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Notes from the Director

“There is a pressing urgency to the work of justice and compassion. As long as there is a shred of hatred in the human heart, as long as there is a vacuum without compassion anywhere in the world, there is an emergency.”

~ Abraham Heschel

I have just arrived home from a gathering of the Beloved Communities Initiative, a national project co-founded by OneLife board member Shirley Strong. (See the related article in our June newsletter.) Thirty spiritually-rooted activists from a diversity of cultural and faith traditions met at Haley Farm in Clinton, Tennessee for three days of talking and listening, struggling and celebrating, teaching and learning, sharing our hearts and journeys with one another. It was a deeply transformative experience and I am humbled to have been part of that circle. I return inspired and fortified for the work ahead.

SPIRIT, SOUND & SILENCE

On Saturday, September 23rd we will host our next Spirit, Sound & Silence retreat. It is a particularly significant date due to the convergence of sacred observances in Judaism and Islam. Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New year) begins a ten-day period of prayerful reflection and seeking after reconciliation that culminates in Yom Kippur, a solemn day of fasting and atonement. In Islam, September 23rd is the eve of the month-long observance of Ramadan, which honors the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad. During Ramadan Muslims around the world fast from dawn

until dark, abstaining from food and drink as a way of focusing their attentions on God. It is a time of dedicated prayer, of building community and caring for the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed.

The season of autumn supports our turning inward as we harvest the fruits of seeds planted in the newness of the year and tended throughout the long days of summer. Whether you join us for the retreat or not, I invite you to use this season as a time of reflection, of gathering up the “learnings” (as my teacher Brother Ishmael Tetteh of Ghana calls them) from all your experiences – the seeming “good” and the seeming “not so good” – and fully receiving the blessings they contain. This acknowledgement supports the process of healing and forgiveness; our spirits are nourished and we are able share our gifts with the world in a fuller way.

TRANSFORMATIVE VISIONS

Please refer to the article on p.5 to learn more about our exciting March 2007 event, Transformative Visions, a multimedia art show, jazz and spoken word concert. *Now is the time* to contact us if you are interested in submitting visual art or spoken word for possible inclusion in the show. We are also looking for volunteers and sponsors.

KATRINA: A YEAR & COUNTING

Last December I had the privilege of befriending the Rev. Dwight Webster and his wife Trudell who had moved to the Bay Area after losing their home and business to hurricane Katrina. Since →→



“ The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing, would suffice to solve most of the world's problems... ”
~M.K.Gandhi

Notes from the Director, continued

the storm, Pastor Webster has traveled almost weekly to New Orleans and other cities, ministering to his congregants in diaspora and devoting himself to the process of community recovery and the right of return. We are pleased to bring you some of his reflections as our featured article in this issue.

ONELIFE ANNIVERSARY

In October it will be two years since the consecration ceremony that officially launched OneLife Institute. Since that time we have initiated a number of activities that have become standards: our quarterly retreats, visioning sessions, and this newsletter. We have presented

classes at home and away, offered counseling and prayer support, and continued to develop our website as a resource for information and inspiration. In the coming year we look forward to stepping more deeply into our mission of offering resources for personal and social transformation. We welcome your participation as all of us grow together into our “greater-yet-to-be.”

Let me take this opportunity to say *thank you*. Whether you are an old friend or a new one, please know that we appreciate you and wish you well ~

In Peace,
Liza

Sarvodaya’s Movement for Universal Peace

On October 2, 2006, the birthday anniversary of Mohandas K. Gandhi, the Sarvodaya Movement of Sri Lanka will host the largest gathering in that country’s history: a one million person meditation for peace.

Founded in 1958 by Dr. A.T. Ariyaratne, the name *Sarvodaya* comes from the Sanskrit words *sarva* meaning “all” or “embracing everything” and *udaya* meaning “awakening.” Combining Buddhist precepts with the teachings of Gandhi, the Sarvodaya Movement has implemented programs in education, health care, agriculture, renewable technology, community development and peacemaking – employing a spiritually based self-help method in their work for sustainable social change.

Since the recent escalation of violence in Sri Lanka, Sarvodaya has expanded its peace initiative with events held across the country. The event on Oct. 2 is intended to influence the collective consciousness of people throughout the world towards peace and loving kindness. As with Sarvodaya’s previous meditations (the last one assembled 650,000 participants), this is a spiritual

gathering for people of all ages, religions and ethnic origins, many of them directly impacted by the ongoing civil war.

People around the world are invited to join, either in person or in spirit. The corresponding time in the US for the culminating meditation is 4:30 - 5:30 AM PDT (7:30-8:30 AM EDT) on the morning of Oct. 2. Complete information and a schedule are available on the web at: www.sarvodaya.org or sarvodayausa.org

Helping Hands & Hearts...

OneLife is looking for volunteers and we would love to hear from YOU!

Short and longer-term projects in a variety of areas are possible, including database set-up, grantwriting, community outreach and networking, help with special events, and more. If you have a particular skill, resource, or expertise that you’d be willing to share, please let us know. Call 510-595-5598 or send an e-mail to volunteer@onelifeminstitute.org.

Thank you!

In the Aftermath of Katrina: A Bomb for Gilead?

By Rev. Dwight Webster

The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt, I mourn, and dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?

~ Jeremiah 8:20-22 (NRSV)

The winds of Katrina blew into everyone's living room. It was a metaphor for everything that is wrong with America.

~ Ron Dellums, Black America Town Hall Meeting, Oakland, CA (3/4/06)

The flooding of New Orleans was not an act of the divine Creator, but the failure of the human creature. The failures of the Army Corps of Engineers, FEMA, Red Cross and others were not acts of the Almighty – they were, rather, the actions of the “high and mighty.”

The diversion of National Guard troops who could have been home guarding the nation and money that could be directed to levees and coastal land preservation was not an act of an angry, vengeful god, but that of petty political potentates more interested in the preservation of their power base rather than how to get the power back on – not merely Uptown and the French Quarters, but throughout a suffering city.

Before Katrina

- Over the years dollars have been deliberately diverted from the levees and coastal restoration
- Over the years dollars have been redirected to a search for the right man in the wrong country with non-existent weapons of mass destruction

According to Mtangulizi Sanyika of the New Orleans African American Leadership Project:

- 35-40 % of African Americans in New Orleans are living in poverty
- 40-50% are underemployed
- 62% of Black households earn less than \$25,000 per year
- 31,000 children are undereducated
- less than 20% own their homes in some neighborhoods – not so in the Lower Ninth Ward where an ownership of 60% was the case
- less than 15% of the businesses are owned by African-Americans
- Blacks die from every type of illness earlier than others; homicide and imprisonment are disproportionately high, and the overall quality of life is among the worst in the US

With United States military expenditures in the hundreds of billions, the words of Martin Luther King Jr. warn us that, “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” (4/4/67)

Instead of the billions of dollars going to support the war in Iraq, a modern-day Marshall Plan should be undertaken and directed toward the entire Gulf Coast – and to New Orleans in particular. The statistics make it clear that the devastation, displacement, and disenfranchisement of New Orleans are of such a magnitude that the situation demands its own redress.

The Plan should be aimed at changing policy such as that which is governed by the Stafford Act to be more comprehensive and consistent in doing what it takes to bring relief, recovery and restoration. Each of these areas is still at issue for so many in New Orleans and in the diaspora. People are still in a state of emergency. People are on the verge of homelessness. People are dying for a lack of adequate medical →

(continued on p.4)



“A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.”

*Martin Luther King, Jr.
April 4, 1967*

A Bomb for Gilead? (continued)

treatment, financial resources, and hope that they could ever be made whole again. It is in the nation's enlightened self-interest to engage in informed advocacy on behalf of the region of the country through which 20-25% of its own oil resources come. Initial charitable gestures and grants were necessary, but only first steps for the so-called greatest nation on earth.

It is one thing to deal with issues of rescue, relief and recovery, but quite another to deal with the justice issues involved in the right of return for restoration, rebuilding, and redevelopment. This involves mega-money and the need for fair and equitable distribution – not just doling out no-bid contracts to well-connected friends. There is the need for the State of Louisiana to distribute recovery money without using a patently insulting and paternalistic welfare model that keeps recovery money out the hands of grown men and women who should be allowed the option of handling their own business affairs. The homeowners are not children. And what of relief for renters? There should also be the meaningful participation of the now dispersed population to vote and have a say in how the city and region comes back. This country managed to facilitate multi-state Iraqi voting – why not for its own citizens?

For those who are looking to do something of substance that really helps the situation, I submit the story of the “Good Samaritan.” In this story found in Luke 10:30-37, a paradigm and a threshold question are put forth: *Who is my neighbor, and what obligation do I have to one found battered and abandoned on the Jericho Road?* Some suggest that love is what is required when one meets one. But when we meet more than one, justice is required and questions about what is going on with the Jericho Road in the first place must be addressed and answered. The prophet leads us to the Great Physician to let us know that there *is* a Balm in Gilead.

Charity is inadequate. Pity is unhelpful. Compassion fatigue is understandable, but unacceptable. Divine right action and divine imperative issue from two great, guiding scriptures:

What does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8 NRSV)

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. (Amos 5:24 NRSV)



*But let justice roll down
like waters, and
righteousness like an
ever-flowing stream.
Amos 5:24*

Rev. Dwight Webster is the founding Pastor of Christian Unity Baptist Church in New Orleans, LA, and a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA. He and his wife Trudell have four sons: Dwight-Nathaniel at Florida A&M University; Toussaint in Morehouse College; Kwame, at Oberlin College; and Amir, a ninth grader at Head Royce School in Oakland, CA, where the family resides in diaspora in the wake of hurricane Katrina.

Most recently, Rev. Webster, together with Civil Rights veterans C.T. Vivian and David Jehnsen, formed *Churches Supporting Churches*, an adopt-a-church program for post-Katrina pastor/church and community long-term recovery in New Orleans. He is the co-founder of the *Jeremiah Group*, a broad-based, faith-based ecumenical organization, affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation, that “seeks the welfare of the city” of New Orleans.

For more on the struggle for recovery in the Gulf visit: www.peopleshurricane.org ;
www.communitylaborunited.net ; www.commongroundrelief.org

Transformative Visions: Call for Artist Submissions

On March 10, 2007 OneLife Institute will host Transformative Visions, a multi-media art show and jazz / spoken word concert lifting up a vision of peace, justice, and possibility for our world. Scheduled to coincide with the annual observance of A Season for Nonviolence and the anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, this event is intended to both challenge and inspire, offering a spiritually-rooted response to the crucial events of the present day.

The concert will be anchored by Destiny Muhammad, our "Harpist from the Hood," leading an outstanding ensemble of local musicians. Linen Life Park Avenue has generously donated use of their beautiful Emeryville gallery to host the event.

Visual and spoken word artists are invited to submit works that consider peace and justice issues through the theme of Transformative Visions. We are looking for original art and performed word that

address a variety of activist concerns and carry a prophetic and empowering message of positive social change. Please contact us *now* if you are interested in submitting work (in any medium) for consideration, or if you know people we should be in touch with.

E-mail visions@onelifeinstitute.org or leave a message at 510-595-5598. Please include your name, day and evening phone numbers, e-mail and postal addresses, and indicate the best way to reach you. Tell us what medium you work in and if the work you'd like us to consider is already complete or still in progress. For full submission guidelines, please visit the Transformative Visions page on our website.

We are also seeking volunteers, underwriters, and in-kind donations to help make this event possible and accessible to all. Please contact us for information.

Thank you!

Call for Submissions!

***Transformative Visions:
Art Show & Jazz /
Spoken Word
Concert***

Spirit, Sound & Silence Retreat ~ Sept. 23, 2006

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
- Be inspired by the words of mystics from diverse faith traditions

Saturday, Sept. 23rd 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM (9:30 AM arrival & registration)

With special guest: 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!***

September 23, 2006

January 27, 2007

April 28, 2007



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Visit us on the web at:

www.onelifeinstitute.org

OneLife Institute is a nonprofit interfaith organization providing services of spiritual ministry and education for the realization of a world of wholeness, justice, and compassion.

Our services include: counseling & prayer support; ceremonies for life passages; consulting & facilitation; creative arts ministry; classes, workshops & retreats that are designed to be informative, inspirational, and practically applicable.

*There is a brokenness
out of which comes the unbroken,
a shatteredness out
of which blooms the unshatterable.*

*There is a sorrow
beyond all grief which leads to joy
and a fragility
out of whose depths emerges strength...*

~ Rashani

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*Spirituality & Social
Transformation*