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The Circumference of Community

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2009

COMMEMORATIVE ISSUE
WOMEN AND SPIRITUALITY
AN INTERNATIONAL INTERDISCIPLINARY ACADEMIC SYMPOSIUM

THE CIRCUMFERENCE OF COMMUNITY

By Patricia Awen Fey O'Lunaigh
Symposium Co-Convener

Since the Women and Spirituality Symposium was my initial foray into the world of conference organization and hosting, I didn't know exactly what to expect. Wiser and more experienced voyagers suggested that I plan for the unexpected, for a few mishaps always went with the territory. Was chaos going to rule the day? Much to my delight, the conference – aside from those one or two now expected mishaps – smoothly sailed out of the harbor of endeavor and onto the open seas of execution.

What impressed me the most was the ambiance surrounding the gathering. Inquisitiveness and expectation abounded, to be sure, but there was such a sense of gratefulness and hopefulness imbuing the space where we gathered – it was almost palpable. I know it wasn't just my own perception, for countless others remarked upon the same sensation throughout the duration of the event. This shows the necessity of such a gathering, and the deep needs that it fulfills. After expressing gratitude for such an opportunity, what was the next observation or comment? It was simply this – when are you having the symposium next year? Definitely one of the true hallmarks of a successful venture!

The symposium opened with a film and plenary panel composed of women from various faith traditions. Their opening remarks and discussion set the tone for what was to follow, and Selena Fox's keynote presentation on "Women, Spirituality, and Social Change" confirmed what was obvious from the outset – here was a safe space for sharing our stories and beliefs, for creating connections and finding renewal, and for dreaming the 'Next Steps' into being.

The program directive that proved both inspirational and essential was the inclusion of various types of presentations.



Rev. Selena Fox (left), keynote speaker, and Dana Aritonovich, Department of History graduate student and marketing strategist for the symposium.

The planning committee invited proposals from established scholars and students alike. This afforded undergraduate and graduate students the opportunity of presenting their first academic papers in a context both comfortable and supportive. Several CSU professors and students participated. These presentations included a session and artistic installation on "Women and Body Modification," papers on "The Croning Ceremony" and on ecofeminism, a tribute to African American Women in Gospel, which included a performance, a Bardic Poetry reading, and a paper on "The Re-Emergence of the Divine Feminine in the Late 20th Century."

Offerings from those outside the academic community were considered equally vital, and provided an array of presentations and workshops that delivered the authenticity of the lived experience and the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom outside of the formal

academic setting. A presentation on "Women in Buddhism" was informative and was delivered in a down-to-earth and accessible manner. One student shared how deeply and positively she was affected by the Reiki workshop she attended, and the Buddhist and Zen meditation sessions were, I was informed, instructive, relaxing, and refreshing. A participant in "The 21 Praises of Tara" workshop was excited by the offering of this unusual opportunity, which allowed her to witness and participate

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Non-Discrimination Statement

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thered the learning experience by allowing educational and spiritual pursuits to continue outside the venue of the symposium.

Certain sensibilities and perceptions have been awakened and new perspectives and paths beckon. The question that remains is - where do we go from here?

While the date of the second Women and Spirituality Symposium has yet to be determined, the sense of community we experienced can continue in other ways. We have completed the review process for the *Proceedings of the 2009 Women and Spirituality Symposium*, which will be accessible via our website in November 2009. Until then, comments, suggestions, and inquiries can be directed to: spirituality@csuohio.edu.

It is the 'Next Steps' that we are particularly interested in. How has this symposium personally affected you, and how has that impact resonated with other areas of your life? What new ideas for enhancing spiritual community have been awakened within you? Have you developed your own rituals, publications, artistic creations, activities, small group meetings or organizations as a result of your experiences here? What resources have you discovered that you feel must be shared? Remember -we start where we find ourselves, which means anyplace is a good place to start!

Once again, I want to thank all of you for your sublime, energetic participation and contributions, for without you community - spiritual or otherwise - cannot be developed or sustained.

Brightest Blessings on your path - until we meet again!

**Photos (clockwise from the top):
Patricia Awen Fey O'Luanaigh,
Regennia N. Williams, and Dean Gregory Sadlek.**

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in an entire ceremony from a tradition not her own.

The Druid ritual entitled "Liturgy of the Mothers" was another case in point. Participants were given the opportunity to learn about a tradition within Paganism first-hand. After the presentation, several individuals remarked upon the similarities between what they had witnessed and the rituals and ceremonies of their own reli-

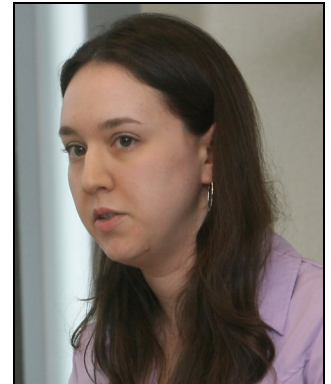
gious traditions. "They all appear to draw from the same sources of wisdom and knowledge," one woman remarked. Exactly. This is what we had hoped for - recognition of the interconnectedness of all the various religious and spiritual traditions represented at the symposium - and our connection through these links.

Spirituality as expressed through music, dance, song, and theater was also an integral part of the symposium. The various artistic presentations offered were diverse and encompassing, and included the use of the tambourine in the worship of the Black Madonna, a "Singing in Sacred Circle" workshop, an "African American Women in Gospel" performance, the Spirit of Life Dancers, and Pagan folk-song. Feminist Oracular and Bardic Poetry were represented, in addition to a film series running throughout the symposium. Having the opportunity to make choices from among such excellent offerings, the audience left each satisfied, yet thirsting for more.

Even the break for lunch afforded participants a chance to discuss what they had learned and experienced while making new friends. The information tables also provided access to resources that fur-



PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORIES



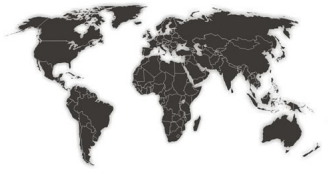
PHOTOGRAPHIC MEMORIES ·



(Clockwise from left) symposium presenters and participants;
(Bottom center, left to right) daughter and mother, Dominique Reminick and Patricia O'Lunaigh, with Rev. Selena Fox.

Women and Spirituality

An International Interdisciplinary
Academic Symposium



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