

AISGA AFFAIRS NEWSLETTER

October 2009

October brought the SDI Conference entitled: 'Being Present' to Dublin. There were about 200 participants gathered in the Crowne Plaza Hotel where the atmosphere was both prayerful and congenial. Daniel O'Leary was the keynote speaker, Carmel Boyle was the ritual leader and Una Agnew was the Conference Spiritual Director. Sp. Directors assembled from many continents and religious traditions. AISGA was well represented and lent considerable support to the event.

3 DATES FOR YOUR CALENDAR

December 5th is earmarked for the AISGA Advent Retreat. Some input on Self-Care for Spiritual Directors and Supervisors will be given. 'Prepare the Way' will be the theme of the day
May 24th to May 28th Fr Sebastian Painadath SJ will direct a Spirituality Study week in Milltown Park Conference Centre. Bookings: uagnew@milltown-institute.ie. **June 4th, 2010** is earmarked for our AISGA summer event. Beverly Lanzetta's list of published books can be found on page 4 of this newsletter.

Carmel Boyle Ritual Leader for SDI Conference Ireland Summary & Reflection

When I was invited by SDI I understood that my role with regard to ritual/prayer for the opening of the SDI conference was to create a welcoming space through song, reflection and ritual movement and to help facilitate connections and openness in the group while helping the group to be receptive to one another and offer a sense of 'Being Present'. I was conscious of the need to be inclusive regarding spiritual traditions and cultures while at the same time offering a celtic flavour that might reflect the spiritual tradition of ourseves, the host country.

The preparation of the environment in the conference space was very limited but Geraldine Holton prepared a beautiful sacred space in the meditation room, a celtic soul garden, that reflected the themes of the Conference and

offered a space for participants to integrate the content of the conference. The space was welcomed by many as a rest-stop in the journey.

DAY 1

For the opening ritual I was drawn to begin with 'Dia Duit', words of blessing in the Irish language set to a familiar celtic melody. Through this simple song contact was made with everyone in the group. The presentation made use of the sound of a waterfall and a visual of a waterfall on a large screen. The lyrics of all songs were clearly displayed on the screen throughout which made it very easy for all to participate. There then followed my song 'Let the waters flow'. It takes the idea that we are all like drops of water, creating a waterfall that eventually flows like a river to the sea. The lyrics reflect the places where people came from, both metaphorically and physically, flowing from the 'well of experience', 'tears of injustice', 'streams of new life' and then flowing from the various countries that were represented at the conference. (including United States, Hungary, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia, Switzerland, France, The Phillipines, England, Wales, New Zealand Australia)

The participants were then invited into a more meditative space as they sat in circles and were invited to sound (Chant/tone) their hopes for the conference; these hopes were gathered in the a white cloth representing a sail. The ritual concluded with the singing of my song 'Follow the Wind' which describes setting sail from a port on the voyage, that is the conference, following the guiding wind, the Spirit.

After the opening ritual my role was to respond to the movement and themes that were emerging and to sense the energy of the group. Hence, although I had prepared a night prayer that was appropriate, I felt it better to abandon it for a more simple response to the day. Una began the day with the ancient celtic prayer 'I am the wind..' and following the input in the evening given by Megan Mckenna who offered many faces of God in her stories, I sang the song I had composed based on that ancient celtic prayer entitled 'I Am'. This drew the day together in a gentle yet effective way.

DAY 2

The prayer of day two began with a movement helpful to 'waking up' our whole bodies while singing a chant. The focus of this prayer time was 'attending to the quality of our presence', a session that had

previously been prepared for an AISGA Day with reflective and autumnal visuals, a reflection 'Quality of Presence' by Geraldine Holton and my song 'Linger Lovingly'. It was perfect for the conference theme of 'Being Present'. What probably made the most impact in this session was what might have been perceived as a problem. My video preparation at the last minute failed to play on the computer provided (still something of a mystery). However, the stripping away of backing music and visuals gave a stark teaching on the spiritual journey when I was left with just the pure unaccompanied voice to carry the session.

In the evening prayer session I also tried to respond to what went before. We were treated to some Celtic Harp music and song and of course this kind of gathering reminded me of that thin line between the holy and secular in celtic spirituality as we gathered in a 'thin space' at 'thin time'. So the prayer began with, surprisingly for some, 'Tura lura lural' which was followed by a simple chant 'Its not what you do ...but its the presence you are'. This gave us an opportunity to reflect on the experiences of the day, the people we encountered, especially at workshops - and to give thanks for their unique presence. I finished with the Night Prayer song that invited us to sleep in the company of the angels. (The group did do a little Irish dancing after that but I headed to my bed)

DAY3

In the morning I sang 'I arise today' in a repetitive style so that everyone could join in. It was a challenge for me as a Christian to be inclusive with regard to the choice of songs and prayers. Following a conversation with a Jewish representative at the conference regarding 'resurrection' I attempted to be inclusive with the words of St. Patrick and so respecting the theme of the conference, I inserted the word 'Presence' where we would traditionally have Christ, this gave other faith traditions an opportunity to include in that 'Presence' the name of their God, their sense of the Ultimate.

In the closing ritual I attempted to bring things together in a spirit of gratitude for all that had been shared over the weekend. Opening with singing the simple chant that I sang the evening before 'The Presence you are'; its familiarity now an aid to participation. I simply played the guitar with the song as the group were entranced by the

chant, acknowledging the many experiences of the 'Presence' over the weekend. There were many synchronicities with Una's invitation to the group to surface a one word summary for the week-end. These words provided me with some lyrics for the song of thanksgiving that included giving thanks for the everyday ways that we experienced our 'everyday God'. I adjusted the lyrics of *Everyday God* to give thanks for the people and the blessings - 'everyday God we thank you, with grateful hearts, for being with us'. Finally with the Irish Blessing which I composed accompanied by simple hand gestures, the gathering blessed one another, those that they companion in spiritual guidance and their journey home. 'May the road rise to meet you.'

This short summary gives a glimpse of what my participation in SDI Conference was. It was a wonderful experience for me to have the opportunity to share my music and sense of the spiritual with an audience who appreciated and engaged with it all. If you are interested, many of the songs mentioned have been recorded and some have also been put together in dvd visual format which would be suitable for use at your own rituals. Contact:

Carmel Boyle or Geraldine Holton, An Croí Wisdom Learning Community, Baltrasna, Ashbourne, Co. Meath
01.8352156 or www.ancroi.ie

A Final Summing up as Spiritual Director of *Being Present* SDI Conference, Oct 16-18th 2009 by Una Agnew

During the *Being Present* Conference, participants from many different nations had the opportunity of resourcing ourselves in the spiritual dimension of our lives. Despite the level of expertise among participants, it is always possible to move deeper into that Divine Source of energy that sustains and enriches our lives. We were recalled over this weekend, in so many ways, through our speakers and workshop animators, to engage in attentive presence which facilitates contemplation; the life blood of our work as spiritual directors and guides.

This SDI event confirmed the fact that the greatest gift that we can bestow on another is this gift of attentive presence. The fullness of this presence is multilayered. I am present to the other in and through my body, mind, talents, history, spirit and soul. I bring a manifold quality of unique presence to each person that I meet. The outcome of such presence is a frail but faithful conduit of God's

presence in the world. Each of us becomes a channel of divine grace to the other, to the world and to the cosmos. Through ongoing self awareness, we come to know what Mary Frolich so beautifully describes as 'one's personhood as an icon through which the grounding mystery of existence flows'¹. During this Conference, 'the grounding mystery of existence' flowed generously and generatively in so many ways.

At our venue, The Crowne Plaza Hotel in Blanchardstown, the beautiful décor of the conference room displayed mounted photographic wall-board cuts depicting details of the boglands of Ireland. These areas of peatland and wild life sanctuary, reminded us that invisible treasures are preserved intact and uncontaminated in bogs. Chalices, stashes of butter thousands of years olds, piece of precious metals, and stone tools have been recovered intact, having been buried for years. Our several associations of spiritual guides: SD International, SD Europe, All Ireland Spiritual Guidance Association, the Australian Network of Spiritual Directors; all work tirelessly to preserve hidden sacred dimensions of life in our selves and in our world. Our depth-psychologist friends inform us that they are no longer competent to minister to the soul pain and soul hunger they encounter in their clinics—they need spiritual guides and spiritual healers to help complement the work they do.

In the course of this Conference we have been reminded to open our eyes, open our ears, our hearts to embrace the sacramental dimension of life. Daniel O'Leary reminds us again and again to *Begin with the Heart* from whence we have the sublime possibility of being open to the Prism of God's Love.

In the inspiring prayer and ritual moments, competently organised by Carmel Boyle, we were exhorted to allow our souls to sing. WB Yeats, who also featured in the evening's harp recital, wrote convincingly of the soul's capacity for celebration. He writes:

*An aged man is but a paltry thing
A tattered coat upon a stick unless*

¹ M. Frolich in: *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, eds. E.Dreyer and M. Burrows, London/ Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press, 2005. 65-67, at 75

*Soul clap its hands and sing and louder sing
For every tatter in its mortal dress.*

Andrew Rudd (poet) one of the workshop facilitators reminded us that although we live in a [knowledge economy](#), we must be guided wisely towards an [attention economy](#). We need to discern what is worthy of our attention. It is such choices that determine who we ultimately become.

Megan McKenna's evening of story invited the group to connect deeply with our many storied lives. We are inserted within a multi-layered conglomerate of the God story, the Story of the Cosmos, the Earth Story, our religious tradition story, our personal story. Our story unfolds as we continue to be redeemed in our many-storied existence. Stories from each of the categories confront us with feelings of desire, guilt, cowardice, and enthusiasm. We need to stop and examine these feelings; they reveal more about ourselves than about the stories that are told.

In the final session, [Korko Moses SJ](#) reminded us of the need for awareness as the hall mark of spiritual living and the gift of a beginner's mind. It is our capacity for awareness that will raise the levels of our consciousness and integrate the bits and pieces of our lives. Our beginner's mind keeps us young and open to learn those 'new things' that the Spirit is always communicating. However knowledgeable we imagine we are, we are always beginners in spiritual knowledge. A number of u-tube interviews took place; these have yet to materialise on the SDI website.

The SLIEVE CROOB SPIRITUALITY WORKSHOP Oct. 9th. Report from Dr Gordon Graham

A broad cross section of the religious and psychological communities gathered on 9 October, filling the Slieve Croob Mountain Inn to near capacity, for the 5th Annual Slieve Croob Conference on Spirituality and Psychotherapy. All four major churches as well as well as practitioners of Zen Buddhist meditation were represented and therapists from the Irish Council for Psychotherapists, the London Institute of Psychosynthesis and therapists certified by the All Ireland Spiritual Guidance Assoc., The British Assoc. of Counselling and Psychotherapy, and the UK Council for Psychotherapy and two guests from the US.

The keynote address was given by Dr. Johnston McMaster of the Irish School of Ecumenics who struck the theme of the relationship of these two often mutually suspicious healing disciplines. From his recent highly acclaimed book on Celtic Spirituality, Dr. McMaster offered a common strategy of avoiding literalism and fundamentalism on both sides and encouraged the use of the rich resources of the Psalms of Lament and the many Judaic and Christian myths, liturgies and poetry augmenting the Greek and Latin myths long used by psychological theorists. Consensus was reached over a caution regarding the possibility that myths of blood sacrifices may have contributed to the fuelling of the violence in the North over the last thirty years.

Consensus was easily reached that a Slieve Croob 6th Annual Conference should be called for the autumn of 2010 to reflect once again on the spirituality readily to hand in the lovely Mourne Mountains.

A Letter from the Chairperson of AISGA Dr Jack Finnegan

Hello Everybody:

And may blessings of presence and alert stillness abound for you in these days of waiting that are now upon us!

I want to thank Una Agnew and Carmel Boyle for the very active parts they played at the recent SDI conference and at so many of our own events over the years since AISGA was founded. Sorcha Woods is currently an ever ready support in our many endeavours. Lift hands in blessing for them and perhaps a little chant of gratitude, the kind that leaves traces on souls.

As spiritual companions we now live in economically and politically challenging times. What does a spirituality for a time of social and personal economic collapse and need look like in your own life and in the lives of those

you accompany? How do you respond? Where do you find the traces of God? Indeed, how is the human spirit seeking form in Ireland today? Where is the fire of Spirit to be found?

The human spirit is the principle of human greatness, dignity and uniqueness. Our task is to tend it well, hold it warmly, and recognise its creativity. Our privilege is to sit in difficult times at the wellsprings of self-transcending empathy, that humane quality of solidarity that rhythms forth as care of the vulnerable. Such contemplative compassion has always informed true humanity, true religiosity, and empowering, emancipating spirituality. Compassionate spirit gives wounded spirit the safe space in which to heal, flourish and grow; and compassionate spirit tends a wounded earth.

May your spirit grow and dance in bright new ways and healing gifts abound! Blessings, Jack

A new edition of AISGA Information booklet is in preparation. The Code of Ethics will be on our website as a *read-only* document. This new information booklet will be available to all as soon as the printing is completed. Sorcha Woods is overseeing this work for us.

PUBLISHED BOOKS by Beverly Lanzetta which you may wish to consult in preparation for her coming in June 2010:

- *Forty Day Journey with Joan Chittister.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007.
- *Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007.
- *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.
- *The Other Side of Nothingness: Toward a Theology of Radical Openness.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- *Path of the Heart.* New York: Paragon House, 1986.