



# *Sacred Heart*

Winter 2007

A Journal of the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province



# ...to Heart

## Dear Friends,

Increasing concerns about the environment, global climate change and a new cosmological consciousness call for our attention from many venues, and in various ways we try to respond.

Our approach is seen in vignettes of daily life, as we find ourselves standing on the porch with various items in our hands, pondering which recycling bin is for cardboard, which for glass; searching for the number on a plastic bottle to see if it is recyclable; noticing with a sense of guilt the collection of pink plastic bags from the grocery store; remarking that the energy-saving lightbulb we have just changed does indeed light up the room; trying to remember to use less water and fewer paper towels; realizing what a lifestyle change it is to be more conscious and conservative in our use of the planet's resources; and at times wondering how much difference these efforts make.

Then we wake up to the good news that Al Gore and the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have won the Nobel Peace Prize, and we are encouraged in our small efforts because something is happening in the public eye. I found myself proud that morning of the women in the U.S. Province who have been prophets and leaders among us in raising our consciousness about the interrelationships of our ecosystem, opening our minds and spirits to the urgency for action for a sustainable future. Once again, the desire to understand the interconnectedness in the cosmos allured me, and I sensed renewed motivation to embrace the changes in consciousness and behavior that this new understanding requires.

As a province, we devoted one whole day of our provincial assembly/chapter to the theme of the environment, with a specific focus on our support of the Earth Charter. Mary Evelyn Tucker, co-director of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale University and one of the drafters of the Earth Charter, spoke of the urgency of the current environmental

crisis and the need to build a sustainable global and "cosmic" community. Her sense of the critical place of spirituality in this endeavor spoke to many of us. She called for a "change of heart, of a new sense of the heart of the universe" and invited us to let our charism lead us in discovering "how we as humans are becoming the hidden heart of the cosmos, the heart of the universe, the heart of a new planetary civilization." Her presentation was followed by a panel of RSCJ sharing their commitments to the environment; we invite you to read two of the contributions by Melanie Guste and Suzanne Rogers in the pages that follow.

As we celebrate the holidays this year, may our gratitude for the gifts of the earth impel us to make choices to ensure that there will be harvests to celebrate for all peoples of our planet, next year and into the future. In an Advent spirit of hopeful anticipation, may we be eager to imagine and understand how to live into God's continuing offer of life. Let us commit ourselves anew to address the environmental issues of our day, whether through recycling or conservation of resources, through understanding of and advocacy for political and economic choices that will sustain life for everyone, or through spiritual exploration of a cosmological consciousness and humble reverence for the intricate beauty and balance of our ecosystem. ✦

May the heart of God continue to lead us,



*Kathleen Conan RSCJ*

Kathleen Conan, RSCJ  
Provincial

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**New team member added:**  
left to right: Paula Toner, RSCJ, Marina Hernandez, RSCJ, Anne Byrne, RSCJ, Kathleen Conan, RSCJ, Provincial, and Nancy Kehoe, RSCJ, who has graciously accepted an invitation to serve for one year.

# Heart

*Heart* is published three times a year to highlight the mission and ministries of the Society of the Sacred Heart, U.S. Province, for a wide circle of friends. The covers, photographs of hearts in nature, symbolic of Christ's presence at the heart of the universe, bear witness to the contemplative dimension of the Society's "wholly contemplative, wholly apostolic" mission: to discover and reveal God's love through the service of education.



Photo: Patricia Hughes Baumer taken at Joshua Tree National Park, CA

The Society of the Sacred Heart was founded by Saint Madeleine Sophie Barat in post-revolutionary France and brought to the United States by Saint Philippine Duchesne in 1818. For more information about the mission and ministries of the U.S. Province, please visit [www.rscj.org](http://www.rscj.org).

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## Eastern-style Meditation Can Open a “Deeper Union” with God



**Manila-based Amelia Vasquez, RSCJ, believes Christians can find effective tools for their spiritual quests from disciplines in Buddhism and Hinduism.**

**A**melia Vasquez, RSCJ, is in a hurry. This globe-trotting former superior of the Philippines District is in the U.S. for a thirty-day retreat and is itching to start her spiritual journey. But she has time for a chat. She quickly goes over her credentials: district superior “off and on” for sixteen years; formation director for women and men religious; teacher, historian specializing in Pacific Rim subjects at two key institutes in Manila – East Asian Pastoral and Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia.

A questioner interrupts her recitation: With her base in Asia and her knowledge of Eastern religions, what is her take on the current interest among many Christians in Buddhism as a way to enhance their religious experience? Her dark eyes light up and she is instantly animated.

“This excites me very much,” she says. Gone is the hurriedness, the previous focus on her next step. Sister Vasquez is into a subject that lives squarely in her spiritual corner, a lively



Amelia Vasquez, RSCJ

place where touch points to God are as diverse and textured as her life.

It was not her natural ties to the Asian continent that first drew Sister Vasquez’ interest in Eastern religions. It was the diverse curriculum that included many courses on world religions to which she was exposed as a young novice in Japan.

“It was the RSCJ who taught me Buddhism, Hinduism; that opened my mind,” she said. She became fascinated at the possibilities for certain aspects or disciplines of non-Christian faiths to enrich the Christian experience. Decades later, her interest and study in this area have grown.

She said she believes there are many aspects of seemingly unconnected religions that may enhance the spiritual lives of all adherents. She has found strong interest among Christians in the West not only in Buddhism, but Hinduism. In fact, Sister Vasquez envisions these three great, ancient religions moving very, very slowly toward one another, with progress perhaps marked in millennia. It is the movement – and not any eventual connecting – that is important, she said.

### Echoes in Amiens

Sister Vasquez’ observations about religions seem a part of a broader view related to her studies in the area of “interculturality” and the effects of

globalization. In a detailed address to General Chapter 2000 in Amiens entitled “The Society of the Sacred Heart in a Globalized World,” Sister Vasquez recognized the obvious pitfalls of Western-leaning globalization but observed that it had this positive implication: creating opportunities for a more meaningful spirituality in the West and even a “wider” application of the Society’s charism.

“In the area of spirituality, globalization provides us, as never before, with tremendous opportunities for consciousness. It also gives us a much wider scope for making known the love of God, revealing ‘the heart of God in the world,’” she told the Amiens gathering.

Later in that speech, she remarked on the value of other faith systems to Christianity, “particularly the Eastern spiritualities, that have attempted through the ages to relentlessly track ego in its lair, helping to liberate people from its grasping and desire.”

“We must choose those spiritualities that help us go the way of detachment from even the conventional mental categories of our religions and cultures. Mission in our age demands a stillness and detachment in the clamor for our attention to a cacophony of noise, consumer delights, non-stop stimuli from the ‘infotainment’ world on the one hand, and grinding deprivation and wars that trigger our messianic tendencies on the other hand.”

History has seen the positive effects of social and spiritual diversity in the past, Sister Vasquez observed in her speech, and held up eleventh century Spain as a fascinating example.

“One shining moment in the history of medieval Spain, of ‘al-Andalus,’ can serve as a paradigm for our shared future. *Convivencia* (conviviality), the



Photo by Brigid Keogh, RSCJ

*It was the RSCJ  
who taught me  
Buddhism, Hinduism;  
that opened my mind.*

peaceful and fruitful coexistence of Christians, Muslims and Jews in the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, created a nexus of spiritual, philosophical, ascetic and scientific interactions that led to the different renaissances of Europe. We too can work towards the transformation of culture and national allegiances so that we can express life together in the biosphere within the circle of conviviality because we are indeed, ‘one world, many worlds,’” she wrote.

### **“A Union With God”**

“This is really where the effectiveness lies – tapping into the power of God, into alignment with God and the transforming of the self,” she said.

One place where she thinks Buddhism and Hinduism have been more effective than Christianity is in the area she refers to broadly as “Eros,” which includes “the desire, the energy part of us.” Most Christian churches, including the Catholic Church “don’t

want you to face it,” she said, and often put up barriers that prevent real fulfillment of our humanity. For example, Sister Vasquez believes this restrictive thinking is at the root of general Christian opposition to homosexuality.

In both Buddhism and Hinduism, she said, the way is open to draw “transforming energy” from physical desire to many levels of love and altruism in action. “Your life is all about giving of yourself.”

And drawing on aspects of other religions can help in that “giving” and become the key to wonderful, loving actions in our world, she said. Conversely, intolerance of differences among peoples and their belief systems leads to conflict and prevents the flow of love and peace.

“We need to be involved in peace-making – and religious plurality is part of that – all for the common good of humanity,” she said.

Sister Vasquez circles back to her immediate reality – her pending retreat.

“Your spiritual life continues to unfold as you move along,” she explained. “I’m continually learning spirituality. And practice. I hope I will be able to bring some of the retreat back to where I work.”

When asked about her favorite retreat venue, there is little surprise when Sister Vasquez says that it is Gethsemani, Kentucky, at the Trappist monastery where Thomas Merton did pioneering work in Christian growth through Buddhist disciplines and philosophical directions.

Gethsemani is a place where one can “align” with God in the stillness, she said.

She imagines that stillness enveloping her. “I just want to be. To be,” she says, almost in a whisper. ❖

# In Mission for Life

By Shirley Miller, RSCJ

*A plan reflecting our  
commitment to our  
elderly sisters,*

*And to the future  
of our province.*

*The Society of the Sacred Heart, U. S. Province, has entered into an exciting and challenging period in its history.*

As an outcome of our strategic and financial planning, we are preparing for a five-year forty million dollar *In Mission for Life* capital campaign.

Through careful study of elder care costs and of current aging trends among its members, the province projects a \$40 million long term shortfall based on health care costs, expected inflation and actuarial statistics involving our particular population. The province will need to raise that amount in the next three to five years. The success of the campaign will enable

us to fund elder care to 2050 and to project our mission far into the future. While forty million dollars is an ambitious goal, we are optimistic about reaching it, based on the results of the national feasibility study concluded in June, 2007, and on the reception we have received to date from potential and actual donors.

The provincial development consultants, Larry Vaclavik and Kelli Fondren from Dini Partners, Houston, conducted a six-month national feasibility study from January to June, 2007. Thirty-five people were interviewed across the country. The conclusions of their study indicated that there is support to affirm the Society's beginning a substantial, comprehensive capital campaign including both annual and major gifts. The province will be successful with the campaign with a clear

and transparent message about mission and need, with outstanding lay leadership, with the support of the RSCJ membership, and with a great deal of prayer and hard work.

The campaign will consist of ten regional campaigns during the next three to five years. These campaigns will be sequenced with a new regional campaign starting approximately every six



Left, Anne Sturges, RSCJ, and Elizabeth White, RSCJ, share a friendly moment during a relaxing time at Kenwood Convent of the Sacred Heart.

months for five years. The province-wide campaign will be led by a national campaign executive committee. Regional campaigns will be chaired by area-specific regional campaign steering committees.

I am pleased to report that even as the campaign is still being constructed, some very significant gifts have already been received. We expect this to continue as the word about the campaign continues to reach a receptive population.

Today, with the new, refined estimates of long-term finances, the success of the new province annual giving program in the last three years and the prospect of this campaign, the mood in the province is clearly one of hope and enthusiasm for the future. "To hope is to believe in the future. Hope is always founded on the strength of conviction which makes change, transformation possible. To hope is to be turned toward the future."

—*Helen McLaughlin, RSCJ*

We know this conviction will continue during the campaign, as we are ever astounded at the depth of love we have been privileged to witness. It is a love we first felt through the witness of St. Madeleine Sophie Barat and St. Philippine Duchesne. They prevailed because they had a fiery determination born of dreams of love, dreams of discovering and revealing the depth of love of the Heart of Jesus and, out of that love, responding to the needs of their 19th Century world. Their love lives on in us, multiplied abundantly in associates, alumnae/i, collaborators, families and friends. Two hundred years later, the U.S. Province is poised to respond to the needs of our 21st Century world, and we invite you to join us on our journey to be *In Mission for Life.* ❖

***CORRECTION for Province Mission Advancement Report:***

We regret that the William M. and Miriam F. Meehan Foundation, Inc. was omitted from the Foundation and Partners categories in the annual report.



Long time teacher Libby Hoye, RSCJ, continued reading the daily newspaper up to her death September 3rd. At 86, she had been a member of the Society of the Sacred Heart for 49 years. Sister Hoye was noted for her ecumenical activities.

*To hope is to  
believe in the  
future... to hope  
is to be turned  
toward the  
future.*

*In Memoriam*

Please see [www.rscj.org](http://www.rscj.org)  
for biographical information  
on RSCJ who have died.

**May they live in the fullness  
of God's love.**

*Elizabeth Hoye*  
September 3, 2007

*Marie Louise Martinez*  
November 12, 2007

*Theresa Banaszynski*  
November 19, 2007



## *A Brush With Success*

By Sheryl Nonnenberg

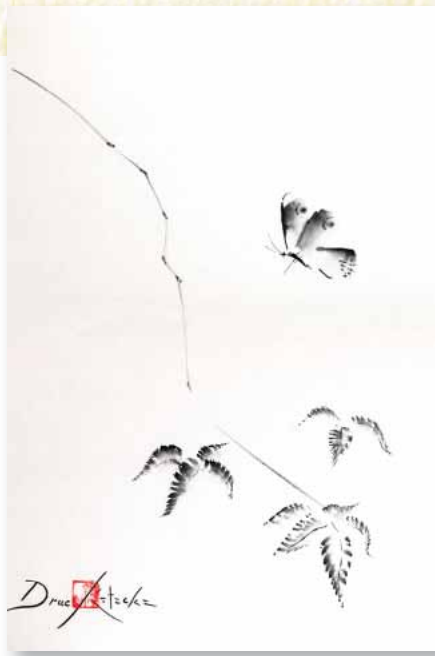
**Sacred Heart Prep alumna Drue Kataoka returns to display her art.**

***M***ost people never darken the door of their high school after graduating, unless it is to attend a reunion. For San Francisco artist Drue Kataoka, coming back to Sacred Heart Prep in Atherton (eleven years after graduating) is a reminder of how her talent and love for the arts were nurtured and encouraged during her formative teen years. She has

*The exacting technique of sumi-e... each and every brush*



< Left, as a tribute to the Crescent City, Drue Kataoka created a painting of a frieze-like procession of a traditional New Orleans second line. The dignified, soulful musicians – step, step, step – lifting their feet, determined not to let their musical heritage be washed away by Katrina’s torrents.  
 > Right, *Wings Tipped in Ebony*.



returned to display fourteen of her *sumi-e*, or brush paintings, in the Lucas Family Library, located in the historic main building. She hopes that current students will be inspired by her success, especially if they have an interest in pursuing a career in the arts.

Drue Kataoka was born in Japan, of a noble lineage spanning five centuries of history. She proudly explains that she is the honorable guardian of the Kataoka Samurai Sword.

At age three, she began study of the ancient art form of *sumi-e*, an action that she says determined her artistic destiny and future. Under the tutelage of Japanese masters in her family, Drue excelled at the medium, which has its roots in Zen Buddhism. By the age of seventeen, she had received her *Han*, or signature stamp, in recognition of her mastery of the demanding technique. “*Sumi-e* is part of my artistic DNA,” she explains.

The visual arts were not her only interest, however. She is also an accomplished musician and has successfully combined her abilities as both artist and flutist.

She has performed nationally and internationally with renowned musicians such as Wynton Marsalis. And music, especially jazz, is often the subject of her lyrical brush paintings.

How does she mesh the two? “My music and art are seamless in the creative process,” she says. Often, while creating a brush painting she will pick up her flute, exploring the connection between a brush stroke and a riff. When she was a student at Sacred Heart, her study of music was encouraged by the faculty and administration, which allowed her to be released from class in order to take lessons, over the telephone, with her master teacher in New York. She was also given time to devote to travel for master-classes and performances. And then there was the

*continued*



Above, Drue places her *Han*, signature stamp, on her original painting *Enso 2007*, centerpiece of her project *Around the World in a Single Stroke*.

*stroke is executed with great concentration.*



late Sister Peggy Brown, director of schools, whom Drue remembers especially for her encouragement. "When I was just a freshman she took great interest in my work and hung my paintings in her office." Kataoka credits the Sacred Heart Goals, one of which is "personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom" as a key component in her success both in school (she was a valedictorian) and beyond. "Sacred Heart's world-class cultural programs spring from their philosophy that nurturing the arts is essential for young people."

The display at Sacred Heart Prep includes a silk scroll depicting a New Orleans funeral second line, portraits of jazz musicians and scenes from the Stanford University campus, where the artist attended college.

All are done in the exacting technique of *sumi-e*, in which each and every brush stroke is executed with great concentration and skill, because once applied, it cannot be erased. A harmonious balance between spontaneity and controlled technique is required; it is a skill that takes years to perfect. Before picking up the brush, however, Drue spends copious amounts of time researching her subject.

This is important, she explains, because one of the goals of *sumi-e* is to capture the *Chi*, or essence, of the life spirit of the subject. The tools she uses are an ink stick, which is mixed with water and ground, often for an hour, while she prepares herself mentally for her work. The prepared ink is then used with a boar's hair brush, which must be just the right density, as one brush is used to create the widest and thinnest of lines. Rice paper is the preferred choice, because of its ability to absorb some, but not all, of the ink. The strokes are made by grasping the brush, almost at a right angle to the

*Kataoka credits the Sacred Heart Goals, one of which is "personal growth in an atmosphere of wise freedom," as a key component in her success both in school and beyond.*



Above, Drue Kataoka painting with gold flute on her studio table. Flute and brushes side by side, the aural and visual are inseparable for Drue in her creative process. Left, *Twilight Courts the Moon*.



Above, hands of an artist – “harmonious balance between spontaneity and controlled technique... is a skill that takes years to perfect.”

Drue Kataoka’s signature. At the age of 17 years, in recognition of her mastery of the ancient canon of brush strokes, Drue received her *Han*, an exquisite signature stamp, carved with her artistic name Serene Calm.

hand, with the fingers remaining free while the work is done by the unsupported arm. “*Sumi-e’s* demanding single stroke technique requires a lifetime of dedication and discipline,” she explains.

Since graduating from Stanford, Drue has undertaken a number of high-profile commissions for the university, including twenty-eight commemorative prints that are part of the permanent collection in the Special Collections Library. She has also found a responsive audience for her work in the corporations of Silicon Valley.

Why would such a frenetic place take to such a contemplative medium? She explains that “My art appeals to the Silicon Valley audience that thrives in the invisible landscape of ideas.” Her latest project, *Brush Hour*, was commissioned by the law firm of Fenwick & West, in order to celebrate the rich tradition and history of the birthplace of high tech.

Recognizing a need to give back and to encourage other young artists, Drue joined efforts with the Rotary Club of Menlo Park to create the Drue Kataoka Arts Scholarship. It is awarded each year to an aspiring young artist or musician, who receives both funding and an opportunity to work with Drue, who serves as a mentor. In an interesting karmic twist, the scholarship this year was given to Megan Putnam, a 2007 graduate of Sacred Heart Prep. Putnam will continue her study of acting and singing at New York University. Says Kataoka, “Returning home or coming full circle is at the essence of Sacred Heart values.” It would seem that, for Drue Kataoka, the circle is complete.

For more information about the art of Drue Kataoka, please visit [www.drue.net](http://www.drue.net) or contact Drue at [drue@drue.net](mailto:drue@drue.net) ❖



*Sheryl Nonnenberg is a library assistant at Sacred Heart Prep where her son, Reid, is a senior. She is also a free-lance art researcher and writer with articles in such publications as ARTworks, Fine Arts Connoisseur and Gentry magazines.*



A special bounty: Sealed and fresh, retrieved food gets the quality check after an adventurous night of dumpster diving.

By day they build web pages,  
but after hours...

## Young CEDC Staffers Live the Gospel on the Streets of Washington, D.C.



You have a vague idea of what to expect when you approach a place known by an acronym and staffed by gen-exers who work on web pages. Computer geeks. Alt-music heads with shallow souls and a taste for veggies. But what if those veggies come from a dumpster?



www.youtube.com

In the dumpster, Ryan Rodrick Beiler hands Laryn Bakker a food hand-off from its unusual storage place while CBS reporter Alison Smith takes note.

Your stereotypes will die in that same dumpster soon after you meet the young missionaries who pose as high tech operators at the CEDC, the acronym behind the unwieldy title of Center for Educational Design and Communications at 821 Varnum Street. With a realistic, gritty reflection of the charisma of the Society of the Sacred Heart, the CEDC staffers practice what others may just preach.

You see it in the love of the Heart of Jesus that breathes through the work of these people. Consider Laryn Bakker, whose business card says he is a “senior designer – web, graphics and new media.” And he is, and one of the best. But his priorities and those of his CEDC colleagues seem far from the comfy offices and humming computers.

You see the contrast on posters throughout the building: images and slogans often created by the CEDC for its clients, calling for social justice for people barely subsisting on the margins of society. Food for the hungry. Living wages for workers. Decent shelter for the homeless.

These aren't just stylized ideals, fancy talk for wanna-be Dorothy Days. Laryn and his co-workers walk the talk of these posters. Or even dive if they have to.

## Hands-On Christianity

It is in the evening, “after” work, that Laryn can be seen practicing what is rather rudely referred to as “dumpster diving,” pulling bags of discarded food from behind various retailers in the D.C. area, some of them fairly high-end food retailers. That's the easy part.

Then it's off to his home where he and his wife Janel and friends go through the food to ensure its freshness and make “care” package to distribute in the community, and sometimes for themselves if anything is left. It is not all serious work, and *continued*



Top, Ryan Rodrick Beiler and Janel Kragt Bakker sorting retrieved food for shipment to the needy. Above, Laryn Bakker in a light moment at his desk at the CEDC.

It is part recycling and part charitable giving, Laryn said.



Left, Will Simpson, at his post at the CEDC. Right, Jeannine Caracciolo on a service trip to Guatemala. Their important jobs at the CEDC come first, but they dedicate plenty of other time to charitable works in the community, and in the case of Jeannine, abroad.

Laryn says he and Janel can be seen at dumpster and food-sorting on the Internet site YouTube.com under the key words: “Dumpster Diving.”

It is part recycling and part charitable giving, Laryn said. “We quality-check everything.” And very little goes to waste.

“Some meat that might not look right goes to feed one of our dogs. Over-ripe fruits and vegetables go into the compost pile,” he said.

In addition to their considerable efforts securing food for others, Laryn and Janel take pains to estimate the value of any of the food they retain for their own use for yet another altruistic reason. “We loosely keep track of what we would have spent for the food and try to give that money to various charities,” Laryn said.

### “To Be Faithful”

His motivation comes out of his Christianity and his view of God’s plan for humanity.

“It’s the best way I can approach the fact that God calls us not to be comfortable but to be faithful,” he said.

His colleagues at the CEDC agree and are busy with their own social service projects despite work and other commitments. Will Simpson is involved in an after school tutoring program for inner city students. Jeannine Caracciolo is a “DC Cares” volunteer who, among other things, teaches English as a second language to immigrants and makes a regular service trip to Guatemala. ❖

# Kit Collins: Leader by Example

**It is no coincidence** that the CEDC staffers as a group reflect the social consciousness of their leader, Catherine Collins, RSCJ, CEDC executive director for the past twenty-three years. Kit (as she is affectionately known) has a passion for society’s “unseen.” It flows from the charisma of the Society of the Sacred Heart as she sees it blossoming at the CEDC.

“Our charisma is to make known the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. To me it means – and it’s the whole story here – that the love of God, which is incarnate, is enfleshed, is at the heart of really loving and caring for the earth, for those who are poor or marginalized. It’s wanting to do that charisma in a way that cares for those who are hidden – the least visible – and outcasts,” she said.

Even the way the CEDC works with clients – and the clients themselves – reflects the social justice commitment echoed in Sister Collins’ words.



## Non-Profit Exclusivity

Under Sister Collins' direction the CEDC provides consultation, web page design and meeting facilities – among dozens of other services – exclusively for non-profit groups with a strong social commitment.

Clients are as well-known as the international “Bread for the World” and as little-known as the tiny local group: “Little Friends for Peace.”

The project list for the CEDC shows that the group is engaged in full-service for its clients, and that website development is just one of many capabilities of the staff. A sampling of the project list:

- ▶ Bon Secour Spiritual Center: complete redesign of its eight-page newsletter into a twenty-eight page, full-color magazine.
- ▶ Center for Concern: complete branding redesign, including logo, stationery, newsletter, website and annual report.
- ▶ Community Foundation for the National Capital Region: redesign of stationery; design of the annual meeting and “Putting Race on the Table” event materials.
- ▶ DC Cancer Consortium: design of its DC Metro area resource book.
- ▶ Religious Formation Conference: materials for its congress event, including logo, registration booklet, folder covers, name tags.

“Some of our clients actually pay us,” Sister Collins said, laughing.

## “Great Karma”

The “meeting side” of the CEDC is very significant, and more than 150 clients use the CEDC's meeting facilities in this regard. Sister Collins proudly explains what draws the groups to the CEDC meeting environment.

“Many people say there is great karma in this space. Groups are drawn here, and they have it as their own space and find this becomes their place and they do it because of the spirit here,” she said.

Sister Collins said the CEDC also has many satisfied “clients” within the Society of the Sacred Heart, and this she attributed to the focused attention that designer Laryn Bakker gives to many RSCJ who call for help. “And if someone calls for help, he gets on the phone, and he's so patient and lovely with them. And so they get to know him,” she

Kit Collins, RSCJ

said, explaining why the phone continues to ring.

Sister Collins, reminiscing about her “Mother Collins” days of running schools and globe-trotting to “twenty some odd countries” to give education seminars, said high tech communications as practiced at the CEDC has come a long way from the “green tissue days” of learning what her next assignment would be.

“You would get an envelope and go into the chapel; and you'd open it up and there's this little green tissue piece signed by the provincial – or the vicar in those days – and it would say something like ‘God is asking you to go to Stone Ridge to be the mistress general,’” she explained, referring to her assignment at Stone Ridge Country Day School of the Sacred Heart in Bethesda, Maryland.

In her long life and tenure, Sister Collins said social justice has been a common thread, beginning in the cloister days in the early 1960s that prevented sisters in the Society from taking part in public demonstrations that were common in that period.

“I was deeply affected by the '60s, the assassination of Martin Luther King. We were cloistered, but because we were educators, once we crossed through the doors of that school it was a different story,” she said. And lively discussions and challenges with the students marked many a social studies class.

After all of these years, Sister Collins said she continues to be inspired and nurtured by the social activism around her, particularly as practiced by her “young charges” at the CEDC, not only in their personal lives, but in what they bring to the projects they work on for their clients.

They write. They design brochures, annual reports, logos and a myriad of other communications items with a social message. They design websites or improve static ones; create calendaring systems and information databases. They develop videotaped stories for clients with a more complex story to tell. They meet with clients to conceptualize, to hammer out a plan that will meet the objective. They are on the cutting edge of technology for clients – partners – with whom they deeply identify, these three young people with computers and equal measures of brains and love.

They create products for partners in the business of helping people for little in return. And because Laryn, Will and Jeannine have the sensibilities from their own lives, the partner gets a more perfectly honed product. Somewhere, somebody, perhaps one of those “least visible” as described by Sister Collins, experiences love in action. It's an idea that warms her heart, and makes her proud to be associated with such hard-working and caring people.

“I love these kids,” she said. ❖



# Spiritual Growth and the Environment



The important connections between the environment and poverty are well documented. The Society of the Sacred Heart formally recognizes this linkage and is on record as committed to environmental initiatives all over the world.

In the following essays, Melanie Guste, RSCJ, and Suzanne Rogers, RSCJ, reflect on the effect of the environment on their spiritual lives. The essays are based on talks that Sisters Guste and Rogers gave under the heading: “Interactions Between My Spirituality and the Environment,” at the Provincial Assembly/Chapter, U.S. Province, Society of the Sacred Heart, this past July at Loyola University in Chicago.

## FINDING GOD – AND HOPE – IN THE RAVAGED BAYOUS OF LOUISIANA

*God is here – in his stripped and naked self – hung out and up on a tree*

BY MELANIE GUSTE, RSCJ



Melanie Guste, RSCJ

After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit the southern coasts of Louisiana, the state launched a massive marketing campaign that highlighted famous local celebrities like Emeril Lagasse and Paul Goodman inviting folks back to our state. They all say with open arms, “Come ... Come and fall in love with Louisiana – all over again.”

All of these ads show images of our state – images that most of us have seen – majestic tepees of cypress trees rising out of swamps, a blue heron in flight at sunset over the wetlands, bayou shacks with indigenous people pulling up crab nets and all of “us locals” feasting over trays of crawfish on papered tables out back somewhere. It is home – my home – Louisiana.

I was struck recently with Thomas Merton’s book, *When the Trees Stop Talking* (Merton, 2003). I opened that book because whenever I make this trip down to New Orleans to work with nonprofit organizations struggling since the storms, I turn onto a raised part of the interstate that is close to a place that I used to play for many years as a child. In that marshy wet wilderness, I woke up to the greatness and grandeur of God – to seeing the pulsating beauty of God’s being in all natural places and to discover, as Brian Swimme says, the “divine depths of matter” (Swimme, 2007b).

But what a difference today! Today, that same wilderness is lost to interstates, spillways and levees all around. We have tried in every way to control nature’s flow, tried to fix and determine its course. The tragic consequence is this: What I see before me on that stretch of interstate is an unmeasured expanse of barren stripped poles of dead cypress standing in almost condemnatory testimony to the neglect and ravenous abuse of this generation’s collective choice. It’s a painful sight.

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Threatened wilderness. Human encroachment is never far from the pristine Louisiana delta bayou country.



The New Orleans *Times-Picayune* recently reported that it “...took the Mississippi River over 6,000 years to build the Louisiana Gulf Coast.” It adds that it has taken “...only seventy-five years to wash it away.” (Marshall, 2007)

This tragedy represents the heartbreaking loss of an entire ecosystem and a living culture. It is what grieves so many of those living in Louisiana after the storms. Katrina and Rita ripped the lid off a reality that nailed us – that’s hard to bear – and even harder to look at, but too hard to deny.

I love something that Pedro Arrupe, S.J., said: “Fall in love, stay in love – it will change everything.” And it does. And it has for me. When I make that trip across the spillway several times a week now and see how entire neighborhoods that once housed a culture are now torn and barren, I cannot help hearing the spirits of those who left and who have never found the road home.

That’s another thing about the destruction of the natural wilderness. It doesn’t discriminate in at least one way: Where you see a ravaged environment, you also tend to see poverty – raw, naked, exposed poverty in all its twisted and horrible expressions. We have it in Louisiana – you saw it in the media – the clear connection between poverty and an abusive disregard for the environment.

In my state – the land of my first love – our country and its corporations have so extensively over-drilled the floor of the Gulf to fuel our national oil consumption that the entire coastline is eroding and literally disappearing. That’s 430 square miles of coastland – the mass extinction of not only entire species, but an indigenous living culture – a way of being for an entire group of human beings. It’s a culture that’s mine, and all of ours and, I believe, not only a precious gift but a revelation of God – a manifestation of God’s own self and God’s being in our world.

I don’t know – some people say “let it go.” Some say it is hopeless and are resigned to the specter of an entire way of life for an indigenous people disappearing into the annals of history, perhaps like the dinosaurs. But, I don’t see it that way. In my spirit, I feel the anguish of God in the immediacy of this tragic ethos.

I see it as the disfigurement of the Body of Christ. Truthfully, it’s agonizingly sad because I learned to love out of that wilderness. I learned something more about God’s love and being out there under the sweltering sun and in the arms of that water. At home, where I am, I sense the abandonment of Christ’s broken cry on the cross and the pouring out of blood and water from his torn side. Sometimes, I ask, “Where is God – really – in this sad, suffering situation?”

Passing that cathedral of dead cypress standing as monuments in the marshy wilderness, I pray. I breathe: breathe...and wait. I know that God is here – in his stripped and naked self – hung out and up on a tree. Waiting – slowly it comes – the awakening of some mysterious hope and reasons to just believe.

That moment is my gateway – my personal communion in the Body of Christ, and my bridge to whatever I happen to be doing in New Orleans that day.

Merton also observed that: “You don’t save what you don’t love.” (Merton, 2003) That strikes me as a beautiful truth about humans and God.

Reaching out from that cross is the tender love of God for those standing around it – me, his Mother and friends.

Experts say that what is happening in Louisiana is not irreversible. We have, they say, ten years – and no MORE than ten years – to make different choices and to turn it around ([www.nola.com/speced/lastchance](http://www.nola.com/speced/lastchance)). The future is not on a fixed course there. We have an elegant window of

opportunity, and the universe – it waits for our decision there with open stretched out arms. I wonder about that: if we ignore this reality, allow for the extinction that is occurring. Will we accept it? Will we simply rationalize it? I think we will find our destiny as a people in our answer (Swimme, 2007a).

With Merton, I hear those trees speaking – all the way through time – from the cross in Jerusalem to the cypress tree graveyard on interstate I-10. I hear God speaking and God’s invitations to do as God did – love enough to save it and to care for those left behind: friends and family.

I think of that every day now. How am I doing that for my twenty-nine nieces and nephews and eight grand nieces and nephews? Will I leave behind for them the possibilities of hot humid days of crawfishing in the wetlands of Louisiana? Will I leave behind for them the chance of discovering God’s grandeur in a sunrise over Barataria Swamp? My childhood wonder has turned into the wonder of an adult – the adult who asks: “Are my daily choices a canticle of creation, or a death march? Am I a faithful steward of the divine universe in my lifestyle choices?”

Driving into New Orleans, I know again that “wood hath hope” and Saint Madeleine Sophie’s words come to me: “...give your heart once and for all to trust and love.”

“...Walk trustingly,” she says. This becomes my prayer. ✦

Loyola University, Chicago  
July 5, 2007

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## EXPERIENCING GOD IN ALL OUR TIES TO THE NATURAL WORLD

*We are connected in powerful ways that we cannot see, most of the time cannot experience, sometimes even struggle to believe.*

BY SUZANNE ROGERS, RSCJ

The renewed awareness of our connection to the Earth has reinforced a lifelong characteristic of my own spirituality.

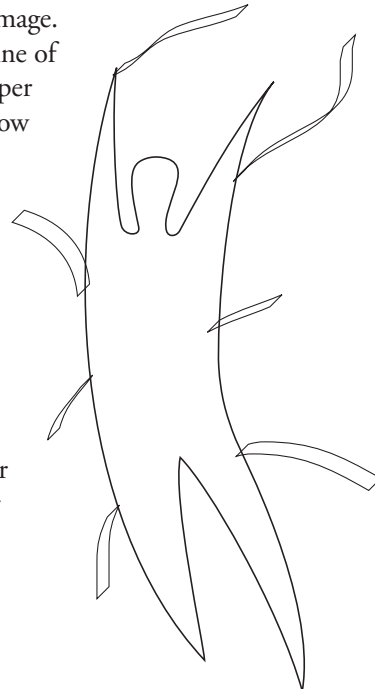
I have never been particularly drawn to a personal image of God as one who directs my life in a special way. Instead, my understanding of God is as the loving Spirit who is the creative and powerful energy in the connection between people and each and every element of the universe we live in.

The actual experience of that Spirit draws from me a desire to worship and a sense of awe at its power and complexity and its loving kindness in each experience of my life. I know these are pretty abstract words. But I can make my experiences more concrete with an image.

Imagine, for a moment, the outline of your body. Think of yourself as a paper cutout in the shape of your body. Now imagine that the edges of your body have stretchy ribbons attached to them. And the other ends of those ribbons, like rubber bands, are attached to every person around you, as well as to every other thing that is part of the natural world.

Some ribbons are wide and colorful – maybe those attached to your friends or parents or siblings, or those attached to a beautiful lake, or the soil in your garden, or your cat, or watching a magnificent sunset.

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Some ribbons are narrow and dark – maybe those attached to people you don't like, or snakes, or murky water or humiliating experiences. But whatever the color or the width, the elastic ribbons attach you to everything and everyone in the world around you.

Being connected to those rubber-band-like ribbons means that every time you move, so do all the rest. This silly image of a universe connected by stretchy ribbons is really not very far from reality. We are connected in powerful ways that we cannot see, most of the time cannot experience, sometimes even struggle to believe.

***The global renewed awareness of the interdependence of all things help me celebrate what I have long believed to be the ultimate truth of our relationship to God.***

But it is nonetheless true that each move we make, each breath we take, each of our decisions, affects and effects the relationships that connect us to every other person and element in the world around us.

Because we can't see the connections, because our minds strain to even accept them, it is a lot easier to forget about them than to honor them.

But these connections, for me, are one of the most basic truths of life. Because it is in the connections that I experience the Spirit of God.

Sometimes I am very aware of the connections – usually when I am experiencing something positive with another person; or when, for example, I take strength or healing from the soil, or when I experience something that I recognize as convergence. On reflection, that awareness prompts me to worship the Spirit of God, who is the connection and the oneness.

It is much more difficult for me to pay attention to the connections through negative experiences. I don't like the narrow dark bands that attach me to people I don't want to respect, or to experiences I regret having. I would rather not acknowledge those connections and am certainly unwilling to foster or strengthen them. But reflecting on those negative connections, sometimes – usually much later – I can accept

that the Spirit of God is free to express oneness however the Spirit chooses.

I think the ancient Sanskrit greeting—*Namaste*—summarizes this aspect of my spirituality. If I can paraphrase, *Namaste* means: “The Spirit within me greets the Spirit within you. I honor the place in you of love, of creativity, of peace; and when you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me – there is only one of us.”

*Namaste* also names the struggle to be ever more accepting of my responsibility to recognize and co-create this complex world that I experience just one moment at a time.

The global renewed awareness of the environment and the interdependence of all things help me celebrate what I have long believed to be the ultimate truth of our relationship to God.

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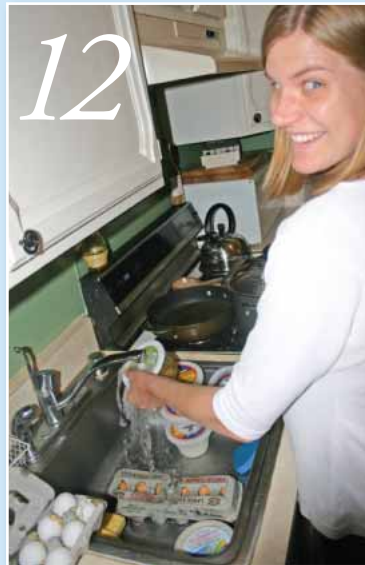
Suzanne Rogers, RSCJ



The sun rises among pilings in the pristine Irish Bayou, New Orleans, after Hurricane Katrina. The nurturing aspects of this kind of scene are noted in a pair of essays on **Spiritual Growth and the Environment**.



Final moment. Drue Kataoka, Sacred Heart Prep alumna, places her *Han* – artistic signature stamp – on a New Orleans scroll, her final gesture in **A Brush with Success**.



Janel Bakker knows the food for the needy will keep on coming, because **Young CEDC Staffers Live the Gospel on the Streets of Washington, D.C.**

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