C R O S S R O A D S

A Newsletter of the Grail International Leadership Team

October 2018

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Letter from the ILT

Dear Grail Sisters Everywhere,

It's hard to believe that we have been serving for 8 months already. We have met so many of you personally through our various travels and have also met others through Skype and Email. Thank you all for your love, support and warm welcomes as we have delved into our work.

October Meeting of International Teams—Golega, Portugal

Within the Grail Internationally we are making final preparations for the October Teams' Meeting. As you may know, it is through these international teams that the decisions of each IGA are brought to life. Given decisions that were made at the IGA-Fatima in 2017, new international teams were formed, others are continuing their work, but with new goals, and some have been reconfigured to best meet our challenges going forward. This is an exciting time as we prepare to gather in Portugal, especially since this is a first international Grail meeting for some participants. At this meeting, we will learn from each other as each team pursues their objectives and also for the collaboration among teams as needed. Sometime will be dedicated to the Big Meeting in 2021 for celebrating our 100th Anniversary.

International Council Meeting (IC) 2019 – Tanzania

Travels for Maria Carlos and Mary took them to Tanzania to visit their many projects that reflect the various ways that they are working on the SDG's that we spoke so much about at the IGA in 2017 and also to discuss with the NLT the feasibility of hosting the 2019 IC meeting for July. More specifics on all of this will be forthcoming.

Young Women International Leadership Training in Maputo, Mozambique

Congratulations to the Grail in Mozambique for their incredible team work and on successfully executing every aspect and detail for the International Young Women Leaders Training which took place in August. Their warmth and unending hospitality made everyone feel at home right from their arrival at the airport and until we were safely back on our planes home. And a special thanks to Lucy Jones, Thanh Nguyen and Abida Jamal for their leadership and coordination. We would also like to thank everyone who identified and prepared the amazing women who participated. We will be sharing more on this, as each participant made a commitment to implement a project back home.

As we close, we would like to report that Dilma is doing well, regaining her strength and would like to thank everyone for their prayers and good wishes.

Again, thank you all for your good work, you good will and support.

Warm wishes to all,

Dilma, Maria Carlos and Mary

PS. For those who might be interested in the preparation that each participant to the Teams' Meeting has been assigned, see below.

The work of all International Teams is grounded in our documents and we invite all Grail members to review:

- **IGA 2017** report where we find the recommendations and guidelines for existing Teams and new ones;
- **IC Manual**, where much information is provided on how The Grail is organized internationally: guidelines on becoming a Grail member and Grail-nucleus; the formation of Grail members; the formation of new Grail groups in different countries; the way finances are organized in The Grail and how funds can be accessed.
- **Vision Statement**

Note from the Editor

The theme for this issue was:

- *What are the causes that personally move you and why?*
- *How do you get involved and what actions do you take?*
- *As a Grail group what are the causes that move you locally, regionally or internationally? What actions do you take?*
- *How do you bring the spiritual values you hold as Grail in the midst of your political involvement and action in today¹s world?*

We have a number of articles reflecting on this as well as other reflections, memorials and sharings. They are all wonderful to read.

Thank you to all these contributors and, as always, thank you to Judith Blackburn my proofreader and Mary Omedo who brilliantly formats it all and gets it out to everyone.

Carol Siemering

Empowering the Girl Child Potential and Dreams *Elemina Musundi* Kenya

Sarah Mabanja, one of the young Grail women in Kenya and also a member of the Kenyan NLT who has been empowered by the Grail Women programmes in Kitale, Kenya, once said, "I wish I had someone who had made me realize my potential much earlier in life. I, however, count my blessing for later finding a neighbor who believed in me, held my hand to the great and successful woman I am today."
As a mother and retired teacher, my agenda over the past 40 years has been empowering the girl child to achieve her ambitions, potential capabilities and aspirations. There is an undeniable value of the role of girls and women in our communities, who are seen as a solid backbone towards the building of a strong society.

At the center of their empowerment is granting girls equal opportunities to access education, gain knowledge and harness their skills. In Kenya, early pregnancies and marriages are common, especially among the rural girl child and those who hail from poor backgrounds. These occurrences have been fought over the years by keeping girls in school, as education has proved to be one of the effective ways to combat early pregnancies and marriages.

An educated girl is aware of the benefits of education, understands the road and ingredients (? steps toward?) to success, is aware of sexually transmitted diseases and their effects, and stands a better chance to better employment and business opportunities. Every day my purpose is to continuously make the girl next door realize she harbors success and all she has to do is to rise, use her education, skills and talent to her benefit.

“Yes, You Can” is a slogan I have inculcated in over 100 girls and women to whom I have made a deliberate effort to harness their skills and grow their dreams. About 85% of them are proud of their current achievements and growth. They have a balance in life and self-acknowledgment that their future is in their hands.

The support has been through providing access to education, short and long term training to sharpen skills, the growth of talents and seed support towards self-employment.

Some of the girls too come from humble backgrounds, therefore unable to access education as their parents live below a dollar a day. I have personally taken more than 20 girls into my home at different intervals, enabled their access to education and other social needs. In the process, I mentor them into becoming young successful women both in school and later in life.

“I got pregnant just before sitting for my class eight exams. It felt like the end of my education. My struggling parents were very disappointed, for they had sacrificed the little they had to take me to school. When Madam Elemina heard about my case, she visited my parents and talked to them not to reject me. Madam later called me to her home and talked to me about having the desire to go back to school after giving birth. This came to pass as she took me to Namanjalala Primary School, where I completed my studies. Today I am a proud mother, an educated young lady and employed because of Madam Elemina,” said Joyce Akinyi, another beneficiary of my girl child empowerment project.

Above all, I inject spiritual values in these girls and women, ensuring they have acknowledgment and respect for God. All of them became and remain active members of the church, a commitment that makes me a very proud mentor, especially when some reach out to me to share about their normal life challenges and how their faith in God and prayers have kept them strong and led to breakthroughs.

I remain a believer that true satisfaction is when you lift others, encourage them and make their lives better. My commitment is to always be a blessing to many others, especially vulnerable girls and women.

My dream is to one day have a world where the majority are committed to empowering and strengthening others, transforming them into better beings. A world where they march up the ladder, whether one step or ten steps up - while holding someone else’s hand.

I believe and continue to pray for extra ability to touch and change the lives of girls and young women in my community and always encouraging them to be a blessing to another girl and woman.

A Gift from the Grail *Marian April Goering* USA

In 2015, I retired from working and moved nearly 2,000 miles (3,200 kilometers) from a town near Washington, DC, to Albuquerque, New Mexico, a city and state in the southwestern United States. In this region, the population is heavily Hispanic and Native American. I had planned to take Spanish courses so that I could communicate with people who prefer that language.

But my Grail experience – working with the Grail in Tanzania from 1975 to 1979 – has made possible an unexpected and compelling concern that now absorbs my time and attention. And I don't have time to study Spanish.

About six months after I arrived in Albuquerque, a neighbor invited my husband and me to meet a family new in her church. To my surprise, the parents of this family were refugees from the Republic of Congo who had fled into Tanzania nearly 20 years ago with two children. Several more children were born in a Tanzanian refugee camp. To their surprise, I still speak Swahili and chatted with them in the language they all know.

When I shared my excitement about meeting this African family with another neighbor, she told me that a professor at the local university teaches a course on refugee issues and advocacy. I immediately signed up for the course and spent two semesters studying the refugee crisis. The course included special focus on resettlement concerns and assigned each student to help a refugee family accomplish their own cultural learning and adaptation goals in this new country. It was a wonderful experience for me and (I hope) helpful to the family I worked with.

Even without experience working in Africa, I might have decided to help refugees resettled in my community. But my Grail experience in Tanzania moved me to deeper and stronger commitment in this service. Grail members and villagers in Kisekibaha and Dido were very, very hospitable and kind to me during the years I spent with them. Now I have the opportunity to return their hospitality to Africans who are struggling to find their way to live in United States.

There are several hundred African refugee families living in Albuquerque. When refugees I meet discover that I can understand their language, they pour out their hopes, fears, and confusions to me. I have learned that these refugees have great resilience and remarkable survival skills. Yet the challenge of learning language, laws, and customs in America is also great. I am doing what I can to make their adaptation to this new country a little easier for the refugee families and individuals I meet.

What am I doing with refugees? Many different things –

- Interpreting for African moms to talk with teachers about the progress and difficulties their children were having in school.

- Attending several prenatal medical appointments with one woman and going with her to the hospital when she delivered her baby. As things worked out, I stayed with her through the delivery interpreting for the doctor and nurses – then taught the parents to say, "This is our new baby boy."
- Sharing the family sadness when a pregnancy ended in stillbirth or when a young child died.
- Helping one dad who had bought a car and learned to drive to understand the various license, registration, and insurance requirements that drivers in the US must know and follow.
- Going with an African woman to the emergency room and helping her before surgery to repair a broken leg.
- When a refugee man I know had broken a law he did not understand, going to court with them and interpreting between his lawyer and him.
- When I learned that a young woman had been assaulted, I helping her get the medical and legal help she needed to protect herself and accuse the attacker.
- Playing games and reading stories to African children – and taking them to movies, parks, stores, picnics, the library, and church.

I plan to continue this work. My Grail experience and human compassion compel me to continue. Helping African refugees expresses my gratitude for the hospitality I received from the Tanzanian Grail and their neighbors. Further, in the context of current unwelcoming and unfriendly US government policies toward immigrants and refugees, this work has become very important to me. Advocacy with refugee immigrants as they adapt to American life is for me a form of protest and an on-going resistance against the US government's anti-immigrant policies.

And it is so much fun to talk and laugh with African women right here in my American home.

Learning in the Grail: About being and becoming autonomous

Marijke de Koning Portugal

The principal cause that has moved me in the Grail is the emancipatory pedagogy with girls and women that structures the educational work of the Grail in Portugal. This educational work constitutes for me a life-long journey, which I described in a book published in 2006, entitled *Emerging Places of the Subject-Woman. Journey with Paulo Freire and Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo* (*Lugares emergentes do Sujeito-Mulher. Viagem com Paulo Freire e Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo*).

In this educational work I distinguished a set of perspectives that made up a compass. This compass allowed the path of my educational journey in the Grail in Portugal to be mainly a good path, I believe. The following 8 ideas have composed my compass until now:

1. The person has to learn to say the words that reveal her reality and herself.
2. The learning process takes place through dialogue and conversation.
3. The learning subject constructs her autonomy through work on herself. This implies learning to live with conflicting choices, dealing with tensions and developing a critical capacity.
4. Autonomy is always relational and relative, dependent on a culture, language, and knowledge. Autonomy always implies managing our "dependencies."
5. Emancipation is a complex process of advances and stepping back.
6. It is crucial to develop the ability to say "no,"

7. It is important to cultivate the ability to admire.
8. It is essential to cultivate the virtues of consistency and simplicity.

Can this compass still be used in today's educational journeys in Grail projects? I think so, but I would like to re-visit the "place" of one of the central concepts of emancipatory educational practices, namely *autonomy*.

In a recent study on autonomy (*Autonomie - Ein Versuch über das gelungene Leben – Autonomy – an essay on the fulfilled life*) Beate Rössler, Professor of Ethics at the University of Amsterdam, takes up this question: "When and to which extent are we autonomous in our action and in the way we are living? Many things in our lives are not determined by us. Sometimes we do things against our will, for example because we are obliged by executives or by governments. In other cases we do not know exactly what we want."
Reading the essay I am asking myself if we in the Grail - while we are moving forward as an international community of women in the 21st century - should not create spaces of reflection on the concept of autonomy?

The time in the Grail when there still was "a strong sense of obedience to the leaders", as referred to in *Women of Vision* (p.73), lies far behind us. In this book, edited by Marian Ronan and Mary O'Brien, we can read how one of the Sixteen Founders of the International Grail refers to this sense of obedience: "When someone said 'its better that you go to South Africa,' you went. I went with great sorrow in my heart. Now we have the idea of personal responsibility, where everyone must decide with her own conscience" (pp. 52-53). How are we, nowadays, and in the different cultural Grail realities, thinking and acting as persons and as a group or community in relation to autonomy?

What do we mean by autonomy? How do we deal with our ambivalences? Is our life only meaningful when we can be autonomous? What do we mean by a meaningful life? Do we know what we think and want? Do we know ourselves? What self-conscience and self-knowledge do we have? Is it ethically correct to have criteria that judge others if the life of a person is fulfilled or good? What about our privacy? In which political and social circumstances are there conditions for the realization of the individual autonomy? These are some of the questions raised by Beate Rössler in her study.

Autonomy is the ability to manage 'dependencies.' How do we deal with our "dependencies" in the Grail? What kinds of developments have taken place in our local and global Grail community in the XXI century? What is important in terms of our personal autonomy, for each one of us as individual Grail members and part of a community?

Emancipation is a complex and endless process of advances and stepping back. As learning subjects we have to shape ourselves. Errors and mistakes are part of this process of learning to be a "good" person. We live in a world in which we need to find a new balance in our desire for individual autonomy and a meaningful life, embedded in a horizon of meaning we are sharing with others, like we do in the Grail. The nomadic circular learning journey is a process allowing us to come back to places we visited before. One of the most structuring places that need to be revisited is the one where decisions are made, and where our autonomy and dependencies are shaped and reshaped. How do I want to live my life? What does the Grail expect from me? Becoming or being an autonomous person implies to be able to handle our ambivalences by "developing a reasonable attitude towards mutually colliding desires, convictions, roles, identity and the contingency of daily life" (Beate Rössler).

Being part of the Grail brings in an extra dimension of ambivalence where we have to overcome the ambiguity of sometimes not knowing how and what to choose. Do I choose into function of myself or in the function of the Grail? Do the Grail coordinators/decision makers take into account the wishes, needs and desires of the singular Grail members? Is there enough space for dialogue and listening during decision-making processes, so that we are not falling into the trap of imposing decisions on each other? Sometimes what is good for the person may not be coincident with what is good for the community. How do we live with this tension in our different Grail contexts? What can we learn from each other in terms of dealing with this tension?
I am just leaving you/us these challenges which seem to me to be central in order to provide a healthy and satisfying Grail context. A context enabling everyone to continue to belong where we are needed: in the Grail and in the middle of many other commitments. Through a variety of experiences in the Grail, I have opportunities to interact with women of all generations. I am inspired and energized by the young women I meet each year at the CSW and I always learn something new when I have the chance to listen to their hopes and challenges and view the world from their perspective. I have deep and long-lasting friendships with members of all generations, from participation on numerous program and leadership teams. The opportunity to work and learn together has been a great source of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth for me personally, but is also fundamental to the Grail. I have gratitude and deep affection for so many older members who mentored me and continue to guide my growing into Grail community.

However, this issue of Crossroads provides an opportunity for reflection on the interaction between generations that I have encountered in my work with our U.S. Elder Care Work Group. Ten years ago, we began to consider with greater focus the question of how the Grail could effectively anticipate and plan for the needs of an increasing number of aging members. Years before, members established a Health and Welfare Fund to provide financial support for those who had worked on subsistence for the Grail for ten or more years. This proved a successful strategy that has served our Grail elders well for many years. Nevertheless, over time it became evident that older members would need more than financial security as they began to face ever more complex challenges of growing older. Our Elder Care Work Group then formed to provide support and assistance, (emotional, psychological, financial, spiritual, housing) to individuals with increasing needs for care during the latter phases of life.

Our small Work Group team has worked since to gather information from individual members and to understand how best to martial Grail resources to meet growing needs. What has sparked this reflection however, is a deepening appreciation of how many Grail members, of every generation, are serving as support persons for one or more Grail elders. They assist with visitation, transportation to Grail meetings as well as doctor visits, serve as financial managers and health advocates, help members pack and move to new residences, organize Grail birthday gatherings, shop, and generally keep the rest of us updated regarding someone's situation and well-being. But beyond support functions, what is most evident are the genuine bonds of friendship and sisterly affection that undergird these relationships between the generations.

Over the years, different Grail processes have tried to define who we are and our levels of commitment. From the vantage point of my experience with the Elder Care Work Group, I have observed and concluded that such interaction and expression of care is evidence of genuine community. This is not something I expect to find in other organizations or movements. It is this community of intimate connection that continues to hold my heart and shape my commitment within the Grail. Through our Elder Care Work Group I have an opportunity to regularly witness the love and care our members have for one another across all ages. It is a profound expression of community in which all involved continue to give and receive.

Lessons from the Talbot* *Elizabeth Lee* Australia

Walk slowly
Pause frequently
Listen deeply
Speak sparingly
Consult widely
Act with integrity
Work collaboratively
Respect unceasingly
Praise regularly
Advocate passionately
Observe closely
Discern wisely
Reflect often
Tread sensitively
Encourage sincerely
Love tenderly
Question perceptively
Discuss openly
Respond compassionately
Laugh heartily
Celebrate frequently
Pray unceasingly
Breathe deeply
Weep occasionally
Wash hands habitually
And live gratefully.

* *The Talbot is Matthew Talbot Hostel, a crisis accommodation centre for homeless men near the centre of Sydney. I have been Pastoral Care Officer at Matthew Talbot for the past 3 years. In mid-August I finished my role there and am taking 4 months sabbatical for rest, renewal, reorientation and discernment,*

exploring spiritual accompaniment in the Margins. I will spend 6 weeks in the USA and 8 weeks in the UK as well as a short trip to the Netherlands. Hopefully I will connect with my Grail Sisters in each of the countries.

Trabajo Educativo Con Pueblos Originarios: *Ma. Luisa Mejía Lagunas* Mexico

UNA EXPERIENCIA QUE NO ACABA DE SER.

Mujeres de Cuentepec y Coatetelco, Morelos, compartiendo conocimientos.

RESUMEN

En el presente artículo hablamos del trabajo Educativo que hemos venido desarrollando con algunos pueblos originarios del Estado de Morelos, México, poniendo especial énfasis con mujeres de los mismos poblados.

Abordamos primero nuestro interés por este sector de la población, que es de los más vulnerables de nuestro país, por ser mujeres, indígenas y además pobres.

Hablamos también en un segundo momento de algunas orientaciones metodológicas que guiaron y continúan guiando el trabajo educativo de campo con esas poblaciones marginadas.

Por último hacemos un recuento de los logros alcanzados por estos grupos de mujeres.

EL INICIO

Queremos en nuestra región Morelos-Valle de México, hacer realidad el llamado de nuestro enunciado en la Visión del Grial: ***"Para crear un mundo sustentable, aunque complejo nos hemos empeñado en buscar signos de esperanza, fortaleciéndonos con las energías compasivas y acciones creativas de las mujeres",*** ya sea que se encuentren en nuestras regiones o en otros lugares.

Así pues, comenzamos en 1996 en la comunidad indígena de Cuentepec, al observar las serias limitaciones que enfrenta esta comunidad, es la subordinación de su idioma -náhuatl- al idioma dominante que es el español, de ahí que se genere una ruptura lingüística, aun cuando a algunas personas se les facilite hablar español, sus habilidades cognoscitivas se ven afectadas en lo referente a lecto-escritura y las matemáticas, que académicamente se marcan en los contenidos para la educación primaria.

Por ello, vimos la necesidad de incorporar a un grupo de mujeres en un primer momento en el manejo del idioma español, para que nos sirviera de grupo motivador y multiplicador en la comunidad, como vía de acceso a otras áreas de conocimiento, buscando su desarrollo social, laboral y cultural sin afectar sus orígenes.

En ese sentido nos propusimos los siguientes objetivos:

- Establecer un proceso educativo acorde a las necesidades de las mujeres indígenas, primero en el pueblo de Cuentepec, que las llevará a desarrollar sus capacidades individuales y colectivas a través de talleres específicos que les facilitara la mejora continua tanto en lo educativo, como en lo económico y en un entorno más limpio, para Ellas y sus familias.
- Diseñar e implementar Proyectos Educativos culturalmente adaptados a sus necesidades.
- Implantar un conocimiento profundo en el manejo de Ecotecnias que ayuden a mejorar la salud y cuidado del entorno, al menos en tres comunidades Indígenas de Morelos.

ALGUNAS ORIENTACIONES METODOLÓGICAS DEL TRABAJO EDUCATIVO DE CAMPO

En primer lugar la acción educativa no debe hacerse de arriba hacia abajo, como una imposición, sino desde ***adentro hacia afuera*** *por las propias mujeres,* con la ayuda de la promotora-educadora.

En segundo término debe ser un método que sea también instrumento de las mujeres y no solo de la promotora-educadora.

Tercero, que dicho método identifique el contenido del aprendizaje con el proceso mismo del aprendizaje (ya que éste es la adquisición de ciertas habilidades, conocimientos o actitudes, de relativa permanencia con la que la mujer no contaba antes). De tal forma que se logre una actitud de creación y recreación, una autoafirmación de la que puede obtenerse una postura activa de las ***mujeres*** sobre su realidad.

Destacamos en el proceso que el roll de la promotora- educadora sea fundamentalmente el ***dialogar con las mujeres*** *sobre situaciones concretas,* proporcionándoles los instrumentos con los cuales Ellas aprenden haciéndoles notar a través de ciertas contradicciones básicas, las situaciones en las que están viviendo, concretamente en el presente, como problemas que, a su vez las desafían, y al hacerlo les exige una respuesta, no a nivel intelectual sino a un nivel de ***la acción.***

Otro aspecto importante que hemos cuidado es que la promotora-educadora no debe ir a presentar a las mujeres su visión personal del mundo (o intentar imponérsela), sino que se procura ***dialogar con las mujeres*** sobre sus respectivas visiones, entonces será en la realidad mediatizadora donde ambas buscarán el contenido programático de la acción educativa. El momento de ésta búsqueda es lo que viene ***a instalar el diálogo de la acción educativa como práctica de la libertad.***

Y es en este momento es que surgen los ***temas significativos para Ellas o el conjunto de sus temas generadores.***

Por lo tanto, la metodología no puede ser contradictoria al diálogo en la acción educativa, sino que proporcione al mismo tiempo la aprehensión de los temas generadores y la *toma de conciencia de las mujeres en torno a ellos mismos.*

Se trata en última instancia de investigar su *pensamiento, su decir referido a la realidad, los niveles de percepción de ésa realidad y su visión del mundo en el cual se encuentra envueltos sus temas generadores.*

El Taller como eje metodológico y dinamizador del proceso educativo vinculando educación-trabajo.

Hemos promovido el *taller como eje dinamizador* del hecho educativo, propiciando el desarrollo de habilidades intelectuales y de actitudes. Así el conocimiento es un fin y un medio en educación, fin en cuanto a que la meta de nuestra organización es que las *mujeres aprendan*, y medio porque al buscar el conocimiento se desarrollan las habilidades humanas y las actitudes.

Es un darse cuenta que el aprendizaje que *educa o deja huella* solo se da si la mujer ***construye en sí misma.*** En ese sentido la noción del *taller viene a proporcionar los espacios, los materiales y herramientas* para la realización de trabajos específicos con una instructora-formadora que oriente a las mujeres para dominar el conocimiento.

Señalamos como una reflexión de este proceso que la ***mujer*** *al realizar una tarea específica, incorpora toda su experiencia y su reflexión personal* sobre el proceso seguido, la lleva a identificar ciertas acciones de carácter general que pueden ser aplicadas a problemas diversos, y de ahí que un ***taller*** *sea una combinación de recursos humanos y materiales.* Es involucrar a las mujeres en un proceso experimental que les va permitiendo ***expresar su sensibilidad*** *a través de la realización de una tarea determinada.*

El taller enfatiza acciones pero también no hay que olvidar la ***reflexión*** que se desarrolla sobre lo realizado, con el fin de establecer la relación que hay entre teoría y práctica.

Principios básicos del taller:

1. Para que el aprendizaje se dé, se requiere de la actividad intelectual, motriz y afectiva de la mujer
2. La instructora-formadora debe promover el aprendizaje de conocimientos, habilidades y actitudes.
3. Se da más peso al aprendizaje de actitudes y al desarrollo de habilidades intelectuales.
4. El aprendizaje se da en forma gradual en función de los conocimientos, actitudes y habilidades de las mujeres.

En base a estos principios y para desarrollar las habilidades de razonamiento y formación, ***el diálogo*** cobra vida en el taller descansando en tres conceptos fundamentales:

a) La **mujer** como persona, concebida como un **centro dinámico** *capaz de captar y dar sentido a su realidad expresándose mediante el lenguaje*

b) *Conocimiento dinámico, concebido como proceso del* ***pensar en una problemática y que busca significado.***

c) La educación y el **diálogo** *se dan a través de una serie de cuestionamientos, que nos lleva a un proceso de análisis y reflexión, que facilita* ***recibir e intercambiar experiencias*** en un clima de *respeto y confianza, en* ***un compromiso con un quehacer.***

LOGROS ALCANZADOS

Como equipo de Grial, en dos décadas hemos logrado conformar dos grupos de mujeres Indígenas de las comunidades de Cuentepec, que pertenece al Municipio de Temixco, Morelos, México y en Coatetelco, Municipio de Miacatlán, Morelos México.

El primer grupo está conformado por 4 mujeres y 4 hombres; y es experto en construir, estufas ahorradoras de leña, sistemas para captar agua de lluvia, biofiltros para limpiar aguas jabonosas, cultivos biointensivos (huertos de hortalizas), elaboración de pan y piezas de barro artesanales.

El segundo grupo se integra por tres mujeres y dos hombres, expertos también en construir estufas ahorradoras de leña, manejo de herbolaria, masajes y organización de festivales culturales.

Construcción de estufa ahorradora de leña.

Siembra orgánica.

Taller de bordado y telar de cintura.

Encuentro de Mujeres Originarias.

Ritual de petición de lluvia.

Taller de autoestima y crecimiento personal.

The Grail in the U.S. takes a look at Systemic Racism *Renee Wormack-Keels* USA

In the United States, systemic racism is the underlying cause for most, if not all, injustices within our borders.

Recently gun violence against Black men and women has led to senseless and unwarranted shootings and killing. Why? The perception that men and women of African descent, or all brown and black people, are perceived as a threat.

Last November The US Grail assembly adopted, as one of two resolutions, the decision to work on becoming an anti-racist organization. This is quite a challenge given the ethnic realities within the USA and the Grail. The majority of the USA Grail can be identified as white or of European descent. The Women of Color, as you might guess, make up a plurality of ethnicities. Those ethnic groups include, but are not limited to, those of African, Hispanic or Latina descent, Native American and Asian heritage and many combinations thereof.

As our working group began to meet via phone conference, a number of things emerged. One of the primary matters to be acknowledged was how to understand who we are given the very broad definition of "white" and even some denial of the fact that the term" white" is a racialized group. And while there is neither time nor space to address the complexity of that term, I will offer a few thoughts and suggest some resources for further study.

The word "white" entered into the fabric of American society as more persons from Africa and the indigenous populations were used for servitude. Immigrants from Western Europe thought of themselves as Polish, Italian, German, etc. but not as "white."
See any of the following for a more detailed analysis:

- *The Heart of Whiteness: Confronting Race, Racism, and White Privilege*, Robert Jensen.
- *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in Seventeenth-Century North America and the Caribbean*, Gerald Horne.
- *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*, Ibram X. Kendi. (My personal favorite)

Our first understanding was to be that of educating ourselves on the origins of systemic racism. The challenge of unpacking white privilege and supremacy are key factors in maintaining racism. Together we collected and shared resources, including the view of a most powerful documentary on the issue: "Race: The Power of an Illusion" is a three-part product of California Newsreel. Following both collective and individual viewing, we were led by Grail member Nancy Richardson in two powerful group study sessions.

In addition, in April of this year, *National Geographic* magazine published an issue on race. We ordered copies for our individual use for study. Sometime this fall we will discuss key stories in that publication.

"So where are we?" you might ask. We have only just begun. To become an anti-racism organization requires a process for dismantling racism. Do we have all the answers? Absolutely not, but we have a determined commitment to evolve and deepen our understanding of how systemic racism impacts us all. And this is not just a USA issue, but also a global phenomenon.

There are tools and resources to which we are turning to help us continue the discussion and build a shared analysis of race and racism within our organization. Then, and only then, will we be able to change and transform ourselves and those with whom we work.

This reflection represents the thoughts of Renee Wormack-Keels and not the entire group.

If you would like to be further engaged, please feel free to contact me at renee@usgrail.com or revdocrenee@icloud.com I am also happy to send along our list of resources upon request.

Names for God *Chris de Leeuw* the Netherlands

In the year 2000, there was a Grail meeting in South Africa: 'Growing older in the Grail.' For our songbook I translated the song of Hein Stufkens: 'Voorbij hoe ik jou denk, ben jij.' I asked Zoë, who lived at the Tiltenberg at that time, to check my English. "No, not 'how I think God' but 'how I think about God,'" she said. Oh no, that is not what Hein meant; he wrote: '**how I think Go**d.'

I think God. Admittedly, that image is fed by various sources from my earliest childhood onwards, but it is - with all feelings which cannot be expressed – grown to *my personal image of God.* In many years of searching – does God exist? who or what would God be? – I heard, read and thought so much. Conclusion: my mind is far too small to grasp God. Experiences in my own life and in lives of other people made me realise that God exists, though I have no idea in which form. So I may think of many, many words describing something of God, even though I know that every word falls short, that I only can describe a tiny little splinter of God's greatness as I think and experience it. I know I am not alone in this. During celebrations I have heard so many different names – and does Islam not have 99 words for God? I look for it on the internet and read: "Abu Hurairah: Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: 'Allah has ninety-nine Names, one-hundred less one; and he who memorizes them all by heart will enter Paradise.'"

How happy I was reading that the Swedish Grail women chose as the theme for the international Grail retreat in Spain: "Images of God in troubled times." We participants created this retreat ourselves, by preparing a celebration, a reflection or a program. Margreet van Leeuwen and I prepared the morning prayer of Wednesday. We made a long list of Names for God and asked Mineke van Sloten to help with the translation. Somehow some names do not have the same feeling when translated in English… but in the end we had a page full of names with a picture of the candles-corner of the Dominicus church in Amsterdam – see the copy of it.

We sang: "Beyond how I think you, you are
a silent hint
a word in the wind
a knowing nothing yet
beyond, like that."

We asked everybody to choose one word which is unknown to her of the page with many names, to meditate on it for five minutes and tell – if she so wished – what this name evoked in her. These personal reactions were very inspiring.

Another translated poem from Hein Stufkens was read:

On a beautiful morning, I believe
you rose from all your names -
in no church you were,
in no doctrine.

On that morning
all your names flowed together
and ever since – for you
I have no words no more.

With a beautiful prayer, translated from one of the prayers of the day of her commitment, Margreet closed our celebration. With gratitude I think back on it.

REFLECTIONS ON OLD AGE *Anita Saisi* Italy

"To get old means to be of all ages" (Author unknown)

Getting old is something very different from growing up from childhood to adult age as expectations for the future becomes very limited. The question is how do we deal with this reality.

My profession as a psychotherapist, has taught me that going through any stage of one's life will be successful as long as the previous stage has been lived fully, accepting the risks and opportunities that any choice brings with it. This means that since I realized that my old age was approaching very fast, I had to start reflecting on how I lived my past life in order to profit from my good experiences and to find closure in relation to the difficult ones.

I will be 80 in August 2018, a special birthday that I imagine as a feast of thanksgiving because I am aware that I received and gave a lot in my life, therefore now I appreciate what I can still receive and give without regretting what I have to give up because of less energies. I ask myself what's better: to live with the same curiosity and interests that are part of my being, or getting sad seeing my energies decline? This is a problem for me and not a simple one because sometimes I need to get rid of the temptation to complain, becoming a nuisance even to myself, imagine to others.

At this point what I do is to look for some possibilities that will help me to enter into old age with a positive attitude of accepting this reality. One way, very precious to me, is to look at the changes in my body with the sense of humor that has always accompanied me in the course of my life, finding in it a great help in overcoming difficult situations. I appreciate discovering that the great Jungian analyst James Hillman, says the same in his beautiful book on getting old called "The Force of the Character". Another help comes from believing that if physical energies become less and less, I can give more time to nourish my interior life by reading, meditating and sharing what it means to experience this particular time that has death as a future.

I also get help from my dreams, as I have done since I prepared to become a therapist. When I wake up and remember the dream of that night as I try to catch its meaning in order to put into practice what the dream wants to tell me, I really feel as excited as I did in the past and this makes me be the Anita I knew so well.

Another aspect that I appreciate very much is the fact that many people, especially women in the middle of their life (40/50 years old) come to me for clarification or advice, even outside the clinical context. I notice how important it is for me "to be of all ages" because I know how a woman feels when relationships become difficult, when she has to make hard choices regarding personal or working life, or when she has to raise children in a very complex society as our own. Changes in social, economic, even in religious

attitudes, make choices very difficult especially because there is less and less certainty that long term engagements are possible. One day you are married or live with a partner, the other day you are left alone, and the same with losing a job, until the day when one cannot believe in anything, with serious consequences for psychological health. It is not easy to feel stable in such an instable situation, and if long term commitments are difficult, imagine life-time ones, as we thought possible up to 30/40 years ago. A real problem for younger generations.

This issue is important, and this is the reason why we need to keep a solid capacity to believe that changes make us stronger and not weaker. This capacity becomes more essential in old age when we don't have a future offering us more possibilities. The future, at my age, goes towards death, a reality no one can avoid. For me it is important to accept this reality, otherwise I may lose the will to live instead of preparing for death as I am doing in different ways; first of all developing the awareness of all that I received in my life, how many relationships I was able to establish, the work I have done with so many people, and especially to continue my spiritual search discovering more that Mystery we used to call God.

My faith has gone through different stages and it has changed a lot throughout my life. Fundamentally my search has been and still is to get inspiration from the mystics. They are present in all historical times and lived their faith without being influenced by social or ecclesiological questions because they witness a way to believe that will last as long humanity exists, therefore we can learn a lot from their example. I believe that nowadays we need to express our faith with the aim of fulfilling our humanity as much as we can, otherwise our spiritual life is lacking any credibility. The Divine is present in humanity and especially in the richness of nature. In recent years my contact with nature has become a source of mystical inspiration and I have learned to listen to all the messages that a single flower gives to me. Just as the English poet William Blake says in one of his beautiful poems:

"*To see a world in a grain of sand*
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour."

Since the year 2000 I started a group with some of my friends who are therapists and counselors about the meaning of spiritual growth in our life. Not necessarily all of us are believers in the traditional ways, but this does not matter because what we are looking for is our growth as human beings, to reject Evil and to foster the Good in all our choices, relations, work and social concern. We call this group "To nourish the soul" and it is a very mystical experience that is both interior and at the same time grounded in everyday problems.

This group, together with two other groups on biblical/theological search, helps me to enter into my future as an old woman in a way that allows my interior life to continue evolving even if my exterior life needs more care for my health, and the need to accept having less energies. This is not easy, as everybody getting old knows, but I believe that it is interesting to discover what old age means instead of worrying about what can happen to me in the next years. Accepting my limits is a challenge and can be a witness of humanity. These words from Etty Hillesum express well what I mean:

"I would like so much to be able to pass on to future times all the humanity that I keep within myself, not withstanding my daily experiences. The only way we have to prepare these new times it is to prepare them in ourselves."

Women, Theology and Mystics Program *Ticha Vasconcelos* Portugal

I am just back from Golegã, the National Grail Center in Portugal. We met there for our Women, Theology and Mystics program (MTM8). This was the 8th edition of our regular program which meets every 2 years and that now includes the possibility for the whole international Grail to participate. Anita Saisi, Patricia Gemmell and Lorna Bowman, among others, were some of the resource people a few years ago. This time, since Maria Carlos - our key person in that program - was in Mozambique for the Grail Formation Program, a team of three people (Helena Porfírio, Maria Ondina and myself) were responsible for its organization. The general topic of the program was, in Maria Carlos' words: "The Jacob's Staircase: I will not let you go before you bless me" (Gn. 32, 27).

This is what Maria Carlos wrote for the flyer: "I will not let you go before you bless me" (Gn. 32, 27): "The experience of Jacob, the vision of the staircase, the unequal struggle, the requirement of a Name, of a blessing, are the starting points for five days of study and recreation. Spirituality and Theology voiced and experienced by women, because God tells about Him/Herself having as a starting point the existential concrete, the place where we are and live. Staircase as an evocation of the non-ending search, the earliest inner unquietness, the marks in our flesh by a God who never is tired of us".

Around 20 people participated, including two women from Paraguay's emergent Grail group, and Felicita Maldonado, Blanca Pascottini, and Simone Oliveira from Brasil. Unfortunately (!!!) a visa was denied to a participant from Uganda. An emergent participant from Ecuador could not attend because of last-hour family reasons.

We had a wonderful and skilled group of resource people:

- Our dear friend Xana Lisboa prepared daily prayers around the topic of Jacob's Staircase: wonderful and deep spiritual moments to start each day.

- Teresa Messias (a Portuguese Theologian, from Catholic University) chose a topic taken from her own research: "Dynamics of Desire and spiritual search in today's world".
- A Spanish Researcher and Philosopher, Esther Miquel, developed the topic "Extra-ordinary Religious Experiences in Christianism of the Beginnings."
- Theoretic Physics researcher and Grail member in Portugal - Constança Providência spoke of "Our struggles with God: a face to face conversation."
- Finally, Sónia Monteiro (Portuguese Grail member doing her Theology PhD in the United States) spoke about her research: "What Theology has to do with Politics."

Later in the afternoon we had relaxing workshops such as "Body/Mind" (Carina Freitas) and "Origami and Mandalas" (Ondina Duarte, a Portuguese Grail member).
In some of the after supper evenings our international participants told us about their own experiences in their countries (including Sónia Monteiro, just arrived from the Holy Land).

As you can see, lots of food for the Spirit and for the Body.

We ended the week with an "Agape," which all participants were involved in preparing.

I myself feel blessed that once again I could attend such a meaningful program, this time with responsibilities for it. Think about coming to one of the next editions of MTM!

From *Simple Song* to *Simple Gifts*: An Experience of God in the Cycles of Life *Pamela Cobey* USA

A reflection from Sobrado

A few months ago I attended a production of Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* in Cincinnati, Ohio. This is the 100th anniversary year of the birth of Bernstein. *Mass* was commissioned by Jacqueline Kennedy for the opening of the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC and premiered in the U.S. in 1971. I had never seen it before, but it is timely still. What struck me about the story within the performance was how our experience of God changes as we experience ever greater challenges in life and how we mature in the process. Ultimately, the celebrant of the Mass becomes softer and more open, sharing his priesthood with all—the ones who challenged, the broken, the poor, the "masses."

As *Mass* opened, the new young celebrant exuberantly sang: *God is a simple song. Lauda. Laude. Sing like you like to sing. God loves all simple things, for God is the simplest of all.* It was beautiful and reminiscent of a time of innocence and "first fervor." Then a street choir begins expressing doubts and suspicions, perhaps even pointing to the failure of the Church's relevance in the midst of the problems and evils of the day. The young priest lost his innocence and grew tired, disheartened and overwhelmed. The piece ended as all of the cast members carrying altar candles surrounded the audience—essentially acknowledging each person's position within a universal priesthood.

For the International Grail retreat in Sobrado, Spain, organized by Swedish Grail sisters Bibi Helgesson and Ann-Charlotte Uggla, participants were asked to volunteer to facilitate a morning activity or to lead a prayer each day. I chose to facilitate an activity based on my reflections from attending Bernstein's *Mass*: a spiritual journey from *in nocere*—without harm/innocence--to *nocere*—harm--to integration/wisdom.

Our work—that would be our work even if we were paralyzed—allows us to be filled with grace sufficient to guide us through those rough times (*nocere*) to a place of integration and wisdom. It is the fuel that sustains the fire. We spent some time reflecting on what that real work is for each of us. Each of us created six mantras: one each to remind us of our experiences of God in innocence, harm and integration and one each to tend to the inner fire within our hearts, our minds and our bodies.

Serendipitously, one of the Trappist artists at the monastery, Enrique, creates paintings that are for him, mantras. He closes his eyes and paints a stroke that he repeats throughout the painting. His mantra is a way of praying through the journey of life. Enrique shared with us some of his own spiritual journey and the family challenges he has recently faced—from *in nocere* to *nocere*, to integration with the help of his mantras/paintings/prayers without words.

At the close of our little exercise with mantras, we each took a three-decade set of beads to help us to repeat our 6 sets of mantras. The beads each had a small sterling charm with a symbol—each one different. It was amazing how the symbols, randomly picked, fit as a symbol of the work of the person who chose it. I picked a set of beads with a symbol of a star and my work is to *be still and be guided*. The star reminds me to be allow myself to be guided—where have I read that before? We ended by singing *Simple Gifts*: *….hen true simplicity is gained, to bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed. To turn, turn will be our delight till by turning, turning, we come 'round right.*

It was wonderful to have this beautiful experience of retreat with our beautiful Grail sisters from many parts of the world. Thank you all and thank you, God.

The painting by Enrique, one of the Trappist Monks at the Sobrado Abbey

In Memory of Mieneke Hage *Maria Carlos Ramos* for the ILT

A reflection by Maria Carlos at the funeral service of Mieneke Hage

"The trees live from the branches. Seeds are light", says a Portuguese poet.

The Grail is a tree that extends its branches through the five corners of the world in at least 21 countries.

On behalf of the International Grail, on behalf of each Grail member, I know I can say:

Mieneke's service, Mieneke's friendship is invaluable.

I will not mention here the endless list of her contributions. With the unfair possibility of forgetting many, many things. Because we all know, we all recognize and admire Mieneke's discretion. In the way she lives, in the way she is and behaves.

Internationally, we are sad.

Mienke's departure hurts us, even though we all know she was living in great suffering.

There is a feeling that we have lost one of the cornerstones of our time. The Grail, without the physical presence of Mieneke, without her wisdom, her attention and her care, from now on the Grail will be something else.

Today we feel more fragile.

Or stronger, I do not know!?

I would like to share with you my thoughts about Mieneke during these last days.

The holm oaks are Mediterranean trees. They are part of the Quercus family.

When I heard about Mieneke's passing away. I was in a silence retreat, in one of those places in Portugal, full of holm oaks.

My parents used to tell me that this acorn, a kind of nut, was for generations the main food of the poorest people. With an acorn, you can make flour, oil or eat simply as nut. The oak trees can withstand extreme temperatures and they live and grow on almost dry land with very little water. During Summer their shade is the place, sometimes the only place, to rest and get new energy.

Under a holm oak, I thought of Mieneke. I thought of how strong she was just like holm oaks. Wise as the holm oaks. Whatever the temperature variation, she was there strong and steady. I thought of Mieneke as she often gave us shade to rest and re-energize us with her good humour and laugh.

For the first time I observed the acorns up closely. I noticed that the acorn blossom, in time, becomes a capsule, a kind of a cup - for me, a kind of Grail cup.

The cup is the link between the tree and the acorn since it becomes a mature fruit.

Between that cup and the acorn there was an oil, a sticky oil - I could feel it on my fingers, I could smell a nice and sweet perfume. I watched closely those in the tree that were still growing. They dropped small drops of oil.

The oil!?

I thought: Mieneke always has a special oil! An oil that nourishes her and all around her.

Later I got to know from Teresinha that this oil is what keeps an acorn in the tree until it is ready to become a mature seed! A promise of a new tree.

I looked down at the ground. There were small shoots. I dug a little. Down were large acorns that began to germinate.

Immersed in these thoughts, suddenly, these two small acorns fell on me.

It came to my memory a Mozambican expression: ESTAMOS JUNTAS!! (We're Together!)

Yes, I thought. We're together!

We will always be together, Mieneke!

Life is here, with Mieneke's presence in our lives.

And we feel strong and joyful because Mieneke was and stays in our lives, making us aware of the Oil, blessing us with the Oil of her life in our lives.

Muito obrigada, Mieneke.

Asante sana, Mieneke.

Kanimambo, Mieneke.

Danke, Mieneke.

Muchas Gracias, Mieneke.

Thank you, Mieneke.

Dankj wel Mieneke

Um abraço