I have made it a practice over the years to begin a presentation or retreat with this cool image of Abraham and the reference to his divine call to leave all he knows and to go forward to an unknown land. Abraham’s call is often thought of primarily as a geographical sojourn. But the original Hebrew wording, Lech Le Che, indicating the command to “go forward,” actually implies a deeply personal, interior journey and is more accurately translated as the command to “go forward towards yourself.” This changes everything! Abraham’s call to leave his father’s house, kindred, and country may well be compared to Carl Jung’s psychological process of “individuation,” whereby one discovers his or her own integral identity, independent of the influences of others. This may also be the underlying meaning embedded in Jesus’ radical imperative to “hate father and mother,” if we are to be His disciples. (Luke 14:26)

As children, the familial bonding we grow up with is essential to our development and sense of well being, and part of this experience involves adopting the constructs passed on to us by parents, ancestors, religion, and society. In essence, Jesus’ sharp directive releases us from inauthentic loyalties and attachments that would impede our personal evolution and gives us permission to take critical inventory of inherited values, practices, and attitudes to determine if they truly are our own. This may well be the meaning implied when the disciples James and John left their father to follow Him. (Matt. 4:21-22) The non-binary movement of our own time, as I see it, is another manifestation of this process. I admire and bless the many courageous souls embarking on this journey!

Abraham’s call and, by inference, our own, may be understood as a call to leave the safe and familiar attachments, identities, values, religious customs, and beliefs of our child- and young adulthood to engage consciously in an interior journey towards discovering a more authentic, divinely connected Self.

In light of this more accurate understanding of the meaning of lech le che, I question, when Abraham believed he was being asked to sacrifice his son Isaac, if this was representative of his first major test for discovering his own authentic truth. How does Abraham resolve the intensity of this excruciating dilemma, the outcome of which would either betray his heart’s integrity, or severely rupture familial ties with the long-held beliefs and customs of his ancestors? Was his encounter with the voice of the angel, in essence, Abraham’s encounter with the wisdom of his true Self? In listening to it and perceiving its basic moral rightness, was Abraham able to transcend the religious biases inherited from his pagan father – possibly involving child-sacrifice— to begin a genuine encounter with the Sovereign God of Love and Compassion?

Abraham has become endearingly known to us as “the father of many nations,” hinting perhaps that, as we journey towards our true Self, we ultimately move towards relatedness and oneness with others. Inspired by the writings of Julian of Norwich, Thomas Merton writes:

At the center of our being is a point of nothingness which is untouched by sin and by illusion, a point or spark which belongs entirely to God.

This little point of nothingness and of absolute poverty is the pure glory of God in us.

It is so to speak, His name written in us...

It is like a pure diamond, blazing with the invisible light of heaven.

It is in everybody...

Abraham’s call and Jesus’ imperative reassure us that we too are called to go forward towards our true nature, and to trust the divine spark within us that will ultimately lead to wholeness, wisdom, and one another.

Have you experienced a call that led towards the discovery of your true Self? Did you leave something precious behind? Where did the call present the greatest struggle? Where did it feel like your truer home?
“Call me Father Anne” * and the Danger in the Otherization of Trauma

by Kathleen O’Connell Sauline, MBA, ARCWP

Well now!

What feelings were evoked when I heard that phrase “Call me Father Anne,” and what old traumas reared up in my subconscious! One of the most important steps in creating a community that is safe and nurturing for all its members is to avoid the “otherization” of trauma. This term refers to seeing others’ perceived trauma as debilitating, while denying our own trauma and its impact. Otherization can, inadvertently, lead to retraumatizing ourselves and fellow community or prospective members, often without awareness of the impact of our words or actions.

I had a wonderful colleague, back in the day, a young Black man who had attended one of the Catholic High Schools in Youngstown. Dawud Abdullah was his name. He held another role too, as an imam at a local mosque. Dawud was amazing with culture and kids. He created skits called “Rewind” where kids would do something foolish, as kids often do, and then “REWIND” and do it again with awareness of how their actions affected others.

One of the things I recall about my dear friend is that he would always introduce me as “Kathleen O’Connell Sauline.” As a man who had changed his name to match his convictions, he was highly sensitive to my right to be called the name of my choosing. In return, I was deliberate in learning to pronounce his name properly. Despite my dyslexia, I can remember how to spell it perfectly to this day.

What Dawud and I successfully avoided was thinking, even subconsciously, that our feelings were important while the feelings of another were not . . . a phenomenon I describe here as the otherization of trauma. As a member of the Anti-Racism Committee of the Association of U.S. Priests, I work with a small group of men committed to a goal that is close to my heart. When the larger committee met at our annual meeting in Minneapolis, I remember a well-meaning white priest saying “our Black communities need male role models.” I was hurt for the many fine male role models I see daily in my neighborhood, a primarily Black community. I was hurt for the dad I saw teaching his son to ice skate, for the dad who line dances with his daughter, and for my great friend, Reverend Lewis Macklin, who is Dad to his own amazing family and a mentor to so many Youngstown youth.

Please call me Kathleen. When my dear friend Honey Bell-Bey, the Poet Laureate of Cuyahoga County and a National Poet Grant recipient, prays; she begins: “Lord . . . ,” a phrase she has reclaimed from slavery. An Indian poet called his book Dot Head to reclaim the phrase his friends have used to taunt his mom to his face. Many young Blacks reclaim the word “Nigger . . . ,” not allowing it to be owned by those who would deny their humanity and take away their human and civil rights.

We don’t need dogma, rules or doctrine. What we need is acceptance and understanding that we all come from unique perspectives. Okay, I’ll swallow my self-righteous bitchiness and call you, “Father Anne.” I bet I’ll be glad I did.

* Refers to newly ordained Anne Tropeano.

From the Editor

by Nori Kieran-Meredith

This edition of our newsletter concerns, in major part, the inward search each of us must undergo in our Christian lives.

Bridget Mary Meehan chooses another from her broad range of topics, reviewing Lorraine Sharpe’s The Opposite of Poverty Is Justice. Here the inner search is detailed for ancillary characters: “a pro bono attorney, a Miami journalist, a retired police detective, and an outraged federal judge.” How could they live with themselves if they honored the conviction of Mary Catherine Hampton? It turns out that they could not. Their inner search indicated they must pursue justice, in the form of redress, instead.

Clare Julian Carbone deepens our understanding of the inward search with Abraham’s call, a command to go forward inwardly, expanding into Carl Jung’s process of individuation.

Debra Trees speaks of the soul’s journey towards its sole purpose. Ingeniously, she teases out possibilities from the field of quantum physics.

Jill Striebinger actually takes us on an inward search in her poetic column. Where do we find the true Way? Wrestling with Jill’s musings appears to be a good start.

Kathleen O’Connell Sauline warns against the otherization of trauma, a refusal to acknowledge our own suffering and pain, to be discerned on the inner search. We see others’ trauma as debilitating, while denying our own.

And, finally, ARCWP’s Anonymous brings the inward search into external realization with her 10 Commitments calling for responsibility in a multitude of directions.
The Opposite of Poverty Is Justice
by Lorraine Sharpe
Book review by Bridget Mary Meehan

Lorraine Sharpe’s compelling book *The Opposite of Poverty Is Justice* tells the story of Mary Catherine Hampton’s journey from poverty, abuse, and wrongful conviction to justice. It is a wake-up call: reform of the criminal justice system must be a priority now.

As I read Mary Catherine’s tragic story, it became apparent that poverty, lack of education, and sexism were contributing factors to her wrongful conviction. Sharpe’s book describes the drudgery of Mary Catherine’s incarceration in graphic detail, including incidents of both kindness and cruelty by fellow inmates and guards.

The author describes the Herculean efforts of a pro bono attorney, a Miami journalist, a retired police detective, and an outraged federal judge to prove Mary Catherine’s innocence. Their persistent legal challenges – after 3 years – resulted in her conviction being overturned and her release from prison.

Sharpe’s fictionalized story engages the reader not only in caring about an innocent woman who was abused, raped, and unjustly incarcerated, but also in wondering about women in similar circumstances, and in raising questions about the lack of accountability of investigators and prosecutors in wrongful convictions.

According to the National Registry of Exonerations, there are over 200 women who have been exonerated in the United States. Forty percent of female exonerees were convicted of harming children or loved ones in their care as a result of unforeseen tragedies – like house fires and undetected illnesses – that were not crimes. Eighty percent of women in jail are mothers and most are single parents. Like Mary Catherine Hampton, two-thirds were cleared because of false or misleading forensic evidence.

In her preface, Sharpe writes:

I wish that poverty, intelligence quotient, gender or race were not factors in deciding the outcome of the trial of any defendant. I wish our criminal justice system was restorative, rather than punitive. I have learned in writing this story, that the opposite of poverty is not wealth, the opposite of poverty is justice. And I have learned that the synonym for justice is love.

*The Opposite of Poverty Is Justice*, an incredible narrative of the wrongful conviction of an innocent woman, is a must-read for all advocates of the reform of a broken criminal justice system.

Kudos to Lorraine Sharpe for telling this moving story! ✨

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Ereshkigal’s Daughter
by Jill Striebinger

If any of us were to write a story of what we have overcome to access a place of healing, we might think we would choose to name ourselves “queen,” for we would be in a place to know that we had surmounted great obstacles to stand in our power. Most people striving to be seen as “good” would certainly not want to name themselves anything associated with Ereshkigal, the Empress of the Underworld. However, those of us who have experienced trauma before it can be recognized already live in a hell of another’s making, or perhaps of many others’ makings, or even our own. We can choose to be the eventual queen of this space, a space where we are aware of the concept of Christ as Light, the place where our faith allows us to believe in Light. We can keep our hope in a royal legacy, a right of heredity, or we can choose to follow another path, one that brings us closer to the true Light of Christ. We can walk the path that religiosity believes Jesus walked in place of us, or we can take the Way that has been obscured by dark yearnings egged on by killer rabbits in the disguise of harmless little bunnies; the path with brambles, where we are poked by tricksters wearing scary suits in the imaginal realm.

To choose this road less traveled is not as scary as it may seem by the standards of the Catholic traditions that we have inherited. There are angels and guides along the way. As Mr. Rogers used to say, “Look for the helpers.” Catholics know, in our own world view about religion, that Jesus is to be found in the unexpected and among the least of us. How “least” is defined in each decade and century may put boundaries on where we can find what are considered “appropriate” helpers and support for our journey. Power structures use invisible fences of fear and tell us that helpers can never be found in certain arenas or among excluded types of people. Aren’t they the “least among us?” We may be warned that there is a monster lurking in those woods. We are scared off of places that have been “othered” as grossly inappropriate or even labeled as dangerous . . . spaces and people associated with concepts of “unworthy,” “excommunicated,” and even “evil.” But I will leave you with this Wisdom found in little silvers of Light in the dark: there is no monster at the end of the book; and it wasn’t witches who were burned, drowned, or hanged, it was women.

So, my hope is this: can Ereshkigal’s other daughters, and really any of her children, access Sophia Wisdom to rise in The Light of Christ? ✨

Obscure References:
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https://maryqueenheavenearth.com

Jill Striebinger, ARCP, is a deacon and a Shipshwen Reiki Master. She attended People’s Catholic Seminary and has completed advocacy and peer advocate certifications through Parents in Partnership and Federation of Families. Jill holds a Master of Science in Management Information Systems, and her business background is in strategic, organizational, process, and system redesign. Jill is married to her wonderful husband, David, and is the mother of Eric, a beautiful angel. She volunteers as a parent advocate for other families with children who have autism.

Bridget Mary Meehan, ARCWP bishop, is an author of 20 books on prayer and spirituality. She is dean of Global Ministries University’s Doctor of Ministry and Master of Divinity programs and co-founder of People’s Catholic Seminary.
Finding Our Sole Purpose; Our Exclusive Journey as Human Beings
by Debra Trees

What if our human life, our body, and life experiences are actually meant as a way to enhance our soul’s journey? Are we possibly on a path to find our sole purpose? We experience unique situations and respond in only the way we ourselves can do. As we learn from what happens to us, our choices call us to walk the talk and to express what we are able to do.

Each of us has unique circumstances as we enter this world and matchless experiences as we travel through life. Those circumstances and experiences challenge us to learn more about ourselves, and the Spirit of Whom we are a part. Might we be given these situations to help us grow closer to our calling and the Great Spirit?

Concepts in quantum physics support all kinds of connections that we might not see but that are there, nonetheless. Our actions and even our thoughts have been shown by scientific experiments to have remote as well as immediate effects. (See The Healing Power of Water by Masaru Emoto). In his book The Physics of God, Joseph Selbie writes:

We are confounded by miracles, whether unexplainable healings or such amazing manifestations as changing water to wine, because we do not see the workings of subtler laws of energy and thought that changed the hidden organization of the invisible energy. Nonetheless, abundant proof exists that we ourselves use these subtle laws of energy and thought routinely—from the instantaneous physiological changes of multiple personality sufferers, to placebo-induced self-healing, to the tiny but hugely statistically significant effect people can exert on the throw of dice. The dramatic miracles of the saints and sages are but the conscious and deliberate extension of the same hidden laws of energy and thought that we use — without knowing how we use them — every day.

So how do we find our sole purpose?

First, we listen to our humanness. Our bodies, especially our emotions, communicate to us in ways that only we can know. Our feelings warn us of problems when we become angry or sad, and let us know that we are on the right path when we experience our happier and even peaceful times. Just like a GPS, we recalculate our path as we touch those personal truths. Sometimes we even hear a summons, as many of us called to ordination know deeply.

Second, we allow ourselves to follow what makes the most sense. As we continue our journey, it is almost impossible for us not to follow our GPS messaging. Our thoughts have an impact and create action.

Debra Trees is a wife, mother, and professional audiologist for the past 35 years. She is working on her Master’s in Ministry through People’s Catholic Seminary. This article is the result of work completed for the Community Chaplaincy Program at Global Ministries University.

The Ten Commitments
by Anonymous

1. Love the earth, its plants, and its animals. Care for the land, the air, and the water, for these are your common heritage.
2. Always give generously of your time, talent, and treasure. Give especially to those who ask.
3. Dedicate your labor to the good.
4. Despise tyrannical actions and oppose evil of every kind.
5. Do not argue concerning God.
6. Be patient with people. Defend the weak, the sick, the foolish, and the crazy, as you move freely among the powerful and the powerless.
7. Continue to evaluate whatever offends the dignity of any person, including yourself.
8. Always rejoice in the good, wherever you find it, and delight in beauty in all its forms.
9. Read these words every day and examine your attitudes as well as actions in their light.
10. Seek to change what can be changed with a peaceful heart. Remember, it is never too late to begin again. Whatever the circumstances: fear not and love much. Trust the process. Cry when you must. Laugh when you can, and do not take yourself too seriously. Live to the full, and you will be blessed forever.