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## Notes from the Director

**It is useless to dream of reforming the socioeconomic structure... as long as there is not a correspondingly deep change in our inner selves.**

~ Dom Helder Camara

Winter is the time of hibernation – of deepened reflection, inward listening, and preparing the ground for coming possibilities. In the aftermath of the presidential election, there is much to celebrate, but also much to contemplate as we ready ourselves to continue the work that is only just begun. Despite the flurry of holiday festivities and the siren call of consumerism, the long nights of winter support us in this inward turning.

In this season of both darkness and light our featured guest author, Dr. Barbara Holmes, shares some of her own reflections, challenging the simple dualism that too often demonizes darkness and makes an idol out of light. In addition to being a friend and colleague, Dr. Holmes is one of my favorite authors and thinkers. Her books, lectures, and creative projects bring together ideas and disciplines that are not commonly found in dialogue, consistently offering fresh perspectives and catalytic inspirations. I encourage you to check out the links following her article on the web copy of our newsletter.

### AEPOCH GRANT

We are delighted, and deeply thankful, to announce the receipt of our first grant. The AEPOCH Foundation has awarded \$15,000 to OneLife Institute through their Community Healing Fund so that our

core programs can better support low income and underserved communities. The overarching goals of the work are: (1) To increase the resiliency and well-being of individuals and communities living under the stress of poverty, violence, oppression, and uncertain times, and (2) To enhance the sustainability of movements for social transformation and community uplift. The grant includes a very part-time position for a community outreach worker, and we are excited by the opportunities that creates.

### TRANSFORMATIVE VISIONS

We have extended the deadline for visual art and spoken word submissions to Transformative Visions until Jan. 15, 2009. Please see the website for details.

### SPIRIT, SOUND & SILENCE

Our first Spirit, Sound & Silence retreat of the new year will be held on Saturday, January 31st. Join us as we open to the vision of greater possibility and plant seeds of sacred intention for 2009 and beyond. Full information on p.5.

### HEALING MEDITATIONS ONLINE

As our gift to you, we will soon be placing audio recordings from two of our retreat meditations on the OneLife website. We hope this will serve as an “on demand” healing resource for you, and that you will share the link with others. Visit the “Listening Room” page of our website to access these files, as well as sermons and music from the OneLife community.

With gratitude and in peace, *Liza*



*Even the seed itself must die to being a seed – must break open to allow its full expression as plant, flower, fruit.*

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## Nourishing the Spirit

By Liza J. Rankow, PhD

*What we call the beginning is often the end, and to make an end is to make a beginning.*

~ T.S. Elliot

As we seek to create a new world order, the old must pass away. If we look at anything in nature, at how Life itself operates, before something new can come into existence the old thing has to be released or transformed. In growing a garden, for example, we don't just plant fresh seeds on top of what was growing there before. We have to dig up the old crops, clear the weeds and rocks, till the soil – to shift and break up outworn habits and beliefs for new ones to take root and flourish. The great rototillers in our lives can be painful or frightening, but they open the way for undreamed possibilities to come forth. Even the seed itself must die to being a seed – must break open to allow its full expression as plant, flower, fruit.

To do the world-making work we are called to (and even just to survive) we must keep our spirits tended, watered, nourished. In my classes and workshops I often invite participants to maintain an ongoing list of things that reconnect them to the wellspring of the Divine. I make the analogy to the “emergency contact list” that many people keep by their phones. (When the house is burning is not the time to have to look up the number of the fire department, for example). This “spiritual 911 list” might include such activities as time in nature, the creative meditation of baking bread or cooking, dance or movement, artistic expressions, time with animals or babies or children, gardening and touching earth, inspirational readings, particular songs or pieces of music that evoke different feeling responses (to sing, cry, praise, shout, move), films that reliably soften or break open the heart, and trusted people to call for prayer, support, encouragement, or a listening ear.

The key is in knowing what works uniquely for you, to keep track of specific resources and activities, and write them down where you can easily access them in times of need. We do not generally do our best thinking when our hearts are constricted and our spirits parched. When we are running on empty is not the time that we will be likely to remember which video or passage from scripture it was that touched us so deeply and melted our armor. Or which song absolutely compelled us to dance no matter how tired, or sing our way out of despair. Or which poem helped us breathe again.

But even more effective than the “emergency list” is cultivating communion as a way of life – making the → →

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### Sharing Our Gifts

In this season of giving, we hope you will remember OneLife Institute in your end of the year charitable contributions. Your generosity allows us to offer services of spiritual ministry and education to all seekers, regardless of their ability to pay, and to provide resources that support compassionate social change. OneLife Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and your contributions are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Gifts may be mailed to us or made securely online using the link on our website.

At OneLife we are committed to sharing our blessings not only through the services we provide, but through donating a portion of our earned income to other nonprofit organizations whose work we believe in. Our 2008 tithe recipients include POOR News Network, Churches Supporting Churches (Katrina justice), Ella Baker Center, People's Grocery, and Destiny Arts. Please visit our Support page for links to learn more about these organizations and past tithe recipients, and their outstanding work.

## Silent Night

By Barbara A. Holmes, JD, PhD

*Silent night*

*Holy night*

*All is calm all is bright*

Although I have been thinking about darkness as a blessed gift for a long time now, I have only recently decided to say so openly. The world as we know it is lit up from one end to another. It crackles with the sounds of daytime activity, yet I am drawn to darkness as moths are drawn to flames. I write during the wee hours, I think and pray in the welcome embrace of midnight. When cell phones stop ringing, I can hear the Ancestors, hear myself, and reflect on the journey. Some friends have alluded to a vampire gene that might account for this love of night, and although like Job, I wonder about the wisdom of those friends, I understand their hesitancy to accept night with the same enthusiasm as the day. I know this because I had the same preference for all things “light” and “bright.”

When you are raised in a Christian home and congregational setting, as I was, a love affair with the light is inevitable. During my early years as an evangelist with an apostolic holiness sect in Texas, I clung to familiar and simplistic symbols of darkness and light, good and evil, to help me to keep my bearings in the midst of unfolding mysteries. Here I was, a church girl comfortable with announcements and hymn page numbers, in a place where the mysteries of faith healing, prophesy, exorcism and manifestations of the spirit were ordinary occurrences. The most amazing things happened as darkness settled around our huge canvas tent. The guitars began to tune, testimonies started, and the faithful knelt at altars or on folding chairs wailing and moaning. Prayer warriors started pacing, the bereft and weary shared their troubles, and all within the sound of the prophet’s voice yearned for

a visitation of the Holy Spirit. This was a place of solace and mystery. For the first time in my life, it seemed as if the mysteries of the faith were wedded to the night and that God also loved and inhabited the darkness.

After these experiences, I had to re-evaluate my exclusionary love affair with light. I soon realized that many beloved hymns and liturgies required that I dismiss and sometimes taunt the darkness, reject my own dark body, and accept false connections between darkness and evil, night and foreboding. History reminds us that western depictions of the “darkness” of an entire continent (Africa) fueled imperialism, justified slavery, and the belief that African people could not determine their own destiny. We are taught that light is a symbol of the divine and that it helps to order a chaotic world. Over the last few years, I have come to the conclusion that light only orders half of the chaos. In fact, the planetary cycles of day and night create a matrix of wholeness that invites us to move beyond our desires to separate one thing from another.

In the tent ministry, I connected history and life experience as I danced in the straw with the others and affirmed the oneness of the life space that comes with complications and contradictions. The most obvious complication for me is that while I am a lover of the mysteries of faith, I was trained as a pragmatic lawyer. The very nature of the law requires that one thing opposes another. It is in the clash of views and legal opinions that the truth is supposed to emerge. Sometimes it does, but those who inhabit this world find themselves viewing their environment as “this” or “that.” The spiritual journey invites us to commit our “either” / “or” mentality to the refining fires of faith. You cannot drag artificial beliefs about separateness → →

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**Dr. Barbara A. Holmes** is Vice President of Academic Affairs/Dean, and Professor of Ethics and African American religious studies at Memphis Theological Seminary. She is an accomplished writer, an attorney, and an ordained Pentecostal minister. She has served with homeless missions and AIDS ministries in Miami and Georgia, and with international ministries in Kenya and Japan.

## Silent Night, continued

with you when you are betrothed to the God of the universe. If you try, you will wear yourself out while pulling your comfort zone and closed belief systems over hill and dale, through success and failure. And if you are able to get through the first part of the journey, you are certain to lose your neat packages when the roller coaster called life hits the curves and steep dives.

I am retrospectively grateful for the rough ride in my life, because I know that I am traveling a lot lighter than I was. During difficult times and abrupt transitions, the darkness welcomed me and helped to move me toward release and embrace, toward being as well as doing. The more willing I am to live in the moment, the more enhanced my senses become. Howard Thurman, noted theologian and mystic says this:

Nightfall was meaningful to my childhood, for the night was more than a companion. It was a presence, an articulate climate. There was something about the night that seemed to cover my spirit like a gentle blanket. The nights in Florida, as I grew up seemed to have certain dominant characteristics. They were not dark, they were black. When there was no moon, the stars hung like lanterns, so close I felt that one could reach up and pluck them from the heavens. The night has its own language. Sometimes the night seemed to have movement in it, as if it were a great ocean wave. Other times it was deathly still, no rhythm, no movement. At such times I could hear the night think, and feel the night feel. This comforted me and I found myself wishing that the night would hurry and come, for under its cover, my mind would roam. I felt embraced, enveloped, held secure. In some fantastic way, the night belonged to me. (1)

The night belongs to all of us. In a universe that is predominantly dark we find our origins in the night skies, in God's "let there be" storytelling creativity, and in connections to those who have come before and those who will come after. Noted scientist Carl Sagan "wanted us to see ourselves not as the failed clay of a disappointed Creator, but as "starstuff" made of atoms forged in the fiery hearts of distant stars." (2)

In the glare of daylight, we must choose between God and science, clay or stars. But in the night, under a starlight canopy, we can have it all. Eventide and morning dawn, foggy days and starlight nights weave the glare of noon and the ink of midnight into a tapestry of one life space. On these dark and chilly winter nights, I am grateful for bright darkness and calm light.

*Silent Night Holy Night... All is calm, all is bright!*

(1) Howard Thurman, *With Head and Heart*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1978), 7.

(2) Ann Druyan ed. *The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), xii-xiii.

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### Dr. Holmes has published numerous articles, and four books:

*A Private Woman in Public Spaces: Barbara Jordan's Ethics, Public Religion, and Law* (2000); *Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to View the World Differently* (2002); *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church* (2004); and *Liberation and the Cosmos: Conversations with the Elders* (2008).

*[T]he planetary cycles of day and night create a matrix of wholeness that invites us to move beyond our desires to separate one thing from another.*



*In a universe that is predominantly dark we find our origins in the night skies, in God's "let there be" storytelling creativity, and in connections to those who have come before and those who will come after.*

## Nourishing, continued

commitment to establish a dedicated spiritual discipline and to integrate small rituals of nurturance and replenishment as part of our daily living; to practice the presence moment-to-moment. We can make our lives a sacrament – every breath, every bite of food, every sip of water, every time we bathe, every touch, every word, becomes an opportunity to experience the Divine.

Another way to fill the well, to reconnect with our awareness of God's goodness, is the practice of gratitude. It is a powerful balm to steep ourselves in the remembrance of our many large and small blessings... especially at the times when we may not be feeling particularly blessed. The recounting of our own testimony of overcoming can sustain and uplift us. Sharing testimony with others, and bearing witness to the miracles in someone else's life supports our faith and expands our receptivity and alert-

ness to the ongoing miracles latent in every moment. God's grace is everywhere, simply awaiting our recognition. As we turn again and again to this awareness, it becomes our habitation.

Our spiritual practice must not be regarded as something occasional or extra, but essential. The Indian mystic Sri Ramakrishna taught that we must pursue illumination with all the urgency and intensity of a person whose hair is on fire in search of a pond. We are living in a time on this planet when all of us have our hair on fire. But fire is a way to prepare the ground for new growth. And fire can be a purifier, and an alchemist.

In these days of transformation, every *emergency* can catalyze the *emergence* of fresh possibilities. If we look closely, we will find the determined green shoots of new life pressing upward within ourselves and in our world. And if we nourish them they will grow. 

*Sri Ramakrishna taught that we must pursue illumination with all the urgency and intensity of a person whose hair is on fire in search of a pond.*

## Spirit, Sound & Silence Retreat ~ Jan. 31, 2009

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, Jan. 31st, 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!**

April 25, 2009  
August 1, 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.

6114 LaSalle Ave. #759  
Oakland, CA 94611

Phone: 510-595-5598

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

*“Hope is that thing inside us that insists, despite all evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us if we have the courage to reach for it, and to work for it, and to fight for it.”*

*~ Barack Obama (1.3.08)*

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*Spirituality & Social  
Transformation*