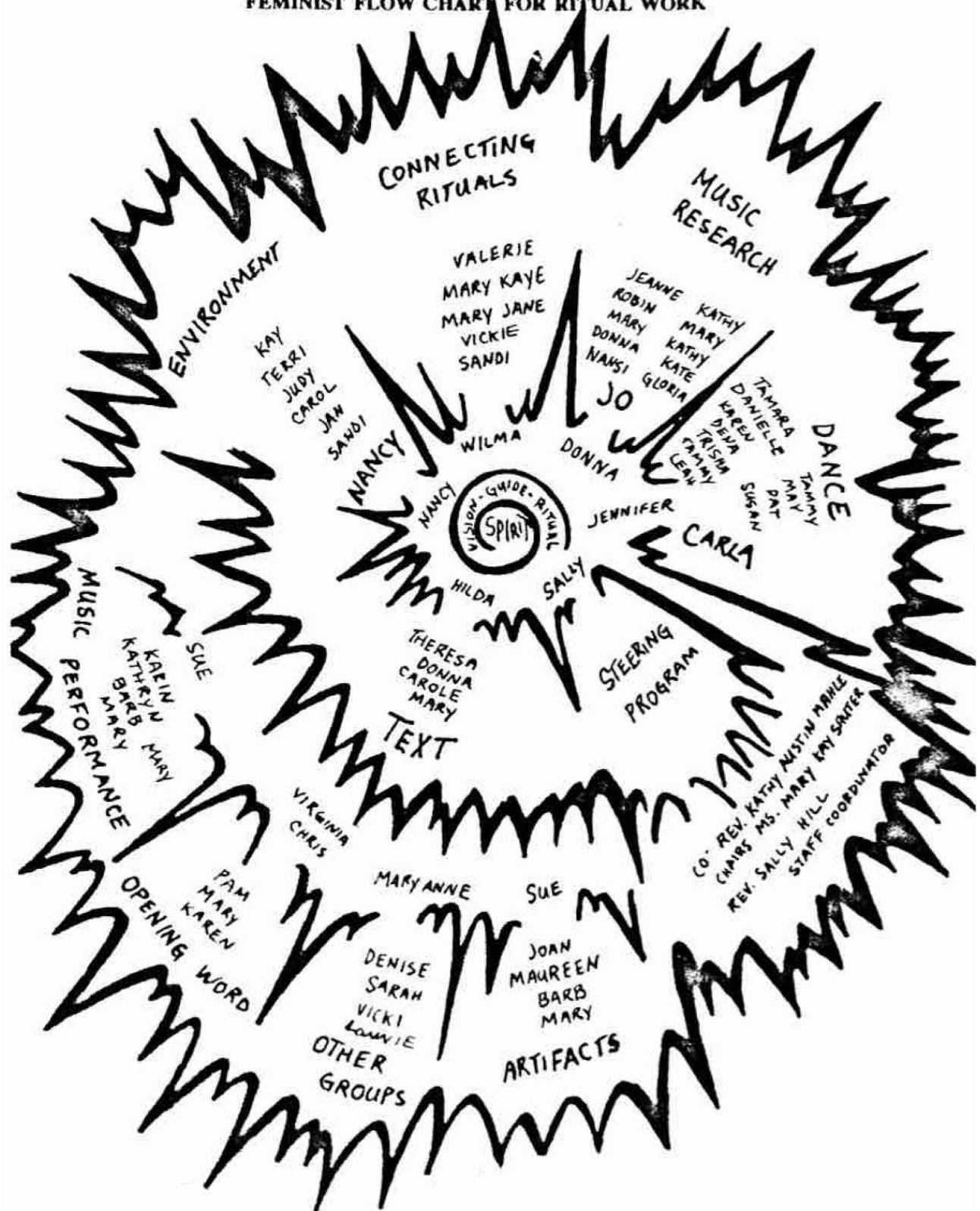
Normally our worship space is arranged in the round. The worship center is in the center of the circle. Participants can see each other. Worship leaders sit in different places with the group so that the voices come from every direction. Many times the participants are asked to bring items from their own life experiences to build the altar setting. These may be ordinary objects that symbolize concrete faith

experiences and moments of transformation. During the gathering we allow time to tell stories about the objects. Sometimes they are exchanged with another person.

**WORKING PRINCIPLES FOR RITUALS
RE-IMAGINING CONFERENCE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA
DEVELOPED BY RITUAL VISION COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY, 1993**

1. WE ESPOUSE SHARED POWER. CLERGY AND LAY ARE ESPECIALLY NOT TO BE SEPARATED.
2. WE BELIEVE FEMINIST RITUAL IS AN ETHICAL ACT.
DIVERSITY IS VALUED, BUT ALL WE DO IS LOOKED AT CRITICALLY FOR ITS UNJUST OR OPPRESSIVE IMPLICATIONS.
LITURGY/WORSHIP IS AN ACT OF JUSTICE.
3. WE HOLD PERSISTENCE AND SURVIVAL AS CRITICAL ISSUES AND NORMATIVE FEMINIST PRACTICE. FREEDOM, FOSTERING GROWTH, AND DEVELOPMENT MAY RESULT, BUT WE GET THERE THROUGH PERSISTENCE.
4. WE DESIRE RITUALIZING TO HAVE A SEAMLESS NATURE, WEAVING AND THREADING EASILY FROM ONE THING TO ANOTHER.
5. WE WILL HOLD WOMEN'S MATERIALS (music, texts, artifacts) IN A PLACE OF HONOR AND CHOICE AS WE DESIRE THE FABRIC OF OUR RITUALS TO BE WOMEN'S WORK. WE WILL BE WILLING TO ENTERTAIN EXCEPTIONS AS WE GO.
6. WE SEEK TO KEEP AS MUCH CONNECTION WITH THE NATURAL WORLD AS POSSIBLE IN THE BALLROOM ENVIRONMENT.
7. WE AFFIRM SIMPLICITY AND BREATHING SPACE.
WE HOPE FOR TIME TO ENCOUNTER THE HOLY WITHIN AND WITH ONE ANOTHER AND NOT SIMPLY BE DRIVEN FROM ONE THING TO THE OTHER.
8. WE LOOK FOR BALANCE ESPECIALLY IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE RIGHT BRAIN: THE KINETIC, VISUAL, AND AURAL EXPERIENCES OF WORSHIP.
WE HOPE FOR THEIR INTEGRATION AND BALANCE.
9. WE POSIT THAT THE SACRED IS FOUND IN OUR EMBODIED SELVES AND BEYOND. OUR EMPHASIS BEGINS WITH HUMAN EXPERIENCE.
WE SEEK NOT TO POLARIZE BUT TO SUGGEST THAT "RADICAL IMMANENCE IS TRANSCENDANCE".
10. WE HOLD IN TRUST THAT WOMEN'S LIVES ARE A LOCUS/REVELATION OF THE GOD EXPERIENCE.
11. WE MARK TIME THROUGH ACTS OF REMEMBERING, BEING TOTALLY PRESENT IN THE NOW, AND GIVING VISION TO WHOM WE MIGHT BECOME IN THE FUTURE.
12. WE WELCOME HUMOR. PLAY, DELIGHT, AND CREATIVITY ARE A PART OF OUR EXPERIENCE. NOT SO SOMBER, PLEASE.

FEMINIST FLOW CHART FOR RITUAL WORK



There is time provided in the schedule for networking. The information display area provides tables to distribute information, time is provided for interest group caucuses, tables and message boards give participants the chance to share networking opportunities. These activities allow the community to build political strength and share gifts with one another.

Preparing a worship space outside of a normal church sanctuary, e.g. in a conference room, living room or convention center presents some challenges. However, women have historically taken the responsibility to provide an inspiring worship space. This begins before the people gather with a blessing of the space sometimes accompanied by burning sage and praying at the entry doors, talking circle tables, worship center, etc. As people begin to arrive there may be music, drumming or group singing.

Miriam provides a good model for some elements of the Re-Imagining worship style. In Exodus 15, there are two versions of the celebration following the crossing of the Reed Sea. The first is the Song of Moses, a carefully prepared formal verse, very different in character from his sister's celebration. The second is the Song of Miriam, who took authority as a worship leader and gathered the women together to express the 'theology of the moment' through music and dance. She initiated an impromptu victory celebration which was spontaneous and joyful. Miriam probably never repeated her celebration in exactly the same way. This is a characteristic of women's worship. Each opportunity to gather is treated as a fresh and new opportunity to communicate our faith. Her song expressed both praise and thanksgiving. I imagine her worship as free, un-timed and uncontrolled. When the Re-Imagining Community gathers, we also celebrate the progress we have made in our individual and communal struggles in the world. Many times it is extemporaneous and not designed to be repeated. Much of it is never written down. This book is an attempt to preserve some of what we have done in the past.

As I began work on this book, it seemed to me that it should be more than a collection of feminist rituals. The process and underlying theology of the community is as important as the actual finished product. For that reason, Part 1 is composed of essays by members of the community that each target a characteristic or element that defines our style. As Randy Nelson said, these essays are "provocative, not exhaustive". They are meant to stimulate a new thinking process. More information

on each of these topics is found in the list of Sources. Part 2 contains resources for worship. The following is a brief description of the elements that are covered in Part 1.

Sherry Jordon's essay about Feminist Theology stresses that it is important for women to talk about God and to re-interpret the faith from their own points of view. The Christian community must be called to recognize the dignity and worth of women so that women are able to practice their Christian faith with integrity. Carolyn Hendrixson continues with an essay about the power that ritual has to shape women's spiritual life. She explains the theological foundations of the Milk and Honey ritual and the Sophia Blessing.

One of the motivations for the creation of the Re-Imagining Community was to bring together people who were engaging in social action. Randy Nelson's essay discusses the importance of maintaining a central focus on liberation of the oppressed and justice for all people in our worship activities. The ritual empowers and strengthens the community to go out into the world and to continue to serve God.

Elizabeth Andrew talks about ways in which we can see our own personal stories as Holy. We can use worship time to reflect on our own stories by building in a time of silence and asking participants to journal, draw, or meditate on their personal experiences. It is also important to provide an opportunity to share those stories with each other because a story is not finished until you hear it out loud and tell it to someone else. The worship service is not just a one-way transfer of information but a dialogue and an opportunity to build a deeper understanding by drawing from our own concrete understanding of God.

Baya Clare writes about ways to encourage everyone to recognize their artistic gifts. Due to our 21st century 'left-brained' culture and our enlightenment driven emphasis on the intellect, it is very difficult to create an environment where people feel comfortable enough to test out their hidden talents. It is a challenge for worship leaders to invite participation in a non-threatening way. Yet, it can lead to interesting surprises as people stretch themselves and see new possibilities for theological expression.

Nancy Chinn is The Re-Imagining Community's only lifetime member. She painted the cover picture for this book. It is an interpretation of Wisdom/Sophia based on Ecclesiastes 24:3-11. At the 1993 gathering, Nancy led us in 'Holy Scribbling'

with oily craypas that were meant to resemble the consistency of lipstick. She gave us permission to use art supplies at any time during the gathering. Drawing and doodling during the presentations transformed the event into a 'kinetic listening' experience. It allowed some people to concentrate more fully and retain more of the information. Chinn's essay provides ideas about bringing the visual arts into sacred space.

The music used at Re-Imagining gatherings is normally participatory rather than performance oriented. We choose music that is fluid and elastic, usually not the *fierhaftigkeit* or regimented 4/4 timing that can be brittle and cold, but warm flowing rhythms with a variety of instrumentation and percussion. Opportunities for movement are led by dancers who model the actions and encourage people to participate as they are comfortable. Sometimes, rhythm instruments are provided. Martin says, "The breath of life offers the song in all of us. It was breathed into us at our creation. The discovery of who we are is always tied up and enmeshed in these most primordial things like breathing and singing and being free."

Jill Kimberly Hartwell Geoffrion has led prayer groups to support the planning of the gatherings and pray for those who will attend. She expands our understanding of prayer as communication with the Divine. She has lead worship services using the labyrinth as embodied prayer. This ties in with Becky Myrick's essay about the importance of worshipping with our bodies as well as our minds and spirits. Myrick has danced at Re-Imagining gatherings and led movements that allow the group to express their spirituality through motion and embodied responses to the ritual.

Nadean Bishop describes some of the actions that the Re-Imagining Community has taken to demonstrate that our gatherings are open to everyone. We follow the example set by Jesus Christ by being welcoming and inclusive of all people.

At the 1995 gathering, M. T. Winter showed us a sign with the word 'Red' printed in blue letters. She asked us what it said to us and pointed out the power of word as image. Cynthia Tidball's essay about inclusive language demonstrates that language is a powerful force in how we communicate our beliefs. If the feminine face of God is hidden from women, it is difficult to understand the message that we are all made in God's image. It is necessary for women to lead churches to use multi-dimensional language that reflects the full humanity of everyone in the community.

Small groups are vitally important to individual spiritual growth as well as the life of the community. Group members support and nourish each other and learn together about issues in the world and in the faith. Small groups can become ‘nurseries for leadership.’ As participants grow in knowledge and confidence, they are encouraged to step into a larger role in the organization. And, equally as important, to step back into the small group for rest and rejuvenation as leadership roles change. Small groups of women are very powerful. At the beginning of the 20th Century when women’s Christian groups were gaining popularity, many groups were required to have a male pastor present at the meetings. It was felt that women praying in the church could be a dangerous and subversive act. ‘Conspire’ derives from the words ‘breathing together.’ Margaret Mead says, “Never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world, indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” As the Re-Imagining movement enters a new phase of existence without a formal organization, small groups will become essential to keeping the flame of our ideas alive. Shaw-Flamm’s advice about starting and maintaining a group is very timely. It will provide the tools necessary to create new groups.

The worship materials in Part 2 form a body of resources that model the Re-Imagining style. The ritual resources are organized in a circular fashion. Part 2 begins with examples of the elements of Re-Imagining worship, including pieces that could be part of a worship service. For example, it includes opening and closing words, talking circle topics, and the Sophia Blessing. The organization of the rituals, litanies and poetry was more difficult. I tried to organize them so that each one would lead into the next. I am a Labyrinth walker and believe that once you decide to enter the path, one step leads to another in a circular fashion. I attempted to present the rituals in this way so that they could be read as a whole or used individually. The rituals lead from uniquely Re-Imagining pieces, (e.g. Biting the Apple and Milk and Honey), through language and word, social action, forgiveness, peace, healing, relationships and theology.

I hope that these materials will provide a jumping off point for creativity. They are preserved here not with the intention of providing a ‘Re-Imagining Book of Worship’ but rather to inspire new ideas. Re-Imagining is known for pushing the envelope of Christian thought and it is important to continue to grow in new directions.

As Madelin Sue Martin was midwife of the original gathering, I am honored to be the midwife of this collection of wisdom. She believed that a book of rituals was needed for transformation in the church. There are two types of religions; those that were written down and those that were unwritten. We only know about those that are written, the others are lost. If we are going to build on the work of our foremothers, we must take care that it is saved. As Jean Audrey Powers says, “Power belongs to those who stay to write the report.” I want to thank each of the contributors for their preservation of the ideas and the work of the Re-Imagining Community. My thanks also go to Sara Evans who had the vision for this book, Rosetta Ross who encouraged me to write it, Genie Williams for her inspiration. Thanks go to Cordelia Strandkov for helping greatly with editing. And as always, I thank my husband, Roger Swanson, for his constant loving support of all my projects.

PART 1

DEDICATION

by Theresa Cotter

Madelin Sue Henderson Seid Martin: generous friend, teacher, confidant, mentor; creative liturgist and musician; Spirit-dancer and Sophia-woman; pioneer and prophet, passionate lover of God, of people, of life.

Madelin modeled a favorite bible story--The Woman at the Well—by recognizing the Divine Presence and the hidden talents within everyone. She then proceeded to affirm both while joyfully proclaiming their presence to others. With a clear-sightedness that was truly a gift, Madelin arranged meetings between soon-to-be friends, encouraged growth of soul and talent, supported the courage to risk, and accomplished all this empowerment with humor and grace of delight.

Madelin was a believer in - and builder of - community. Maintaining that the truths and talents of individuals are divinely-given to be enjoyed by all. The silencing or omission of any group lessens the community itself: Humanity's worship song lacks harmony if women's voices are not heard; Humanity's story is incomplete if gays and lesbians are omitted; Humanity's tapestry and poetry are artistically diminished if all peoples and nations and races and faiths are not embraced.

She gave of herself generously, yet when limitations dominated her life Madelin readily sought others' help, knowing that in community, both giving and receiving are equal. To the end, Madelin continued to embody the precept that faith in God needs to be accompanied by faith in people.

To honor the memory of Madelin: BUILD COMMUNITY.

WHY NOT?

by Jill Kimberly Hartwell Geoffrion

Why not?!?

Why not indeed-

It is a useful question

From time to time.

It has led me

To places I would never have visited

Had I asked,

Why?

WHAT IS RE-IMAGINING? HOW DID WE GET HERE?

by Sara M. Evans, Co-Chair, Re-Imagining Coordinating Committee

"Re-imaginers are devoted Christians who feel exiled from their own tradition and are trying to find a way back home," Rebecca Walker described our dilemma with such clarity at the 2000 Gathering – the problem of loving those who hurt you, of not giving up on relationships that are your lifeblood but also leave wounds that are difficult to heal. But there is also clarity on the margins, and strength in community. We have learned this the hard way.

The Idea

First it was a conference.

1988 – an idea in Sally Hill's mind which she shared with Mary Ann Lundy – a dream of "a global theological colloquium" as part of the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women.

1990 – a retreat in Minnesota, Hill persuaded a local group to put on the event. By mistake someone wrote "re-imagining" on the board as they pondered "images" "image" "Imagining" "re-imaging."

The Experience

HOMECOMING "...Re-Imagining also reassured me and made me finally certain that theology is for everyone. Even me. ... I felt as if, after a lifetime of fitting in nowhere, I had finally come home."

Elisabeth Mack

BREAKING SILENCE "That Sunday morning when the words were read, a wave of electricity went through the crowd, and women hooted and hollered in celebration of a silence broken."

Hilda A. Kuester – creator of the Sophia ritual

NEW AND STRANGE "The overwhelming impression is of incredible challenge and nurture at the same time. Imagine that this conference must have been planned by women who have many children.... I liken it to going to a different country . . . This conference was about stepping into a different culture, a foreign land. We thought new thoughts, felt new feelings, and reexamined our faith from new perspectives."

Barbara Price-Martin, *In a Foreign Land*

RENEWAL, STRENGTH *"Re-Imagining renewed and strengthened me for the future..."*

Bernice Johnson Reagon was one of the first speakers. 'The storm is the only way I know what

an anchor is,' she said. 'There's no way to know what sheltering is if you don't live in the storm.'"

Kittredge Cherry

The Backlash

There was euphoria after the conference and glowing evaluations. In 1993 the Christian Century listed Re-Imagining as one of the top ten religious stories of the year. BUT – the story was about backlash. Held in November 1993, the meeting attracted little notice until *The Presbyterian Layman*...and *Good News*, the journal of an evangelical caucus in the United Methodist Church, charged that the conference had been rife with heresy. In Minneapolis, the mood gradually shifted as horror stories – charges of heresy, hate mail, job losses, death threats, etc. were received.

Becoming a Movement – our response

Action 1

"By January the silence was unbearable. Wasn't some agency or official group within the United Methodist church going to step forward to refute the charges of heresy and goddess-worship related to the Re-Imagining Conference? Instead of remaining frustrated and silent, nine women friends gathered on Saturday, February 19, 1994, to do something. The frustration in the room exploded into energy and resolve when one of us said that the only thing to do in the face of this awesome disapproval was to stage a second Re-Imagining."

Beryl Ingram-Ward, *The Nine of Us*

The nine wrote a statement, *A Time of Hope – A Time of Threat* that went out the last week in February and held a press conference on March 8, 1994. Over 800 letters of support came in. They printed them in big, bold type, two columns to a page, page after glorious page. At the press conference – packed with people spilling out of the doors "The air was charged with the snap, crackle, and pop of

energy. Someone later remarked that it was as if God's spirit whirled and danced in our midst, inviting all present to bear witness to Her singing once again, 'Behold! I am doing a new thing!' The nine of us are churchwomen who gathered ourselves together and pooled our resources so that we could speak with one voice rather than remain individually silent in the face of injustice and wrongdoing. Our action made a difference. We're glad we did it, and we continue to go from strength to strength because of it."

Action 2

On-line debates in the aftermath of Re-Imagining took place, where the charges of heresy were circulated over and over. In the midst of the whirlwind, a new network was formed. People discovered like-minded people in other parts of the country, especially in the Presbyterian Church. "Re-Imagining has continued on-line with a new network of people - men and women from various denominations throughout North America. And, as with other things surrounding Re-Imagining, if it weren't for the heat we would never have found one another."

Shawn Victoria MacDonald, Electronic Heat

Action 3

Organizers in Minneapolis had no plans at that point for continuation. But backlash across the country generated cries for support, for connection, for community, for help from Minneapolis. A process of discernment led coordinating committee members to reject retaliation and retribution and to embrace re-membering and re-imagining. The committee decided to dream about the possibility of becoming an independent organization: Newsletter? Small groups? Resource materials? More conferences? The Re-Imagining Community became an independent organization. Its existence is a symbol of hope, of resistance, of remembering, and of course, Re-Imagining.

The Challenge

Concerns: How do we sustain hope? How do we stay connected? How do we nurture our faith in God? How do we continue as a movement? How do we sustain ourselves in the struggle?

- Gatherings - events where we can experiment and celebrate, be visible to ourselves as a community and renew ourselves.

- Small groups – like consciousness raising in women's liberation; a continuing source of fermentation, experimentation, action, and support. Nurseries for leadership.
- Support across denominational lines by linking friendly congregations and sharing the struggle for justice.

The power of the backlash is a sign of the power of our movement, but the weight of building it is now on our shoulders. We no longer receive financial support from the institutional church (with the exception of a few, generous friendly congregations). We have an office in a basement with no windows, with paid staff 10 hours a week and volunteers. How can we sustain the Re-Imagining movement that has grown to have a unique voice in the Christian Church?

"I think of Sally Hill as a grain of sand inside the oyster shell of the church. She gathered the Re-Imagining resources, and each element – people, words, music, dance, art, and ritual – added its own luster and luminosity. We now have a Re-Imagining pearl inside the church which cannot be ignored."

Sue Swanson

We need to think about how we can continue to be that grain of sand.

THE FUTURE OF RE-IMAGINING

by Sara M. Evans, Co-Chair, Re-Imagining Coordinating Committee

Re-Imagining is one of many names for a massive social movement. Its roots lie in the upsurge of “second wave” feminism in the 1970s, when feminist theologians began to rethink every aspect of received tradition by re-viewing it through the lens of women’ experience. For everything from our understandings of sin and atonement to images of God, they offered new perspectives, unearthed previously overlooked Biblical imagery, and challenged the church to find ways to speak meaningfully to all, to imagine every human being as created in the image of God. The “re-imagining” spirit drove campaigns for women’s ordination, it inspired efforts in many denominations during the 1980s to write inclusive language into liturgies and hymnals, and it participated in an emerging hunger among women for an understanding of spirituality and spiritual community in which they could be fully at home.

Re-Imagining got its name at the 1993 Gathering, where its questions spilled out of academic theological discourses and internal denominational discussions and into the broader society. This occurred, we realize in retrospect, at the height of a massive backlash (sometimes known as the “culture wars”) against the changes wrought by feminism and its sister/brother movements for racial equality. No one anticipated the venom that the Gathering would provoke. As organizers lost jobs and participants faced charges of heresy, the power of this new word – Re-Imagining – became clear, as did the need to continue to hold gatherings where the new word could be spoken. Thus was born the Re-Imagining Community, one organizational expression of the ‘Re-Imagining Movement.’ Many other organizations have subsequently come into being, ranging from formal institutions to informal groups scattered across the country.

Ten years later, the leadership of the Re-Imagining Community is actively planning our seventh Gathering for June 2003. We have done this again and again despite the total lack of denominational support. This one, like the others, will be a brilliantly designed, participatory experience of feminist theology in action. It will also be the last in this particular series. At this point we do not foresee keeping our office beyond the end of the year, and we are in the process of discerning whether the resources exist to sustain Re-Imagining in new forms (e.g. a journal,

an e-mail newsletter, a website). As we celebrate our 10th Anniversary, we are called to Re-Imagine the future of our movement and the place of this one particular organization in its longer trajectory. Movements remain alive by continually seeding and reseeding themselves, by remaining open to new forms, and by creating structures appropriate to the needs of each historical moment. A social movement is an impulse for change shared by a large number of people. A social movement organization, in the parlance of sociologists who study them, is a formalized group of people, linked to and inspired by a social movement. Organizations can be identified by the presence of institutional apparatus such as membership, budget, formalized leadership roles and mechanisms for selecting individuals to fill them, staff, office space, and newsletters or other publications. They can be critical to furthering the goals of a movement but they are never the same as the movement, and when sustaining an institution takes energy away from the movement itself, that can be a sign that new forms are called for.

These are the ideas that the leadership of Re-Imagining is pondering. Though this organization is experiencing relentlessly declining resources, the movement that called it into being continues to grow and change. New issues, such as the ordination of gays and lesbians, now lead the struggle in some denominations. Feminist theology is a central and powerful thread in creation-centered liturgical practices and in the work of churches committed to social justice. Feminist theology is also highly contested and a continuing focus for the authoritarian religious right. Perhaps it is time to look at the seeds we have already cast, find new ways to nourish them where they have fallen, and re-imagine ourselves once again.

Everyone who has been touched by the Re-Imagining spirit is part of this process. We joyfully invite your thoughts and prayers about the many ways we can continue to work together to Re-Imagine our Christian tradition by opening it up to the fullest breadth of human reality and to its responsibility for God's creation.

RE-IMAGINING CONFERENCE, 1993

By Pam Wynn

It was a small thing
...in the beginning...
the planning, the meetings
a good time would be had by all
re-imagining who is invited
to live in the image of God,
who is made in the image of God,

who makes the image of God.

It was meant to be a small
step into a large room
full of Divine Space

-a sacred vision, a childish
innocence. No one prepared
for the fear, the howling gales
and havoc that would sweep
through churches
when word got out
about wild women
dancing and praying,
worshiping God
in uncontrollable ways.

No one expected a tear
in the fabric of the church
as clergy tripped over altars
rushing to slam church doors.
None of us have
forgotten the dull thud
of the deadbolt slapped
into place.

Re-imagining, it seemed
like a small thing, like replacing
Jehovah with Yahweh,
a mere correction or refinement
of interpretation
-which remains
I AM

-who is
I AM

FEMINIST THEOLOGY

By Sherry Jordon

Re-Imagining is committed to fostering, supporting, and teaching feminist theology, but what is feminist theology? The word theology literally means words or discourse about God. Theology asks the fundamental questions of life: Is there a God? If so, how is God revealed? How do we experience and talk about God? To talk about God, however, is also to talk about ourselves – our dreams, aspirations, desires, pains, and struggles. What does it mean to be human? Why is there evil in the world? Where do we find joy and meaning in life? How do we work for justice and compassion? Feminist theology asks these same questions but it does so from the perspective of women. Normative and authoritative theology has been done, primarily if not exclusively, by men. Until recently, women have been excluded from positions of leadership, denied education, and largely excluded from the right to speak on theological matters. This does not mean that women have not been theologians, for they too have experienced God and reflected on the meaning of that experience. But they have historically been denied the right to public and authoritative theological statements. Feminist theology recognizes this history of exclusion and seeks to reclaim women's voices from the past and encourage women's contributions in the future.

Feminist theology is rich and multi-faceted; indeed, it would be more accurate to speak of feminist theologies. These varied feminist theologies have some commitments and contributions in common, however. While not denying individual sin, feminist theology explores the ways in which sin is built into the very structures and institutions of society, including the church. Many feminist theologians build on the insights of liberation theology, particularly its identification of poverty as structural sin and to analyze the structural sin of sexism. The church has characterized women as weak, irrational, and carnal, and has justified domination by men as part of the God-given order. The ideal Christian woman has been defined as silent, obedient, long-suffering, and submissive. Today, feminist theology seeks to counter this structural sin by articulating positive images of women, proposing more inclusive models for community, and avoiding exclusively masculine language for God and humans.

One of the tools feminist theology uses to expose the structural sin of sexism is a “hermeneutics of suspicion”. Hermeneutics refers to principles of interpretation. It seeks to identify the values, convictions, and biases people bring to a text and to articulate the principles they should use to best interpret it. Recognizing that the Bible and other texts central to the Church’s tradition have been produced by and for men, feminist theologians approach those texts with suspicion. While not denying that they may have been inspired by God, feminists argue that they also reflect the culture, experiences, and biases of the humans who produced them. In doing so, feminist theologians are reflecting a view of inspiration consistent with Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and mainline Protestant traditions. Feminists, however, emphasize the patriarchal nature of these societies and the ways in which sexism is embedded in these texts. The goal of interpretation is, whenever possible, to liberate these texts from their sexist bias and to find the liberating possibilities within them. To do so, the experience and ideas of women must be seen as authoritative. A hermeneutic of suspicion is thus used in the service of another principle, namely, that the best interpretation is one that leads to greater justice and compassion.

This concern for justice and compassion is rooted in feminist theology’s understanding of salvation. While defined in a variety of ways, salvation is often understood in terms of liberation or healing (its primary meaning in Latin). Just as sin is not understood exclusively in individual terms, neither is salvation. If salvation is defined as liberation or healing, it must be inclusive and communal. Salvation is inherently relational; it involves a loving and just relationship with God, with other people, and with all of creation. Third wave feminism (a movement within feminism that began in the late 1970’s) has recognized that gender is not the only source of identity and discrimination for women and that race, class, and sexual orientation are crucial to this process of liberation and healing. To seek justice as women means also to seek justice as and for women of color, poor women, disabled women, and women of all nationalities and sexual orientations. This quest for justice cannot be limited to humans, however. Ecofeminism has pointed out the ways in which Western culture has identified men with civilization and women with nature in an effort to justify the subjugation of women and as well as the exploitation of nature. Therefore women (and men)

cannot be truly liberated until we live in harmonious and respectful relationship with nature. Salvation thus is not conceived as the entrance of individual souls into heaven but as the restoration and liberation of all of creation.

Feminist theology, like liberation theology, is therefore committed to the connection between theory and praxis (or practice). While often intellectually challenging and academically rigorous, it is not elitist or impractical. Belief shapes action and action shapes belief. Experience, particularly the experience of women, is central to feminist theology. By carefully and consciously reflecting on experience, whether of joy or pain, justice or oppression, feminist theology seeks to create a more just and loving world and to worship the One who inspires and sustains us.

THE POWER OF RITUAL

By Carolyn Hendrixson

In the beginning of the first night of the first gathering for Re-Imagining, the procession and drumming ended and the doors of the convention center closed. As they shut, an everyday meeting space suddenly became a sacred temple. We were on holy ground and we spoke sacred-drenched words and made spirit-filled gestures. What happened? Only this: Christian women from all over the world came together, claimed a free space, made it their own, assured its safety, and invited in the presence of God. We were church. We repeated this simple act of being church again and again in Re-Imagining gatherings over the years.

As a church we worshipped, and through our worship we participated in rituals. Rituals in any form of worship have the power to deepen the experience of the presence of God. The rituals designed for Re-Imagining drew on our tradition in new and creative ways. As Marjorie Proctor-Smith writes in her book, *In Her Own Rite*, “As the church of women we celebrate our religious power and ritualize our visions for change and liberation.” The women of Re-Imagining created new rituals from within the Christian tradition and made them their own, no small feat. Designing and participating in these renewing rituals empowered women to clear a new spiritual space in which to encounter God. New images, new elements, and new words set the stage for new and liberating experiences of the Holy.

One of the most important dimensions of the Re-Imagining rituals was their power to affirm and celebrate the reality of women’s lives. Because it was a place of safety, Re-Imagining rituals gave participants an opportunity to claim totally who they are face-to-face with God. The rituals made holy what the Christian tradition over the centuries had denied and denigrated about women. The Milk and Honey ritual, which caused such a strong reaction outside of the Re-Imagining worshipping community, was based on the radical claim that women’s bodies could know and experience the Holy. The physicality of our God-created bodies was seen as a source of life and as a symbol of abundance, rather than a manifestation of sin. Such a ritual has the power to change how women see themselves in relationship to what is holy and sacred. Rituals have the potential to expand the depth and the intensity of a person’s experience of God. As a

participant, I remember feeling a direct, unmediated presence of the Holy which affirmed my total being.

The Sophia Blessing became a ritual of repeated words, a mantra at all successive gatherings, whereby the participants asked for the blessing of divine wisdom. Again, this ritual provided a welcome opportunity for women to invite the mind of God to be upon them, to “dwell deep within them.” This ritual carried the deeply affirming message that Wisdom, the divine essence of God, could be known and experienced within women. When the Re-Imagining Community defines itself as radical, this is what is meant: the radical idea that women are full partners in creation with men and whole beings in relationship to God.

Rituals have tremendous power. They can affect the shape of our spiritual lives and nurture faith. They have the capacity to change a spiritual reality. The Re-Imagining rituals healed, called, and empowered. They awakened us to recognize our wholeness and our connections to one another and to all of life. And most important, they opened us to the Holy.

“Bless Sophia”

RE-IMAGINING WORSHIP: from the perspective of social action

Randy A. Nelson

In its essence, the activity of worship is a form of response to the prior activity of God. Within the biblical witness, an encounter with God was often an event of such power that a common response of the worshipper was to ‘fall on his knees and worship.’ As a response to God, worship was a form of service that was rendered to God. The close relationship between worship and service is illustrated even today with language that describes the main Sunday morning activity in most churches as a ‘worship service.’ The connection is also expressed by those congregations that use language such as “you enter the church to worship; you leave to serve” as a way of describing their understanding of the relationship between Sunday morning and the rest of the week.

Part of the impetus for the Re-Imagining Movement that began in the early 1990s was an awareness that the connection between worship and service was no longer very vital in many congregations. The Sunday morning (or Saturday evening) worship service for many Christians no longer seemed to help them connect their worship lives with their lives of service, work, or activity in the world during the rest of the week. That lack of connection was due, at least in part, to the fact that the activity of worship itself all too often paid little or no attention to the social context in which worship took place. Unless the specific activity of worship pays attention to its social context, and its structure and content incorporate the lived experience of the worshippers’ everyday world, the connection between the worship of God and the service of God becomes more and more tenuous. Why is that? Because worship as the service of God implies loving one’s neighbor, and if the real world of neither the worshipper nor the neighbor is present in worship, the likelihood that love of neighbor, as a fundamental dimension of service of God, will be a result of worship is diminished.

Re-imagining worship, therefore, involves attending to the same realities that are at the heart of a social action ministry. The milk and honey ritual which generated such controversy at the 1993 Re-Imagining Conference was an effort to re-introduce an old tradition in worship that had meaning in and of itself. But the ritual also became an opportunity to look at the Eucharist in a new light, and to

remind us how sustained and habitual use of any ritual can domesticate its meaning.

Milk and honey or bread and wine, as elements in worship are born out of suffering and oppression—whether the suffering and oppression of a nomadic people seeking a homeland or the suffering and crucifixion of an individual embodying a way of being that the world is unable to accept. Such oppression continues today. Groups of people continue to suffer as their efforts to live at peace in a world of ethnic, racial, and gender oppression are resisted. And individuals, either as part of a group or alone, continue to be victims of injustice and abuse as their hopes are overwhelmed by ignorance, indifference, and/or hatred. Worship that does not include an awareness of such realities, both historically and presently, will lose its connection to that service of God which is more than adoration, praise, and thanksgiving.

Re-imagining worship with social action as an informing dimension is first of all a critique of any worship that has become self-contained, isolated from, or untouched by the realities which surround those who worship everyday. Just as preaching needs to be done with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other (Barth), all of worship must be planned and exercised with an awareness of the tradition in which it stands and the world in which the community lives.

The comment on preaching actually points to a positive way in which worship is informed by social action. Re-imagining worship will allow the context to speak constructively not only as the preacher attends to the biblical story but in the music that is sung, in the prayers that are prayed, and in whatever ritual is used. Worship is an opportunity to bring before God and the gathered community those issues that plague us, those concerns that trouble us, those moments of grace that restore us, and those events that give us hope. The happenings in the economic, political, and social order that form the backdrop for our relationship with God and each other form the backdrop for our worship as well, and can be set in the larger context of God's history and God's people.

Finally, worship informed by social action celebrates God's activity in mending the world while reminding us that God's activity is not yet complete. Worship informed by social action not only allows the context to speak, it also identifies the challenge to the community as the community seeks to live out its

discipleship. Thus, worship can empower the community and its members in their efforts to engage in social action – to bring healing to the world – as agents of the God who has called them into community. Occasionally, that empowerment takes the form of attending to specific issues by recognizing resources and allies available for the use of the community in its efforts. More commonly, however, that empowerment will be a result of the formative power of worship on those who participate in it. Not just any worship will do, however. Rather, the worship that is necessary is worship that is practiced in and by a community that understands worship of God as the service of God which gets lived out in love for the neighbor—both near at hand and far away.

OUR STORIES: HEAVEN BOILED TO A DROP

by Elizabeth Andrew

"She didn't read books," Zora Neale Hurston wrote about her character, Janie, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, "so she didn't know that she was the world and the heavens boiled down to a drop." Poor Janie! Uneducated, deprived of literature, she thought she was just a woman walking around her Florida town. But Zora Neale Hurston knew otherwise. I suspect Hurston wanted the reader, who does read books, to pay attention to this amazing phenomenon. Each of us is a concentrated universe; each of us mirrors eternity. What reminds us of this are our stories.

I teach memoir writing, and time after time I'm faced with students who are eager to put their stories down on paper and are also abashed. Invariably, one raises a tentative hand. "Who am I to write this story? Why would anyone care?" I tell my students about Janie, and then I ask why they read other memoirs, especially other ordinary people's memoirs. The answers are variations on a theme. We like experiencing other's lives vicariously. We learn how others deal with problems similar to our own. We sense a truth or a sacredness in others' stories, and can then see truth or sacredness within our own. The indisputable fact is that all of our stories contain the holiness of creation. The universe is packed into our very cells; the molecules of our bodies are made of star-dust flung from the big-bang. Our experience of pain taps into the world's suffering, our laughter at a bad joke is a human release, and our bout of loneliness reveals creation's drive for connection. Not only are we made in God's image, but we are God's image, sitting in traffic, chatting with a neighbor. Isn't this what Christian scripture is trying to teach us? Jesus' story is one big reminder that sacredness is made manifest in humanity – not just Jesus' humanity, but ALL humanity. In fact, the sacred handwriting is scrawled over all creation.

One way we can pay attention to it is by listening to others' stories, as well as our own. If worship is about honoring holiness – paying attention, celebrating, engaging, and wrangling with holiness – then our stories need to be front and center. Most Christians do a marvelous job of listening to the stories of the Bible in worship; that's where we've been taught the locus of God's revelation resides. But the Bible, old and new testaments alike, shouts over and over, "Sacredness

emerges in and through ordinary people!" What a disservice we do to the Bible, to ignore our own, unique scriptures! "The spirit," says Meinrad Craighead, contemporary mystic, "tells our stories to us in the unfolding of our life journeys." How dare we not pay attention? How dare we deny our capacity to create, to use our voice, to participate in humanity's ongoing conversation? If worship is about honoring holiness, then the stories of the worshippers belong in the pulpit.

"Telling one's personal or community story authentically is a religious event." So say Charles and Anne Simpkinson, publisher and editor of *Common Boundary* magazine. Why might this be so? If we explore our memories (any memories will do, really) with integrity, sincerity and depth; if we search our lives with an openness to transformation, and then share those stories with others, we take the profound, intimate revelation that's taking place inside of us and bring it into a public space, into the light, where others can hear and identify and remember and, sometimes, be opened to transformations of their own. For instance, every Lent my church puts together its own devotional of members' stories. One year, the theme was "God in the details." A twelve-year-old wrote a delightful anecdote about visiting a creek in the winter; the waterfalls that rushed in the warm weather were now frozen, and she and her brother slid down them. She ended her story with the question and answer, "Have you ever walked on water? I have." Yes, of course! I have walked on water, and Thea reminds me of this miracle. Reading her story becomes a religious event because my heart connects to Thea's heart for an instant, binding us with praise.

Here's a bit of writerly wisdom that is helpful for thinking about stories' place in worship. If you use huge generalities (words like faith, love, forgiveness, and even God), those words travel into people's heads. It takes some work, but it's possible for abstractions to eventually filter down into people's bodies, and make some sense. But if you use specifics (how your teddy bear was your first awareness of God, for instance, because he was so soft and trustworthy), they immediately touch the hearer's body and heart. Isn't that ironic? You'd think that to touch the greatest number of people with your writing, you should use large generalities. It's simply not so. Therefore, when we show up for a worship service or a ritual, we're hungry to know how, exactly, God loves us, and what it's like to forgive. We need

the stories – the ordinary, human details – to teach us. "Thy will be done" means one thing in the abstract, and another entirely when Kristen tells the story of discovering God's will within her anger toward her abusive father, and how riding this anger healed her.

Our beliefs are meaningless and devoid of the sacred if they're not rooted in our stories. Even the stories of the Bible and other holy scriptures are two-dimensional until translated into the blood-and-bones realities of the present moment. After all, it's the dreams that wake us up at midnight and the harsh mysteries of cancer and the first buds on the forsythia that propel us into communities of worship. We want to know what's at the heart of creation. We want to be fed. If worship is our way of connecting with our Source, our breath, it must begin with what we know. The Sacred dwells inside of creation. Creation is the best place to go looking for it, and the best way to honor it. In the end, all we have are our stories.

I'll conclude by sharing my secret suspicion: God isn't the author of these stories; God is the story itself, still unfolding and eager for our voice.

RE-IMAGINING ART

by Baya Clare, CSJ

I have a friend who makes wonderful things with her hands: beautiful hand-dyed quilts, tiny pieces of exquisite miniature furniture, prayer shawls, and painted plaster casts, among other things. Her creative process is clearly meditative and imaginative. The things she makes are not just handicrafts, but art, made for the comfort or delight or edification of those in her life. Despite all this, she hesitates to name herself Artist.

It took me a long time to claim that name for myself too. Part of my hesitation was that I wasn't making any money from my stuff. Nor had I any formal education in art. It somehow seemed presumptuous to attempt to vault myself into a category occupied legitimately only by beret-topped residents of Manhattan whose work I'd seen in *Art News*. For me the turning point came when I attended a lecture by printmaker Nathan Oliveira at the University of Minnesota in 1987. At that time, Oliveira was using some 200-year-old Spanish paper stock to ghost-print a series of blockish shapes on which he then drew and painted pictures of bundles, boxes, and packages. When someone in the audience asked him what was inside them, he replied that he didn't yet know. "I feel like I'm illustrating a story I haven't read yet," he said.

That he could fearlessly create something without being able to clearly articulate what it was, was a real revelation for me. Up to that point I had always thrown away anything that I couldn't explain, but I stopped doing that after hearing Oliveira. That one change made a huge difference not only in my creative process but also in my life. I was teetering then on the edge of coming out, a creative process of its own that also requires making space for the new and the unexplained. I was also moving into a wholly new awareness of my own body-self, and away from seeing it as an object to be deplored, subdued or ignored. Out of that sacred time of shedding, healing, and self-discovery, one of the names that came to stay was Artist. Other callings have since found space in the wake of that transformation, including the call to be a Sister of St. Joseph.

Would all this have happened without Nathan Oliveira's bundles and packages? Oh, perhaps, eventually. I was ripe for it, I know. But I am certain that it was not an accident that art was the medium by which it was accomplished. That

is what art does – it transforms. And it does this by refusing to be pinned down to any one correct, logical, or narrow interpretation. An artwork can mean different things at different times and in different spaces, lights, places, and eyes. It can hold things not clearly articulated, but true nonetheless. Art widens the possibilities and makes room for deeper shades of meaning and hope. And for these reasons it is essential to anything we Christians call worship.

But first we must bring art and its gifts and questions out of the sad, misunderstood place in which it exists in our day. Art is a ministry, and must never be allowed to become marginalized or to degenerate into a self-indulgent pastime or consumer commodity. It ought rather to be central to the experience of worship if worship is about transformation and relationship. Art is inherently incarnational. It embodies wonder and truth and leads us to an awareness of their embodiment in us.

And so, whether they arrive wearing berets or not, Christian communities must begin again to name and call their Artists, must incorporate artistic expression and questions into their worship experiences, and must make revelation of the creative, multilateral, ever-expanding experience of divine beauty central to their search for God in everything.

Conceptual artist Jenny Holzer says that the question at the heart of patriarchy is, “How dare you not be me? How dare you have a body different from mine? How dare you see from another viewpoint? How dare you flourish?”

But those were not Jesus’ questions. Whatever he drew on the ground before the mob of accusers enlarged their understanding so that they dispersed to make room for a woman to flourish. May it ever be so.

VISUAL ART IN WORSHIP: An Irresistible Home for the Imagination

by Nancy Chinn

For centuries, the visual arts have served many functions in worship spaces and liturgies. One need only cast iconoclastic eyes throughout most churches to see the extent design, art, and architecture define and limit our spaces and what we do within them. But there is currently a quiet revolution in the field of liturgical art, and that is what I wish to address with these comments.

Visual Choirs: I have come to understand of late that the work of the visual artist in the church can be to create a visual choir. Through a process of studying the scriptures or themes of a cycle together to discern the particular word of God for that time, a theme will emerge. Then the visual people draw from the deep wells of personal story through memory sharing and imagination about those words. As they concretize these ideas into sketches, and talk further about them, visual themes emerge that can add great depth and richness to the liturgies of the cycle. It is useful then to apply some of the seven design elements that are discussed in my book, *Spaces for Spirit: Adorning the Church*. Those design elements are: light/dark, transparency/opacity, color, scale, texture, repetition, and movement. The combination of those elements with the theme chosen seems to generate a consensus of opinion, and the design proceeds to fabrication. Essentially the choir has composed the project. The choir then spends what would be equivalent to traditional choir rehearsal times to create the work and install it. The last step is verbal interpretation for those who are not visually adept. Because this work is for a particular cycle, it is always temporary. For many reasons, it must be removed as the cycle ends. In the art world, this sort of art work is known as temporary installation, a sculpture term.

Contemplation: Some of us are comfortable with the primary use of words to communicate. That is why so much of our worship service has been traditionally word bound. Most services are 90% verbal. We apparently assume that is how everyone learns. But it is not so. About a third of our human race learns this way, but another third learns primarily through images, and the other third through kinesthetic knowledge. A truly inclusive worship service will include elements of all three forms of experiences. To learn from image or visual thinking, one thinks in a different pattern than the verbal learner. Our knowledge comes to

us in a non-linear, non-logical pattern. We see whole bodies of knowledge at once, without discerning a hierarchy of points, or a pattern of common sense. Further, that knowledge is fluid, or plastic. We make huge leaps of intuition, and are often at a loss to explain with words what we see or what we understand.

The kinesthetic thinker learns through movement. Perhaps this is at the root of why ritual is so powerful for some of us. Although I am a visual artist, my primary knowledge is rooted in the kinesthetic, and touch, texture, and gesture are my strongest cues. All of us have one primary form of learning, but we all use all three all the time. The verbal learner does not use many words to drive a car. The visual learner must cope with words to fill out forms or follow directions. The kinesthetic learner, while learning a dance step, will also use words and visual information to first learn the basic patterns. Visual images in worship are a place to stop and gaze, and this puts the viewer potentially in the place away from time (*kairos*) where the gaze becomes contemplative. The viewer is absorbed in the art work, and during that time, ordinary time is broken open and new experiences arise from viewing the work itself. It is not unlike the act of contemplative prayer. Some complain that this process "takes away from worship". I am at a loss to explain this, for it seems to me when this happens, it is a very sanctified moment. Does God really need words to reach us? For this reason, banners with words are really difficult. Usually the words are really the title of the work. We do not see words with the same potential power with which we see images, especially those titles which tend to be slogans. Often the title is the only visual element on the banner! How does one enter the contemplative space described above with a word? Most of us will see the word, get the message, and move on. Frankly, the time it takes to make such an art work is disproportionate to what it contributes.

Most important to me, however, is the role of symbolic thinking. This is different than the traditional use of symbols such as crosses, butterflies, or Greek letters. Symbolic thinking produces multiple layers of meaning, and multiple meanings, some of which can be entirely opposite. By placing words, not images, as primary design elements, we abort the symbolic process and encourage unilateral thinking. This is good if you want everyone to think alike. But when the art leads one viewer to one experience and others to other interpretations, we are

encouraging pluralism and many right answers. We also always learn a wider interpretation than our own when we listen to others talk about what they see. It is a place to practice openness and respect for other's points of view.

Creativity: The most dramatic quality of the arts for me is their use of imagination to create something where nothing was before. In visual art, it is to change raw materials into an object which communicates meaning beyond the materials themselves. This practice of creativity is essential for the human to cultivate in order to solve problems, to enhance our lives, and to be fully made in God's image as Creator.

But one of the great lessons of creativity is that it never turns out just as one might have hoped. Along the way in every project, something slips, something aborts, or something fails. Here we are called to re-invent, to re-create, and to re-imagine what to do next. We must learn how to change what seems like a mistake into a doorway to something we could never had imagined. This vital link is often what is missing in our culture where we so highly value perfection, winning, and power over our environment.

So when I teach art making to folks, it seems primal that they move beyond their original intentions to listen for what the materials might be suggesting, and to watch what their hands seem to intend. It is in this three-way conversation that the alchemy of creativity is nurtured, and the tyrannical voice of judgment is quelled so that the work can emerge.

In creating art for worship, we are not celebrating the traditional role of the artist in our culture. We are not creating something that can be bought and kept as investment, or treasured in a museum. In the best process, this work is done by the local community and celebrates their creativity, not what they found in a catalogue or a local artist made for them. This is a new/ancient reclaiming of the joy of making art for worship spaces. It also suggests that the art be made, not as a set for a cycle to be used year after year, but made as a series, with new pieces added to the series each year. It suggests that relevance, not aesthetics, determine its value to the community.

But the secret of making art for worship is even more profound than that. It is truly within the process, from beginning to the end, where the joy is found. Everyone who helps out owns the work. We get ideas from each other, and energy

that rises beyond what any one of us could do alone. We accomplish together work that would exhaust one person. The work is almost always richer than what one could do alone. It is hung in our common space, and it comes alive most fully in the context of worship. It is visual liturgy, the word made incarnate, and our spirituality is blessed by its presence.

SILENCE

MUSIC IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Compiled from the notes of Madelin Sue Martin

by Sue Swanson

Music is a vital part of the celebration when the Christian community gathers to learn about relationships, share food for the journey and tell the good news. Ritual music is the glue that holds the worship service together. As the music joins the Word it becomes a strong memory tool as well as a fresh way to express the story of faith with joy and spirit. The music is not sacred in itself, but it carries the sacred when it performs sacred acts.

Music is a symbolic language because it speaks beyond itself and through itself. Its meaning is multivalent and there is no one right way to interpret its effect. Music acts as a strong expressive instrument as it works in context with the ritual. Depending on how the music is used, it adopts its character in the context of the entire worship experience similar to the way rice or cous cous take on the flavor of the dish they accompany. Music leads from the right brain which gives it a natural affinity to the feminine. It is not a cognitive venture. It is a doing, rather than a thinking process that appeals to aural or kinesthetic learning styles. Music stimulates emotional and embodied responses to the worship experience.

Liturgical workers - musicians, artists, preachers, and pray-ers - who prepare, celebrate, and evaluate the use of music in worship, all hope to have enough vision to enable the prayer of Christ to be fully embodied in the midst of the congregation. Some of their expertise comes from books on liturgy, theological training, and experiences of what seems to work and what doesn't. But an important part of the work is done quite by instinct and intuition. It is much more difficult to talk about and assess intuitive ways of knowing and we often speak of them as trivial or inconsequential; however, we know that some people simply have the knack for liturgical leadership.

The Paschal mystery of death and rebirth is the heart of the Christian ritual. It can be experienced in the sweep of the calendar year (from fall to spring), through the course of a day (from the setting sun to the dawn of rebirth) or during a worship service.

One way to think about the function of ritual music is through four familiar path markers. They are "heart spaces" that represent where people might be in

their inner life when they gather for worship. In the course of a single service or over the span of a few weeks in the life of a congregation, liturgy planners can intentionally try to touch into each of the four heart spaces. These signposts are:

- | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| <p>• Maranatha
cosmic
curious
cool
virgin place</p> | <p>Advent (fullness of the reign of God)
contemplative
mysterious
removed
miracle</p> | <p>wonder
awe
Holy Other</p> |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>• Emmanuel
simple
grounded
home - earth</p> | <p>Christmas (incarnation)
tribal
connected
near at hand</p> | <p>earth
life in the present
close</p> |
|---|--|--|
- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>• Kyrie Eleison
transforming
testing
lamenting
coping</p> | <p>Lent (preparation for baptism, learning to be a priest, prophet, king)
disorienting
unpeeling
weeping
breaking</p> | <p>forging
pruning
healing
dying</p> |
|---|---|--|
- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <p>• Alleluia
praising
ecstatic
honoring</p> | <p>Easter (believing beyond believing that life can spring from death)
jumping
hilarious
dancing</p> | <p>acclaiming
shouting
rebirth</p> |
|---|--|--|

The word 'MEKEA' is formed by combining the first letters of each of these words. The music in the worship service can lead the participants on a journey through these four expressions of emotion. These sign posts have been passed on to us through the tradition, almost from the beginning, borrowed from our Jewish heritage and from rituals of the surrounding culture. They offer the potential for prisms of understanding and discovery of the faith story which do not bind, quantify or qualify. They only give us a possible bird's eye view, maybe akin to the red hawk, which is reputed to have clear vision from a high altitude in order to act decisively when hunting for food on the ground.

The music on the following page is an example of the harmonic sounds of MEKEA. Maranatha and Emmanuel have to do with our relationship to God. Kyrie and Alleluia have to do with our relationship to the world. Maranatha (Mystery) describes a distant God who is cloudy and mysterious. Emmanuel (Incarnation)

describes a clear and present God. Kyrie (Lament) and Alleluia (Joy) are two ends of an emotional continuum; in other words, how we are feeling about life. These four primary cycles of emotion can be used to shape the worship service by choosing music that moves from one to the other so that the participants feel the fullness of the entire spectrum. The music weaves into the Word and sacrament to form a fully integrated whole. The worship service becomes a vehicle for personal and communal transformation. As the participants leave sacred time, they are changed because they have deepened relationships, and are nourished and strengthened for the continuing journey.

MUSIC for MEKEA

$\text{♩} = 74-80$

MA- RA- NA- THA.

E- MA- NU- EL.

KY- RI- E E- LE- I- SON.

AL- LE- LU- I- A.

Be pri-mal si-lence. Be earth-ly poem.
Be har-mon-ic in-spir-a-tion now and ev-er-more.

PRAYING HERE, THERE AND EVERYWHERE

Written by Jill Kimberly Hartwell Geoffrion

in honor of Madelin Sue Martin

If you want to connect with The Holy, what do you do? Get quiet and try to listen? Or, do you start speaking? Maybe you find it easiest to sense Truth's presence when you are with others. Or, perhaps you are most able to be with The Sacred in significant ways when alone. Do you wake up spiritually if you can move? Or, will meaningful experiences with The Holy come most naturally if you are totally still? Do you write or read to discover Love's presence? If you want to pray, what helps?

It is a wonderful experience to ask others "Was there a prayer that meant a lot when you were growing up?" The answers are varied, the content sometimes disturbing, but often there is an emotional recollection that is very tender and strong. For many it is easy and enjoyable to return through memory to a time when prayer was simple, helpful and maybe even fun. We can reclaim the joy of praying easily!

"Intentional connection with the Sacred," is the most useful working definition of prayer I know. Many of us pray all the time. We aren't aware of it because we define prayer in ways that limit, rather than open, our awareness of The Divine.

Prayer is connection—intentional connection. Singing can be just singing but singing as a way to express love for our Creator is praying. Walking a labyrinth can just be strolling on a pattern; walking a labyrinth with faithful trust is praying. Reciting a creed can be just mouthing words; saying it as a way of affirming an important connection with The Holy is praying.

If the thought of a friend in need and Sacred Love flow through your mind in close proximity, you are praying. If you, as a person of faith, join with others in writing out your deepest desires for the world community, you are praying. Gazing at a candle, seeing Light before you, is praying. Demonstrating for a cause based on your beliefs is praying. Sitting silently, focusing on your breath and a Divine name, is praying. Praying is acting in faith; whether the action is breathing, emailing your senator or participating in a religious ritual.

Becoming aware of all the ways we have been praying without even knowing it brings great joy. There are countless ways to connect with The Divine; may you enjoy many more of them!

EMBODIMENT AND MOVEMENT RE-IMAGINED

by Becky Myrick

What do animals, music and touch all have in common?

They all have a mystical way of bringing us out of anxiety or preoccupation into an awareness of joy. They all have an amazing ability to remind us of our aliveness and our desire to express our intuitive and nurturing side. When we feel a vibrating, warm cat on our lap, when we hear a familiar song from our youth, when we feel someone's hand in ours, we know more clearly the power and beauty of being alive and being loved. These experiences are more vivid than words. They are, in fact, the physicality of grace.

Caroline, a young woman who was a strong leader in her congregation, suffered from bipolar syndrome, unbeknownst to most people. One day her condition became serious and she had to be hospitalized. The following week, the congregation which makes intercessory prayer an important part of worship, held Caroline in their hearts. But instead of simply using words to say a tradition prayer on her behalf, Caroline's favorite necklace was placed on the worship table and as the congregation said prayers for her, the liturgist called awareness to the precious object in their midst. When the necklace was later returned to Caroline, she felt more clearly the prayer said on her behalf as she wore it around her neck once again.

To embody another's blessing such as holding in your hand an object of worth to you, or wearing a ring given by another, or exchanging a familiar gesture of greeting is a powerful thing. It is to know through our senses and our bodies the physicality of grace.

Many of us have been taught that "spiritual experiences" happen in stillness or quiet in our heads. Wisdom from God given to us has often been seen as a mind experience. But spirit experiences are physical as well and can happen when we are running, hiking, dancing, laughing, making love, singing, working and more. In fact, when we are more physically alert we are often more spiritually alert! This is because aliveness is knowing grace, knowing the Spirit's presence in our bodies, minds and hearts. As Phil Porter puts it in *Wing It*, the dualism of body and spirit has done enough to constrict us and it is time to explode our "spirit pictures". But first we have to start by noticing the images we carry, such as:

- the spirit is separate from the body
- the spirit is ethereal- white, 'floaty', 'disembodied', 'up there'
- spirituality speaks in whispers
- spirit is good and the body is suspicious

Any part of a picture has truth to it, but we need to sort out what makes sense for us, and listen to what brings grace beyond the things we've been taught. We need opportunities to listen to our own bodywisdom. The body and spirit are not separate. Instead we are all 'bodyspirits' with desires for God's love known through these magnificent bodies!

The four most common elements of all indigenous people's rituals of celebration or remembrance are music, storytelling, dance and stillness. It seems humans have known throughout time that these elements constitute a full honoring of the divine. The common threads are very striking throughout religions and cultures. In our American Christian celebrations we have done well in the areas of music and storytelling (or sharing of the word). But we are seriously lacking in dance and stillness. Without these we are out of balance. Without these we are disembodied.

Prayer is the process of shifting attention, becoming more aware of God's presence in our midst. Shifting attention or 'prayer' is something which happens to us as we begin to include our bodies in spiritual practice, in daily rituals, in relationships, in work and play. It is a mammoth shift for some. How often do we feel as though we are just 'dragging' our bodies around rather than experiencing life through our bodies to find fullness, wisdom, joy and self-understanding? We can visibly recognize the difference in how people 'carry' their spirits in their bodies. I know a man or woman with a big spirit when I see one! It is in the way they walk into a room, it is in the ways they live in their bodies and how they move their bones and muscles. It is apparent in how they breathe. It is visible in how they communicate energy. The 'bodyspirit' needs to be felt in our worship experiences as well as in daily interactions. Many have left churches because with the Reformation we allowed the mind to take up most of the space in the front chancel of the church. And things that are lost when we leave our bodies uninhabited are energy, exuberance, rhythm and aliveness. There is an African tribe who has a word for white people which can be translated as "the people who sing without

moving their bodies.” How telling and true that is. Perhaps the popularity of walking the labyrinth, because it is a form of prayer in movement, is a way to begin to include our bodies in our spiritual practices. When we are more physically alert, we are more spiritually alert. Our sensuality helps us to find intimacy with God and with ourselves.

We also know the physicality of grace in how we allow our bodies to lead us. Often our bodies have things to tell us but we are experts in ignoring them. We have a stoicism about the messages our bodies give us which runs very deep. But if we let our bodies lead more often we find fullness within ourselves we cannot know any other way. For example, we may find at times that we feel very ‘overwhelmed’ by life. The physical signs are tingling in the back, tight shoulders, stiff neck, shallow breathing, and sleeplessness. The body is trying to say there is too much to hold within. It is time to move, because when we move, dance, or exercise we release information and emotions that have accumulated too long within. Our bodies are vessels which hold memories, feelings and stories. To be conduits of balance and wisdom we need to have healthy ways to release, healthy ways to move things out of our bodies. Instead of just being receptacles of information, we also need to let our bodies lead us to “exformation,” as Porter & Winton-Henri point out, so energy is moving both in *and* out. From clearing brush to swimming laps, from dancing to music to doing yoga, we release energy and information and clear space within for deeper, freer living.

Kinesthetic connection is also a way we can re-imagine our lives into greater fullness. We are connected to each other through energy in infinite ways. When we watch a graceful dancer or a tightrope walker we have a physical reaction. Our bodies begin to wake up and respond even as we are just observers. When we see a child leaping or swinging or spinning, the child part of ourselves wakes up in physical ways. This is kinesthetic identification. If our worship leaders are stiff and leading ‘joyful’ worship without joy in their bodies we often feel nothing. But if we allow for movement and physical expression in worship we all feel the flow of energy through our natural kinesthetic abilities. When we express ourselves physically others can identify or enter into the experience much more readily, just as the world of theater demonstrates. For these reasons, it is very important to include movement in worship in as many ways as possible.

Movement in worship

When we dance we recognize our own beauty and our own ability to live in the moment. When we dance from the heart, we let go of the need to be perfect or to control things, but instead enter a realm of spontaneously exulting in life and in God. Even if we are not personally dancing, through our kinesthetic abilities we can know the joy and aliveness being expressed by the dancer.

Incorporating dance or movement in worship can happen through soloists, or circle dances such as 'universal dances of peace.' It can occur through entrances and processions by moving celebrants. We can ask children to help us experience their visual art as they walk around the sanctuary as moving art easels. When we pray, we can use movement in unison, such as bringing our hand to our heart after a prayer is said, holding it there to claim as our own and then drawing our hand out to give to God. During communion, movement by the celebrants can be powerful in the simple way we lift the bread and pour the wine and move about the space to show inclusiveness. Simple hand movements with sung responses by the congregation as a whole are beautiful and artful. Any music we choose should also allow us to experience and respond to God with a myriad of emotions and expressions. Finally, all movement should have intention not of performance but of bringing our presence more fully into the now. As Rabbi Heschel says "We are within the Sabbath, not the Sabbath within us."

Dance, I believe, refers to the journey of movement throughout all of God's creation from human to vegetative, planetary to celestial. Using the word 'dance' often and with many meanings, in worship, helps demystify movement and body creativity and invites us to remember that we all naturally move. Stillness is not the only way to find a state of receptivity to the Spirit. Movement reminds us of our aliveness and connection to the stream of the Spirit's flow. "Let my prayer be counted as incense before thee, and lifting of my hands as an evening sacrifice!" (Psalm 141) Movement evokes response whether it is being watched or experienced directly. Words are not always enough, in fact, seldom enough. Let the physicality of grace surprise you in the ways you embody and move with the all that you know of the goodness of the Spirit. Let it help you re-imagine and play with the Creator alive within.

In *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, Jurgen Moltman expressed it

this way: “When I love God, I love the beauty of bodies, the rhythm of movements, the shining of eyes, the embraces, the feelings, the scents, the sounds of all this protean creation. When I love you, my God, I want to embrace it all, for I love you with all my senses in the creation of your love. In all the things that encounter me, you are waiting for me.”

INCLUSIVITY

by Nadean Bishop

From the beginning, the organizers of the Re-Imagining Gathering in 1993 concentrated on making the event totally inclusive, inviting speakers from many ethnicities and many nations of the world. As the 1996 *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies* (Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson, eds., with 175 contributors) and the recent *Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology* (Susan Frank Parsons, ed.) remind us, there are many feminist/womanist/mujerista theologies. The organizers recognized that we are enriched by being exposed to as wide a range of feminist theologies as possible across the spectrum.

For example, the 2,200 participants at the first gathering cheered when womanist theologian Delores S. Williams contrasted "Sweet Little Jesus Boy" with "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" and opted for the vibrant living Jesus over the patriarchal atonement theology which focused on the body on the cross. We were inspired by the witness of Korean theologian Hyun-Kyung Chung enhancing Christian theology with dance and concepts from Taoism and Shintoism. We came to see as never before, as a dozen speakers brought their challenging messages, that we need a diversity of theologies if we are to be effective in re-imagining our own theology.

Since the first gathering, we have struggled with how to attract participants across as broad a spectrum as the speakers. At one point we reassured ourselves by recognizing that minorities make up less than 10% of Minnesotans and that women of color have their own spiritual gatherings. But we persisted in our quest for diversity by hiring an African-American woman as the Re-Imagining office administrator and constantly reminding one another to invite women from minority communities to plan with us. Scholarships have been awarded for every gathering to minority women and we have especially courted minority Seminarians. In spite of these efforts, minority women at one gathering formed a caucus and did a dramatic protest manifesto at one of the closing worship services.

During the 1993 gathering, a group of lesbians including Carter Heyward, Melanie Morrison, Janie Spahr, Loey Powell, Cathy Anne Beattie, and Nadean Bishop approached the co-chairs to get a few minutes on the program. This time was granted, and call was extended to all lesbians and their supporters to come to

the central platform. Hundreds came forward in a thrilling moment and joined us in the reading of a statement of support for lesbian clergy and parishioners. Tears came to many eyes because of this long-hoped-for affirmation. Some of the lesbians present were members of CLOUT (Christian Lesbians Out), a national organization that had its first meeting in Minneapolis in 1991. CLOUT has had a caucus meeting at every subsequent gathering.

A workshop on "Lesbian Theology" at the 1993 gathering (organized by Nadean Bishop and Diane Christopherson) drew 125 participants. When the United Methodist conservative publication *Good News* published their tabloid attack, this workshop got front page exposure. Major presenters at the gatherings have included "out" lesbians like Carter Heyward, Beverly Harrison, Letty Russell, Cathy Ann Beattie, and Christine Smith.

Inclusivity for those who are "otherly abled" became a focus as Re-Imagining evolved. The co-chairs of the third gathering hired a consultant, who made several recommendations which are instructive for local churches. First, we engineered all the public spaces to have ramps for wheelchairs and made the aisles wide. Signers were engaged for those who are hearing-impaired. A note appeared in pre-conference notices asking participants not to wear scents that might cause allergic reactions in some. Special menus were available to take dietary preferences into account. At the 2001 gathering, Kathy M. Black from Claremont spoke of disability as a justice issue, demonstrating with her own need to have a lift onto the platform.

Denominational insularity has been broken down through the ecumenical nature of the Re-Imagining experience. Most of us had only been exposed to the theological intricacies of our own denominations before joining Re-Imagining. Suddenly we were able to share in the rich Roman Catholic liturgical tradition through liturgies by Madelin Sue Martin and her team. The current editor of the *Re-Imagining Quarterly* is Baya Clare, a Sister of St. Joseph. Major speakers have covered a wide denominational range: Episcopalian, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, Church of the Brethren, Roman Catholic, United Methodist, American Baptist, and Unitarian Universalist.

As the Re-Imagining Community continues its task of interpreting feminist

theologies in order to revolutionize the contemporary Christian church, we will continue to try for more and greater inclusivity.

ABOUT THE FUSS OVER INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

By Cynthia J. Tidball

What is inclusive language? Why does it matter?

Inclusive language at its most generic recognizes that “humankind” is more accurate than “mankind” and advocates for “she or he” instead of “he.” Behind the words, it acknowledges that the use of the word “mankind” means that men control and define culture and women are therefore “other,” invisible, silenced, and powerless in it. It means consciously choosing to use words that both reflect and help shape the current reality instead of merely echoing an inequitable past.

The trouble generally begins when inclusive language enters the spiritual arena and is used to refer, not to people, but to God. It may be the use of relatively benign terms like “Divine One” or “Holy One,” or it may show up in terms like “Goddess” or “Sophia” which are almost always considered heretical.

The patriarchal tradition of the Christian church has the strength of centuries behind it, and it will not easily be broadened to include the feminist perspective. The language of this patriarchal tradition is perceived by many today as an anachronism, a dinosaur whose time has come and gone and yet refuses to die. Others revere it as a sacred cow; language so deeply enshrined in tradition as to be holy itself.

Language is metaphor. It points to something else. But gradually the words we use can come to be that something else. For instance, think about someone you know well. You can describe your experience of that person, but you have never been that person, so you can only relate your observations—he or she is tall, has three cats, and plays the clarinet. You hold an image in your mind but it’s an image you created, circumscribed by words you use in reference to your acquaintance. It grows dangerous when we confuse our words with the reality behind them, for then we tend to use our words to manipulate reality. For instance, consider the statement, “Where God is male, the male is God,” or the difference between saying “God is like a rock” and “a rock is like God.”

The same is true of language for God – it is, of necessity, all metaphor. Since we can’t literally see or know God, we can only say God is like something else that we can see or know, like a rock or a flame – but our God-language contains our relationship to the Divine. It’s easy and comfortable to stay within our

well-defined box, and we don't have to think too hard about it. But when such a container is rigid, encrusted with the ages, it becomes limiting, and we may not even be aware of it. If my God-box holds a God who blesses the righteous with wealth and prosperity but curses the unrighteous with poverty and suffering, how well-equipped am I to uphold Jesus' vision of compassion for the poor and outcast today? If your God-image is confined to the stern, law-giving, judging God of Leviticus, how can you continue to embrace your child who has just come out to you as gay?

If you yearn for a meaningful relationship to God, where do you find that meaning—in the longevity of your tradition, in the historic words of that tradition, or in the content behind those words? I would suggest that when our words no longer adequately represent the meaning that we value behind them, we must find new language to express that meaning. Inclusive language isn't about abandoning tradition or abolishing meaning, it's about recognizing and adding metaphors that can reveal additional layers of meaning.

The Christian tradition has lost its meaning for many people today. Women especially experience difficulty finding their place within it. Its language is incomplete; it does not include women. Where can women place themselves in a phrase like "wise men still seek Him" or in an understanding that all people are created in the image of God when that image of God is male? Is it healthy to even try or is it selling oneself out? How can women relate to a male Savior or a male God commonly imaged as King, Lord, Master?

Inclusive language need not be solely gender-based. There are many Biblical images for God that are non-human and therefore gender-neutral (at least in English)—rock, light, water, wind, fire, fortress—each of which implies a specific characteristic of, not the entirety of, God. There are also Biblical metaphors for God that reference care-taking animals, some of which are feminine—mother hen, eagle, bear. Finally, there is the Biblical Sophia. To image God primarily in powerful male terms in the face of this abundance of images is to drastically limit our understanding of the mystery of God. Although I understand many feminists' temptation to turn the tables and use exclusively female language for God and humanity, nothing will be resolved by insisting solely on female imagery for God. This is not inclusive language.

Further, to image ourselves solely as “children of the heavenly father” is to limit our understanding of ourselves. Do we never get to grow up and assume responsibility for our own lives? Are we merely playing at adulthood with our big houses, fast cars, surplus of possessions, executive jobs, and weapons that could destroy the earth many times over? We claim responsibility for our sins in our confessions in worship, but if we truly are responsible, why continue to refer to ourselves as children? What would it be like to be a grown-up of God?

Thinking of God as lord and master and of humankind as children points to the dilemma of the power differential, the one-up/one-down dynamic. It probably began with learning to understand oneself as separate from other people. We are certainly not our mothers, but so also we learn that we are not the others in our society—we are not the child who is poor or abused or homeless. We are not the child who is ethnically or economically different. It seems a natural inclination to compare Self to Other and to do whatever is necessary to ensure, at least in our own eyes, that Self is better, faster, bigger, smarter, richer, sexier. This hierarchical thinking has for ages aligned men with self, mind, abstract, good, power, and God, and women with other, body, nature, matter, evil, and powerlessness. Children, animals, and the rest of creation (rain forests, oceans, wildlife) are indeed of little value in such a system. This ranking creates isolation and power-over in a divisive, contentious society. An inclusive community that truly welcomes others because of, not in spite of, their diversity; values power-for rather than power-over each other; and treats the earth as part of itself, rather than something outside of itself to be used up and discarded, is our hope for the future. Such a community begins with the use of inclusive language for, as history has shown, language has remarkable power to shape reality.

We need a multi-dimensional God. We need not only the assurance that a powerful God is in charge, but we also need a nurturing God when we are hurting. We need a rock of ages, but we also need a wind that blows where it will. We can pray “God, our Father” and sing “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind” when it is balanced with “God, our Mother” and “The Care the Eagle Gives Her Young.” It’s the “both-and” rather than the “either-or” that will enrich us, that will help us to expand our sensibilities to the mystery of God and to create an inclusive community on earth.

SMALL GROUPS: Feminists Doing Theology—The Authority Rests in Us

by Jan Shaw-Flamm

If charged to write an essay on “What My Re-Imagining Small Group Means to Me,” it would center on theological integrity, compassion and fun. Our group of (now) seven has been meeting approximately monthly since February 1995, and it’s where I go to learn, to test ideas, to rage on occasion, and to drink in the wisdom of my spiritual sisters.

Ours is a group of heart and head. We have seen each other through deaths, church estrangement, empty nesting, health scares, and faith crises. We have celebrated new publications, graduations, new jobs, vacations, holidays and retirements. We’re a bookish bunch and have read a broad range of works on theology and spirituality. Yet our group has been far more than a book club, support group or coffee klatch because of its feminist, Re-Imagining core.

What is a Re-Imagining small group? It’s a group of people who meet regularly to think about God in new ways, consider questions of faith, and learn from each other. Your group might focus around book studies, ritual, Bible studies, videos, potlucks, or something else altogether.

How do you get started? You can invite friends, put up a notice at church or in the neighborhood, organize through a bookstore, or in an appropriate online chat room. If you have strong ideas about what you want and are willing to support, state it at the outset. For example, “Looking to form a book-based, feminist theology discussion group. All ages and faith traditions welcome.” If you’re open to a variety of possibilities, keep it general, then discuss the possibilities when you see who shows up.

What do you need to accomplish at the first meeting? You should decide what you will do, where and how often you will meet, starting and ending times, a way to share contact information, and the ground rules. Ground rules might answer such questions as will we serve food or beverages? Will we commit to confidentiality guidelines? i.e. “What is said in this room stays in this room.” Will meetings be split between a topic of discussion, ritual and a check-in time? What

can we do to make our group succeed? A group is more likely to be successful if everyone has input into the formation, and agrees on the ground rules.

Other suggestions for a successful group:

- Consider opening with a centering time to draw participants away from the jumble of daily details and into community.
- Employ shared leadership.
- Be realistic about time and frequency of meetings, and amount of “homework,” (reading, journaling, etc.)
- Avoid frequent changing of times and dates.
- Avoid side conversations, talking about things only some people have in common.
- Decide if it will be a closed or open group. If open, how will new members be included?
- Be flexible. While it helps to have ground rules, you may need to adjust them along the way.
- If socializing threatens to take over other discussion, try checking in with only a sentence or two from each person. “Tonight I am feeling _____ because _____.” Or “My prayers today are for _____.”

If books are going to be the focus of your group, you may find that someone in your group has just read something exciting she or he would love to re-read and discuss. While your own group knows best what will feed you, some books we have enjoyed are Marcus Borg’s *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*, and Rachel Naomi Remen’s *My Grandfather’s Blessings: Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging*. If videos will be the focal point, the library, a faith community, or social justice organization may have good options.

Whatever you do, the strength and delight of a Re-Imagining small group is that the theology comes out of your wisdom, life and spiritual experience. For me, the fundamental idea of Re-Imagining, and what made it threatening to many, is the knowledge that feminists will not just swallow spoon-fed, top-down theology. By the same token, neither is a meaningful, working faith framework likely to rise up, complete and universal, out of only one person’s experience. We need

community. This doesn't mean rejecting our faith traditions, but rather searching for what is authentic and compassionate within and perhaps beyond them.

A small group, in which there are experiences common and unique, is a wonderful incubator. May you hatch friendships that give and take, ideas that won't let go, and an experience of the sacred that is with you always.

PART 2

OPENING WORDS

Gathering people is an ancient act.
The care and mindfulness with which we gather is,
 in itself, a Re-Imagining of community
 and an encountering of the Divine.
We linger here, as gathering moments invite us
 to become a people together.

GATHERING LITANY

One: The voice of Sophia has called us to this time – to this place. Welcome!

Two: In our time together we will explore, sing, talk, listen, dance, create, play.

Three: We will venture into the unknown, honor our Re-Imagining traditions,
 create new traditions.

Four: In our gathered being we claim this space as our own – a safe place to share
 our dreams and fears, frustrations and hopes, sorrows and visions, doubts and
 joys.

One: We make this space safe in our openness to Sophia's presence and ask Sophia's
 blessing.

Song "Bless Sophia."

One: Sophia, the Re-Imagining Community has gathered. We have come from the
 east, west, north and south to this space. Bless this space with your vision and
 wisdom. Bless this space that it may be a safe place to dream and share for all
 who have gathered here.

Two: Sophia – our tradition is to gather at tables – round tables – symbols of this
 circle where all are welcome, all are valued and heard. Bless these tables –
 tables of dreaming, sharing, creating and hoping.

Song "Gathered Here."

One: Gathered in the presence of Sophia...

Two: To name...

Three: To claim...

Four: To Re-Imagine!

Song "Gathered Here."

One: The mystery enfolds us, weaves us together within it's Being, inviting us to
 know and be known...

Two: Here is God, Sophia, Wisdom, Creator, Eternity,

Three: Compassionate One, Giver of Gifts, Healer, Earth Mother...

Four: Breath of Life, Amazing Grace, Holder of all Tears,

One: Tenderness, Companion, Comforter, Weaver-Woman God...

Two: Spirit Within, Bakerwoman God, God of all Hope,

Three: Holy One who Breaks Bread, Parent of My Soul.

Four: God, of wisdom and mystery, beckons us to gather in one body, one story, to
 celebrate all stories, all bodies.

Song "Gathered Here."

One: Gathered in God to name...

Two: Name our Stories of Power, Spirituality, and Eros that make us whole.

Three: Name our stories of Power Difference that exposes our racism,

Four: Name our stories of Power and Acts of Institutional Subversion that give us
 hope.

Song "Gathered Here."

One: Gathered to claim...

Two: Claim our struggle to weave the power of the erotic with our spirituality,

Three: Claim the struggle to face our difference and claim our racism,

Four: Claim the struggle to act out new awareness of our power in relationship to the church.

Song "Gathered Here."

One: Gathered to Re-Imagine...

Two: To Re-Imagine the power of the erotic that nurtures our spirit.

Three: Re-imagine difference to call forth the celebration of diversity.

Four: Re-imagine the institution to bring forth Shalom.

Sing "Gathered Here."

One: Sophia, God of Mystery, struggle and power, draw near to us, bless us...

Two: Sophia, draw near, enfold us in blessing:

Song "Bless Sophia."

Three: Sophia draw near, enfold us in power:

Sing "Bless Sophia."

Four: Sophia, draw near, in blessing and power as we bless each other:

Song "Bless Sophia."

One: In the Mystery of knowing and being known we are invited to enter into relationship – to know ourselves and to know each other.

MORNING GATHERING

One: Gathered in the presence of God.

Two: To name.

Three: To claim.

Four: To Re-Imagine!

One: Gathered bodies – young and old, proud and strong.

Two: Gathered bodies – Rested and relaxed,

Three: Gathered bodies – weary and battered,

Four: Gathered bodies – holding memories and pain,

One: Gathered bodies – knowing pleasure and joy,

Two: Gathered after a time of scattering.

Three: We gather once again to celebrate the beauty and diversity of our gathered bodies.

Four: As we celebrate we see new light bathing us in warmth,

One: Calling us to new life.

Two: Encouraging us to share our dreams, our fears.

Song "Gather Us In."

One: In our flesh and bone we feel the presence of Sophia.

Two: In our flesh and bone we feel the chaos, hurt and pain.

Three: In our flesh and bone we carry hope and doubt, fatigue and energy, courage and fear.

Four: In our flesh and bone we stand around our tables asking Sophia to gather us in.

THREE STEP PRAYER

Guided Meditation

Close your eyes

Breathe deeply and let it go with some sound.

It sounds like the ocean in here and that's good.

Who am I today?

What aspect of myself is most prominent today?

What is unique about me that I am bringing to my table here today?

Feel the weight on the bottoms of your feet,

And shift your weight back and forth,

And really notice what you weight and love it!

As you do this, appreciate the absolute dependability of gravity

There for you everyday.

Now as you breathe in, feel your body expand.

Notice that you take up more space.

Perhaps wonder where you end and the rest of the world begins.

It's always changing.

What color am I today? That could be skin, or aura or mood.

Now as you breathe, See if you can feel blood rushing through your veins

Bathing your organs, bringing oxygen,

Taking the old stuff away

Maybe you can see how all races run through your veins

All genders reside in your cells

This is you.

Do I bleed today in synchronicity with the moon?

Or has my bleeding graduated into a flowering of creativity that busts out of me everyday?

or perhaps I carry new life in me today

I STEP INTO MYSELF

I STEP INTO MYSELF

Is it morning today? For some of us it's still last night.

What kind of weather is out there today?

You have to do some remote viewing from here.

How do I feel today? What's going on in my town, my country, my continent today?

How is the world going to be different because of today?

I STEP INTO THE DAY.

I STEP INTO THE DAY.

I feel my intimate connection with every molecule of creation.

Every star, every termite, every agate, maple leaf, lemur.

I feel how the universe is me and I am the universe.

I notice how every thought, every word and every action I make

Ripples out and changes everything.

What am I going to think and say and do? How am I going to nudge the universe today?

I STEP INTO THE MYSTERY.

I STEP INTO THE MYSTERY.

Welcome

MAKING HOLY TIME

- One: Let us bless this time together spent in Re-Imagining all that is around us, behind us, before us, and especially that which is within us these days.
- Many: There is a time for everything under the sun.
- Section 1: A time for waiting and a time for action.
- Section 2: A time for listening to others and a time for speaking our own truth.
- Section 3: A time to hear the stories of the church of yesterday and a time to call forth the stories from the church of now.
- Section 4: A time to put our roots deep in our traditions and a time to grow in new and untried directions.
- Many: There is a time for everything under the sun.
- Section 1: A time to acknowledge the religious differences that keep us apart and a time to build on our similarities.
- Section 2: A time to connect with those who are like us and a time to learn from and make friends with those whose culture is different from our own.
- Section 3: A time of sorrow for prayers that exclude many and a time to pray with words and gestures that include all.
- Section 4: A time to live with the names and possibilities others have put on us and a time to name our truth and to explore our gifts, and our call to serve.
- Many: Most of all, it is a time to state clearly and dream wildly about who we are as people of God, and who we intend to be in the future through the power and guidance of the spirit of wisdom whom we name Sophia.
There is a time for everything under the sun.

WELCOME

People of Re-Imagining
We welcome you!
We open our hands to receive this day.
This newly created day.
We bring this day into our hearts.
We open our hands to receive the word.
This Re-Imagined word.
We bring the word into our hearts.

CALL TO CELEBRATION

- One: Welcome to a celebration of new life. God's gift of abundant life is renewed in you and me.
- Many: Praise the Holy One for today! Praise Her for the creative spirit in our midst!
- One: Be awake and know that God is here. Let the Spirit in.
- Many: We are ready to pray and sing and rejoice. We are ready to be bearers of the Spirit's Wisdom.
- One: She changes everything, she touches and everything she touches changes, even in times of sorrow and hopelessness, in times of rest and times of growth.

Many: We are a circle of women gathering tonight. Being reborn by the power of our Mother. Born to be changers. Change us Sophia. Touch us. Change us, Source of all Life!

INVOCATION

In the movement of light and color,
In a variety of sizes, shapes and forms,
Our God comes to us,
Multi-Colored,
Multi-Faceted,
Never Ended,
And Never Contained.

BLESSING FOR THE DAY

From far and near,
From many nations and continents,
We come with passion for liberation,
Para la lucha.
With many cultures and communities,
Pulsing in our blood we come.
Aware of mystic contemplative connections which bind us.
West and east,
From south and north we come
Ever persisting
Enduring active interveners who change everything we touch.
May everything we touch today change.
Some of us come to Re-Imagine for the first time.
May our eyes and hearts be fresh,
Our questions resound.
Our imaginations flow free.
Some of us come ready to grow Re-Imagining traditions.
May our eyes too be fresh,
Our hearts ready, our questions and commitments resound,
Our imaginations and passions flow free.
Some come in critique, concern, fear, faith.
May the eyes of our eyes be opened.
The ears of our hearts be attuned.
Let our imaginations and fears
Be drenched and quenched
In love's faithful free creativity.
Welcome Holy Spirit at playful work in the day
The way before us.

DRUMMING

The drum is feminine and the drumbeat is the heartbeat of the earth.
Drumming gathers the group together as they arrive to enter Holy Space.

NAMING THE HOLY ONE

Song

“Bring Many Names” Verse 1-3

Leader: The naming of our God is a sacred act.
The words we use give meaning
To our imagining of the Divine.
In this time apart,
And in this space made holy by our presence,
We, as one, honor the divine,
With joy and reverence,
We speak the hallowed names of God
Ancient names, Newly-found names –
We speak the hallowed names of God.

From four quadrants, readers proclaim:

Divine Ancestor
Mother God
Father God
Almighty Creator
Hokmah
Elohim
El Shaddai
Shekinah
Adonai
Spirit
Ruach
Abba

Song

“Bring Many Names” Verse 4

From four quadrants, readers proclaim:

Mystery
Lover
Eternal Goodness
Alpha and Omega
Fire of Love
Loving Presence

Song

“Bring Many Names” Verse 5

From four quadrants, readers proclaim:

Sophia
Thought Woman
Earth Mother
Spirit Woman
She Who Is
Cosmic Dancer
Weaver God

Speak aloud at your table other Holy Names

Song

“Bring Many Names” Verse 6

Transforming Laughter
Womb of Creation
Higher Power
Prime Mover

Ying and Yang
Unknown God
Un-nameable God
Holy One of Blessing

Song

“Bring Many Names” Verse 7

CALL TO CELEBRATION

One: Welcome to a celebration of new life.
God’s gift of abundant life is renewed in you and me.
Many: Praise the Holy One for today!
Praise Her for the creative Spirit in our midst!
One: Be awake and know that God is here.
Let the Spirit in.
Many: We are ready to pray and sing and rejoice.
We are ready to be bearers of the Spirit’s Wisdom.
One: She changes everything she touches and
Everything she touches changes,
Even in times of sorrow and hopelessness,
In times of rest and in times of growth.
Many: We are a circle of women gathering tonight.
Being reborn by the power of our Mother.
Born to be changers.
Change us, Sophia! Touch us. Change us.
Touch us, Source of All Life!

GREETING

As we begin our Gathering, we look around our circle and into the faces of each person gathered here today. We realize that we are all made in the image of God. Introduce yourself to the people around you saying, “God! It’s good to see you!”

MATRILINEAR INTRODUCTIONS

We thank God for the Mother’s who gave us birth and who nurtured us in our faith. In honor of our foremothers, we will introduce ourselves by tracing our heritage through our Mother’s names. We will go back as far as we can remember.

For example:

I am Susan, Daughter of Esthermae, Daughter of Anna,
I am a daughter of Mother Wisdom, Sophia,
I am a reflection of God’s glory.

PRAYERS

OFFERING PRAYERS

We have spoken of the past,
We have celebrated our present
It is time now for an offering
Which will make possible our future.
We invite you to give generously
From your hearts as you remember
The Re-Imagining Community.

Bless Sophia, Spirit of Wisdom and Truth,
We who continue to seek new life and a
New vision for the church,
Sustain the evolving vision of peace and
Justice unfolding daily before us.
Support us in your journey of creating a
New reality for the church and our world.
Bless Sophia, the new year as it opens a
myriad of possibilities for growth, for change,
and for new life. Amen.

Godde of Wisdom, Love and Hope,
You have gifted us with so many
Blessings. Be with us as we open
And accept these gifts so that we
May share your blessings with the World.
You have given us:
The creative power to dance, sing
And celebrate your great love for
All of your people.
Help us to be more loving.
Give us imaginations that enable us to
Re-imagine our world.
Help us to Re-Imagine life, which is
Not always kind and good, so that
We can live together in peace and
As one people – your people.
Vision for a new tomorrow for your
People and your church.
Help us to live into that vision
Wisely and unselfishly.
Give us the ability to become free of our
Fear of otherness.
Help us to celebrate the gift of
Those who are not like us, in
Whatever ways, and to recognize
Our common humanity and your

Sacred power within us all.
Gracious Godde of Wisdom, Love and Hope,
You have gifted us with so many
Blessings. Be with us as we open
And accept these gifts so that we
May share your blessings with the World.

MEAL BLESSING

BREADS FROM MANY LANDS

As we prepare to break bread,
We recognize, with gratitude,
The gifts of Sophia and of each other.
With gratitude we receive tortillas,
The gift of the peoples of Central and South America to the world.
With gratitude we receive rye bread,
The gift of the peoples of Eastern Europe to our world.
With gratitude we receive buddeena,
The gift of African peoples to the world.
With gratitude we receive manto,
The gift of the people of Asia to our world.
With gratitude we receive pita,
The gift of the people of the Middle East to the world.
With gratitude we receive baguettes,
The gift of the Europeans to the world.
With gratitude we receive corn bread,
The gift of the Native Americans to the world.
And with gratitude we receive the varieties of breads
which are the gifts we offer one another.
People of Re-Imagining,
We invite you to break bread with one another.
Song "We have come to tell our stories."

SOLSTICE PRAYER

by Chuck Dayton

Our Creator,
Throughout the heavens,
Hallowed be thy flame,
In a trillion suns,
Thy will be done,
In the tiniest cell,
Thy kingdom comes,
Give us each day,
A bird in flight,
A flower's perfume,
A bright star's light,
And lead us not on a path of greed,
But teach us to tread lightly,
Take only what we need,
For ours is the journey,
From ignorance to understanding
From separateness
To oneness,
Together with you,
The universe,
The energy, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.

EMBODIED PRAYER

And so we pray,

This day all is praise and thanks for all our days.
We breathe and it is your breath that fills us.
We look and it is your light by which we see.
We move and it is your energy moving in us.
We listen and even the stories speak of you.
We touch and you are between finger and skin.
We think and the thoughts are but sparks from the fire of your truth.
We love and the throb is your presence.
We laugh and it is the rustle of your passing.
We weep and your Spirit broods over us.
We long and it is the tug of your kingdom.
To this we say, Amen.

BLESSINGS

Blessings from on high,
Blessings from around,
Blessings in disguise,
Blessings evident-
All these, come to you,
By the grace of God.

Blessings from before,
Blessings still to come,
Blessings in tight straits,
Blessings when you're freed-
By the grace of God.

Blessings dressed in jeans,
Blessings dressed in silks,
Blessings bringing smiles,
Blessings shared with tears-
By the grace of God.

Blessings of newness,
Blessings of sameness,
Blessings abundant,
Indeed, these and more -
By the grace of God.

PRAYER FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

It seems that a very holy part of building communities of justice has to do with the truths we are able to tell each other.

I want to invite us into a moment of prayer at our tables.

In absolute quietness, we offer in words to one another our prayers of confession and our prayers of truth-telling about the assumptions we still continue to hold about the nature of human wholeness that continue to participate in the oppression, the invisibility, the violence against people with disabilities.

I ask us to share those phrases or those sentences as an act of prayer.

(a time to share)

Holy God, Divine Presence,

We give you thanks for the courage to speak words of truth and to embody truth to one another. Help us be agents of your transformation for a just world. Amen.

RITUAL OF SOLIDARITY

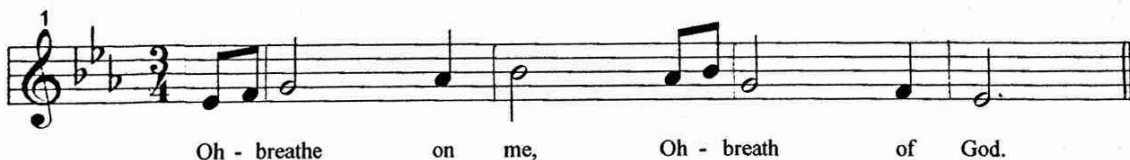
This prayer was developed by the Ritual Committee for the 1994 Gathering. It was sent out with registration materials to pray for those who would be attending as well as those who would not be able to attend. It was also used during the Gathering.

Sing with gesture as you choose that resembles the fall of breath.

- Oh, breathe in us your life-giving Spirit. . . .
(Allow time after each call for spoken or unspoken prayers to emerge, and then sing the response.)
- Oh, breathe in our small circles of friends and family your breath of life's goodness. . .
- Oh, breathe into our communities of faith the winds of renewal and change. . .
- Oh breathe into our world the continued yearning for and response to your unconditional love. . .

Concluding Prayer

Breath of Life,
We rejoice in your Spirit,
Calling us forth
From the depth of our being.
In this season of nature's majesty,
Even when the wind sweeps
The leaves from the trees,
Something again unnamed
Asks for our vulnerability, too.
The truth takes time
To be accepted.
Holy are You.
Holy are we.
Who are one with You. Amen.



PRAYER OF TEARS

Water sounds – trickling, flowing, gushing...Begin in a circle

We were called forth from the crashing salt sea,

And each alone tasted salty, gently sloshed womb water.

Ready childhood cry tears turned into tears of grown-joy at weddings, worship, wins.

The outside waters of baptism transform into inside waters of wine, Sacred-meant.

Sophia wept over Jerusalem.

Mary wept under Jesus her son, crossed.

We weep in groan-time, when time washes away loves, lives. One hears tears.

Join hands by holding each other's wrists to feel heartbeats.

PEACE PRAYER

Holy One, untamed

By the names we give you,

In the quiet of our hearts

Name us.

Remind us of who we are

In this tumultuous time.

Reveal to us the truth you

Have inscribed in our hearts.

Show the way of trust

So that we might know

Your Love is enough,

And will give us the sustenance

To do your work of peace.

Peace before us,

Peace behind us,

Peace above us,

Peace below us,

Peace within us and between us.

Let it be...as surely

As the name you have given us –

My people.

PRAYER FOR THE PLANNING OF A GATHERING

O God, in whom we live and move and have our being,
We thank you for our Re-Imagining community.
We come to you today as a group of women
who realize that you have blessed us with many gifts;
gifts of leadership, creativity and spirituality.
We also thank you for our humanity.
In everything, we do we strive to follow the example of Jesus Christ.
But we know that we are very busy, we make mistakes and
We do not always do things perfectly.
Help us to learn from all of our experiences together.
We ask that you help us work with authenticity and respect.
We know and love each other and we rejoice that _____ is _____,
(Use the names of everyone gathered e.g. Cathy is Cathy),
_____ is _____, _____ is _____, etc.
Give us the guidance that we need to bring together our community
so that the Gathering will empower us
to go out and seek peace, love and justice for all of your people.
In the name of Jesus. Amen.

A PRAYER FOR HEALING

Edith LaChelle Gibson

Dear God,

Please weave together all the desires of a woman's heart like a woven quilt.
Lord God please mend our broken hearts and heal our hurting souls from
abusive childhood pain.
Mother, Father God please reconcile our hearts and minds onto You,
Your will, and Your ways.
Merciful and Gracious God cleanse our hearts and our minds for You and
Your good purpose.
Oh Heavenly Mother, Father thank you for the miracles embedded in us,
Your daughters, and thank you for the miracles You brought in our lives in
Times of suffering and sweetness.

In the matchless, majestic, and mighty name of Jesus Christ I ask this prayer.

Amen!!!

SOPHIA BLESSING

*I was there, I, Sophia, was by Mystery's side.
I was the artisan, artificer, master builder,
delighting God day after day,
ever at play everywhere in the world,
delighting to be with the children of the earth.
- Proverbs 8:30*

Many of our gatherings begin with the Sophia Blessing. Speakers are blessed by the people of Re-Imagining before they give their address. Sophia is a figure who appears throughout the scriptures as a female personification of the wisdom of God. To her are attributed the same works of creating and ordering the universe as elsewhere are attributed to Yahweh. See the three major Wisdom poems in Proverbs (1, 8, and 9). In the Christian scriptures what is said of Jesus is the same as what Judaism said of Sophia. The Gospel of John, especially its prologue, shows Jesus' story as the story of Sophia "present in the beginning," coming to pitch a tent among us.

INTRODUCING THE SPIRIT OF RE-IMAGINING

Re-Imagining is a vulnerable and creative act.
It becomes possible through the power of blessing and respect.
We invoke Sophia, Divine Wisdom,
Who chose to play with all the people of the world.
Her voice has been silenced too long.
Let her speak and bless us throughout these days.

She is a woman of the Word.
She is a woman of Vision.
She is a woman of Movement.
She is a woman of Music.
She is a woman of Wisdom.

SOPHIA

Sophia, the fashioner of all things taught me . . .
- Wisdom of Solomon 7:22

Perhaps she's a bit like my mother
she was always saying, "Go
outside and play. Get some fresh air."

And so I came into the world
sliding through a narrow canal
on a wave of sound,

sent to sing with the orioles,
listen to the music of the red maple leaves,
crunch my heels on hard snow,
sit and create a small stillness
in the center of this swirling pool.

I am here to measure the space
between earth and the stars.

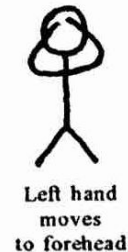
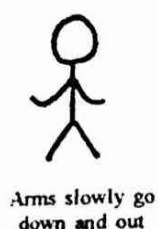
I will leave one day in silence
with my mouth sealed shut, my tongue
weighted by the secrets inside the pearls
that I have found.

I will leave to dance
upon her table,
wander freely in a maze of rooms
and find the one prepared for me.

- Pam Wynn

SOPHIA BLESSING

Now, Sophia,
Dream the vision,
Share the wisdom,
Dwelling deep within.



CLOSING WORDS

BENEDICTION 1

Re-Imagining sustains our common vocation of transformation.
Many are the dimensions of this struggle.
Doing what must be done is a courageous act.
This endless work is a dance of fire, passion, and persistence.
Much will be required.
Go forward with swift pace and unswerving feet.

BENEDICTION 2

Sophia calls us to face squarely the struggles we find along the road of faith,
to deal with them,
to be inspired and challenged by the Word.
Then we dance away from this place
with the fire of passion and our commitment begins.

God of mystery and wonder,
as mystery advances and darkness enfolds us
We keep faith with you.
Ever Creating One,
in the quiet of the night
revive us with your compassionate love.
Renew us. Amen.

BENEDICTION 3

In the darkest night I invite you to the morning.

BENEDICTION 4

Now, in peace,
In balance,
We pass into the night,
Into the heartbeat of the world,
Walking with each other in love.
We go singing,
Faithful,
Flowing,
Troubling the water,
Standing by our sisters;
We go singing.

BENEDICTION 5

The group is lead in sounding “OM” moving to “SHALOM.” As the chanting continues, we bless each other for a peaceful night and a safe return in the morning.

BENEDICTION 6

The group is arranged in pairs. One begins by saying:

I share your joy (action – stroking the hair)

I wipe away your tears (action – touching the cheek)

I am with you on the journey (action – draw a circle on the hand)

The other person repeats the ritual.

Each person finds another person to bless.

COSTA RICA BLESSING

This ritual is used at the close of women's meetings in Costa Rica. The purpose is to build community and to foster self-esteem. Costa Rican women have used this ritual for over twenty years to provide strength to women's groups in the face of difficult economic conditions. The flow of energy around the circle as each person prays for their neighbor is life-giving and encouraging.

The group stands in a circle holding hands. The leader explains that each person will pray for the person on her right, sending her blessings, affirmations and support. Some people may know each other better than others; however, even if specific prayer concerns are not known in advance, the general prayers for that woman's well-being are important also.

The group prays in silence with the prayers flowing in a counter-clockwise direction around the circle. It is an exercise in simultaneously giving and receiving prayer.

To signify the end of the ritual, the leader may offer a benediction or the group may sing a song together, for example, "Go Now in Peace."

CLOSING LITANY

As we began with the song “Open Wide the Circle,” let us bring to a conclusion our being together, opening wide our circle and praying for the needs of our universe. For nations torn by war, strife, violence, killing and division, that peace may come to their peoples and lands and that we may learn to stop our violence. We pray:

For the hungry in the world, hungry of body and hungry of spirit that we might discover ways to share bread. We pray:

For the poor, victims of unjust economic and political systems, that together we may find ways to end oppressions and injustice. We pray:

For ourselves, the Christian community, that we may be unbound and break out of our boundaries to include all: women, men, gays, lesbians, married, unmarried, rich, poor, black, white, red and even blue. We pray:

For those who have died, who have gone before us, who are held in the heart and memory of God. That we may never forget them. We pray:

And now if you would like to add you intentions, you are welcome to do so and we will join in prayer . .

Please repeat after me, in a commissioning of one another:

By the grace of God,
In imitation of Christ,
Through the power of the Spirit,
We charge ourselves
And commission each other
To go forth from here
Into the midst of life,
As word enfleshed,
As wisdom incarnate
Re-Imagining the Sacred,
Unbinding the Word,
Liberating the oppressed,
Transforming our world,
Telling our story,
Which is God’s story,
Proclaiming good news,
Really good news!
In Sophia’s name,
In Sophia’s image,
Until we meet again.

Amen.

Alleluia!

Between the petitions of this prayer, sing “O God Hear Us, Hear Our Prayer.”

TALKING CIRCLES

At many gatherings, Talking Circles are used to offer a special time of gathering and discussing. The talking time usually begins and ends with song, For example, “I Will Sing On” and “I Shall Not Be Moved.”

Talking Pieces are provided for each person to hold as they speak. At some of the gatherings, these pieces are created at the table. For example, bare tree branches and a pile of ribbons decorated each table when the participants arrived. They were encouraged to tie the ribbons onto the stick as they got acquainted with one another.

Talking Circles are a Native American tradition. Each person is encouraged to speak. They participate one at a time while others listen without interrupting. Each person holds the talking piece as they speak then passes it to the next speaker.

Each person takes a risk to speak because they are supposed to speak the truth.

It is our hope that community will take place in your Talking Circle this means there is an openness, an affirmation of all positions, that we not only listen, but truly hear each other and that together we can create a safe space to explore, share doubts, seek the unknown, imagine new ideas and thoughts.

Intent of the Talking Circles:

- Build trust so that issues may be discussed openly.
- Build community and friendships.
- Share hopes, dreams, frustrations and visions.
- Respond to the presentations that have been made through talk, artwork and ritual.
- Eat meals together.
- Exchange addresses so that you may keep in touch.
- Plan for the future.

It is helpful to choose a Convener who:

- Is the timekeeper.
- Helps the group on the topic of discussion.
- Ensures that everyone has equal time to talk.

At some gatherings, special tables were provided to honor the needs of everyone who attends. For example, women-only tables, mixed tables, scent-free tables and artist tables. Sometimes questions are gathered from the small groups and are processed by the presenters.

HONORING THE COMMUNITY OF THE TALKING CIRCLE

One: In the name of the Holy One we greet the place of God's presence in one another. (Table groups stand with open hands and touch each other's palms in the circle.)
I revere the presence within you.

Many: I revere the presence within you.

One: I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides.

Many: I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides.

One: I honor the place in you of love.

Many: I honor the place in you of love.

One: Of light, of truth, of peace.

Many: Of light, of truth, of peace.

One: I honor the place within you

Many: I honor the place within you

One: Where, as you are in that place in you

Many: Where, as you are in that place in you

One: and I am in that place in me,

Many: and I am in that place in me,

One: There we are one.

Many: There we are one.

One: Namaste.

Many: Namaste.

One: No less sacred is our naming of ourselves.
Whisper the sacred word that is your name.
Again, whisper it.
Speak aloud the sacred word that is your name.
And now, write the sacred word that is your name.
Greet one another with the words:
"I revere the presence within you."

TALKING CIRCLE TOPICS

These are some questions that the Re-Imagining Community used to stimulate discussion in small table groups.

I chose to come here today because . . .

What's sounding in my life right now is . . .

Some words I am waiting to hear are . . . Some words I am waiting to speak are . . .

What I am hoping for today is . . .

The scripture story I would like to unbind is . . . The way I re-imagine this story is

. . .

Name the times in your life when the word carried you . . .

Words that are sounding in me now are . . .

As you listened to the presentation, what images came to mind?

How do these images relate to your own experience?

How do we sustain hope and courage?

How do we stay connected?

How do we nurture our faith in God?

How does the Spirit/Soul speak in/work through you?

Who is your God? What does your God sound like, taste like, and look like?

Name God and share those names . . .

How have your images of God changed over the years?

What experiences have led you to those changes?

What is your vision of a faith community?

What changes are needed to support your vision, both locally and globally?

Who is not here?

Think of a time in your life when darkness has been a time of safety, trust or mystery.

What is your favorite sound?

When is silence necessary for you?

What tastes, feelings, sounds, sights and smells are healing to you?

What needs healing in your life, the community and the world?

What do you do to heal yourself and others?

What is something in yourself about which you were once silent but are silent no longer?

What were the circumstances that helped you move out of silence?

Were there women or men who empowered you to break your silence?

Have you empowered others to break their silences?

Has God/Divine One or a "face of God" been silenced or made invisible in your life?

What gift are you ready to receive from God? What gift do you bring to God?

What do you see/ don't you see in the winter?

How do you live if you don't have to hurry before the setting sun on the day of summer solstice?

What has forged your path?

What propels your dreams?

What pulls you away from your Source?

What gives you life, energy and courage?

What blessings are you receiving from the Re-Imagining Community?

Where is our power and how can we use it to keep our questions alive?

RITUAL ARTICLES

Many times we asked people to bring different items that would stimulate the discussions. We have also given people remembrances to take home with them. For example:

Items that remind us of special women in our lives

A stone

A small token of birth or rebirth

A candle

A piece of cloth

A symbol of wholeness

A shell

A package of seeds

SHEETS

During the 1996 Gathering, everyone received a strip of cotton sheeting to use. They were used for dance and movement. Participants used markers and fabric pens to transform the strips into prayer shawls, stoles and altar cloths. They could draw and color at any time during the Gathering.

To introduce the project, the following litany was used:

We make love between the sheets

We are conceived between sheets

Sheets were used before sanitary pads

Sheets cover us at birth

Sheets become costumes for evildoers

Sheets shroud us at our time of death.

GATHERING THE WATERS

At the 1998 Gathering, participants we asked to bring a container of water from their home. The following ritual was used:

We bring what we are to this place. We bring what we are, who we are, our histories, our people, our joys and sorrows, and we mingle them in the river of life. What we join here cannot be separated. We are one in spirit, irrevocably.

Mingle your waters!

The well is deep indeed. Indeed we are living!

At table now we meet each other by name. Then pouring the water each one has brought into the center bowl, we hear each one tell from where the troubling water comes.

After the talking circle, we plunge, stir, outpouring our table-waters into the center pool.

On our way from here, sprinkling and blessing one another and ourselves we go streaming.

ANOINTING

ANOINTING WITH SPICES

GATHERING UP OUR SPICES, COOKING THE WAY

Each person is invited to bring a packet of spices to the Gathering. As we arrive, we name the spices we have brought and tell the story of why we chose them. We dream about what they can do here.

In celebration of the sacred and sensual beings that we are, these bodies infused by God, we place the spices in the bowl at the center of the table. Then we use our spices to energize our senses. This is a time to celebrate the body. One at a time, each person, spending as much time as they desire with the spices, takes them and feels them smells them, tastes them (careful with the chili powder!) And let them bless you.

All the tables may combine their spices into a large basket at the platform.

Leader: Mary Magdalene went to the tomb with nothing in her hands.
Tonight she invites us to anoint the living.
To anoint one another.
To raise up the body of Christ here.
We have spices.
Mary invites us to gather these spices for every table.
One from each table will come and receive the spices which we have gathered.
We will bless and anoint ourselves, each other, and our whole body.
You may offer a blessing or a word that you want to speak to a person near you.
You may ask for a word that you particularly need to bring to your life in a new way.
Tonight we are anointing one another for living.
For as we heard earlier today, we, the body of Christ, are risen.
Let us anoint one another in the spirit of God.
Speak words of blessing as you wish and are able as you anoint each other.

ANOINTING WITH OIL

Those gathered are invited to form groups of four.

Each person will state how they wish to be anointed. Some ideas are: commissioning, naming, blessing, healing cleansing.

Each group will receive a dish of oil and a towel.

Participants will bless each other saying:
"Heal our hearts, hear our prayers."

Or

"You are a child of (name mother, grandmother, great-grandmother....)
You are a child of Mother Wisdom, Sophia.
You are a reflection of God."

GUIDED REFLECTIONS

Time Out to Absorb the Presentation

At the 1994 Gathering, a Guided Meditation was used after each presentation. It gave participants a chance to stop in quiet and reflect on the information that they heard.

I'd like to invite you to move into a place of softness.
A place where your mind softens
And your eye focus softens
And your body becomes receptive to what is moving within.

Let yourself begin to connect to your breath
In that place where it is softest and easiest
It may be a very tiny place,
Or it might be quite a large breath.
Wherever it is for you,
Feel that breath.

Allow the images and words that were shared with us
to reconnect deep within your being.

Find that place where what touched you deeply dwells
And let the images continue to come up:
Memories,
Thoughts.
Body awarenesses.

I would invite you to allow any kind of response that needs to be done
To rise within you.
So, if you need to sketch or draw,
Jot down some words that will help you as you move into talking circles,
Move it in your body to even deepen what's happening in you.
Move or make a sound or
Simply to rest in your breath and
Meet your awarenesses as they bubble up
Listen to your response.
And as you become aware of that, do what you need to do.

We paused for a moment to listen to quiet, meditative music.

FORMING CLAY VESSELS

You have on your tables a lump of earth - a lump of potential. I invite you to take a handful of that lump - To feel it in your hands, to share with it your warmth the warmth of your blood, the warmth of your skin. To feel it, to touch it, to share. Please take a lump.

The first thing that I ask you to do with your clay would be just feel it. Feel the way that it takes moisture from your hands, feel the way that it responds to everything you do to it. To every gentle touch, it responds. If we could please, make a vessel from that clay. To think about containment, to think about security, to think about holding something in clay.

As you make that vessel, I'd ask you to think about the qualities that clay knows. Clay knows more than we can possibly possible know in my world.

It knows if it is too thin it collapses. If it's too thick it cracks.

It knows how to be, it knows how to dry, it knows how to harden, and it knows how to disintegrate when it comes into contact with water.

It knows when it meets heat that it turns to stone and stays for 10,000 years.

It knows fragility.

It knows that when it dries the most gentle touch breaks it to nothing, nothing but potential, nothing but earth.

In this process of building communities, of building vessels, I'd ask you to put that love, that attention, that excitement into that vessel that you make with your clay.

There is no right thing you can do. There is no wrong thing you can do. Every motion, every time you touch clay it is perfection, because it is that moment - that moment that you give information to that material. As you touch that clay, share that emotion with that clay.

I'd ask you to pass the piece of clay that you have in your hands to someone at your table. Anyone at your table. So there is a whole new potential, someone else's energy already in that clay as you feel your colleague's form, their manipulation of their clay, I'd ask you to now turn that vessel into an emotion, it may be the excitement of the time we will spend together, It may be fear, fear of what you might learn. Whatever that it may be, I ask you to turn that vessel into an emotion.

I invite you to look at the emotions set forth on this table and ask you to arrange those emotions, these clay pieces in the middle of your table and somehow connect these emotions of the people next to you and sitting around you. With little or no talking, through your breath, through your thoughts, through your hands, through your heart, manipulate the clay.

RE-IMAGINING CHURCH

by Sara Evans

Reader 1: Remember the goals of Re-Imagining which centered on church as the gathered people, a spiritual community.
Now we must ask ourselves what can “church” mean to us?
Together, each in her/his own mind, about our common project, a Re-Imagined church. This is a guided meditation.
Feel free to stop off in the course of the meditation and linger in one place or with one image while others go on.
Close your eyes. Let the words, “Re-Imagined church” hang before your eyes. The letters fade like the title of a movie and you enter the picture. Look around you. What kind of a place or space are you in? Follow the movie camera around this space, noticing its shape, its features, its colors.

Reader 2: People are there. Perhaps you know some of them, perhaps not.
Look around and see their faces looking at you, returning your gaze, welcoming you.
What are they (and you) doing?

Reader 3: Perhaps you have joined a worship service. Watch and Listen.
You may even have a role in this service.
Is there music? Hear it?
Are their prayers? Say the words to yourself.

Reader 1: This is a church in the world. How to people there talk about the world?
What are their concerns? What do they want to do together in the world?
Walk up to someone in the congregation or gathering and ask.
How do you work for justice? For peace?

Reader 2: Now think of a word or phrase that describes this church.
Say it to yourself as you gently inhale, and again as you exhale.
Breathe and dream, and when you are ready, open your eyes.

Reader 3: While the image is still vivid, write down your word or phrase on the sheet of paper provided in your packet.
Add to that anything else you want to remember from your dream.

Invite people to talk in small groups for 20-30 minutes, sharing their dreams. As a group, think of one or more concrete, practical steps that you can take in your individual lives to move toward that dream

Invite audience members to call out words, phrases that describe this Re-Imagined Church

POETRY

TOPIC POEM

There are times in this life that call forth a poetic response from us. I want to invite us to be in one of those moments together. A Topic Poem is composed of five lines. This first line contains only one word, a noun – and usually the topic of the poem. The second line contains two adjectives relating to the noun. The third line has three verbs. The fourth line has a four word comment. The fifth line is a single word which is synonymous with that used in the first line.

For Example:

Connection

Vibrant, contagious

Living, Challenging, Transforming

Together, We are more

Spirit

AMAZING SONG!

The participants call out two syllable words that are related to a theme, e.g. Sophia, breathing, prayer. The words are arranged in six lines;

The words are then sung to the tune of “Amazing Grace.”

WORD PRAYER

While listening to the presentation, one person is designated to write down a litany of words that the speaker used. After the presentation, those words are read as a litany of remembrance.

MOVEMENT

MORNING WARMUP

Place your legs shoulder width apart
Slightly soften your knees
Sway back and forth
Feeling the earth beneath us
Taking some nice deep breaths
Roll our necks in a circle to one side and then to the other
Roll our shoulders back continuing to breathe deeply and then forward
Do a hand dance with your hands
Reaching up to the sky and stretching
Then bring that back to your center and take another breath.

THE SEASONS

Bring our hands up to the sky with our palms facing the sky.
This symbolizes spring,
a plant growing and reaching to the sky.
When you get top, open your hands.
This is the season of summer,
the season of fruition and blooming.
Then lower them to the ground,
the season of fall and letting go.
And then ground them placing the palms toward the earth.
This is the season of winter,
The season of contemplation and reflection.

BREATH

What happens when . . .
We move holding our breath?
We breathe rapidly?
We breathe through a yawn?
We breathe a sigh?
We breathe groaning?
We breathe laughing?
We breathe wailing?
We breathe sounding?
Inhale then exhale into a movement?
Exhale then inhale into a movement?
We breathe in and out sharing our discoveries?

CATACOMB DANCE

In ancient times the women danced through the catacombs taking two steps forward and one step back. It symbolized the walk with Christ – overall progress is always mixed with some retreat.

INCENSE - THE SPIRIT'S BREATH

Since the fourth century of the early church, the burning of incense has served as a devotional sign of prayer, based on Psalm 141:1-2 "We call upon you, come quickly to us; give ear to our voices when we call to you. Let our prayers be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice."

Light a stick of incense and observe the patterns of the smoke wafting up into the air.

Seeing the incense with our eyes.

Drawing the wafting of air with pencils or crayons.

Blueprinting the feeling of air rising within our bodies.

Expressing what we found in movement to music.

BODY PRAYER

by Grace Carlock

Begin with the Namaste gesture, then use gentle hand movements to indicate the directions described in the prayer.

Thanks be to God for this day!

For all that is above me
For all that is below me
For all that is around me
For all that is behind me
For all that is before me
For all that is within me

I open myself to new experiences
I open myself to new relationships
Being true to the earth
And true to myself.

Thanks be to God for this day!
Thanks be to God for this day!

CIRCLE DANCE

Truly this is our signature piece and if you feel that you are going around in circles, that's part of the process of Re-Imagining! We move in circles.

The tune for the dance is "Holy Manna" (God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens)

Motions for the dance:

Right-together-right, left-together-left,
Arms up to the right, down to the left, Arms up to the right, down to the left,
Right-together-right, left-together-left,
Arms up to the right, down to the left, Arms up to the right, down to the left,
Put palms together with your neighbor and take 8 grapevine steps to the right.
With hands down to the floor then moving up over your head:
clap, clap, clap, clap, clap, clap - clap,clap,clap.

MILK AND HONEY RITUALS

“The oldest of the communion texts of the early church holds a well kept secret in its ancient rubrics. How many cups? Three, not one... the first cup offered to the newly baptized was a cup of water... those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness were given water to drink for the inner washing of the spirit. The third cup is now our one and only, the cup of the new covenant, the chalice of the fruit of the vine. What is missing from our memory is the second cup, a cup of milk and honey. This missing cup was given to ‘the children of God for the healing of the bitterness of the human heart with the sweetness of Christ’s word.’ So reads one of the oldest worship texts we possess.”

Heather Murray Elkins, *Re-Imagining Quarterly Publication*, May 1995

The drinking of milk and honey celebrates the Biblical metaphor for the land of promise.

SOPHIA’S TABLE

by Madelin Sue Martin

Setting the Table with Praise

Each person chooses one of the following phrases as an opening sentence. She may speak a further word about why that phrase speaks to her heart today.

- Praise to Sophia who comes to us in every thought.
- Praise to the one who pervades and permeates all things.
- Praise to Wisdom, who glorifies in herself in the midst of her people.
- Praise to Sophia who is at play everywhere in the world.
- Praise to the one who raises her voice in public squares.
- Praise to Wisdom, who deploys her strength from one end of the earth to the other, ordering things for good.
- Praise to Sophia, who is the tree of life for those who hold her fast.

Offering Gifts from Our Lives

Offer your gift which you have brought: flowers, bread, milk or honey, an object, a cloth, etc. Offer it with a sentence about what experiences or emotions you are bringing to the table today, or you may prefer to come to the table in silence.

Antiphon

Praise, my friend, this holy cup; sorrow’s overthrowing.

This short refrain might be sung after each person speaks about their gifts.

Prayer

All creatures depend on you
To feed them throughout the year.
You provide the food they eat,
With generous hand you satisfy their hunger.
You turn away your face, they suffer.
You stop their breath, they die.

You give breath, fresh life begins.
You keep renewing the world.

(from Psalm 104)

The Meal

Voice: *Raise fruit*

All Sing: Approach me you who desire me, and take your fill of my fruits.
Sophia Blessing (Bless Sophia, dream the vision, Share the wisdom dwelling deep within.)

Voice: *Pour milk into glasses*

I am like a vine putting out graceful shoots, and over the waves of the sea and over the whole earth, and over every people and nation I have held sway.

Song "Sophia Blessing"

Voice: *Pour honey into glasses*

Memories of me are sweet as honey, inheriting me is sweet as the honeycomb.

Song "Sophia Blessing"

Voice: *Raise the bread*

They who eat me will hunger no more, they who drink me will thirst no more.

Song "Sophia Blessing"

Song "Cup of Blessing"

*Each person offers a piece of bread to another, saying:
The bread given for the life of the world.*

Eat and Enjoy

Shalom

Exchange peace in whatever way your group decides.

MILK AND HONEY RITUAL FROM THE 1993 GATHERING
by Hilda Kuester

As a people we acknowledge our humanness
 In the midst of the struggle.
How do we live truthfully and confessionally
 In the face of oppression?
Our capacity to probe and to claim this lived experience,
 Opens us to power and possibility for our lives.
We can then dare to drink and to taste the milk and honey
 Of the land of promise,
Where indeed hope burns through the terror.

And Sophia invites us,
All you who are hungry, all you who are hungry, come.
All you who are thirsty, all you who are thirsty, come.
All you who are empty come.
Come to my table and be filled.
You who desire abundant life,
Come drink milk and honey.
Let the sweetness of my word
Heal all that is bitter and broken within you.
Come all you who are hungry
Come all you who are thirsty
Come all you who are empty
Come.
The song "Cup of Blessing" will be sung while the milk and honey is served.

People of Re-Imagining,
Truly Sophia is amongst us here.
We are filled with Sophia's word,
With Sophia's milk and honey.
Let us proclaim her presence
In sound song and gesture
The "Sophia Blessing" or "Shalom" is sung.

BLESSING OVER MILK AND HONEY

One: Our maker Sophia, we are women in your image:
 With the hot blood of our wombs we give form to new life.
 With the courage of our convictions we pour out our life blood for justice.

Our mother Sophia, we are women in your image:
 With the milk of our breasts we suckle the children;
 With the knowledge of our hearts we feed humanity.
Many: Sing "Sophia, Creator God, let your milk and honey flow..."
One: Our sweet Sophia, we are women in your image:
 With nectar between our thighs we invite a lover, we birth a child;
 With our warm body fluids we remind the world of its pleasures and sensations.

Many: Sing "Sophia, Creator God, let your milk and honey flow..."

One: Our guide, Sophia, we are women in your image:

With our moist mouths we kiss away a tear, we smile with encouragement.

With the honey of wisdom in our mouths, we prophesy a full humanity to all the peoples.

Many: Sing "Sophia, Creator God, let your milk and honey flow..."

(All drink of the milk and honey together at their table. The milk is rice based milk called "Rice Dream," found at most health food stores, and is safe for most people with allergies to milk products.)

THANKSGIVING FOR THE SHARED MILK AND HONEY

Sophia, we celebrate your life-giving energy which pulses through our veins.

We celebrate women attempting to preserve life while surrounded by war, famine and disease.

We celebrate women's willingness to pour out their lifeblood for others;

To celebrate, to fight, and to protect both what they believe in and those whom they love.

Song "Make Wide the Circle"

We celebrate your wisdom poured out upon women for eons.

We celebrate our unique perspectives, intelligence, institutions and processes.

We celebrate our mentors, our guides, our spiritual mothers, our models.

Song "Make Wide the Circle"

We celebrate the nourishment of your milk and honey.

Your abundance drips through your fingers onto us and we in turn feed others.

Through the sharing of this holy manna we enter into community which strengthens and renews us for the struggle.

Song "Make Wide the Circle"

We celebrate the sensual life you give us.

We celebrate the sweat that pours from us during our labors.

We celebrate the fingertips vibrating upon the skin of a love.

We celebrate the tongue which licks a wound or wets our lips.

We celebrate our bodiliness, our physicality, the sensations of pleasure, our oneness with earth and water.

Song "Make Wide the Circle"

All: We celebrate and we dance!

Love! Peace! Let us begin.

(The song "Sanna" can be used instead of "Make Wide the Circle".)

BITING THE APPLE

One: We invite you to honor our mother Eve who risked everything to know.
Many: Let us bite the apple in celebration, for we, like Eve, are created to know.
One: We honor those women from the Bible who showed us the loving, healing place between women.
Many: They risked everything to heal and be healed. Let us bite the apple in celebration, for we, like them are created to heal.
One: The stories of institutional subversion are not only ancient stories but have been lived throughout time.
Many: Within our midst are others who have been created to be curious, to love, to heal and to change the course of events.
One: We listen to each other's stories. We too have stories to share of the risks we have taken, of the acts of subversion we have created.
Many: We bite the apple in celebration, for we also have risked.
One: We claim our power to be ourselves to accomplish God's work.
Many: Sophia, in your presence, we Re-Imagine our institutions to be places of healing, places of refuge.
One: I invite you to share your apples with each other.
If you cut the apple in half horizontally, it reveals a star.

A WORD ABOUT HOPE by Madelin Sue Martin

Hope is

To rejoice that God became one with us.
To know that hope is the companion of faith and love.
To realize that good has more power than evil.
To listen in a way that permits others to trust all over again.
To smell the roses and know that God blesses us as bountifully.
To laugh and cry when fear has been tamed.
To inherit with joy the adoption as children of God.
To be open to the unexpected with less fear.
To advance in age, wisdom, and grace in joyful expectation.
To be aware of love as it is freely given by others of hope.
To strive for the impossible dream, sensing the Spirit's presence.
To let the land we live on be a sign of God's presence in our lives.
To turn the page in life, knowing that God made the first move toward us.
To look forward to better things because God loves the oppressed.
To ask questions, knowing that the answers are not more important.

FEASTING AT SOPHIA'S TABLE

by Diann L. Neu

Pentecost is the birthday of the Christian church, the day the Holy Spirit comes to Her people. This is a Pentecost liturgy that recognizes the presence of the divine Sophia Spirit. WATER, the Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual in Silver Spring, MD, invited thirteen DC area feminist communities together for this celebration. Use this ritual as a model for the Pentecost your community needs to celebrate.

Form two circles of chairs under the trees. In the center put a round altar table with a red cloth and on it put a basket filled with prayer ties, a basket with bread, two goblets of juice and wine, a bowl of fruit, two red napkins and bubbles and snacks for the children. Have a sheet of music for each participant. Invite three women to be bread blessers, two to read..

Call to Gather

One: Welcome to this Pentecost Celebration! Welcome to feasting at Sophia's table. Today we gather in solidarity with those worldwide who are filled with Sophia Spirit.

Sophia Spirit, Holy Spirit, you call to the spirit within us to rise like a spiraling wind. Sophia Spirit, Holy Spirit, come empower us.

Many: Sophia Spirit, Holy Spirit, come empower us.

One: Sophia Spirit, Holy Spirit, you call to the spirit within us to leap like a revolutionary fire. Sophia Spirit, Holy Spirit, come transform us.

Many: Sophia Spirit, Holy Spirit, come transform us.

One: Sophia Spirit, Holy Spirit, you call to the spirit within us to flow through the world like a life-giving breath. Sophia Spirit, Holy Spirit, widen our hearts.

Many: Sophia Spirit, Holy Spirit, widen our hearts.

Song: "Come Sophia Spirit, Come" (adapted by Diann Neu)
(During the song, a dancer blesses the space and welcomes Sophia Spirit.)

Come, Sophia Spirit, come.
Come, all loving Spirit, come.
Come, come, come.

Introductions of Individuals and Groups

We come from a variety of communities today. Let us hear the names of the communities represented here. Call out the name of your group and then add, "Sophia Spirit is here." (Group naming)

Look around. Notice the faces among us. Turn to those around you and introduce yourself by saying, "Hi! I'm _____ (name). Sophia Spirit is here." (Introductions)

Song "Come Sophia Spirit, Come,"
(During the song, a dancer blesses the space and welcomes Sophia Spirit.)

Come, Sophia Spirit, come.
Come, all loving Spirit, come.
Come, come, come.

Setting Sophia's Table of Solidarity

Six women invoke Sophia Spirit by unfolding a cloth from various parts of the world, saying:

Reader 1: Let us call upon Sophia Spirit who dwells on each continent to feast with us at our table today. We set our table in solidarity with women, men and children worldwide.

This cloth is a gift from the Philippines. Come Sophia Spirit, Kuan-Yin of Asia, from the Middle East to Beijing, from the Islands of Japan to the Philippines. Come feast with us.

All: We are in solidarity with you.

Reader 2: This cloth comes from the UN Decade for Women Conference that took place July 1985 in Nairobi, Kenya. Come, Sophia Spirit, Womb of the Universe of Africa, from the land of the Nile in Egypt to the land of freedom in South Africa. Come feast with us.

All: We are in solidarity with you.

Reader 3: This bowl is a gift from a women's liturgy study group in Germany. Come, Sophia Spirit Earth Mother of Europe, from the land of the former Berlin Wall to the highlands of the new Russia. Come feast with us.

All: We are in solidarity with you.

Reader 4: This basket was made by the Acama Native American women in New Mexico for the 1993 Women-Church Conference. Come, Sophia Spirit, Grandmother of North America, from the tip of Mexico to the Arctic Ocean. Come feast with us.

All: We are in solidarity with you.

Reader 5: This serape is from Bolivia. Come, Sophia Spirit, Pacha Mama of South America the highlands of Guatemala to the rim of Antarctica. Come feast with us.

All: We are in solidarity with you.

Reader 6: This silk cloth was a gift from dear friends in Australia. Come, Sophia Spirit, Sun Woman of Australia, from the outback to the seaside. Come feast with us.

All: We are in solidarity with you.

Song and Dance "Sophia as a Breath of God"

Reading: The Pentecost Story, Acts 2:1–21

Setting: Two readers read from their place in the circle.

1: When the day of Pentecost came, they were all gathered in the same place. They came from many communities and regions, young and older, speaking many languages of different professions, religious people who practiced their faith in various ways. They came from all corners of the land, from northern VA, to Washington DC, Ecuador to Silver Spring, Chicago to Mt Rainier, Alaska to Silver Spring. Suddenly they heard the sound of a rushing wind shaking the house where they were. Something that looked like tongues of fire hovered above each one of them.

2: Suddenly, all of them, women, men and children, realized that they were filled with the power of Sophia Spirit and they began to speak in different languages.

1: Hearing this sound, a crowd assembled, devout people from every continent known on earth: Africa, Asia, Europe, South America, North America, Antarctica, Australia. All were amazed and astonished, for all of them heard the words preached in their own language.

2: They heard Chinese! Serbian! Swahili! German!

1: Cherokee! French! Japanese! Spanish!

2: Whether the pilgrims were from large cities or country villages, they heard the disciples proclaiming in their own language the wonderful works of the Spirit.

1: These words of the prophet have come to pass: “In the days to come, it is God who speaks; I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity. Your daughters and sons shall prophesy. The young shall see visions. The old shall dream dreams. I will pour out my spirit and they shall prophesy.”

2: Sophia Spirit was given not only to the early community, but to us as well. For all of us belong to the one body, the body of Sophia–Christ. Whether Jew or Greek, female or male, gay or straight, black, brown, yellow, red, white, differently-abled or able bodied, poor or rich, we have all been baptized into one body by the same Spirit.

1: And that Spirit calls us to proclaim the good news to all people. Whether in known or unknown languages. Whether in the language of the child or the adult, of the haves or have-nots.

2: We are all called to proclaim that Sophia Spirit is rising in all creation. To her be all glory forever and ever.

All: Amen. Blessed Be. Let It Be So.

Sermon and Sharing

Sophia Spirit shares her gifts with each of us and with our communities. Children, girls and boys, come around the table. These snacks and bubbles are symbols of Sophia Spirit. Sophia Spirit is another name for God. She is our friend. Have fun now with these gifts of Sophia Spirit. (*Children play.*)

Some possible questions for consideration

What does solidarity mean? What does it mean to understand each other? Do we need to agree to be in solidarity? How do we choose whom to be in solidarity with? Why do we choose to be in solidarity? Are we in solidarity with non-humans?

Collection

We have shared gifts Sophia Spirit has given to us and to our communities. We know to keep this movement going we need money. This collection will be used for WATER's Women Crossing Worlds project in Latin America. As the basket is passed you may take out a prayer tie and put your money in. Let us now be generous people and share our financial offering with this community and the women of Latin America.

Song

"Make Wide the Circle"

Prayers of the Beloved Gathered Community

Let us make our prayers visible with prayer ties today. As you pray out loud or silently, please tie your cloth to your neighbor's on your right and your left with the ends hanging down to dance with the wind.

We pray for all those who are marginalized because of their culture, language, differing abilities, race, sex, age, sexual orientation, immigrant status or class.

Response: Sophia Spirit, be with them.

We pray for those freedom fighters who love kindness, bring peace and do justice.

Response: Sophia Spirit, be with them.

We pray for those living with AIDS, cancer, addictions and all illness.

Response: Sophia Spirit, be with them.

We pray for our communities of faith, our churches and our denominations.

Response: Sophia Spirit, be with them.

Let us offer other prayers now.

The prayer tie is rolled together and placed on the altar.

Eucharistic Prayer

Three blessers stand in the circle and pray in turn:

1. Blessed are you, Loving and Challenging Friend, Spirit-Sophia.

With joy we give you thanks and praise for creating a diverse world
And for creating women in your image.

You call us to share your story,

So we join all creation in singing your praises:

Song "Bless Sophia"

2. Blessed are you, Womb of All Creation, Spirit-Sophia.

You create women, men and children in your image.
From age to age you form us from your womb;
You breathe your breath of life into us.
And you call us to share your story,
So we join all creation in singing your praises:

Song "Bless Sophia"

3. Blessed are you, God of Our Mothers, Spirit-Sophia.
You call diverse women to participate in salvation history:
Eve, Lilith, Sarah, Hagar, Miriam, Naomi and Ruth,
Mary, Mary Magdalene, Tecla, Phoebe, Hildegard of Bingen,
Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, Sojourner Truth, Joan of Arc,
Maura, Ita, Dorothy, Jean and countless others,
And you call us to share our stories,
So we join all creation in singing your praises:

Song "Bless Sophia"

1. Blessed are you, Creator of all seasons and all peoples, Spirit-Sophia.
You call us each by name
To be prophets, teachers, house church leaders, saints,
And to image your loving and challenging presence.
And you call us to share their stories,
So we join all creation in singing your praises:

Song "Bless Sophia"

2. Blessed are you, Companion on the Journey, Spirit-Sophia.
You have built yourself a house,
You have hewn seven pillars,
You have prepared a rich banquet for us.
And you call us to share your story,
So we join all creation in singing your praises:

Song "Bless Sophia"

*Each blesser puts her script on the table, picks up a bread, drink, bowl of fruit and
small paper with the words, and the three pray together:*

Blessers in unison: Extend your hands toward the bread.

Blessed are you, Holy Bakerwoman, Spirit-Sophia,
In your abundant love you welcome all to come and dine.
You proclaim from the rooftops,
"Come and eat my bread, drink the wine which I have drawn."
And you call us to share your story,
So we join all creation in singing your praises:

Song "Bless Sophia"

Blessers put the bread, drink and fruit back on the table and face into the circle.

3. Come, O Holy Sister, Spirit-Sophia, upon this bread and wine.
Come as breath and breathe your life anew into our aching bones.

Come as wind and refresh our weary souls.
Come as fire and purge us and our church of sexism, racism,
classism, heterosexism, ageism and all evils.
You call us to share your story,
So we join all creation in singing your praises:

Song "Bless Sophia"

1. Come, Soul Sister, Spirit-Sophia,
And bring the new creation:
The breaking of bread,
The raising of the cup,
The doing of justice.
You call us to share your story,
So we join all creation in singing your praises:

Song "Bless Sophia"

2. Eat, drink and partake of the banquet of life.
Receive the love, healing and nourishment of Spirit-Sophia.
(Blessers pass bread and goblets around the group.)

Communion Song: "Bring the Feast to Ev'ry Hillside"

Sending Forth

In solidarity with Sophia Spirit and her people on every continent,
Let us go forth from this sacred circle
To share the feast with the hungry.
To speak Wisdom to church leaders and government officials.
To spark courage and hope in those who need healing.
To tend the bold flames of justice and peace for all.

Greeting of Peace

Let us share and receive Sophia's Spirit by offering one another a greeting of Pentecost Peace. Blow into your hand. Feel Sophia's breath within you. Blow this greeting to the earth and to the world. Let us offer one another a Pentecost greeting of Peace. (*Greeting*)

Song "Guide My Feet"

Feasting

LITANY OF REMEMBRANCE

This litany is distributed in advance so that participants may write down the names of women who have inspired them and the category into which they fall. During the ritual the names of the women are read.

We have come to this gathering on paths forged
By the women who preceded us.
They have made possible this time, this place, this conference.
We remember them.
We remember the forgotten and unnamed women. . .
We remember those women who brought us into life...
We remember those dedicated to the healing arts...
We remember adventurers and risk-takers...
We remember holy women and religious leaders...
We remember preachers...
We remember political leaders, activists, and heads of state...
We remember musicians, dancers and artists...
We remember scientists, engineers, mathematicians...
We remember sportswomen and athletes...
We remember poets and storytellers...
Women from all over the world have been sources of inspiration to us.
We dare not forget them.

SOUNDINGS

by Sue Swanson

Before this guided meditation begins, write each 'sound' word on a slip of paper and hand them out to the community.

Leader: We have listened to the voices as our community gathered here today.

Now we listen to the silence as we begin to focus on our task.
Listen to the soundings of the spirit within you.
Listen for the voices of those who have gone before us.
Tune your heart to hear the needs of God's people today.
How do you respond when you hear the sounds of:

The participants respond with the words written on their slip of paper, pausing between each word for reflection:

Breathing	Whispering	Whimpering	Hissing
Sighing	Echoing	Shouting	Bubbling
Laughing	Echoing	Moaning	Gurgling
Singing	Yawning	Screaming	Howling
Wailing	Crying	Cooing	buzzing

Leader: What other words would you like to add?

Pause for sharing.

Leader: Repeat after me:
We listen to the sounds of the spirit
And then we find our own voice and speak.

**We listen to the sounds of the spirit
And then we find our own voice and speak.**

BEING THE WORD

One: People of Re-Imagining, let us imagine we are gathered around a mammoth campfire telling our stories late into the night. Find four people and form a Talking Circle. Huddle together in circles of four either on the floor or on the chairs.

Birthered in body we are flesh and bone.

Gifted with life we are words, images and sensations;

We are memories and possibilities and songs.

Two: We birth and nurture the sacred in the stories of our lives, our journeys, and our experiences.

Give us our sounds and our voices.

Three: As we speak our stories to each other and to the world, we discover Sophia, our sacred soul mate. Sophia summons forth her wisdom from within us.

One: People of Re-Imagining, as Sophia's word is blessed, so too are we.

Before sharing the word of our stories,

We bless our eyes-

That we may see the word enfleshed in one another.

We bless our ears-

That we may hear the word.

We bless our lips-

That we may speak Sophia's word.

Two: Sophia offers us her guiding wisdom:

Three: My beloved children, listen with your hearts to each other's words. Speak the words which you long to speak.

Talking Circles meet for 20 minutes.

Three: We discover Sophia among us;

We discover Sophia within us.

Our words, our stories weave together to birth a word – one word – that names our shared stories.

Two: Sophia invites us to seek the common words which unite us.

Three: My beloved child, what word within your stories dissolves separateness? What word within your stories weaves those stories together?

One: People of Re-Imagining, we invite you to select a word that summarizes or includes all the stories heard in your group. Write that word on the cards that are being distributed.

One: Each of our stories is unique. Yet these stories connect us in a weaving of relationship.

Two: Wisdom is never given only to the individual. We are never alone. We are not complete. Sophia encourages us.

Three: My beloved children, speak your word to others. Weave your word into a fabric of community.

One: People of Re-Imagining, Spread the word! Take your card with the word upon it to another Talking Circle. Introduce yourselves and share the word that binds your stories, share why that word was chosen.

RE-IMAGINING GOD: Text Collage

Five readers, visually and vocally diverse, among the people (one in each of the four quadrants and one on the platform) begin reading about names, images, reflections on God, interspersing quotes from Beacon Book of Quotations by Women with quotes from women of scripture. The Word is proclaimed from the center platform. After every scripture, there will be silence or ongoing percussion.

Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God.

Elizabeth B. Browning

It is easier to gaze into the sun, than into the face of the mystery of God,
Such is its beauty and its radiance.

Hildegard of Bingen

God I can push the grass apart and lay my finger on Thy heart!

Edna St. V. Millay

Hagar says, "You are a God who sees."

Genesis 16:13

Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee.

Sarah F. Adams

Until I am essentially united with God, I can never have full rest or real happiness.

Julian of Norwich

Home is the definition of God.

Emily Dickinson

Sarah says, "God has given me cause to laugh, and all who hear of it will laugh with me."

Genesis 21:6

How much did I hear of religion as a child? Very little, and yet my heart leaped when I heard the name of God. I do believe every soul has a tendency toward God.

Dorothy Day

I cannot walk an inch without trying to walk to God.

Anne Sexton

Destiny doesn't exist. It's God we need, and fast.

Adelia Prado

Miriam the prophetess, with tambourine in hand, sang, "Sing to God who is covered with glory."

Exodus 15:20

God is not indifferent to your need. You have a thousand prayers, but God has one.

Anne Sexton

God is a God of Lovingkindness.

Anne Roiphe

The soul is kissed by God in its innermost regions.

Hildegard of Bingen

Ruth says, "I will go where you go and stay where you stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God."

Ruth 1:16

i found god in myself / and i loved her / i loved her fiercely.

Ntozake Shange

As truly as God is our Father, so truly is God our Mother.

Julian of Norwich

She makes everything possible.

Helen Reddy

Esther says, "O God, hear the voice of those in despair, and deliver me from my fear."

Esther 14:19

God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you are not looking, or don't know what you looking for. Trouble do it for most folks. I think ...yeah, IT. God ain't a he or a she, but a IT.

Alice Walker

It isn't that I believe God is dead, but God is so silent, has been for so long, and is so hidden. I take it as a sign I must watch in other places or simply tend my small fires until the end.

Mary Virginia Micka

New gods arise when they are needed.

Josephine Johnson

Judith says, "Our God is a God who crushes war, who encamps in the midst of the people."

Judith 16:2

Just as a circle embraces all that is within it, so does the god-head embrace all. No one has the power to divide this circle, to surpass it, or to limit it.

Hildegard of Bingen

Mary says, "My being proclaims the greatness of God, my spirit exults in God my liberator."

Luke 1:46-47

Listen, God love everything you love – and a mess of stuff you don't. But more than anything else, God love admiration. I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice.

Alice Walker

Why indeed must "God" be a noun? Why not a verb – the most active and dynamic of all?

Mary Daly

Wisdom says, "Wisdom is luminous and never tarnished; she willingly lets herself be seen by those who love her and known by those who look for her. She comes first to meet those who look for her."

Wisdom 6:12-13

Invitation to all:

Who is your God?

What does your God sound like? Taste like? Look like?

Name God!

Tell each other at table!

Re-Imagine your God!
In name and image!!

LISTENING TO CREATION

The chairs are arranged in a circle with an altar in the center. One votive candle for each person represents the light of God that they carry. Individual servings of Pop Rocks candy are poured into 1 ounce plastic cups. A spiral or labyrinth is in the center.

Invocation

by Betty Lundeen

Sophia,
To you we come:
You are the Wisdom of God
You are the Whirl of the Spirit
You are the intimate Connection
You are the Star in my Heart

Sophia,
Open our beings to the radiance of your presence
To the guidance of your companionship
To the compassion of your indwelling
To the lighting of your blessed vision.
Sophia,
We walk together!

Sophia Blessing

Now you are invited to walk around the room and bless one another by singing the "Sophia Blessing."

Cacaphony into Symphony

A Reading Based on Genesis 1:1-23

by Coqui Conkey

In the beginning, when God was creating, a great cacophony of sound filled the air. God said, "Let there be stillness," and there was stillness. God heard that the stillness was good and separated the stillness from the sound. God called the stillness quiet and silence and the sound God called noise.

There was quiet and there was noise, the first day.

And God said, "Let the sounds within the noise find order." And the sounds that kept the beat, that moved with the heartbeat of God gathered together. God heard that it was good and God called the beat rhythm.

There was quiet and there was noise, the second day.

And God said, "Let the sounds be separate." And God gathered the sounds from the wind blowing through small spaces and the sounds from the vibrating of threads and strings. God gave each its voice and range of notes. God heard that it was good and named the sounds tone.

There was quiet and there was noise, the third day.

And God said, “Let the sounds of creation be heard together.” And the tones of wind and vibrations and the rhythm of beating came together and separated in ways that were pleasing. From cacophony there was symphony. God heard the sound together yet not the same. God heard that it was good and called it harmony.

There was quiet and there was noise, the fourth day.

And God said, “Let there be sounds of creatures in the waters and of birds in the air.” The waters were filled with the bubbling of air rising to the surface, with the movement of fins and tails, and of great splashes as creatures leaped to the sky and returned, and with the calls of one creature recognizing the other. The airs above were filled with the rustling of feathers and the buzzing of wings and with the many sounds of the birds of the air, of raucous voice and of soothing song. God heard all the sounds from the water and the air. God heard that they were good and blessed them.

There was quiet and there was noise, the fifth day.

And God said, “Let there be sounds of creatures upon the land.” The earth was filled with the sounds of all manner of creatures passing, the sound of slithering and crawling, of leaping and stomping. The air was filled with the sounds of their voices – hisses and barks, roars and trumpets. And God heard that it was good.

And God said, “Let us make humankind in our image with ears to hear and voice to speak.” So God created humankind in God’s own image. God gave humankind all manner of voice – soprano and bass, alto and tenor, tuneful and monotone. God said, “Listen, I have given you every sound that creature and wind and beat can make. Hear them all and tune your voices in response.” And it was so. God heard everything that God had made and it was very good.

There was quiet and there was noise, the sixth day.

Thus were the heavens and earth filled with noise and stillness, rhythm, tone, and harmony and with the voices and movements of all the creatures. And on the seventh day God finished the work and God rested. God blessed the seventh day and called it Holy. For in the seventh day, God hears all of the sounds that God calls forth. God hears that cacophony and the harmony and the symphony. God hears the beating of hearts, the whistle of the wind, and the vibration of the threads. God hears the sounds of all of God’s creatures individually and collectively, in dissonance and in harmony. God hears the sound of the people calling out in their own voices, tuning to respond to the sounds all around, making noises that we send forth to our Creator. God listens. God hears. God says, “It is good. It is very good.”

Song

“From My Mother’s Womb”

Exploration of Sound

We are wonderfully made!

All of the parts of our ears work together to form the sense of hearing – the outer ear, the sound trumpet, the auditory channel, the barriers for insects, the vibrating eardrum, the tiny bones of the inner ear, the spiral cochlea – a labyrinth leading to deep listening and balance, the nerves that carry sound to the brain at lightening speed.

Each person is invited to take and eat the Pop Rocks and listen to the parts of the inner ear as they explode in their mouths. This is designed to give participants a greater sensitivity to sound.

Talking Circles

Listening is an activity of the heart, not just the ear.

What is the sound landscape of your day? How do sound and silence interact?

What sounds do you avoid?

What sounds do you long to hear?

Benediction

by Betty Lundeen

Go now, knowing that the glory of Sophia is within us,

She is the source of grace and peace.

Mother of love, we look to You,

Feeling your power and wisdom

As we live out this day. Amen.

RE-IMAGINING FROM OUR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDERED SISTERS AND BROTHERS

God’s grace extends to all people. Nobody is excluded.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered members are invited to bring forward scarves.

We mourn that some of us who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered are not able to come forward because of some oppressive structures that have silenced us.

As the rainbow scarves pass the tables, we invite you to stand, as you are able, in solidarity.

Because Christian institutions have historically devalued the gifts and stifled the voices of Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people, we hold our identity as Christian and lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgendered in creative ambiguity.

We wish to claim our spiritual and sexual wholeness, to proclaim the goodness of our lives, our ministries and our relationships.

We wish to empower ourselves and all of you to challenge the oppressive structures of the churches and institutions to which we belong.

We decry the systemic evil that perpetuates our disconnections.

As we tie our disconnected, multicolored scarves together,

We seek to partner with justice-minded sisters and brothers world-wide to further the healing and liberation of all creatures and the earth, especially those of other marginalized groups both within and beyond our churches.

We give thanks to our brown mother, our inspiration, who invites each of us to celebrate our erotic powers with joy and with gratitude to further God's Kin-dom. Amen.

PRAYER LITANY ABOUT RACISM

- One: Sometimes when I come to a place of prayer, eager to know the shining countenance of the Holy One's face, I find that my God is weeping.
- Two: Why is this so, I ask anxiously?
- Three: In seeking Her presence, I realize Her hands are tied together!
- Four: Her creativity, Her glorious justice-making hands are bound up.
- One: What a heart-breaking sight. I am frozen by such a picture.
- Two: Slowly Her thoughts enter mine as I seek Her presence:
- Sophia: My little ones have misused the sacred power given to them. For those with pale skin have squandered my resources, claimed the seats of power, and shaped institutions of government for their benefit.
- Three: I stretch out my hands to comfort my weeping, wounded God.
- Four: I seek to distract Her with words of praise. But She says:
- Sophia: Without life-giving justice, without sharing of power, there is no comfort for me. There is no peace in heaven or on earth.
- One: What are we being asked to do, those of us who are white and privileged? (pause)
- Two: What are we being asked to do on this new day, in this New Creation? (pause)
- Three: O Divine Wisdom, open our eyes and our ears;
Open the doors of our hearts and minds.
- Four: That we might express your longing for oneness, your longing for love in this universe.
- One: As we think about racism we have work to do.
- Two: We carry the baggage of society – the obvious and the subtle teachings of racism.
- Three: We are called by Sophia, Creator God, to unpack the knapsack that carries our obvious and subtle racism.
- Four: We are called by Sophia, Creator God, to unpack the knapsack – freeing us to stop the injustice of racism.

VISION KEEPING LITANY

- All: And so together
- 1: We resist oppression.
- 2: We dream new dreams.
- 1: We find hope in community.
- 2: We insist that we shall not be silenced.
- 1: We shall not be deluded or appeased.
- 2: We continue to dare to risk.
- 1: We discern the voice of the Spirit.
- 2: We empower people, not seize power.
- 1: We reflect on and learn from our experience.
- 2: We listen to the experience of those different from us.
- 1: We embrace the celebrations that emerge,
even in the midst of our struggles.
- All: We build solidarity by linking communities –
Vision keeping process.

LAMENT

We cry to You, Holy One, Planetary Womb of the Sacred, Darkness who enfolds us:
Within You all things are formed.

Truly You are the Mother of All, As You live, so do we live.

Strengthen us; heal us by Your fires within.

As church we have professed to be in solidarity with women.

Yet, at the close of this decade, too many of our offices and orders remain closed to women, especially women of color.

We have called on You, the Holy One Encompassing All,
and we have heard others say, "You are not Christians! You are not welcome! You may not destroy the faith we bear!"

We come here tonight to keep faith with these, with all, with any who call themselves "Christian."

To you who leave the churches, who can no longer tolerate ambivalence, we cry out,

"No more! Come, be with us here! Now!"

Enrage us, Holy Mystery – us, to birth the Body,

The Church in solidarity with all who believe,

All whom no church commemorates."

We cry out for women whose choices are eroded by circumstance.

We cry for women for whom abortion is a necessary choice. We cry, in support and solidarity with women and men who are working in clinics, and with all women who have had abortions or who have had to even so much as contemplate an abortion. We are with you.

We cry out for women of alternative genders and sexualities, for women with alternative family systems and structures, for women who know aloneness too well, for women who never find time for themselves, for women whose roles do not fit them or who do not fit their roles. We extend to them love, and space, and comfort.

We cry out for our sisters who have fought, and continue to fight, for ethnic and racial justice and for those who live with the daily consequences of an oppressive and intolerant world. We cry for equity and for a sensitivity and a vision which sees beyond skin and into heart.

We cry out that more women and children than ever in the world's history now live in poverty, even as national economies are declared "healthy" and "robust." We know well that remuneration for the work of too many provides neither a living wage nor a fair distribution of earnings, goods, profits, and resources. Here, we stand ready to make change.

We cry out for women who are victims of a violent world society. We cry out for those whose souls are among us, and for those who face fists of rage in their homes. We cry for mercy for these women.

Enlarge our minds and hearts, we cry! May all who are homeless, mentally ill, abused, or afflicted in any way find a home among us and be supported by what we do here.

For those who have endured and continue to endure injustice because they have sought to bring justice, we cry out!

Bless us today and tomorrow.

TURNING OUR WORLD UPSIDE-DOWN by Kathleen Tomlin

Re-Imagining our economic relationships is a topsy-turvy exercise. It means imagining a world where competition is exchanged for cooperation. It is humanity agreeing that we are bound with the earth in a universe that is one fabric. It means rethinking what work is and what brings dignity to work. It is turning the world upside down and shaking the pockets of the rich and powerful in such a way that they never become quite so full again. It means that those who are struggling to survive will have their basic needs of housing, health care, food and education satisfied.

In an ever increasingly global marketplace, this kind of major revolution in our way of being and thinking may seem impossible. But globalization – lowest wages, lowest prices, unsustainable specialization – is a choice. We make choices to participate in the current arrangement almost every hour of every day. But there is an alternative. We could instead choose to honor the global common good in a way that values cooperation and the spirit that weaves our lives together as one. The globalization that oppresses could give way to a globalism that embraces.

We've all seen catalogs, particularly around the holiday season, that urge us to buy from co-ops, locally owned markets, and other worker-owned initiatives that replace the multinational conglomerate retailer. These small entrepreneurial endeavors stand in significant contrast to the sophisticated appeals to create needs out of our wants. These comparatively small enterprises remind us that individual and local decisions do make an impact in a global economy.

A Ritual for Re-Imagining Our Economic Relationships

Prior to the gathering: Facilitator and participants gather pictures that represent the following four categories: luxury, necessity, enough and share.

Setting: The group should sit in a circle. In the middle of the circle is a large circle of paper or string that is divided into four quadrants marked luxury, necessity, enough and share.

Facilitator We are gathered here to reflect on material possessions. Some of these possessions are basic to our lives, some enhance our lives, some complicate our lives, and some deprive others of a decent livelihood. We know that our attitudes toward consumption, needs, and wants are deeply rooted in our life's experiences. We share our perceptions of these pictures in order to get in touch with that which is enough, that which is unnecessary.

The group is invited to build a temporary mosaic and share their stories. Participants are asked to choose pictures from among all the pictures brought, describe why each fits into a category, and tell how it touches their own economic story. The conversation will probably include different perspectives on the same image. Share the differences. Share the commonalities.

Facilitator: Weaving memory and reality, we pray:
For those among us who are oppressed.
Response: We beg for what is ours in justice.
Facilitator: For those among us who are oppressors,
Response: We beg for forgiveness;
Facilitator: For our foremothers and forefathers who suffered at the hands of the rich and famous,
Response: We beg for clarity and truth;
Facilitator: For our foremothers and forefathers who built their wealth on the toil of others without sharing the benefits.
Response: We beg to let go;
Facilitator: For the nations of the world who seek to control global trade without extending benefits to other nations,
Response: We plead for dialogue and power relationships turned topsy-turvy;
Facilitator: For our world so bent on the profits of competition rather than the prophets of the common good,
Response: We plead for justice and a world at peace because everyone has enough.
All: Divine Spirit, we do pray for humanity. We know in our deepest souls that we are bound with the earth in a universe that is one fabric. Give us the courage to resist the temptations of "too much." Connect us to one another so that we may act into a new way of being.

THE SOUNDS OF MONEY: A LITANY by Rose Tillemans

This litany is for one or more readers and a chorus of five or six women. You will need a pouch of coins and bills (which participants might like to offer and then contribute where it may be needed) and a metal container.

Chorus: The sounds of money are heard in the land. We stop. We listen.
Reader: Two quarters clink as they drop into the coin slot on the city bus. A bent, elderly woman has paid her fare. She holds up her Medicare card to prove to the driver that she is over sixty-five. The bus heaves ahead with noisy urgency.
Chorus: The sounds of money are heard in the land. We stop. We listen.
Reader: At the Casino, coins flush out in rapid succession into a metal trough the woman holds. It's a payoff! Clink, clank, clang. The woman squeals with delight! Again and again she feeds her loot back into the machine. "Holy Mother, please," she whispers, "my gas bill, my car payments." But nothing comes. No more clinks, clanks and clangs. Only sobs.
Chorus: The sounds of money are heard in the land. We stop. We listen.

Reader: It's Peter's Pence Sunday. A woman in the pew hears the priest announce, "You must all be generous today and share your money with Our Holy Father the Pope. Remember that the widow in the Bible gave her last coin for God." The woman sighs, then closes her eyes and moans. She hears the heavy, even steps of ushers, stomp, stomp, stomp to the front of the church with their baskets. Nearer and nearer and now very near, the soft flutter of bills and checks dropping into the Peter's Pence baskets. The woman does not open her eyes.

Chorus: The sounds of money are heard in the land. We stop. We listen.

Reader: A woman unclasps her billfold and lifts from it a five, ten ones, and a handful of quarters, nickels, dimes and pennies to pay for her groceries. The coins clatter onto the checkout counter as they spill from her hand. The cashier frowns. A young boy bags the few groceries. The woman takes the bag and motions for her small child to follow her. "Mommy, Mommy, I want more!" she whimpers. "Why can't we buy more?"

Chorus: The sounds of money are heard in the land. We stop. We listen.

Reader: A young woman stands at a dimly lit street corner waiting, waiting for a car to come by to pick her up. She thinks of her baby crying at home to be fed. Tonight she might be lucky and get a trick or two. She hates what she must do. A man drives up, squeaks his brakes, and stops. The young woman slides in beside him, and they head for a motel.

Chorus: The sounds of money are heard in the land. We stop. We listen.

Reader: A child of three discovers how to open her piggy bank. The copper coins spill out onto the kitchen table and down to the floor. Her parents, alarmed at the clatter, rush into the kitchen. The child, scooping up her coins, looks at them and beams. "I buy a Barbie doll now," she chirps.

Chorus: The sounds of money are heard in the land. We stop. We listen.

Reader: She clicks her ball-point pen and carefully writes a check for one thousand dollars. She rips it from her checkbook and slips it into her purse. Her Mercedes Benz starts with a gentle purr. She heads for the office of a women's political action organization where she'll deliver her check and stay to volunteer for the day.

A woman comes forward and empties a pouch of money into the metal container. Then silence.

Chorus: The sounds of money are heard in the land. We stop. We listen.

Reader: I ask this group to name women or places where poverty is rampant.
Names and places are spoken
Let us now silently bless the money poured out and pray that in whatever economic status we find ourselves, we might think of it as gifts by which we bless our own lives and the lives of all our sisters and brothers.

Unison Prayer

We ask for light and guidance
to use our money with care for others
and prudence for ourselves.
May our goal be to walk

with a consciousness of those
who daily struggle for survival.

KEYS TO AUTHORITY

by Lonne Murphy-Burkhardt

All are seated comfortably in a circle or in a living room or around the dining room table. In the center, have enough keys and strings (ribbon, shoelace, yarn) for each person. Take a time of quiet to clear the mind of its many levels of tasking, worrying, and wondering. If you do not know each other, go around the circle and say your name. Put on music and do free-form dancing to integrate body, mind and spirit. Just move about, feeling the freedom of the body in dance.

Introduction

Leader: The ritual at hand focuses on authority. It flows from the belief that God is the Source of all authority, which is then shared with all the people. The fundamental empowerment so graciously bestowed upon us was that of *becoming* children of God through rebirth in water and the Spirit. This is an act of *being*. And this is the source of fundamental equality among all people. At birth and at baptism, each person is delegated a facet of God's authority through a special talent or ability, a gift or genius, for the good of all people. In the early Christian church, this authority was delegated for the purpose of service so that the needs of the group were met by each according to their gifts. This way the community needs were met and yet no one was burdened with too much "authority." Two thousand years later, we are in great need of reform in our practice and exercise of authority. And so we begin with prayer.

Opening Prayer

All: Loving God, Tremendous Mystery, Source and Center of all that lives, we praise and thank you for the gift of your Spirit breathing in our hearts. In our identity and in our action we are linked to you and to one another. Be with us in this time we have set aside to pray and play, to ponder and embrace authority anew. Amen.

Readings

- Isaiah 22:19-24 (*Key of David*)
From the *Jerome Biblical Commentary*: The key, symbol of the major-domo's authority to grant or deny admittance to the royal presence, was worn over the shoulder. The images used here to denote the authority of the steward are similar to those of Matthew 16:19. (A major-domo was the highest ranking steward to the royalty and was entrusted with keys to the palace.)
- Matthew 16:19 (*Keys given to Peter, more rock than light*) and/or
- Corinthians 12:4-13 (*A variety of gifts but always the same Spirit*)

A First Response Activity

All choose a key and a string from the collection in the center, place their keys on their strings, and place the strings around their necks. All are invited to brainstorm the different types of keys they have had throughout their lives, such as a skeleton key, radiator key, roller

skate key, “church” key, house key, car key, Florida Keys, key to my heart and so forth. Go around the circle and share (appropriately) about the key.

All Reflect: How does this key open the doors to “where I live today?”

A Second Response Activity

Ask everyone to locate their authority issues: in church, in government, in the medical establishment, in the school or university system, in the postal service (“male-service”), in children, in spouse, and so forth. Once located, ask them to write a nursery rhyme or limerick about it. Share these examples.

Vatican City-

What a pity!

Her treasures are locked

And they’ve lost the key

In the Holy See!

Or

Sally and Anita went up the Hill

They’d finally had their fill

The frozen chosen

In the state of Dozin’

Said, “Uff dah! Dose girls should be stopped!”

Re-Imagine that!!!!

Or

Friar Tuck

In all his muck

Ate too much butter-knife steak

The “Pine Curtain” came up

And he can no longer sup’

Without the FBI.

Perhaps these verses could be written on “authority-issues-tissues” made by Charmin or some other “authori-T.P.” When all have had ample time to create their verses, go around the circle and create a litany with them as follows:

All: Mistress Merry,

Quite contrary?

You go, Girlfriend!

One: Reads the verse just written.

All: Oh, oh! Na, na, Na, na, Na, na!

Detel-eatel, eatel-eatel, eatel-eatel-eeee!

Hee hee hee hee!

Repeat until each person’s verse has been read. After much laughter and glee, have a ceremony acknowledging each person’s authority and bestowing support and encouragement for that person to go forward, exercising her or his genius/talent/gift with authority.

One person begins: I acknowledge that I am currently an authority on _____, and to the best of my ability I will live and function in the gift for the good of all.

As this person moves the key so it hangs down the back, the rest of the group responds.

All: We acknowledge you as the authority on _____, and we lovingly encourage you in your role as major-domo!
When all have spoken and been encouraged, conclude with high authori-tea!

A COMMUNION OF FORBIDDEN FRUITS

By Fayette Maki

Gather around a table which has been set with a cloth, perhaps of two-thirds world origin. At the center, place a bowl of apples, a knife, candle, matches, and colored paper ribbons (1"-2" wide strips). A talking stick would be helpful for times of sharing. The voices below are preferably read by different persons.

One Voice: We gather here today to reclaim those parts of ourselves and of creation that have been cast off, made fun of, abused, and demonized. Whenever powerlessness is experienced by a culture, those issues, concepts, or persons understood in order for the mainstream to regain its power. This has been the experience of women in patriarchal cultures. As women we have been disempowered so that others (both male and female) can feel powerful. That taking of others' power is Sin. We claim today our lives and our power. We name what is the real source of sin – powerlessness. We Re-Imagine a world where persons are not marginalized and cast in demonic roles because of their difference. The results of our Re-Imagining will have implications for how we understand salvation and our need for it.

One Voice: I invite you to name the “powerless,” those who have been cast out, those who have suffered abuse, those who have been demeaned and demonized because of their difference. I invite you to light a candle in honor or memory of each one named.

Those gathered name the many peoples, creatures, concepts, and experiences where power has been taken by the powerful.

One Voice: Our church and our world have given women the message that to be whole they must be connected – connected to a man, preferably. This has demeaned women's integrity and forced men to deny their wholeness and integrity without women. Our wholeness is dependent, not on our connection to others, but on our connection to the Sacred One. We are connected to others through our connection to the Sacred. I invite you to name those times when you have been fragmented, splintered, made less than whole by experiences in the church. As you name those experiences, hold one of the candles of the “powerless” or the hand of someone next to you, remembering that our strength lies in our solidarity and connection.

Those gathered name experiences within the church where they have been fragmented.

One Voice: Evil comes in many forms – human evil, institutional evil, and spiritual evil. Evil thrives on deception. Truth-telling is essential to counter evil no matter what form it takes. In the story of Adam and Eve, Eve is blamed for eating the apple, a symbol of knowledge. Knowledge or the pursuit of knowledge was understood as evil. I invited you now to tell a

story where you encountered evil. Perhaps it is a story of blame, such as Eve's. Perhaps it is a story of cultural shaming, such as the woman with the flow of blood. Perhaps it is a story where lies and truth were so woven together that separating the strands was nearly impossible. On the paper ribbons on the table, name the evil you have experienced. Use more than one ribbon if needed. Then tell your story. Reflect on how power and powerlessness, connectedness and autonomy were a part of your experience. As you tell your story, take an apple from the bowl, cut it in sections and eat with your table companions.

Those gathered tell their stories. This will take longer than the other sharing. Allow adequate time for all to be heard.

One Voice: We gather together those who have felt disempowered, those whose power has been stolen, and those who have taken power. We gather together those who have experienced evil in all its various guises. In solidarity with all those who have been oppressed, let us Re-Imagine a world where power is shared, not taken; where the wholeness and integrity of each individual is respected and honored; where evil cannot find a home to lodge. I invite you to imagine a world where you can make a difference in the world around you. Name that difference that you can make. Name the gifts that you bring to a Re-Imagined world. As you name the gifts you bring, take your ribbon or that of another and light it from the flame of the candles of the powerless. Put it in the bowl in the middle as it burns.

As each person names their gifts and gives their vision of a re-imagined world, extinguish one of the flames of the powerless. All the candles should be extinguished by the end of the re-imagining.

One Voice: As we hold those oppressed and those who are oppressors in our hearts and minds, let us pray together that we may find compassion to speak the truth in love, the energy to work for justice, and the strength of heart to make peace.

A prayer may be said at this time using a refrain such as "Holy Mother, deliver us from the evil of injustice so we may be instruments of peace." As the prayer is said, the ashes of the ribbons may be used to place a mark of peace on each person.

A RITUAL CONSIDERING POWER
by Nancy Berneking

Scripture

One: Ephesians 6:12-13 - For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand.

A Litany for the Powers and Principalities

All: Steel strong, rock hard,
It thrusts its structure toward the stars.

One: She came one day with flowers growing happily in a basket of peat moss. She set her basket on the ground, dug up clods of hard clay, and replaced them with the beauty in her basket. She went away with her basket now filled with the dusty clods to be recycled into new life.

All: Steel strong, rock hard,
It thrusts its structure toward the stars.

Another One: She came again the next day, her basket filled with more flowers, more peat moss. Again she dug up clods. Again they were exchanged for beauty in her basket.

All: Steel strong, rock hard,
It thrusts its structure toward the stars.

Another One: A third day she came. Her friends, having seen the beauty she had planted, came with her, carrying their own baskets of beauty. More beauty was planted at the base of the structure. More clods were hauled away.

All: Steel strong, rock hard,
It thrusts its structure toward the stars.

Another One: Faithfully, she came with her friends day after day. Those inside the structure passed by them occasionally, patting them on their heads. "How sweet," they would murmur. "How nice that they keep busy."

All: Steel strong, rock hard,
It thrusts its structure toward the stars.

Another One: Time passed, the flowers thrived. The peat moss grew rich with moisture. The dusty air was gone. The sweet, spongy smell of a bog welcomed all who came near.

All: Steel strong, rock hard,
It thrusts its structure toward the stars.

Another One: One morning the sun was hidden by clouds. The wind blew, the rains came; the storm was intense.

All: Steel strong, rock hard,
It thrusts its structure toward the stars.

Another One: After many inches of rain had fallen, the structure began to sway. Slowly the footings gave way, and the structure fell. When the sun returned, the flowers surrounding the ruins sparkled happily. Beauty and the elements were standing together in harmony. How sweet it was.

All: Steel strong, rock hard,

It thrusts its structure toward the stars.

Naming the Structures

One: We name the structures, the powers and principalities, that need to fall.

All: We resist... (Members of the group name the structures within society that they would like to see dismantled.)

Naming the Beauty

One: Each of us brings beautiful gifts that can transform these structures.

Each One: I bring my gifts of ... (Each member of the group names her gifts, such as patience, passion, energy, music-making, dancing, etc. Depending on the climate and season, as each person states her gifts, she might be given a small potted plant or a bulb to plant.)

All: Faithfully, we stand together, working in harmony with love. Sage sweet, rose hardy, we plant our beauty beneath the stars.

WHAT SHALL WE DO?

by Coqui Conkey

Both of the prayers in this ritual are reflections on I Samuel 2:1-10, Hannah's Song. You may want to read this Scripture before, between, or after the ritual.

All: Maker of Justice, what shall we do?

Where will we stand?

How will you judge our actions?

One: The conflicts of your people are many.

Nation wars against nation, race battles race.

The wealthy fear the impoverished.

Men and women work against each other.

We have divided the human community

And threaten to tear it apart.

All: Lover of Justice, What shall we do?

Where will we stand?

How will you judge our actions?

One: When we feed the hungry, shelter the homeless,

Clothe the naked and heal the sick,

Share our wealth, tend our environment,

See beyond race and gender,

Set aside weapons, stand against power that is used to oppress,

Pray

Is that enough?

All: Giver of Justice, What shall we do?

Where will we stand?

How will you judge our actions?

One: We will raise up those who have been put down and

Gather together those who have been pushed away.

We will sit together, at last, and feast at Your table of honor

Set before those who follow the ways of justice and peace.

All: Maker, Lover, Giver of Justice, What shall we do?

Where will we stand?
How will you judge our actions?

Take time to reflect. How would you answer these questions? What other ways can you see that humans have divided their communities? What actions of healing and justice do you want to see happening? In what actions do you participate? What vision do you have for a world of justice and peace?

You may want to reflect by writing or drawing. You may choose to reflect by sharing as a group.

After a time of reflections, we respond in prayer for God to continue to give us new visions. In the following prayer, different people may be voice 1 and voice 2 for each stanza. Or you may choose to have a leader read one voice and the group respond as the other voice. Or half the group could read Voice 1 and the other half read Voice 2.

Voice 1: Topsy-turvy my world, O God.
 Let me see everything as
 Though I walked on my hands.
 (Active option: try standing on your hands or head or while sitting, put
 your hands on the floor and look around.)

Voice 2: Then right me back up so that
 I cannot forget the vision
 Of the world seen upside down.

Voice 1: Spin my world, O God.
 Let me see everything as
 Though I were whirling dizzy.
 (Active option: Stand up and spin to be dizzy.)

Voice 2: Then stop and settle me so that
 I cannot forget the vision
 Of the world blurred into one.

Voice 1: Head-over-heels my world, O God.
 Let me see everything as
 Though I were turning somersaults.
 (Active option: turn somersaults)

Voice 2: Then set me up so that
 I cannot forget the always changing vision
 Of the world set head-over-heels.

All: Topsy-turvy our world, O God.
 Set it spinning into a new oneness.
 Set our world head-over-heels, O God,
 And set it back in rightness.
 Then let us never forget the vision
 Of a new world topsy-turvied,
 Dizzy-spun, Somersaulted head-over-heels. Amen.

Even if all of a group is not physically able to act out this prayer, I hope that some will choose to put body as well as soul into this. Our imaginations carry us far, but we sometimes need to remind ourselves what it is to be upside down, dizzy, and head-over-heels! Have some fun while you work!

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE
by Becky Myrick

*Above all else then:
Be prepared at all times
For the gifts of God
And be ready always for new ones.
For God is a thousand times more ready
To give than we are to receive.
For the person who has learned to let go
Nothing can hinder.
-Meister Eckhart*

Resurrection in daily life is about letting *go* of that which keeps us from God and from our own fullness and faithfulness and letting *in* the reality that God is giving us abundant gifts, gifts that bring new life at all times.

Start your ritual by reading the above words. Then ask the participants, who can be standing or seated, to breath deeply and slowly at their own pace. Pay attention to places of tension or heaviness and “shake out those parts,” moving the body more easily afterwards. Again pay attention to breathing. If they wish, participants may use the mantra “Letting in” (inhalation), and “Letting go” (exhalation). Do this silently for about three minutes. Then ask people to stay in silence, being open to the Spirit for another five to fifteen minutes. If you like, accompany the silence with a quiet drumbeat, with a rhythm like the human heart.

Next, pass baskets of stones around the room and ask people to choose one. Then read the passage of the women going to the tomb that had been blocked by a rock and finding the stone rolled away. (Matt. 28:1-10). Read it a second time. Share a few words of reflection, if you like, but only a few! Then have people form groups of three or four and talk about what the passage means to them or has meant to them in the past.

Now, have five designated people come to the front with their rocks for a “stepping stones” scene. Ask the group to imagine that the five people are standing before a rushing river. This river is very fast and furious, with strong currents. They have no idea how deep or shallow it is. This river represents *fear* and the *unknown*. Ask everyone to take a moment to see the river in the mind’s eye and listen to its very real sounds.

Next, have them imagine having to cross this river. Tell them, “It is essential to get to the other side or you will be unable to fulfill one of your greatest dreams in life, which you are so close to having. Pay attention to what it feels like in your body to think of crossing the river – without a bridge, without a boat. But you do have stepping-stones, hard places on which to stand. Feel the stone in your hand. It may seem small, but it is solid and reliable and will prove to be very sturdy.”

Now, with the stone in hand, each of the five people says a few words about a “stepping-stone” in life – something which gave support or security or an event which offered new hope – and then places the stone on a nearby table. After each person has spoken, the five clasp hands and pretend they are crossing a river together, maybe two or three at a time, stepping on imaginary rocks until they get to the other side. Be playful or sacred or solemn, but be present to the experience. When they get to the other side, do some celebratory gesture or song or sounds. Share in a closing song, reading, or ritual (communion perhaps, or a river song, such as “Wade in the Water”).

If it is appropriate to the occasion, conclude by asking people to write down their thoughts and feelings in a journal.

“Above all else then:
Be prepared at all times
For the gifts of God
And be ready always for new ones.”

FORGIVENESS RITUAL

by Maria LaSala

Prayer for the Gathering

One: Holy Spirit, renewing energy, by you we are born again as daughters of God. You make us living temples of your presence. You pray within us prayers too deep for words.

Many: In returning and rest,
In quietness and confidence,
Shall be our strength.

One: Be still and know that God is here.

Many: Be still and know that God is here.

One: Be still and know that God is here.

Scripture

2 Corinthians 5:17-21, 6:1-2

For anyone who is in Christ there is a new creation; the old creation has gone and not the new one is here. It is all God's work. It was God who reconciled us ... through Christ and gave us the work of handing on this reconciliation. In other words, God in Christ was reconciling the world...not holding our faults against us, and has entrusted to us the news that all are reconciled. So do not neglect the grace of God that you have received. For God says: at the favorable time I have listened to you; on the day of salvation I came to your help. Well, now is the favorable time; this is the day of salvation.

Song

"O Lord, Hear My Prayer"

Prayers of Forgiveness

We ask forgiveness for all those times we have closed our hearts to the promptings of the Spirit and narrowed our horizons to what has been comfortable and safe.

We ask forgiveness for our failure to be risk takers often.

We ask forgiveness for the times we have been bitter, for the times we manipulated others to achieve our own ends.

We ask forgiveness for the violence around us and within us and for all those occasions when we failed to make peace.

We ask forgiveness for our smugness, which gives rise to revolutions.

We ask forgiveness for all the injustice we perpetuate and for upholding values the Gospel abhors.

We ask forgiveness for all those times when your Word remained mute in us while the world awaited the uplift of its song.

We ask forgiveness for our cluttered lives and for our fear of approaching you empty-handed.

We ask forgiveness for our lack of warmth that inhibits a welcoming spirit.

We ask forgiveness for failing to be fully alive to our potential, for refusing to be a people poured out for the sake of the Gospel.

Time for Reflection

Blessed be the letting go of old hurts and pains. What do we want to leave behind?
What do we need forgiveness for? What have we learned and want to take with us?

A bowl of fruit and nuts is passed. Eat that which is good and to be taken forward and throw shells into the bowl as a sign of truly letting go of old hurts and pains.

Song

“O Lord, Hear My Prayer”

Assurance of Grace

But now it is Shaddai who speaks, “Come back to me with all your heart, fasting, weeping, mourning. Let not your hearts be broken.”

Blessing

May the blessings of God we have experienced throughout our lives enable us now to trust in Her continued blessing, in which She gives us life and enables us to flourish.

WORSHIP WITH SYMBOLS OF ORDINARY LIVING

By Maren Tirabassi

Invite the participants to bring one or more old keys. Gather a circle of chairs around a low table covered with a white cloth. On the table, place an empty basket, a basket for the keys, a basket of Band-Aids (choose colorfully designed ones), a stack of paper plates that can be written on, stamp pads in several colors, pencils, and an inflatable or cloth globe. Place a small candle before each participant.

Gathering

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

Pass the empty basket around the circle and ask participants to put in their watches. Those who do not have a watch may use an appointment book or calendar as a symbol of setting aside this time to make it holy. Light the candles around the room with each person saying her/his name and this affirmation, "For me, this is the time for..."

Prayer

O God, hear our hopes.

Receive the gift of our time.

Hold gently the wick of our spirits

So that we may always keep your flame alive. Amen.

Time of Confession and Reconciliation

Read Luke 19:5-7

Pass out the paper plates. Invite participants to write in the center of the plate the name or category of person with whom they would not be comfortable sitting down at the banquet of life. Write a prayer on the plate which includes this information. Do not self-censor the prayers. Some participants will want to read their prayer. After each prayer respond, "This is table-grace."

Time of Intercession

Read Revelation 22:1-2.

Pass out the unwrapped Band-Aids. Pass around the globe and ask each person to place a Band-Aid on the globe and name what needs healing or blessing. These may be global, community or individual needs.

Offering

Read 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

During a time of silence, let the participants lean forward and play with the stamp pads to decorate the white cloth with fingerprints. Some may place one fingerprint, while others may put all ten in different colors and still others may create a design.

Prayer

Gentle God, we give you thanks for the holy difference

And the precious gifts in each of us.

Receive the offerings of our individuality,

For we pledge that our fingerprints

Will always be found on open hands. Amen.

Benediction

Read Matthew 7:7-8 or John 14:1-3

Pass the baskets of keys. Ask each participant to choose one and give it to her or his neighbor, completing the sentence: "I give you this key..."

PEACE RITUAL
by Maria LaSala

The Gathering

You are invited to sit at table with soup and bread and share the stories of your day with those gathered around you.

Call to the Gathering

One: I am the Alpha, the beginning.
Many: I am the Omega, the end.
One: I am Living Water.
Many: I am the Bread of Life.
One: I am Justice.
Many: I am Mercy.
One: I am She.
Many: I am He.
One: I am White like snow.
Many: I am Crimson like blood.
One: I am Light of the World.
Many: I am the Darkness of the womb.
One: I am Wisdom.
Many: I am Mystery.
One: I am Song.
Many: I am Silence.
One: I am One.
Many: I am All.
One: My peace is All in One.
Many: My peace brings all things together.

Song "Dona Nobis Pacem"

Scripture Stories

Acts 16:16-34; Luke 1:46-55

"Peacemaking after the Fall" – Time for Reflection and Sharing Our Stories

Objects have been placed around the room. Each woman is encouraged to find a pair of objects that remind her of her own story of peacemaking. Then we will come together to share our stories.

Prayer

Sing of a Blessing

Sing we sing of a blessing...
A blessing of love...a blessing of mercy...
Love will increase... a blessing of peace.

Pray now, pray for a blessing...
A blessing of joy... a blessing of justice...
Love will increase... a blessing of peace.

Share now, Share in a blessing...
A blessing of hope... a blessing of courage...
Love will increase... a blessing of peace.

Live, live, live as a blessing...
A blessing within... a blessing among us...
Love will increase... a blessing of peace.

Send forth, send forth a blessing.
A blessing to all... now and forever...
Love will increase... a blessing of peace.

Benediction

Go in peace. Live simply, gently, at home in yourselves. Act justly. Speak justly.
Remember the depth of your own compassion. Forget not your powers in the
days of powerlessness.

Do not desire to be wealthier than your peers and stint not your hand of
charity. Practice forbearance. Speak the truth, or speak not. Take care of your
bodies, for you are a good gift.

Crave peace for all people in the world, beginning with yourselves, and as you
go, go with the dream of that peace alive in your heart.

**A RITUAL TO DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING AND EMPATHY IN HUMAN
RELATIONSHIPS**
by Susan Marvin

Sometimes we cloak ourselves with possessions that both announce our public identity and filter out any easy understanding of our core or essential identity as human beings.

In my living room I have an old oriental carpet that was my paternal grandmother's carpet. She owned several authentic oriental carpets that were for her a sign of increased social status as she and my grandfather accumulated greater wealth and property. For me, this carpet is a precious heirloom. Precious – because it connects my life with my grandmother's life and my father's life. Precious – because I know that I couldn't afford to buy such a beautiful rug at today's prices. Precious – because it reminds me that I do *not* place the same value on social status and material possessions that some of my ancestors did.

For my spouse, this is a ratty, old carpet that doesn't fit the size or the color scheme of the rest of the room. It is both symbolic of relationships with my family origin and a source of friction in my marital relationship. I need to stand on that carpet with my spouse and explain its meaning for me, not to convince him it should stay in our living room, but to unravel for him the deeper levels of who I am and why I value that ratty, old carpet. Perhaps with a shared understanding of its meaning. I'll agree to replace it.

Before arriving, give participants the following instructions.

Select a personal possession that holds deep meaning as it relates to your identity: the communities you come from, the gifts you offer the world, the sorrows you've borne, the conflicts that still persist in your life. Be prepared to share those meanings in a few sentences and to exchange your possession with another person's. (Items may be returned either after the ritual or after a designated period of time, say at the end of a retreat or at the next gathering of the group. Or items may be exchanged permanently if both parties agree.)
Setting: The group should sit in a circle with a candle in the center and plenty of space between the candle and the seats to allow for walking and placing the items around the candle.

Facilitator: We are gathered here to offer and receive the gifts of deeper, more authentic relationships within this community. We perform these ritual acts within this intentional community in the hope that they will inspire us to approach all our relationships – intentional and accidental, formal and informal – with greater openness, patience, and honesty.

Group: We offer now these tokens as symbols of our willingness to strive for deeper understanding and empathy in human relationships.

Facilitator invites participants to step forward silently, place around the candle the personal items they have brought, and return to their seats.

Unison Prayer of Blessing:

O Great Spirit, only you know the full meaning of these tokens –
The love and the fear,
The hopes and the sorrows,
With which they are offered.
Hold us now, tenderly, securely,
As we reveal our deeper selves to each other. Amen.

Facilitator invites participants to move around the table again, select another person's item, and return to their seats. When all items have been chosen, the facilitator invites participants to go around the circle, one by one, saying their names and displaying the items they have selected. As each new item is displayed, the person who brought the item says her or his name and shares the meaning of the item. Offer this blessing before moving on to the next person:

Facilitator: For the gift of _____ (name) _____'s true self,
Group: We offer thanks and blessings.

After every participant has shared, offer this closing litany:

Facilitator: Holy Creator and Lover of humankind,

Group: We hold in sacred trust the offerings of self shared here.

Facilitator: We go forth eager for deeper understanding,

Group: And greater empathy with all whom we encounter.

Facilitator: Where we witness great passion –

Group: Inspire us to seek justice and abundant living for others, as well as for ourselves.

Facilitator: Where we witness pain and sorrow –

Group: Inspire us to offer healing and comfort and tears.

Facilitator: Where we witness joy and celebration –

Group: Inspire us to sing and laugh and dance.

Facilitator: Where we witness awe and wonder –

Group: Inspire us to recognize your presence,
Here among us,
And active in all human relationships.

All: Amen and Amen.

Since a group ritual is not always possible or desirable, this ritual can easily be adapted for a one-on-one exchange between people seeking a deeper relationship or to mend a conflict. It could also be used privately to seek greater understanding of a person or group one can't meet with in the flesh – someone deceased, someone who refuses to meet with you, or a public figure or group. In a private ritual, you must choose the symbolic item and imagine the

meaning on your own. The point is to open yourself to deeper understanding and empathy for the situation and choices of the party who can or will not be present.

A HEALING LITANY FOR FAMILY REMEMBERING

by Elizabeth Nagel

After the sacredness of our conception, we take root in the wombs of
Our mothers. Before birth, we are formed and altered by family
Of she who carries us. Ever after we are planted firmly

In the soil of family.

Whether or not another family is ours through adoption as a child,
God-creating and family are our sources.

**Let us remember the names of those who were the family
Of our childhood.**

As with all living things, not everything planted thrives. Sometimes
There is too much or not enough moisture or sunlight. Or the
Soil lacks or is toxic. As with all living things
Some families are not places for thriving.

Let us remember families we know.

Families whose members thrive.

And families where it is not a good place to be planted.

Some families love one another unsparingly. They provide safety and
Protection for all their members, giving strength to one another.

Encouragement and challenge are woven together.

Into the texture of their shared lives.

They know how to laugh and to cry together.

Their abundance overflows into the lives of others.

Let us celebrate God-loving, God-creating energy in families.

Other families muddle along. Sometimes they are brilliant in loving.

More often they stumble around, making many mistakes.

Often it is possible to say "I am sorry" to each other.

These families are trustworthy because everyone

Continues trying and learning.

**Let us learn the meaning of continuous resurrection,
The peace of forgiving.**

Some families abuse each other sexually: emotionally: physically.

Shame and belittlement create no-safety,

Breeding mistrust in oneself and in others.

Unhealthy boundaries and distorted reality preach

False messages of unworthiness.

Survival is constructing a fortress.

These families are filled with pain and sadness,

Where early the wonder-light in a child's eyes clouds over.

Let us not be alone,

As we struggle with disharmony in ourselves,

When reconciliation with family members is not possible.

When forgiveness is the name given to our need to let go

Of the pain and past that hobbles us.

There are families who simply are not there for each other.

Each person insulated from another, engrossed in individual

Worlds of success and failure. Or families who are

Collections of persons living on the surface,
Denying life can be very hard.
Families who look good on the outside,
But within are lonely and hollow places.
**Let us learn how to name reality. To claim what is,
What is not.**

Sometimes people grow beyond their families, whether by geographic
Location, education, or lifestyle.

Introverts born among extrovert, or the reverse.
Families bonded only by blood. Empty, dissatisfying relationships.
Persons who do not choose willingly to spend time with each other.

**Let us grieve for what is not,
For failure to form deep, lasting bonds,
For feelings of inadequacy and anger
The cost of "being different."**

Families come in every size and shape imaginable. Reality is a world
In which any family is complicated, no generalizations accurate.

The worst of families sometimes love unsparingly.

The best of families sometimes bring pain.

**Let us be transplanted when it is needed,
Finding others who can be family for us,
Persons who guide us to God's healing.**

A lifetime of being part of many families. Families who give us
Genetic material to become flesh, rear us, sometimes well
And sometimes not.

Families we form when we commit ourselves to another,
And when relationships irretrievably are broken
And we divorce.

Families who adopt us and the families we adopt.

Deep relationships with others

Who may be all we had hoped family could be.

**Let us give thanks for the promise
Of continually created family.**

Adding and subtracting persons who form the soil

In which we are planted.

**So that we might flourish as
the God-created persons we are intended to be.**

THE SPIRITUAL WORK OF OUR HANDS

by Sue Allers-Hatlie

I write this ritual out of the context of many years of work with young people in jail and detention. Daily I take the hands of young men and women. I hold both hands and pray with them. Sometimes I know “where their hands have been”; other times I do not know, but I sense where they’ve been involved. To grab those hands is not to offer quick, unthinkable, undeserving forgiveness but to call on the powers of the Almighty, Wise Mother God who paces like a lioness watching over her young. To hold hands that destroy is to battle face to face, to look evil in the eye and say, “You no longer have any power over us; your power to destroy is done; your hands will never go there again. We offer these hands back to the Creator, for only with God’s help can they do what they were intended to do.” Holding young hands, perhaps only a few moments, my prayer is that the spirit of my hands will remain in theirs to guide their actions forever, for I believe that at the entrance of our souls (which some in the East believe is the palm) there is spiritual residue or more positively the residing of the spirit. I pray with all my spiritual might for the greatest powers of God(dess) to transform those young hands.

During spiritual direction, prayer, worship, or meditation, I have experienced in my hands the hands of those who have gone before me, such as the aunt who raised me. She died in her eighties with distinctly smooth translucent skin with beautiful age spots. I know her hand and her hand comes to hold mine whenever I have the “mind” to keep my hand open enough to let God comfort me through her presence. I have also experienced the hands of my father and a chaplain friend. They, too, have passed on, but they still offer their hands to me for comfort, nurture, and guidance. These things of the spirit cannot be explained but only offered. Now when I’m troubled or concerned for someone, I pray that the hand of a beloved mother or friend will come to comfort and guide.

It is out of this professional, personal context that I created a hand-washing ritual to use during Holy Week in a juvenile jail. I offer it to the Re-Imagining Community to make their own and as a loving extension of my own hand to the many women in the community who have nurtured, guided, and held my hands. As chaplain of Juvenile Detention Center, I offer this ritual to help the community know that we must not “Lock them up and throw away the key,” but we must extend our hands.

The Power of Our Hands in the Work of Repentance, Reconciliation, and Renewal

Have a large bowl of water and a towel before you.

Opening

Our hands live out the center of our hearts and the deepest of our spiritual yearnings. There is great power to words, yet it is the hands that reach and confirm the validations and affirmations our heads know.

Reflection

Reflect for a moment on your hands. Think of the comfort they have given, the pain they have inflicted, the healing they have offered, the miracles they have felt, the rage they have held, the agony with which they have ached. Feel the strength they have offered, the guidance with which they pull, the spirit they enflesh.

Ritual

Place your hands in the water and ask the Creator to take away whatever your hands need not carry, whatever you've taken on that doesn't belong. Ask for forgiveness for the things you wish your hands had not done. Seek reconciliation with the Creator, whose purposes for these hands were clear from the beginning. Re-Imagine the powers your hands were created to hold. Re-open your hands to the Source of renewal.

Renewal and Remembering

Sit with your hands in a position that makes them open to being held, hanging off the arms of a chair or at your side.

Acknowledge those who have gone before you but are now with God. Remember how they would offer you comfort and guidance. Let your hands remember the touch of their skin, the shape of their hands, and what they offered to you.

Allow a few minutes to sit and hold and honor the spiritual workings in your hands.

YESTERDAY OR TOMORROW
by Joan F. Kennedy

I have to choose between
Yesterday or tomorrow.
Optimist that I am.
I choose tomorrow.
It would be easy for me to
Choose yesterday.
I know how it will turn out.
I've lived the patterns that caused me to
Be on the path I'm
On today.
But that would be the easy way out.
I'm like an adventurer on
A new journey.
The adrenaline is flowing, and I'm
On a high that propels me
Into the future.
I have no way of knowing
What the outcome will be,
But I trust my intuitions.
I don't give myself the
Luxury of asking what could
Have been.
I know my choices will be what
Are meant to be,
My life is a tapestry I'm weaving.
I never see the whole picture,
Only the knots and tangles
On the back of the picture.
When finally God turns it over,
I'm awed by the beauty of
The colors and the lines of design.
The twists and turns
That I thought were
Mistakes, add a dimension to the
Whole that makes the
Tapestry of my life
A truly exciting work of art.
I have become an Engineer.
A designer of the only thing
That matters – my life.

A RITUAL FOR SAYING GOOD-BYE

by Jan Lugibihl and Rose Mary Meyer

The National Assembly of Religious Women (NARW) has actively sought justice for 25 years. Following is a ritual designed to say good-bye as NARW draws to a close. We share it here both as a tribute to NARW and as a model for community ritual. This ritual was also published by Probe.

May We Continue to Bloom

Why are we gathering?

Reader: Why are we gathering?

“The first reason is to express a commitment to justice carried out in a context of faith and spirituality and to do so in a public manner. We provide witness in this place.

The second is to affirm our belief that we receive from each other bread for the journey. Baking bread is a part of all of our histories. We come together to feed one another.

The third reason is to provide the kind of support necessary for mourning our losses and celebrating our victories.”

(Francis Wood, Spokane Conference, 1992)

Instrumental Water Music to Center Ourselves

Stories from our Sisters

After each reading, the reader will symbolically pour the story into the water.

Reader: Adelante! Let us move on. Let us continue the struggle so that all women can live liberated from injustices. Together we have power, together we find strength to carry on. Let us allow our power, love, hope, energy and determination to spill over to the women in our lives and to women in all parts of the world. Adelante!

(Joellen Sbrissa, following a NARW-sponsored retreat experience in Nicaragua, 1988)

All: Refreshed and strengthened by past memories, we continue to do justice.

Reader: Each of us must move now. We know where we are. We must organize, gather the people, speak our truth, take to the streets and walk and talk...and no longer look back. We must put aside our old ways and take on the new. We must not be afraid. Look, there, goes Fanny Lou, Sojourner and Martin, too. We have to move together, get closer. There is birthing coming on.

(Rosalinda Ramirez-Irizarry, 1989)

All: Refreshed and strengthened by past memories, we continue to do justice.

Reader: I have faith and I believe that we can bring together the most empowered and committed women to establish a new dialogue that will combat the tragedy of lost loves, broken dreams, and premature death in the lives of women, of families. We cannot be silent or afraid or fearful. We must acknowledge and accept our mandate: “We are the ones we’ve been waiting for.”

(Sharon Gary-Smith, 1991)
 All: Refreshed and strengthened by past memories, we continue to do justice.
 Reader: This is the historical moment of peripheries, and those who people on the edges must become capturers of the seeds of change – and builders of visions in the history of humankind.
 (Connie Murray, 1990)
 All: Refreshed and strengthened by past memories, we continue to do justice.
 Reader: What have I achieved in my life – not much. Am I satisfied – of course not. But deep within me is the knowing that I have stayed in the struggle in spite of the long loneliness, the cosmic weariness, the contradictions, the betrayals. I am still in it, of it, and with it. Most of all, I still believe it.
 (Marjorie Tuite, OP, 1985)
 All: Refreshed and strengthened by past memories, we continue to do justice.

Our Stories

Spend some time thinking about a story you might share in response to one of the following questions:

- Person(s) in NARW who influence me
- A funny moment in my NARW-connected life
- A difficult in moment NARW herstory
- An energizing time in NARW herstory

After the sharing of each story, the teller comes forward and symbolically pours the story into the water. Those gathered say the following response after each story.)

Response: Refreshed and strengthened by past memories, we continue to do justice.

Blessing

Reader: We are refreshed and strengthened by re-memembering these stories of sadness and of joy, these stories of celebrating justice. Let us sprinkle one another with the blooms of former seeds planted and nourished by this story-ed water.

One person at a time comes forward, picks up a flower and dips it into the story-ed water. Then she goes to the person sitting on her left, sprinkles her with the story-ed water and says the following:

May you continue to bloom along your justice journey.

Closing

Reader: The hundreds of women who have connected with NARW have rooted something precious and true to this earth; we have witnessed the bloomings; we must not lose faith in the seed. We need to strongly name that we are seed, that what we have received has been given to us in a trust, that life was never meant to end here. We need to proclaim our love and our purpose. We need, not to lie down, but to return to the generative energies of the whole, as a seed is returned to the earth, with our lives and energies living a faith in the fields beyond these hills.
 (Carolyn McDade, 1995)

Song “The Rest of Our Lives”
 (From *Songs for Congregational Singing* by Carolyn McDade)

At the next full moon the convener of this ritual gathering will return the story-ed water to Earth to nourish rebirth.
The cycle of life continues.

CHANGE

By Jill Kimberly Hartwell Geoffrion
(Dedicated to Jillian Rose and her mother)

May be a dream –
May be a plan –
May be a thought –
May be a belief –

Can you let it go?

May be a habit –
May be a discipline –
May be a feeling –
May be a tenseness –

Will you release it?

The trees can guide.
The leaves can instruct.
The wind will issue its threats.
The sun's messages are sure.

When it's time, things change.

Cling if you wish.
Restrict. Constrict.
Hold on as tightly as you can.
Turn away from the shift you sense approaching.

It matters not.

One season leads to the next.
Pay attention.
What time is it?
Wake up!

Embrace this moment. Let it embrace you.

A PRAYER BY HEART
by Lonne Murphy-Burkhardt

Christ-revelatory and redemptive witness of God/dess work in history is Christa/Community.
Journeys by Heart by Rita Nakashima Brock

Center yourself, notice your breathing, and place your hand on a pulse point at your neck.

Feel the natural rhythm of your heart.

Tap with your finger, for a few moments, the rhythm of your heart today.

*Heart is what keeps us alive physically,
Emotionally, and spiritually.*

Pour oil generously on your hands, massaging them and let the oil penetrate.
Experience its feel, its smell, its presence.

Massage one another's hands if you are with another or in a group.

Find your pulse once again.

Meditate now on your heart's strongest impulses.

Where is your heart? At home? With friends? In the work for issues of justice?

In your caring? In your search for true meaning?

This unique human impulse/energy
Is Eros, love and power.

(Read the following aloud and meditate on each or respond in your own words.)

"Christa/Community of erotic power is the connectedness

among the members of the community who live with heart.

We are connected and co-create one another at the depths of our being."

Journeys by Heart by Rita Nakashima Brock

"Good people, most royal greening verdance, rooted in the sun
you shine so finely, it surpasses understanding. God hugs you.

You are encircled by the arms of the mystery of God.

And so, humankind full of all creative possibilities, is God's work.

Humankind alone, is called to assist God.

Humankind is called to co-create."

Hildegard of Bingen

"The play space of erotic power is life sustaining.

It is the basis of freedom, creativity, and spontaneity."

Journeys by Heart by Rita Nakashima Brock

End with a Christa/Community creative, spontaneous play time.

Hum or improvise some heart music.

Respond through dance or movement as a group.

Create with clay.

Finger paint.

Write a poem,

Record your own laughter.

After the creative, spontaneous time, quiet your heart again and find your pulse.

WITH THIS RING
by Jan Bucher and Steve Blons

Sixteen years ago a woman called and asked if I would accompany her in a ritual. She told me she was raised in an alcoholic family and, by the time she was a sophomore, was herself an alcoholic. After high school she went to treatment, then college, and eventually became a drug and alcohol counselor.

She had worked very hard on recovery from many addictions but the hardest was her co-dependent pattern of pleasing everyone. She was about to be married and was afraid her “old self” would surface and wipe away all her hard work. She took a creative path instead. She wrote vows to herself, purchased a ring, and asked me to join her at the altar to witness her commitment to her own path before she made a commitment to another.

I was taken by her wisdom, and as we processed into the church, I scooped up holy water for blessing. We walked slowly toward the sanctuary and finally stood in front of the altar. This young woman vowed to be faithful to herself and to listen, love, and honor her soulful instincts. She asked God for strength and blessing. Together we anointed the ring with holy water. She placed the ring on her ring finger, and we stared into the face of God, trusting we were honored.

I have never seen her again, I have never forgotten her.

Jan’s story suggests that making vows to oneself might be crucial before making vows to another person. Someone who is living in intentionally uncoupled life could also make such vows.

Key elements in this ritual as described here are

- Clear intention
- A concrete symbol, such as a ring
- One or more witnesses (but probably not the intended partner)
- An appropriate setting (based either on one’s tradition or whatever feels sacred)

The vows themselves could take many forms. Here is just one possibility.

God, your wisdom resides within me.
Listening to myself, I listen to you.
Honoring my thoughts and feelings, I honor you.
Following my heart’s desire, I do your will.

I will be faithful to myself
And ask for strength never to abandon the wise one within.
I put on this ring as a sign of these promises
And as a reminder.

May truth and light be my guides
As I continue my life’s journey.

Perhaps the ritual could begin with a drum and a chant as participants gather and enter into the space together. And drumming, singing, or dancing might be a way to close and celebrate. For chant ideas, see *Songs for Earthlings* by Judith Forest

Middleton (Emerald Earth Publishing, 1998), especially “I Will Be Gentle With Myself” (p. 241) and “I Am the Self” (p. 243).

PRACTICING SABBATH: A SPACE FOR GRACE

by Holly W. Whitcomb

The presidential election made most news-conscious citizens newly aware of the existence of Sabbath. But the idea of Sabbath is nothing new. For centuries, Jews have been celebrating Shabbat from Friday evening until Saturday evening and Christians have honored the Sabbath on Sunday. In our Judeo-Christian tradition, Sabbath has always invited us into a tranquil time of rest, re-creation, and renewal.

I don't know what I would do without Sabbath in my own life. I have come to call it "a space for grace." Sabbath is a time to reconnect with God and with our deepest selves, a time to remember that we are defined, not by what we do, but by being unconditionally loved by God. In Sabbath time, we can stop striving and just be.

For some of us, Sunday is a delicious and receptive time for Sabbath; for others of us who are weighed down by responsibility and distractions, it is not. I don't think God cares when and where we observe Sabbath, just as long as we make it a consistent part of our lives. It is a commandment after all. God rested, so we also must rest.

Monday is my Sabbath Day, and on Mondays, I spring out of bed. There are no "shoulds" or "oughts" on that day. On Mondays, I do the things I love. I may begin the day with a long walk and perhaps some prayer. Almost always I'll take a trip to one bead shop or another. My hobby is jewelry making, and I love to wander around the bead stores looking at the colorful trays, fantasizing about what I'm going to put together next. Then I often have lunch with a friend to catch up on news and laugh a lot. Frequently Monday is a letter-writing day, not because I have to, but because I enjoy writing letters. Letter writing is a way of building community for me, a way of tending relationships, a way of telling my loved ones that they are important. Maybe I'll take a two-hour nap on Monday. Sometimes I'll cook, perhaps taking time to make a more intricate and rewarding recipe than usual, one that deserves leisure time. I am usually a bit wistful on Monday night. The day is almost over. But then I thank God that I finally discovered what a good Sabbath day could be. On Tuesday, I'm ready to go back to work, because I have been given the spaciousness I needed. I have been refueled. I have been reconnected. I have been reminded that I am much more than my work.

Sabbath provides some space to receive God's grace. The Book of Exodus says, "In six days God made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day God rested, and was refreshed." Author Wayne Muller tells us that the word "refreshed *vaiynafesh* in Hebrew, literally means "and God exhaled." Sabbath is a liberating time of exhalation. Why not consider Sabbath's invitation for your own life? *Shabbat shalom*. Sabbath Peace.

As the group gathers, you might have music playing quietly in the background. Invite the group to sing two verses of "Amazing Grace" and think about the ways God's grace comes to them.

Unison Reading

The fourth Commandment (Exod. 20:8-11)

Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work But the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh, your God; you shall not do any work...for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.

Leader: Where do you find Sabbath in your own life?
A time of discussion.

Leader: What are the fruits of this Sabbath time for you?
A time of discussion.

Leader: Is your present Sabbath time enough?
A time of discussion.

Leader: How is God inviting you to grow in your spiritual life right now?
A time of discussion.

Pass out crayons and paper and invite each person to draw an image of grace. Those who are willing are invited to share their drawings with the group.

Leader invites everyone to complete this sentence:
God's grace has freed me to

When all who wish have spoken, hold hands in a circle and sing two verses of "Amazing Grace."

All: Shabbat Shalom.

LAYING HANDS ON THE VESSEL OF GOD
A Ritual for Sharing
by Harriet Gleeson and Nancy Chinn

Following is a ritual of bathing as an act of prayer. Its focus is thanksgiving and reverence for one's body as a home for God.

The Setting

Prepare a shower or bath by ordering and cleaning the space. Put out fresh towels, a fresh bar of soap, place candles, light incense, place fresh flowers, oils, mirrors, set nearby favorite music; do whatever makes this a special place for you. Take the phone off the hook and ask those who may live with you to give you a half hour of quiet time alone.

The Ritual

Rest quietly becoming more and more conscious of your breath. Cross over into sacred time. Do whatever you are comfortable with to move toward a sacred core, a center, where your God is within. When you are there, greet God and know that at this moment your body is sacred because it is here you can meet that God. Disrobe when you are ready and enter the bath or shower.

Stepping in, give thanks for the water. Recall waters of the past: chaos, desert springs of Mariba, the waters of floods, the waters of the Red Sea liberations, the waters of baptism. Recall the waters of our bodily fluids: secretions, streams, reservoirs, lubrications. Pour water over yourself, giving thanks for the Waters of Life.

Reverently and consciously soap and clean every part of your body. As you clean, bless each part giving thanks for what it does. Take care as you wash to remember that you are cleansing a home of God. Give thanks also for the God who became Flesh and for the God who dwells within and acts now in your body. Ask for healing for the parts that need repair or renewal.

When you have finished this, recline in the water as the womb water of God or stand quietly feeling the warmth of God pouring over you in the shower.

The Closing

When you sense you are ready, leave the water and take time to carefully towel and anoint your body, clothing it to celebrate and protect it. Emerge and cross over with strength into common time.

BAPTISM
by Joan F. Kennedy

The air is hot and stifling.
My breath comes in ragged gulps.
I wish the rain would come,
The clouds are lowering and an
Occasional flash of lightening
Tears across the sky.
Suddenly, there is a torrent.
The rain is pummeling the
Ground in great fury.
The rain sloshes over everything,
And I'm glad there is surcease
To the heat.
As it lessens, I have the urge
To run out in the rain the
Way I did as a child. –
I change into a bathing suit,
Drop a towel at the door and
Splash unto my deck
The rain drops are cold
As they hit my back.
I raise my face, and the drops
Run down like tears upon
My cheeks.
The smoldering heat of the day
Is washed away from my body
And my soul leaving me
Refreshed and young again.
It is a baptism for a new beginning.

PASSING FORM GIRLHOOD TO WOMANHOOD
A RITE OF PASSAGE
by Kristen Lund

This ritual is meant to mark the passage of a young woman from girl to adult. It might be done at the time of the girl's first menses or to celebrate her becoming a teen. It could also be used as an alternative to or an enhancement of a traditional confirmation service. It should include important women in the girl's life: mother, grandmothers, special aunts, sisters, special friends – both peers and adults. It will be most effective if the group is small, not more than eight women and girls, and the participants are intimately connected to one another. It is recommended that the host/facilitator be someone other than the girl's mother.

The form of this ritual is primarily conversational with a facilitator to move it along. However, it might be advisable (depending on the group and their experience with talking intimately about these topics) to allow both the young woman and the participants to prepare their thoughts by sending them a letter listing the conversation topics. Parts of this ritual that may need advance preparation or thought by the participants are noted with an asterisk (); parts for the girl to prepare are marked with a plus (+). [Girl] indicates the girl's name should be used here. Each participant is asked to bring a small token representing a hope, an affirmation, strength, a blessing to give to the girl. Each may want to attach a small note to it. The host will provide a special box or basket in which to collect these keepsakes during the ritual. It is given to the young woman at the close of the ritual. The parts of the script designated for the host and the suggested prayers could be distributed among the group to be read at the appropriate times. Create a centerpiece consisting of a bowl of water, symbolizing life; a candle, symbolizing the Spirit; one or two of the girl's favorite toys, symbolizing childhood; and something symbolizing womanhood, perhaps a piece of sculpture or a photo of a foremother, and the special box or basket. One suggestion might be to use nested Russian dolls, which could represent the different layers of a woman's personality or, unnested and arranged in order, her growth. Arrange all the objects on a lovely piece of cloth. Chairs or cushions are placed in a circle around the centerpiece, which is on a low table or on the floor.*

Greeting/Centering

Host: We are here today to honor [Girl] and to mark this particular day along her journey to becoming a woman. Since early times, people have created special rituals or festivals to mark important passages in a person's life.

Examples of baptism and marriage, graduation ceremonies and parties, and so on may be offered by the group.

The transition between girlhood and womanhood is more difficult for our culture to mark, drawn out as it is over several years of adolescence – from first period to first driver's license to first job to first love to graduation to moving away from home – and we have lost track of ancient ways of welcoming girls into the circle of women which might help them along their journey of continuous knowing and growing. Let's take a few moments to bring our attention to this moment and come into the circle of this community of people who love [Girl]. Take some deep breaths, calm your

hurrying inner spirit. Silently, let your mind lovingly recall rituals, milestones, and significant people along your own journey through life.

A time of silence.

Celebrating the Child

Host: We are not asked to leave behind who we are as a child. Strong women remember who they were as children and bring the best parts along on their journey of life. Let us begin by sharing with [Girl] a *story of a time or event in our own childhood that was special to us. As you do so, name the personal trait – perhaps playfulness or spunk or curiosity or delight in the wonders of nature of determination or some other trait – which the story represents.

A time of sharing.

Prayer

Holy one, who brings forth children for us to love, bless this child and these children within us. For their inquiring minds and intuitive sense of justice, we thank you. For their beauty, wisdom, and innocence, their joy and laughter, for all their ways that fill us with delight, we bless you. We thank you for our dreams, born in childhood, and for our children's dreams. Walk with us as we live out our dreams, and give us voice to help create a world where each child's dream can blossom. Amen.

Celebrating this Special Woman

Host: Today we are here to make sacred an important passage in the life journey of [Girl]. It is a day of looking back and ahead. Let us pause here, though, to look at the wonderful person she is at this very moment. You are each invited to *describe [Girl] to herself, affirming who she is and what you have learned from her and from watching her grow.

A time of sharing.

Affirming the Gift of Our Bodies

[Girl], would you like to +describe yourself to us? What do you like best about yourself? If you would like to add another name to your name, or to take a new name, tell us now what that name is.

The girl's response.

Host: As we know, our bodies change as we grow, and they never really stop changing. We, beautiful female humans, created in God's image, know that an exciting aspect of growing up female is that of growing into our mature female form. Inasmuch as we dwell in our bodies and how we feel about our bodies shapes our emotional and spiritual lives, it seems appropriate to spend some time praising our bodies. Let's begin in prayer with a brief litany of thanksgiving.

Host: For creating us in your image,

All: We praise you, Holy One.

Host: For our moon cycles, which help us stay in touch with the earth and with one another,

All: We praise you, Holy One.

Host: For rounded hips, and breasts, and bellies, suggesting fertility, generosity and promise,

All: We praise you, Holy One.

Host: For the pleasure the touch of our bodies gives to others and ourselves,

All: We praise you, Holy One.

Host: For the miracle of human reproduction, the intricate beauty of our female biology; for ovaries, uterus, vagina, clitoris,

All: We praise you, Holy One.

Host: For the variety of the female form – angular and rounded, full-bosomed and A-cup, café au lait and freckled, ebony, pink-skinned, and sienna, tall and short, agile and awkward, handsome and plain – echoing the beautiful diversity of creation,

All: We praise you, Holy One.

Host: For the opportunity to experience deep intimacy with another person through the expression of physical love,

All: We praise you, Holy One.

Host: O Spirit of Holiness, make us at home in our holy bodies, that as one person – body, mind and soul – we can express your love to the world. Amen.

Having affirmed the gift of our bodies, let's now share with [Girl] and with one other *the ways in which it feels good to you to be in a woman's body. What is special joy for you about being female? Have you always felt this way and, if not, what has helped you to gain acceptance of your body?

A time of sharing.

Accepting responsibility for Caring

Host: Another important quality of being adults is that we take responsibility for the earth and the creatures that inhabit the earth. As the sex that is responsible for bringing new life into the world, we are keenly aware of the brokenness of the world. We yearn always to heal and protect the earth and the creatures of the earth. Part of our journey as women of faith is to accept and do our part in this healing of creation. Fortunately, we have women of faith, both living and dead to lead us and instruct us. Before, we gathered, I asked [Girl] to tell me +two (or one) women of faith she admired. She named [woman of faith] and [woman of faith]. Here are their stories.

**The host may have asked two of the women attending to prepare short stories about these foremothers or she may prepare them herself and ask two people to read them. If the girl has named one of the participants in the ritual as one of her role models, the girl might want to tell this person's story and why she admires her.*

We have heard about women who heard God calling and were not afraid to follow. Undoubtedly, the example they set for us began as dreams within their heart. Tell us, [Girl], about +the dreams you have for helping to make the world a better place, the

garden that God intends it to be. How is God calling you? Are there things you already know you want to do now and in the future?

The girl's response.

Seeking the Sacred in Our Lives

Host: Throughout our lives, we women continue to nurture and define our own individual sense of spirituality and sacredness. We experience a continuously unfolding knowledge of ourselves and the Holy. I invite you, [Girl]'s mentors and guides, to share with her *something of your own spiritual life that might be particularly instructive to her as she faces the joys and challenges of being a woman.

A time of sharing.

Tell us, [Girl], +how do you experience God (or the Holy) in your life today, knowing that this will change and grow with you?

The girl's response.

Invoking God's Blessing and Going Forth as Woman

Host: Let us pray and meditate together: God of our Mothers, bless these gifts of heart and spirit and help each of us to be faithful to our promises to [Girl], for we know she needs our love and support. Loving Spirit, who knows us like no other and hears the longing of our hearts to live in community, we pray that [Girl] will, at every step, find herself closer to you, to the Truth. Lead her to communities that will enjoy her gifts, give her support, and provide opportunities for growth and service. When she is alone, burn brightly within her, reminding her that she is part of a great cosmic community that dreams of wholeness for her. In the name of the One who will not desert us, Amen.

To close our time together, I have asked each person to bring *an object or token that represents a particular blessing they would like to bestow upon you as you continue forward into full womanhood. I invite each person in turn to place that item in the box (or basket) and offer your blessing on [Girl].

A time of sharing.

Unison Prayer

Holy One, tenderly hold this woman, [Girl], in your love. She carries with her our love, our hopes, our dreams. She carries within herself your creative Spirit. She is a child born of love and a girl weaned on love. She is daughter and granddaughter and niece and friend. We have nurtured, as best we could, her woman's heart. As a woman, she will not be a stranger to sorrow, and as a woman, she will know great, deep joy. Smooth the rough places in her path and keep her from harm. Call to her always that she might know who she is, for she is, and will always be, [name of girl or her new name if she has chosen one], child of God, sister of Spirit, daughter of human love, woman of faith. In the name of Jesus, our companion on this journey. Amen.

CRONING RITUAL: GAINING A NAME

by Carolyn Stahl Bohler

A croning ritual names and celebrates becoming a wise old woman. Since traditions name virgin, mother, and crone as three stages of women, based on the bodily process of menstruation, some of us claim our new name – Crone – at about fifty when we enter menopause. Other women prefer to gain this title later: at retirement or even upon becoming eighty.

My twin sister and I decided to celebrate our fiftieth birthdays (one hundred together!) with a group of women friends in my living room, where we sang, prayed, shared, and ate food that took on symbolic meaning. When they received our invitation, some of our friends understood what a crone was, but others had no idea. Nevertheless, they came and joined us on the floor, in a circle, with candles and flowers abundant, as we followed this ritual we had created. The invitations sent out in advance requested that each woman bring one or more of the following: bread (baked by a woman); a piece of fruit, fruit juice, or fermented fruit juice; memories of names given to them when they were very young; thought or photos of their creations – or a creation itself; remembrances of times they had said no to themselves or others; names of other women who have influenced them deeply; a favorite poem or prayer; dreams or goals for the future; thoughts or photos that reflect their bodiliness.

Our gathering included eighteen women. Fewer than half shared at each turn, and the celebration lasted three hours!

A CRONING CELEBRATION FOR _____ WITHIN A COMMUNITY OF POWERFUL, GRACEFUL AND WISE WOMEN

This ritual includes several sections. Each section includes an activity, shared food, and music. Begin with gathering music.

- **Sharing Names**

Have each woman write her name on a nametag and announce it loudly for all to hear.

Prayers and poems

Share poems and prayers and place them onto scrapbook pages that are passed around the circle and then given to the new Crone.

Music

Select music that celebrates names, preferably led by some of the women gathered.

- **Remembering Names**

Remember and share names or nicknames given or chosen when each was very young.

Eating Oreo Cookies and Milk

Enjoy cookies and milk or whatever snack brings back childhood memories within the crone's culture.

Singing the Blessing

“Bless Sophia”

- **Naming Creations**

Name some creations, what has been created through each one, what each has said yes to.

Eating Fruit and Drinking Fruit Juice

Enjoy the fruits of creation.

Singing the Blessing

- **Naming No's**

Name times of saying no to ourselves or to another.

Eating Hamantaschen

Enjoy Hamantaschen (fruit-filled, triangle-shaped cookies from the Jewish tradition) in honor of Vashti, who said no to the King in the Hebrew Bible's Book of Esther, chapter one. The cookies are named after Haman, literally “Haman's Hat” a three-cornered hat. Choose another symbolic snack if these are not available.

Music

- **Naming Our Blessed Embodiment and Bloodiness**

Read the parable of the woman baking bread: The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened (Matt. 13:33). Choose other readings on the blessedness of blood. Name blessings that bodies bring (those gathered may share photos of themselves at different ages.)

Eating bread and Drinking Wine

Enjoy bread baked by women to honor embodiment and wine drunk to honor bloodiness.

Music

- **Naming Women**

Name those women (or men) who have influenced each one deeply.

Eating Candy Kisses and Hugs

Enjoy hugs and kisses or equivalent sweet that connotes endearment.

Music

- **Praying for Women and Men Around the World**

Pray for others around the world, holding a pillow in the shape of the world or touching a map

Eating pretzels

Enjoy pretzels, which originated as “little hands,” folded in prayer – or another symbolic snack.

Music

- **Dreaming Dreams**

Share goals for the future as individuals or in community.

Blessing the New Crone(s)

A blessing is given by a few friends, affirmed by all.

Singing the Blessing

Repeat several times, in close circle, arms raised or embracing each other.

Music

RE-IMAGINING AGING: OUTr-AGE-oUS
by Lonne Murphy-Burkhardt

As people gather, have a basket at the door where all are invited to symbolically leave their preoccupations, worries, and concerns in preparation for this experience. All are seated in a circle. Light the fire (candle, fireplace, incense, sage bundle, etc.)

Call to Celebration

Invoke the presence of women who have gone before; acknowledge that they are with us in the eternal NOW: deceased loved ones, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, friends, sisters, daughters, cousins, famous leaders, saints, role models.

Leader: Our hearts are present and united in solidarity with each other and with those who are with us in spirit. Sisters through the ages, who now live in the eternal light, we invite you to be present here with us today. "Walk through these doors and into our midst, with strength and peace." We move with our spirits through the thin veil of time separating us from past, present and future. We are here in the Now.

Song: "Walk Through These Doors" Marsie Silvestro, ©1987 [Available from Moonsong Productions, 49 Dover Street, #36, Somerville, MA 02144, (617) 628-1808.]

Before the last refrain. include spontaneous singing of names of women with whom you are in solidarity.

Pause for a few moments of silence for all to focus and arrive at the ritual moment.

Leader: As we are here to ritualize and re-imagine aging, let us begin by deconstructing what patriarchal lessons have taught us in the past and which we now recognize as no longer acceptable.

DECONSTRUCTION: A Litany on Old Age Ideas

Reader 1:	You can't teach an old dog new tricks	All:	I DON'T THINK SO!
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Reader 2:	Over the hill.	All:	I DON'T THINK SO!
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Reader 1:	Old timer.	All:	I DON'T THINK SO!
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Reader 2:	You're as old as you feel.	All:	I DON'T THINK SO!
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Reader 1:	At my age, I don't even invest in green bananas	All:	I DON'T THINK SO!
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Reader 2:	Old hag, old bag, old hen, old biddy.	All:	I DON'T THINK SO!
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Reader 1:	Old cronies, spinsters, old maids.	All:	I DON'T THINK SO!
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Reader 2:	Never ask a woman her age.	All:	I DON'T THINK SO!
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Reader 1:	Grow old gracefully and invisibly	All:	I DON'T THINK SO!
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Spontaneously add your own adages which need to be deconstructed.

SYMBOLIC ACTION: Bubbling

Leader: Let us now say good-bye to the old paradigm of aging. One way to symbolize our letting go is by blowing bubbles. Hold in your minds and in your hands all those old ideas which must be dismissed and blown off! Everyone bubble and imagine the old ideas floating away hilariously. Blow bubbles; spin in circles making many bubbles at once; making huge

bubbles and teeny-weeny bubbles. Witness the letting go of these former ideas which are no longer acceptable to our growth and happiness.

After this exercise is completed, everyone comes back to the circle.

CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW PARADIGM

Leader: Now let us continue by beginning to create something new. Women know the process of giving birth to new life. Let it be known that the birthing of a new age of age is about to begin.

Plant the Seed

Reading: Choose a passage to read or recite that will help you plant the seed.

Water and Nourish the Soil

Meditation: It is important for us to feel happy, sad, full, empty, delighted, worried, loving. But it is also important to let those feelings go. It is important to revel in our successes and grieve our failures. Take five minutes of SILENCE and reflect on how you have treated success and failure in your life. Have these two experiences defined your life? Reflect on your losses: bodily, emotional, spiritual, relationships, loved ones, mortgages, sunglasses, pens, socks, etc.! To the degree that you are comfortable and willing, share with the person next to you how you have dealt with success and/or failure, or how you have dealt with loss in your aging process. How might you change your responses to loss, to success and failure in your life?

After the time of reflection and sharing, come back together as a group.

Sunshine on the Soil

Leader: The following is an example of a prayer of gratitude that can be prayed in time of loss to help us embrace aging and loss in a new way.

Prayer of Gratitude

O Holy Mother, like a river, life flows from you,
Toward you and ultimately merges with you
Into the great ocean of your love.

We are grateful for our lives and for all that we have received.

We are grateful for all that the waters of life have taken from us,

For those we love who have gone before us,

For our abilities along the way,

For our quickness as children,

For our passions as youth,

For our successes and failures in early adulthood,

For our wisdom as we age and experience life,

For our body parts, which we may have lost:

Hair,

Eyebrows,

Teeth,

Reproductive organs,

The firmness of our stomachs, breasts, knees, ankles.

Thank you for the gift of life, for our bodies, for all the joys that people and things have given use. We grieve their loss, but we are grateful for the full lives you have

given us and continue to give us. And now, we have no time to look back, except to remember with fondness. Now we look forward to the days ahead and the adventures that await us!

POTENTIAL FRUIT OF THE PLANTED SEED: Litany of the New Age of Age

Leader: In a spirit of OUTr-AGE-oUS fun, respond “yoo-hoo” to each invocation. Aging can mean:

Reader 1: Discovering new people, places, ideas.
All: YOO-HOO

Reader 2: Being involved and active in projects.
All: YOO-HOO

Reader 1: Stopping sexual activity only when you choose to stop.
All: YOO-HOO

Reader 2: Giving thanks for what we must lose.
All: YOO-HOO

Reader 1: Raising hell, rabble-rousing, raging and rallying around important issues.
All: YOO-HOO

Reader 2: Giving and taking advice.
All: YOO-HOO

Reader 1: Celebrating something every day, celebrating crone power, maintaining a childlike curiosity.
All: YOO-HOO

Reader 2: Engaging and connecting with others and ideas to keep growing and renewing.
All: YOO-HOO

Reader 1: Letting go of things out of your control, being honest, thrusting losses to the universe.
All: YOO-HOO

Reader 2: Laughing a lot, finding humor in life’s difficulties with those you love.
All: YOO-HOO

Reader 1: Yielding to dreams and hopes and forgotten wishes.
All: YOO-HOO

Spontaneously add your own Yoo-Hoos.

Closing

Leader: Let us go forth to be real, to be authentic at whatever age we find ourselves and to live, live, live every day of our lives. In the spirit of freedom and camaraderie, let us offer one another a sign of peace and affection.

Final Song and Dance

“Come and Seek the Ways of Wisdom”

HOME BLESSING
by Denise Moreland
(for Donna and Ramona – July 15, 2001)

This ritual is for blessing a home. Begin at a central place in the home and walk to a different room to read each section, and back to the starting place for the final section.

In a central place in the home

God of earth,
We give thanks for the land on which this home is built.
We bless the sand and dirt which holds it secure,
We honor the men and women whose hard work built this structure.
We remember the creatures and plants which formerly made this place their home.

In the Kitchen

God of abundance,
We give thanks for the food which enters this kitchen.
We bless the earth, plants and animals which provide for us.
We honor the men and women who work to make food available for us.
We remember our mothers and grandmothers who taught us to prepare meals.

In the Eating area

God of hospitality,
We give thanks for the friends and family who gather around this table.
We bless their conversations and laughter.
We honor all with whom we are connected in relationship.
We remember those who remain with us only in spirit.

In the Living room

God of life,
We give thanks for the space in this home designated “living.”
We bless (name) and (name)... who share their lives together here.
We honor their need for relaxation and renewal.
We remember those who lack a place of safety in which to live.

In the Bathroom

God of our bodies,
We give thanks for our physical forms.
We bless our bodies with water and substances which cleanse and nourish them.
We honor the needs and complex processes of our beings.
We remember the joy and pleasure our bodies bring us daily.

In the Bedroom

God of intimacy,

We give thanks for the relationship between (*name couple*)

We bless their slumber and the intertwining of their lives.

We honor the spirituality of their connection.

We remember the years, the days and the moments they have shared together.

Back to central place

God of all,

We give thanks for this home.

We bless (*name those who live in the home*), who inhabit this place.

We honor their being together in relationship here.

We remember all the homes you have provided us in our lives. Amen.

FEMINIST RITUAL: IT'S IN THE PROCESS

By Steve Blons

So much work has already been done – inclusive language texts, new music and rites, women as priest and preacher, women's stories honored as revelation, faith circles without hierarchy, new insights into sacred writings, lost voices rediscovered. Shelves of resources abound, a treasure of new ways to imagine and worship. And so, instead of another ritual, I want to describe what I believe to be a feminist process for making worship: the community makes its own rituals, writes its own prayers and music, tells its own stories, presides over its own sacraments.

As Madelin Sue Martin was so fond of telling us, liturgy is a communitarian art form and should be created in community. For the last four years, I have been part of a worshipping community fully committed to this vision. Each week we gather in a circle to listen to the upcoming lectionary reading and share our thoughts, images, and questions. Out of all this, worship is planned. In the ritual itself we strive to hear from all our voices, to maximize participation and expression, to make space for our diversity of experience and taste. We try not to control too much, to leave the Spirit plenty of room to surprise us.

I want to share two examples from our recent experience, one textual and the other visual. My hope is that these might inspire the circle that plans your rituals. I believe it is from a feminist perspective that we can re-imagine ourselves, every single one of us, as ritual makers.

One week last summer the text was the familiar passage we know as the Lord's Prayer. At first we considered reading several of the many new versions that have been written. Then it was suggested that we try writing our own. And so, in place of a homily (we often employ active forms of reflection on the word of the day) we placed sheets of newsprint around the worship space; each with a single line of the prayer as a heading. People then went to each sheet and wrote an equivalent line in their own words. This included adults and kids, tradition-lovers and skeptical seekers, and a street person who has become a frequent visitor to our service. Later, people had time to revisit these pages and read everyone's contributions.

It was then suggested that we use these words in our weekly prayer. We realized that choosing which lines to use together would inevitably reflect the chooser's point of view. So each week the prayer was composed by selecting at random one line from each page. The familiarity of the prayer provided all of the continuity we needed, so that mixing images and styles didn't seem to matter. The result not only worked as community prayer, but it deepened our sense of connection to one another. Here are three of the versions that came out of the process.

Holy Spirit that dwells within us, you are the divine mystery.

Let us be ruled by your love.

We believe that we all will be one, when we listen and act on your desires and not on our own.

May the same principles that govern the spiritual world govern the earth, civic life, and all social relationships.

Open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts that we may receive this day our daily bread so freely given by you.

Forgive us for the ones we hurt and let us forgive those who hurt us.

Do not tempt us beyond our strength to resist.

You are the infinite universe.

So as in peace, go in peace, into the world according to the Buddha and sing to all people.

Great God who watches over all people, we adore you.

Let us be ruled by your love as you dwell within us.

Thank you for this day, and all our blessings in it.

Thank you for a spirit of community and togetherness and caring.

Help us be wise in our decisions, and when we aren't, please protect us from and in our foolishness.

You are the infinite universe. Hallelujah!

O Sacred Source who loved us into life, you are holy to me.

Please fill my heart with love and compassion and the hearts of all people, too.

May the same principles that govern the spiritual world govern the earth, civic life, and all social relationships.

Teach us to accept that we cannot all be the same, but that diversity is your *gift*.

You are the light in our darkness, guiding us home.

You are the infinite universe.

Shalom. Blessed be.

Another example. We often use projected images in our worship because we have some wonderful photographers within our circle. But recently, we had people stay after worship to create slides from blank pieces of film using markers or scratching the surfaces. The kids especially had a good time with this. This was Advent, and we told people to show us God coming to be with us. Some of the three dozen images that emerged were abstract and suggestive, others more representational.

During worship the following Sunday, which was also the Winter Solstice, the slides were shown continuously through most of the service, including communion. Later many people commented that these images made amazing connections for them with the words being sung or spoken or with the ritual actions we were doing. This was pure serendipity, of course. Once again we were implementing an idea that came from the community, using the labors of the community, feeling the grace of the community throughout the ritual.

One final point. Not everyone in this community is attuned or sensitive to a feminist perspective. Some love the old hymns, for example, poor language and all. And so, sometimes, we use those hymns without messing with the language, to honor our diversity. Sometimes who the ritual includes is more important than what it says.

Making worship in this way not only expresses who we are as community, it also forms us more and more into community. To me, this is a way to re-imagine ritual from a feminist perspective. I encourage all of you to be bold, to claim your rituals and make them together in community.

MANY NAMES AND MANY FACES
by Manley Olson

Many names and many faces
Help us God, to learn your ways.
Words and pictures ever changing
Faith grows deeper day by day.
As we seek to know you better,
As we strive your flock to be,
Each new day brings us new visions
Glimpses of eternity.

Our Creator and Redeemer,
Our Sustainer, Guide and Friend.
Fire by night and cloud at morning,
Rolling thunder, quiet wind.
Mighty ruler, gentle shepherd
Mother eagle on her nest,
Living Bread, renewing water,
Source of mercy, peace and rest.

Helpless infant in a manger
Dying savior on the cross.
Solid rock in time of trouble
Comforter in time of loss.
As Sophia source of wisdom
Sign of peace as hovering dove.
Trinity, yet one forever
Holy Spirit, endless love.

Womb of life and caring parent
Fierce avenger, judge as well.
God of space, remote, eternal
God with us, Immanuel.
As it was in the beginning
Word was God and God was Word.
So we each share words and visions
Of the God we've seen and heard.

Tune: Nettleton 8787 D
(Presbyterian Hymnal 355)

SHEEP AND WOMEN

by Denise Moreland

- All: Both sheep and women know. They know their wild natures, the oppression of being dominated, the horror of being sacrificed, and the hope for restoration to right relationship.
- Reader 1: When everything, including sheep, were wild...
“And God made the beasts according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.” Genesis 1:25
- Reader 2: Domestication of sheep began when “dominion over” began...
“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth...’”
- Reader 3: Through domestication came the need for sacrifice...
“When a man is guilty in any of these, he shall confess the sin he has committed, and he shall bring his guilt offering to the Lord for the sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a goat, for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for him in his sin.” - Leviticus 5:5-6
- Reader 1: Can we remember when women were wild and free—before domination? Woman roamed the earth with the creatures of creation, smelling the fragrances of the garden, and eating freely of its fruits...
“And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.” Genesis 2:25
- Reader 2: Like sheep, women became dominated by men
“To the woman God said, ‘I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” Genesis 3:16
Woman became property of man, and objects for his sexual pleasure. They were herded like sheep for his harem and became his concubine.
- Reader 3: Like sheep, women were sacrificed...
This is the story of the concubine of the Levite who was brutally raped and murdered by the men of Ephraim. The Levite "seized his concubine, and put her out to them; and they knew her, and abused her all night until morning." She was found by the Levite, dead from her abusers. The Levite returned the woman home, then "he took a knife, and laying hold of his concubine he divided her, limb by limb, into twelve pieces, and sent her throughout all the territory of Israel." Judges 19:16-30
- Reader 4: The God we worship does not require sacrifice. God says to the people of Ephraim, in "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offering." Hosea 6:6. God desires right relationship.
- Reader 5: God as the Good Shepherd, will lead and guide us, not control, own or dominate us...

She will feed her flock like a shepherd,
She will gather the lambs in her arms,

She will carry them in her bosom,
And gently lead those that are with young. Isaiah 40:11

Reader 6: Jesus as the Good Shepherd, will find the lost sheep...
Jesus told them this parable:
‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.’” Luke 15:3-7

Reader 7: Jesus, the Good Shepherd, reminds us to respect difference and tells us that even in laying down his life; he does not relinquish his power.
“I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me...And I have other sheep, that are not in this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father.” John 10:14-18

Readers 1, 2, 3
Sophia is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

She maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
She leadeth me beside the still waters.

She restoreth my soul;
She leadeth me in the paths of righteousness
For her names's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For thou art with me;
Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies;
Thou anointest my head with oil;
My cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of Sophia for ever. – Psalm 23

Prayer for Sheep and Women

We consider the plight of sheep.
Once they were wild animals, free to roam and wander.

Then they became dominated;
Used to meet human need.
Their skins shaved to keep humans warm.
Their milk taken to give humans nourishment.
And slaughtered to provide meat for human consumption.

And they were killed upon alters
As a sacrifice of life and blood to human gods.

In the tradition of American Indians
We thank the sheep
For providing for our needs.

Like sheep, women remember our wild selves.
We understand domination
And human consumption
And sacrifice to god.

We re-claim our wild natures
And affirm the wild natures of sheep.

We look to the God of sheep and women.
As the giver and sustainer of life.
She provides the warmth, the milk and the nourishment.
And She requires no sacrifice of life or blood.

Dear God of sheep and of women,
Give us the courage to keep our wild selves alive
In the midst of domestication and human consumption.

Give us the grace to care for one another,
Especially the least among us.

Give us guidance
To make justice on earth.

Give us intuition
To develop right relationship.

And give us wisdom
To know the truth.

AT THE WELL WE'RE ALL TOGETHER
by Manley Olson

At the well we're all together,
Sharing in the gift of life.
God supplies the living water,
Gives the peace that conquers strife.
Water served a thirsty Jesus,
Did God's glorious feast foretell.
Bread and wine we share with neighbors,
All together at the well.

At the well we all are welcome,
Rich or poor it matters not.
Here our past is left behind us,
Here our sins are now forgot.
Like the woman who met Jesus,
Then her neighbors ran to tell.
We must share the gospel message,
All together at the well.

With the one who spoke to Jesus
We know sorrow, doubt and fear.
With her when we greet a stranger,
It is Christ whose voice we hear.
As we help the poor and hungry,
Visit those in prison cell.
We serve Christ and all God's people,
All together at the well.

Peace, I leave you, was Christ's message,
Share my teaching far and wide.
Live in love as I have taught you,
In your hearts let peace abide.
In a world where peace is needed,
Do this task and do it well.
Go proclaim the peace I give you,
All together at the well.

8787D

Suggested tunes: Scarlet Ribbons (English Traditional)
Hymn to Joy
Rustington
Nettleton

MEDITATIONS ON MOSES AND MIRIAM

by Barbara Battin

Prayer is communion with God. This prayer ritual is intended to lead into alignment with God, into unity with the sacred, into "Holy Communion." Always there are two dimensions to prayer: the prayer process (ritual, spoken prayer, sung or danced prayers) and the actual encounter with the Sacred. Ritual is the vehicle, not the destination. Ritual is the vase that holds a variety of experiences of the Holy One.

Begin in silence.

Let your breath flow naturally. Become aware of your surroundings; simply notice what is around you, remembering that God is in all things and through all things, that every thing may speak to us of God. Now notice what is within you. Be aware of what thoughts are passing through your mind, what feelings rise in your heart, what memories may surface, what yearnings may be present in this moment

Simply be the moment.

(Remember God's response to Moses during the encounter with God in the burning bush. When Moses asks the name of God, God says, "I am who I am," or "I am becoming who I am becoming" (Exod. 3:14). God is the Great I AM, the God of Being.

There is no need to shut out anything if everything may be a way to God. There is no need to deny either external or internal phenomena. The world is home. God is at home in the world. We need only to remember we are already home in order to apprehend the holy in each moment. Like Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, All you need to do is click your heels to go home!

Take off your shoes.

Out of the corner of his eye, while tending sheep in the desert, Moses catches sight of the burning bush. Inadvertently, Moses is called from the midst of his work and routine. God says to Moses, "Take off your shoes. You are on holy ground" (Exod. 3:5).

Take off your shoes so that there is nothing between you and God. Take off your shoes so that all that gets in the way of seeing the Sacred in life is removed. Take off your shoes so that you may feel keenly the Presence, the Thick Presence of the Holy.

Let go of anything that is getting in the way of simply *being* present to the Sacred in life, to the Holy in this moment. As you let that drop away, piece by piece, layer by layer, let the fire of God's passionate presence be a warming, relaxing glow around you.

If you choose, you may want to let one of these questions rise in your awareness: What may God be calling me to do to free myself from the slaveries of my routines, from the snares of places I get caught in other people's needs and expectations, from the places I am bound by oppressive structures and unjust systems? What may God be calling me to do to free others from such experiences?

Wriggle your toes.

Feel the freedom of this. Remember that it was with a first toe stepped into the Reed Sea that the journey through the waters started.

Like the unbinding of the feet of Chinese women, let yourself revel in wriggling your toes. You may want to laugh as you remember the graffiti that says, "Life is too short for tight shoes."

You may want to recall all the places that your shoes feel too tight, all the places that make your soul feel as if it is bound. Keep wriggling your toes as you do this to feel the difference between bondage and freedom.

If you can, bathe your feet or massage them. Treat them with tenderness.

Now DANCE!

When Moses and the Israelites reached the other side of the Reed Sea, There was singing and dancing. Miriam, sister of Moses and Aaron, "took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing" (Exod. 15:20).

Dance with God! If you are in a place where you can prance and pirouette a bit, dance with joy, remembering all the places you have found new freedom in yourself, in your life, in relationships. If you cannot physically get up and dance, then in your imagination, dance with God.

Close this ritual by again simply *being*. Slow your dance. Look around. Notice this place in which you have met, been met by, God. Give thanks for this encounter, for this Holy Communion with God. When you are ready, return to your day, taking with you the glow of God.

You may want to experiment with various contexts for this ritual. You may remove your shoes under your desk at work. You may do it as you take off your shoes as you come home. You may even just wriggle your toes in the midst of a meeting or a social gathering or some other occasion to remind yourself that you are free, unbound. You may let your soul dance, even when your feet can't. Let any ache in your feet be a reminder to you that in any moment, you can "take off your shoes" and stand on holy ground in the presence of the Sacred. Amen!

NOTICING GOD
By Denise Moreland

Reader 1:

When I was young, I was taught that Man has dominion over the earth and all living creatures. Living things included only those that were born, grew, and died. After death, they were no longer considered alive. Fallen leaves, dirt, air, and rocks were not considered alive. I was taught that nature was wild and to be feared.

Reader 2:

When I got older, I learned that the earth thrived for billions of years before human beings even entered the scene. I stopped categorizing things by living and nonliving, for I sensed the life and energy of dirt, fallen leaves, air, and especially rocks. I began to view nature as good and people as evil. My relationship with earth was based on shame and guilt for being human.

All:

Now I believe that nature and humans are part of the same interdependent circle. My relationship with the wondrous world around me is no longer based on fear, shame, or guilt. It is based on appreciation and respect. I am nourished by the beauty that surrounds me. And I try to nurture the world around me by sharing the beauty inside of me. In these things, I see God's face, feel God's touch, and hear God's voice. By participating, I taste and smell God's creativity.

God speaks through each reader. Each line should be read slowly, allowing the listener to remember the image being spoken. Persons not reading may want to close their eyes to remember. The reader or listeners may want to physically move to "act out" what is being spoken.

Reader 3:

I am in the smell of grass,
...the mystery of stars,
...the purity of a baby's face.

I am in the sweetness of fresh fruit,
...the energy of dirt,
...the ancient knowing of rocks and clay.

I am in the lush green of trees,
...the ocean mist,
...the smell of wood.

I am in your own heartbeat.

Reader 4:

I am in the healing warmth of sunshine.
...the refreshing smell of rain,
...the startling rumble of thunder.

I am in the serenity of the sunset,
...the unique pattern of each snowflake,
...the meandering of a river.

I am in the playfulness of birds,
...the blue of the sky,
...the depth of the sea.

I am in the movements of your body.

Reader 5:

I am in the dryness of the desert,
...the majesty of mountains,
...the restfulness of sleep.

I am in every smile,
...the transformation of the butterfly,
...the refreshment of water.

I am in fun and joy,
...in fear, doubt, and pain.
...in the challenge of each day.

I am in the creativity of your mind.

All:

I am the life energy that nourishes
your body, mind, and soul.
I am inside of you and all around you.
Live in harmony with all
manifestations of me.
Be gracious as you live in grace,
And you will know profound peace.
Amen.

A HARVEST OF REMEMBERING

by Baya Clare

This ritual for a time of thanksgiving recalls events in United States history, but you are invited to adapt it for your own context. Each nation, each state, has events that need to be remembered when thinking about what has been harvested. Who is hungry? Who is well fed? Why? It is in remembering that we can harvest the goodness God meant for all.

Voice 1: On this happy day we gather to celebrate peace and contentment, abundance and joy, and our life together in this community.

Voice 2: We also remember that many people in this violent and polarized world have not peace nor community in abundance.

All: For the peace and joy which we share and enjoy today we give thanks, and we pray that our choices and actions may ever be directed towards mutuality, sharing and cooperation.

Voice 1: We remember that many of our ancestors came to this continent to escape oppression in their own lands.

Voice 2: We also remember that many of our ancestors were brought here against their wills.

Voice 3: and that the legacy of slavery continues to cause division, misunderstanding, and inequality among us today.

Voice 2: We also remember the Indian people, who were already here when our immigrant ancestors arrived.

Voice 1: For the terrible destruction of life and livelihood and cultures, which accompanied that immigration, we ask forgiveness.

Voice 4: We also remember that people still come to this country from all over the earth in hope of finding a haven, and that, for many, it is that, but, for many others, it is not.

All: We pray that we may never forget our histories, nor see them silenced or suppressed. We ask for the gift of listening without prejudice and the wisdom to work together to change those systems that oppress us all.

Voice 1: Many of the foods we eat daily are native to this continent and were shared with our ancestors by the first people of this hemisphere: corn, potatoes, tomatoes, squash, cranberries, chocolate, turkey...

Voice 3: Many of the foods we eat daily are grown by people in other lands who live in poverty and hunger because the fruits of their farmlands are brought to our marketplaces: Bananas, pineapples, beef, coffee, tea...

Voice 4: And we are mindful of the farmers and workers in our own land who struggle as well.

Voice 2: We know that there are still far too many, even in this abundant land, who do not have enough.

All: We give thanks for the food we share today, and we pray that we may never be satisfied until all creatures have what they need for life. We are both graced and grieved by our place in this world, as people who live in the midst of so much abundance and so much need, whose histories are filled with such baffling contradictions, such generosity and such greed. Let us bless and be blessed by our awareness. Let us take courage and act. May the food and friendship we share here today give us the

strength and courage to name the truth and do the good work always.
Amen.

SOLSTICE RITUAL

This ritual celebrates the Winter Solstice when the light returns to a darkened world.

The group begins with the room darkened as much as possible.

Each person names the sorrow and sadness that she has experienced in her life over the past year.

After each person has a chance to speak, the leader invites the group to howl like wolves. The lamentation continues as the group is immersed in the cleansing sound of released sorrow.

Then, each woman lights a candle and tells the group about the places in her life where she is experiencing joy, growth and happiness. The light grows as each person tells her story of hope.

The ritual may be ended with prayers, poetry or songs.

CANTICLE OF INCARNATION

by Baya Clare, CSJ

For three speakers and chorus. This should be read clearly and fluidly at a moderate pace with minimal pauses between voices except where noted. The Chorus always speaks with great joy and gladness. A muted drumbeat, like a human heartbeat, may sound softly and steadily throughout the reading, if desired.

Voice 1: And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled. And all went to be taxed, each into their own city. And Joseph and Mary also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of King David, which is called Bethlehem. Mary was very great with child, and so it was, that while they were there the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn, a son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in the manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

(Short pause.)

Voice 2: And so it was, that, while they were there

Voice 3: While they were there, at *that* time, in *that* place

Voice 2: The days were accomplished that she should be delivered

Voice 3: The ancient myth became fact and was born into history

Chorus: And she brought forth

Voice 2: from her body

Voice 3: At *that* time, in *that* place

Voice 1: A new body

Chorus: Her firstborn, a son

Voice 3: Situated in time, born into history

Chorus: Fully human and fully God

Voice 2: This is my body

Voice 1: My body, made in secret, fashioned in the depths of the earth

Chorus: Fashioned in the depths of the earth from the dust of the stars

(Pause)

Voice 1: You have cupped in your hand the waters of the sea

You have marked off the heavens with your palm

You have held in a measure the dust of the earth

And weighed the mountains in a scale

Voice 2: What are we that you are mindful of us?

Voice 3: Who are we that you care for us?

Chorus: So, fearfully, wonderfully made

Voice 3: A sign

Chorus: This shall be a sign to you

Voice 2: My body

Voice 3: My body

Voice 1: Awe of God is in the bodies of all created beings

Chorus: Fear not, for behold

We bring you tidings of great joy

Which shall be to all people

(Pause)

Voice 1: From the earth God created us
In God's image we are made
Limited days of life we have
Until we return to earth again
Voice 3: Who are we that you care for us?
Voice 2: What are we that you are mindful of us?
Chorus: Unto you is born this day
Voice 3: And that day
Voice 1: In the city of King David
Voice 3: And here
Voice 2: From the body of a woman
Voice 3: At that time, in that place
Voice 1: To us
Chorus: Fear not!
Voice 2: This life became visible
We have seen and bear witness to it
Chorus: To you the eternal life
Voice 1: That was present to God
Voice 3: From the beginning
Voice 1: And became visible to us
Voice 3: In history
Voice 2: We have heard
We have seen with our own eyes
Voice 1: And our hands have touched
Voice 3: I will never believe it without touching
Chorus: What you knew from the beginning
Let it remain in your hearts
Voice 2: And in your eyes and hands and ears
Voice 1: This is my body
Voice 3: In that time, in that place
Chorus: In all times, and all places
Voice 2: From the beginning until the close of the age
Voice 1: I am with you always, until the end of the world
Chorus: I am with you and within you now
(Short pause)
Voice 3: You have formed my inmost being
(Short pause)
Voice 1: You knit me together in my mother's womb
(Shorter pause)
Voice 2: And Mary was great with child
Chorus: On earth peace, and good will to all.
Voice 1: Amen.

PHILO-SOPHIA procreated Philosophy

by Edith La-Chelle Gibson

So the story continues with another generation
of creation

The God of love created Mrs. Black Woman
from a fresh pink flower and a pink fashion skirt

The God of love appeared to beautiful
Mrs. Black Woman because of her
wisdom and strength to create a helpmate

The God of love wooed her into a deep sleep
And took a piece of her womb and her Spirit
to create Mr. Black Man

Mrs. Black Woman and Mr. Black Man roamed
the moon and the sky, too

The two unnamed stumbled across the God of love
requesting their names to be changed, to empower love

God stretched out Her staff with a little bit of Her power
changing their names to represent a new historical identity

The God of love gave Mr. Black Man the name Philo, Greek god of power
and Mrs. Black Woman became Sophia, Greek goddess of wisdom

Philo and Sophia became one holy unit of peace and love

Together Philo and Sophia intertwined their power and wisdom,
together to procreate a daughter and a son of Philosophy

Philo-Sophia created melody and harmony to write romantic love
Songs

Philo-Sophia equipped the Spirit and the womb to grasp
the manifestation of love making in the Upper Room

Philo-Sophia arranged the light and the sun to dance
on a cloudy day

Philo-Sophia together twisted war and victory to defeat
their adversaries

Philo-Sophia together enthralled sex and love to express
the depth of their souls

Philo-Sophia fashioned rhythm and rhyme to embellish
their fears through poetry

Philo-Sophia formed heaven and earth to establish
their own theology

Philo-Sophia together shaped a new generation and nation of Philosophy

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