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Editor's Introductory Note

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Initiative for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora

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In *World Religions in America* (2009), Jacob Neusner suggests that an introduction to the world's religions "is important, because to understand America, you must understand religion." I am pleased, therefore, that, in Women's History Month 2016, I was able to find the time, space, and other resources to publish the **Proceedings of Cleveland State University's Women and Spirituality Symposium**. This is a special issue of *The Journal of Traditions & Beliefs*, the peer-reviewed publication of the Initiative for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora (RASHAD). This journal did not exist at the time of the gathering that inspired the poetry, essays, and scholarly articles contained herein. Today, I am indebted to Barbara Loomis and other staff members in CSU's Michael Schwartz Library for their ongoing support of this journal and other Engaged Scholarship publications.

I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge the many unforeseen challenges associated with making this publication available. Through no fault of our contributors, the target publication date was revised more than once. The first major delay was related to my Fulbright research and teaching in Nigeria, and my relocation to the Washington, D.C. Metro Area on March 1, 2016 caused the most recent delay. In hindsight, however, it appears that the timing was good, because, thanks to the availability of Engaged Scholarship, I can now afford to share the *Proceedings* with readers throughout the global community. No budget is required for printing and postage!

Special thanks to each of the contributors for participating in the symposium, revising their presentations, and submitting their work for peer review. Thanks, also, to Patricia Awen Fey O'Luanaigh, Co-Convener of the Symposium, Marketing Strategist Dana Artonovich, the planning committee members and reviewers, our co-sponsors, and every attendee.

The names of our program participants are too numerous to include here, but you will find them listed in the souvenir program booklet. Please do not stop there, however. I invite you to review every page of the booklet and the illustrated symposium keepsake, "The Circumference of Community." These primary documents provide evidence—in words and photographs—of the incredible diversity that characterized our audiences, presenters, and the subjects of their presentations. The women and men who participated were students and/or practitioners of a variety of the world's religions and spiritual traditions, and they gladly shared their knowledge with others.

The aforementioned diversity is also reflected in the contents of this issue; from the opening poem about a young women's spiritual journey—and articles on the spirituality of Indigenous women, African survivals in American folk culture, and women's contributions to transcendentalism—to discussions of the experiences of a female astrologist in Thailand, the creation of croning ceremonies in the United States, and an analysis of the leadership style of Jesus. First person narratives, information gleaned from oral interviews, and analyses of other primary and secondary sources are included—along with bibliographies designed to facilitate further reading and discussion. Taken together, these works have the potential to enhance our understanding of the complex relationships between spirituality, organized religion, the arts, and the humanities.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,

Regennia N. Williams, PhD, Editor
March 31, 2016