

## DISCERNING THE CONNECTIONS

Well, it's that time again. Now that I have finished a mock-up of the entire issue (sans ads), it is time to put on a Mozart CD, light some candles, climb into a hot bath and read *Presence* from cover to cover. It's not just for pleasure, and it's not just for proof-reading. I'm on a quest to find the single thread that runs through every article. And once I have found it, to find the point of connection with my own life. Often, there are many. Sometimes, I have to dig. Whatever treasure I uncover will become this article, the Focus for this issue.

It's not much different from writing a sermon (which I must do much more frequently). It is really a process of *lectio divina* and journaling. In both cases I must enter into a text with all that I am — in the case of a sermon, the appointed scriptures for the day, and in the case of *Presence*, all the articles in a given issue — and emerge with an insight and a story. Sometimes it feels not unlike Jacob wrestling the angel — and emerging with a limp and a blessing. Though in my case it's often a crick in my neck rather than a limp. (*Note to self: buy a bath pillow.*) Usually it isn't much of a struggle. After all, if everything is connected, the connections should not be too difficult to find. In the popular cartoon, Calvin says to Hobbes as they're digging through the dirt, "There's treasure *everywhere!*" Calvin may have been talking about worms and old cans, but hey, wisdom is wherever you find it.

In the case of this issue, it is the theme of connection itself that leaps out at me. The word "religion" literally means "to connect again," to rejoice that which has been divided. This is in

large part precisely what our ministry of spiritual direction is all about: helping one another discern what has been torn, lost, or estranged, and helping with the mending, the finding, and the reconciliation. A "curate" in old English is one entrusted with the "cure of souls." Spiritual directors are "curates" indeed, dedicated to the cure, the coming together, the connection between soul and body, past and present, the human and the divine.

In this issue we see plenty of connecting going on. In our first article, "From Costly Silence to Spiritual Health," Susan S. Gaumer tells of her work reconnecting women who have been traumatized with their authentic voices, their pain, and their true worth; and, hopefully, eventually, with their Creator.

While Susan Gaumer focuses on reclaiming what has been lost, Patricia Galli, RSM reveals the step-by-step process by which novice directors gain the skills to practice good directing in her article "The Emergence of a Director." While the acquisition of knowledge, techniques, and intuitive insight may come quicker to some than others, Patricia describes the road that most of us travel at the beginning of our ministries as we connect with tradition, common sense, and the Spirit of God. A useful map, this article will help trainers identify the roadmarks in the development of the director's craft, and not a few of us will see our own journeys reflected here.

"How to Follow a Spiritual Friend" is chock-full of connections and delightful insights, as we read a 19th-century manual for "directees" on how to find and properly follow a "director" in the

Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Points of contact with traditional Christian direction are plentiful, but there are also many differences, which make for sometimes painful and sometimes amusing (even at the same time!) reading.

While we are likely to find much to smile about in our comparison of Eastern and Western techniques of spiritual companionship, turning the page to our next article, “Companions at the Threshold: Spiritual Direction with the Dying” moves us into decidedly poignant territory. In this sober and compassionate article, Margaret Guenther describes the necessary and difficult work of companionship those on the final stages of their earthly journeys, helping them find connection to the universe and to God, and to begin to let go of their connections to those people and things they will leave behind. A moving and important article, we are honored to be permitted to reprint it from the upcoming anthology *Still Listening: New Horizons in Spiritual Direction*, edited by Norvene Vest, and published by Morehouse.

In “Discovering Your Purpose,” Duane Bidwell and Lee Self detail their experience facilitating a spiritual direction group focused on one’s vocation, helping participants find points of connection between their work and their souls.

Finally, in our “Listening to Scripture” column, Editorial Board member Susan Schenck Izard shares her experience with a group of women who meet to pray, support one another, and . . .

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knit. “Knitting into the Mystery of God” is the perfect close to an issue so replete with connections, as we see these women discovering their lives to be woven together with yarn, connected to those to whom they minister. Often unbeknownst to them, the shawls that they create and pray over find exactly the right people, again and again, uniting people across generational and denominational boundaries, and enfolding them with prayers and love, tightly knit and given with no thought of return.

No, it’s not hard to find connections. Connecting is what we are all about. Lately, an odd lyric has been haunting the twilight time between my sleeping and waking. I’ve been waking up morning after morning, singing “We believe in the heart, we believe in healing, in the house where angels sing. We unite the divided and the fallen ones, we will serve the Flower King” (“The Flower King” by Roine Stolt). I have rarely heard such a poetic or succinct description of our ministry. The divisions are everywhere: within ourselves, between one another, between ourselves and our Maker. And we have all fallen short of our own expectations, regardless of our stand on original sin. The uniting, the connecting, the *re-lig-ion*; this is our ministry and our calling. Let us serve the Flower King. z

—John R. Mabry