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## Notes from the Director

**Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing... Someplace where we can be free.**

~ Starhawk

With this issue of the newsletter we welcome our first returning guest author. Dr. Vincent Harding honored us with his contribution to our December 2006 issue. Now, as we approach the November elections, and as we consider all that is at stake – not only for this country, but for the world – for the present and for the future, I asked for his reflections. So that we might reflect with him. So that we might be encouraged to our own deepened reflections, commitments, and prayers. Without any conscious collaboration, his article and mine seem to echo one another as we explore the possibilities inherent in these unsettled times. Perhaps that congruence is a propitious sign of something seeking to emerge.

On October 16th, OneLife Institute will celebrate it's fourth birthday. Whatever the outcome of the presidential contest, we will have work to do. Not just OneLife, all of us. Work that requires the fullness of heart, mind, spirit, and strength. We hope, in the days and years ahead, that you will continue to journey with us; that you will share your struggles and your strength, your insights and inspiration. And we hope that we might also be a resource and a blessing to you.

## TRANSFORMATIVE VISIONS

Please see p.2 for an exciting update on our art, jazz and spoken word event!

## SPIRIT, SOUND & SILENCE

Our final Spirit, Sound & Silence retreat for 2008 will be held on Saturday, October 18th. Join us for a day of healing and renewal as we welcome back our beloved Harpist from the Hood, Sister Destiny Muhammad. See p.5 for details.

## THURMAN AT MOAD

We invite you to be present with us on the afternoon of Nov. 16th for "With Head & Heart: The Life and Legacy of Howard Thurman," part of the Sunday salon series at the Museum of the African Diaspora (MoAD) in San Francisco. This post-election session, timed to honor Thurman's birthday, will consider the relevance of his wisdom for contemporary struggles and the road ahead. Gather at 2:30 PM for refreshments and a showing of filmmaker Arleigh Prelow's documentary short, "Howard Thurman: Spirit of a Movement." Then from 3:00-5:00 PM I will facilitate the lecture-discussion and share excerpts from the video interview "Conversations with Howard Thurman." Please visit our web site or consult [www.moadsf.org](http://www.moadsf.org) for more.

## SPIRITUAL COUNSELING

I am pleased to announce the expansion of my counseling practice, with increased availability for both phone and in-person sessions for individuals and couples. If you are interested in an appointment, or would like more information, please e-mail me at [rankow@onelifeinstitute.org](mailto:rankow@onelifeinstitute.org) or leave a message at 510.595.5598.

In Peace and Gratitude,  
*Liza*



*Kairos [is] the moment of grace and opportunity, the favorable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action.*

~ The Kairos Document

## Crisis :: Opportunity

By Liza J. Rankow, PhD

Perhaps it is human nature to regard our particular historical moment as essential and pivotal. To think that the decisions we face are the most crucial, and in our actions (or failures to act) hang the balance – even the existence – of the future. Perspective may only come with hindsight, yet surely it is not an overstatement to say we are living in urgent times. *Kairotic* times.

The Greek word *kairos* does not have a direct English translation. It can be understood as the “right or opportune season,” the “crucial moment” or the “appointed time,” but it is a *qualitative* rather than chronological time. I like the definition provided in The Kairos Document, a theological manifesto of liberation written by a group of South African clergy and laity in 1985, during the struggle to end apartheid. Kairos, they said, is “the moment of grace and opportunity, the favorable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action. It is a dangerous time, because, if this opportunity is missed, and allowed to pass by...the loss will be immeasurable.” Kairos is “a moment of truth that shows us up for what we really are.”

The frame through which we understand and respond to the kairotic times in life evidences our deepest beliefs and bears witness to our theology. Thus the kairotic moments of our collective social history become our individual moments of reckoning as well. How do we, each of us, construct our theological understanding of current conditions, and how do we, from this foundation, choose to respond to the events of our time?

I believe that we come to this life by intention. That there is a spiritual intelligence within each of us that chose to take birth on the planet at *this* time, uniquely equipped for a particular soul’s purpose. It can be helpful to discern that purpose as a guide for our lives. Consider: What are your special gifts and

talents? What can you see from the vantage point of your specific social context and set of experiences? What is the urging in your heart of how to express and serve and make a difference? What are you called to do and *who* are you called to be?

Dr. Howard Thurman offers a tool to aid in this discernment. He calls it the “Life’s Working Paper.” It represents the guiding principles by which an individual lives her or his life: the blueprint of traits and values that define how we will direct our time and attention, the compelling questions and central issues of our concern, and how we choose to respond to these concerns. Thurman asked the penetrating question: *How have you lived your life in the knowledge of your Truth?* (continued on p.5) → →

### ‘Transformative Visions’ Returns

In March 2009 we will be bringing back our community art, jazz, and spoken word event, Transformative Visions. Scheduled to coincide with the annual observance of *A Season for Nonviolence* and the anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq, this event is intended to both challenge and inspire, offering a spiritually-rooted response to the critical issues of the present day, and lifting up a vision of peace, justice, and possibility for our world.

We are seeking original art and performed word that addresses a variety of activist concerns and carries a prophetic and empowering message of positive social change. Full submission guidelines are available on the Transformative Visions page of our web site, or you can contact us for a copy.

We also welcome volunteers, underwriters, and in-kind donations to help make this event possible and accessible to all. Email: [visions@onelifeinstitute.org](mailto:visions@onelifeinstitute.org) or leave a message at 510.595.5598.

**Thank you!**

## Midwifing a New America

By Vincent Harding, PhD

I think it was sometime early in 2007 that I began to find myself almost possessed by a profound premonitory sense that the next year, *this* year, 2008, would be filled with a special power. At first I was unable to articulate or explain my feeling with any more clarity than a deep and growing conviction that we were approaching what my Buddhist friends would call a propitious historical moment. Although I realized that the likelihood of an amazing presidential electoral possibility was a part of the story, I knew there was more at work. I began increasingly to suspect that there was a relentless connection in my mind (and heart) to the fact that the spring of 2008 would mark 40 years since the assassination of my friend and brother, Martin King. Grounded as I am in the biblical accounts of 40 days and nights of rain, 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, 40 days of testing and preparation for Jesus' ministry, I could not resist the possible symbolic associations and what meaning they might have.

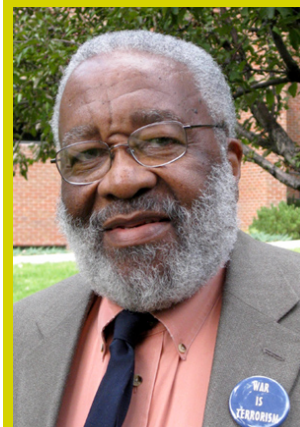
Earlier this year I shared my ruminations with Rabbi Arthur Waskow, a long-time friend and co-worker. Art said that he had often sought to understand the persistent presence and power of the number 40 in the Hebrew texts. What had begun to be evident to him, he reported, was the fact that while we usually speak in our culture of nine months as the normal time of a woman's pregnancy before giving birth, the more precise and traditional period is actually given as 40 weeks. As soon as I heard Art's words it became clearer to me what I had been feeling, sensing so deeply. And I began to try to articulate it for myself and others: *Something is trying to be born in America*. Again, I'm not quite certain what it is, but the new emerging reality seems firmly related to the visionary calls of King and the earlier urgent hope of Langston Hughes ("O, let

America be America again/The land that never has been yet/and yet must be /The land where every [one] is free.") Suffusing all of it I hear as well the beautiful wisdom and strong challenge of June Jordan: "We are the ones we've been waiting for."

So as this year went on, as I sat one August night in Denver among the tens of thousands of on-site witnesses to Barack Obama's acceptance speech, it seemed obvious to me that my young brother was related to all of this, but more as an opening, an opportunity, a new space. He seems to offer the place where all the "we" people can stop our waiting and carry on our work to create the pathway, the birthing channel toward "The land that never has been yet, and yet must be." Indeed, as I wrestled with Biblical symbols, the birthing imagery and the calls of Langston, Martin and June (herself the marvelous offspring of Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ann Braden and Amzie Moore), I could not escape another revelatory metaphor. Not only is something trying to be born in America, but some of us are called to be the midwives in this magnificent, desperately needed and so painfully creative process.

As so often happens, the midwife metaphor overtook me before I knew what it really meant. So I turned to Selena Green, a gifted, compassionate and socially-conscious midwife, and asked her to tell me something about what she does. Selena said that one of her most crucial roles, especially toward the final days of a pregnancy, was to help assure the mother that "you can do this," and that she is not alone in the very difficult journey. Then this highly skilled practitioner shared with me another extraordinary element in the description of her loving ministry (of course Selena's work deeply fulfills the basic definition of ministry as "an act of serving"). → →

(continued on p.4)



**Dr. Vincent Harding**  
 Is an historian, author  
 and activist who has  
 participated in movements  
 for compassionate justice  
 and nonviolent social  
 change since the late  
 1950s. He is professor  
 emeritus of Religion &  
 Social Transformation at  
 the Iliff School of  
 Theology in Denver, CO  
 and the co-founder of the  
 Veterans of Hope Project.  
 For more please see:  
[www.veteransofhope.org](http://www.veteransofhope.org)

## Midwifing, continued

Often, especially in the last stages of a pregnancy, this spiritually-grounded companion of hope said she also speaks to the infant in the womb.

Recognizing the deep sense of safety and security experienced by the womb-kept child, imagining the great joy involved in having all his/her needs supplied almost effortlessly, Selena said she shares words of encouragement with the infant as well. Like a womb-whisperer, she says something like, “I know how good you feel, how surrounded you are by a protective nurturing ocean of love. I realize it feels as if this is the only world you need to know. But, my child, when you start to feel the urgent life forces beginning to move you down, to push you out, to press your tender head into that seemingly impossible opening, go. Let yourself move toward the light, painful though it may be. The fullness of your life is waiting for you on the other side. Go, come, my child. You can, you must make it through. You can do this.”

Even as Selena shared her marvelous work and words with me, I began to see their meaning for our nation and its social midwives. We Americans are both mother and infant, giving birth, seeking new life, full of fear, full of pain, turning away from the possibility of even more pain, feeling “the urgency of now,” wondering if we are able, afraid of what the new life demands and costs, fearful of giving up all we know (or think we know) so well, grasping all that keeps us from new beginning, from new life. Afraid of the pain, afraid of the unknown, afraid of the hope, we live urgently in need of midwives. Are we the ones?

Over the past several weeks, as I have shared these searching reflections with other people in what I like to call “democratic conversations,” my own perceptions have been expanded. For instance, in one of Atlanta’s Historic Black Colleges, a group of Morehouse men immediately grasped and celebrated the idea that *they* could be midwives for the nation (following in the steps of their most renowned alumnus, Martin Luther King, Jr.). In another Atlanta session two women who had given birth years before remembered their own labor. One of them recalled screaming, pleading with her midwife to find some way to stop the labor process and its agonizing pain. Then, she also shared with us the power that entered her being when her midwife urged her, encouraged her, helped her to face the pain; “turn into the pain, don’t run away,” her helper said. Facing the pain, the mother recalled, she endured and overcame. In Boston, a female hospice doctor called my attention to how much my womb-whisperer friend, Selena, was like their hospice service – helping, encouraging that fetus to give up one surely satisfying life for the great possibility of moving toward something magnificently more. So midwives and hospice attendants may work together in this powerful moment, helping us face the pain of dying and being born, letting America become the land that never has been yet, and yet must be.

Perhaps this deepening of my own vision was why I needed to return last week to Denver and share the midwife call in a class I was visiting at the Iliff School of Theology (where I taught for 23 years before retirement – whatever that means). There, a student came up to me at the end of the class, identified herself as a midwife and said “When I go through the pain with my mothers, not only do I say, ‘you can do it,’ I say, ‘you *are* doing it.’” Is it possible that those are the words, the hope needed for a nation now filled with political, social, economic and spiritual crisis? Perhaps the Chinese pictograph for the word “crisis” is the word that midwives must carry: “Crisis: time of great danger/time of great opportunity.” Perhaps we are the ones who will walk through the great danger into the marvelous opportunity for helping our nation begin in a new way to realize its best possibilities – to be born again. Perhaps we are not only the ones we’ve been waiting for, but we are the ones who have already begun to do the work of creating a more perfect union. And we are not alone. 🌍

*We Americans are both mother and infant, giving birth, seeking new life, full of fear, full of pain ... feeling “the urgency of now”*



*So midwives and hospice attendants may work together in this powerful moment, helping us face the pain of dying and being born, letting America become the land that never has been yet, and yet must be.*



## Crisis :: Opportunity, continued

In our private meditations we can regularly reassess how our life bears testimony to the principles and values of our soul's purpose, and consider where we could perhaps step up to a greater integrity with our Truth.

We declare ourselves with every choice, every word, every act. Gandhi said: *My life is my theology; if you want to understand my theology, look at my life.* Can we make our lives a witness to what we claim to believe? To do this requires the congruence of means and ends, for only transformative means can generate transformative ends. *We must be the change we want to see,* says Gandhi. We cannot create what we are not willing to become.

As we face the tumult of failing social institutions, what would it take to risk something new? If rather than shoring up unjust and unsustainable models of

finance, healthcare, energy, and national security we created a society that authentically supported the common good. What if we developed social structures based on the deepest values of our "Working Paper" – values such as justice and compassion.

There is a familiar verse from the book of Proverbs: *Without a vision the people will perish.* And an Elder (now Ancestor) I know insightfully offered the reciprocal of that proverb, saying, "Without the people a vision will perish."

It is my prayer that we, individually and as a nation, will hold ourselves accountable to the mandates of a higher vision, a greater integrity with the values we claim as our Truth. That we may transform crisis into opportunity, as we – to quote again the Kairos Document – "translate the challenge of our times into action."

*It is my prayer that we, individually and as a nation, will hold ourselves accountable to the mandates of a higher vision, a greater integrity with the values we claim as our Truth.*

## Spirit, Sound & Silence Retreat ~ Oct. 18, 2008

Join us for a day of renewal, inspiration and enrichment...

- Replenish your soul in the gentle power of intentional silence
- Open to inner wisdom through a guided visioning process
- Walk the meditation labyrinth
- Savor the healing properties of sound and music
- Share in sacred community
- Be inspired by the words of mystics from diverse faith traditions

**Saturday, Oct. 18th, 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM** (9:30 AM arrival & registration)

**With featured musician:** Destiny Muhammad, Harpist from the Hood

**Retreat location:** Holy Redeemer Center, 8945 Golf Links Rd., Oakland, CA 94605 ~ This is a wheelchair accessible site.

**Tuition:** Sliding scale \$35- 100 (more if you can / less if you can't ~ no one turned away for lack of funds) *RSVP requested for planning purposes.*



**Upcoming Retreats:**  
**Save the Dates!**

Jan. 31, 2009

April 25, 2009



**OneLife Institute** is a nonprofit interfaith organization providing resources for the integration of spirituality and social action. Through classes, retreats, publications, events, counseling and consultation services we seek to support and empower individuals and groups in their commitment to personal and social transformation.

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Visit us on the web at:  
[www.onelifeinstitute.org](http://www.onelifeinstitute.org)

*“Once there is seeing, there must be acting.  
Otherwise, what is the use of seeing?”*

*~ Thich Nhat Hanh*

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*Spirituality & Social  
Transformation*