

The New Seminary News

"Never instead of, Always in addition to..."

Non-Governmental Organization in consultative status with The United Nations Economic and Social Council

A Letter from The Board of Trustees

By Reverend Dr. Michael Festa
 Vice-Chair, Chief Executive Officer

The Trustees of The New Seminary welcome you to the first installment of The New Seminary News. We invite you into our community and encourage you to participate with stories, inquiries and information, as we share a common bond of caring for humanity.

We are pleased to report that our school continues to thrive. Our staff and students continue to prove themselves as "heart leaders" in the community, at home and around the world. Nearly 2000 graduate ordained ministers are involved in activities and programs in area such as hospices, soup kitchens, homeless shelters, senior citizen centers, child development programs and churches. They bring together individuals from different backgrounds and beliefs, in marriage, commitment and other lifecycle ceremonies that promote cultural and religious harmony. They are inspiring deeper insights into our common humanity, bringing together many who see themselves as outsiders because of their differences. As our graduates build bridges of understanding and kindness, where there was strife and hardship, there is now acceptance and respect.

The gift of an open heart and generosity is exemplified by one of our students, who recently won an incredible gift basket, donated in part by The Garden of Eden, NY, from a raffle. The student donated this food basket to the NY Firefighters Burn Center Foundation. A twelve year old boy recovering from third degree burns in a Brooklyn hospital, received the basket. This random act of love and kindness was greatly appreciated and is the kind of selflessness that inspires us to continue our work with an even deeper dedication to our mission.

As we continue to grow, we you encourage you to join us in expanding our open hearts, moving into an even deeper understanding of the world's religions and spiritual paths. Be open to what is new and dig deep for meaning in your life. Today, more than ever before in our lifetime, we have the opportunity to create a common ground. With technology, communication and action, we can open deeper discussions for understanding, prayer and compassion.

We thank all of those that have helped support The New Seminary and the greater community of humankind. We send you our prayers and best wishes for peace and prosperity in your days, and look we forward to further conversations with you. On behalf of our Board of Trustees, I offer you our thanks for a job well done, and our blessings.




The Directors Corner

By Reverend Deborah Steen Ross
 Associate Director

Welcome to *The New Seminary News* Directors Corner. As Associate Director of The New Seminary, it is my great joy and privilege to share news about our institution in this column. We have wonderful things to report.

Our current First Year class is the largest in New Seminary history—110 people. We have corresponding students from as far away as Australia, London, Spain, and Puerto Rico as well as from Canada. At least six of our students are published authors whose books are available online and in bookstores. Four first year students are in our Accelerated Program; their advanced credentials allow them to take both years' programs simultaneously and graduate in June 2004.

Our Second Year class, which will graduate this June, hosts — among many talented people — the core of our Music Program. We have several composers and published musicians among their ranks.

In September 2003, the seminary was privileged to have the Reverend Gloria D. Karpinski, celebrated author, visionary and one of the Spiritual Advisors, present a special conference, *Who Shall I Say Sent Me?* Gloria's conference led up to The United Nations sanctioned International Day of Peace Vigil in Central Park on September 21. As part of this annual peace vigil, The New Seminary's choir, under the musical direction of Second Year student Robert Hrasna, performed the "Credo" from Carman Moore's *Mass for the 21st Century* and was filmed by The Good News Network.

This year, The New Seminary was granted Non-Governmental Organization status by The United Nations. And at the recommendation of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, the seminary was granted special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of The United Nations.

We are delighted to announce the seminary was able to lower its fees for the Continuing Education Program. During this current program year, offerings include *Spirituality and Children*, *The Interfaith Wedding*, *Pre-Marital Counseling*, and *Conversations with God*, among others. Our Continuing Education Program is an extension of the seminary's two-year program; many of our spring offerings (see page 8) are open to the public, and to students, graduates and alumni of any Interfaith Seminary.

The seminary has begun the process of welcoming new students who will comprise our Class of 2006. It is personally exciting for me to get to know each prospective student during the application and interview process and to begin gaining a sense of the "flavor" of the new class as it begins to form.

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On Interfaith: You're Going To Be a What?

By Rabbi Roger Ross, M.S.C.
Executive Director

That was the first question my parents asked when I told them I was enrolling in The New Seminary and would be ordained as an Interfaith Minister, with Reverend before my name.

What's a nice Jewish boy doing in a place like that? Isn't Judaism enough? Is my heritage so awful that I would turn my back on it? What had my parents done to deserve this? With time, effort, and great patience on my part, they began to understand.

My parents understood that The New Seminary was first, and is now the most prestigious Interfaith seminary in the world. That it was founded in 1981 by Rabbi Joseph Gelberman based on the idea that if we could all learn to respect each other's religious beliefs, no one would ever again go to war in God's name. Since 1981 over 2,000 ministers have been ordained by The New Seminary. I am one of them.

Everything flows from the seminary's motto; "Never instead of; always in addition to..." I was not turning my back on my heritage, but deepening my understanding of it and using it as a benchmark against which to reflect the knowledge of other faiths. To help my parents understand, I quoted from Geoffrey Parinder's *World Religions: From Ancient History to the Present*: "To study different religions need not imply infidelity to one's own faith, but rather it may be enlarged by seeing how other people have sought for reality and have been enriched by their search." I thank God my search led me to The New Seminary where I could study and participate in other faiths, acquire a fine higher education, and become a person who could minister to anyone drawn to me as an expanded Human Being.

I learned of the Qur'an and its similarities to Jewish scriptures seated beside my Muslim brothers. I sang and danced with Sufis, reaching levels of bliss as warm and satisfying as any found with my Chasidic friends. I found the same joyous and profound connection to God I had found as a Jew, once I was able to let go and be a Muslim and worship Allah with Imam Wall.

I celebrated communion with my Christian friends, and found I could experience grace, love, and communion of the Trinity, as a Christian. I have been Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Unitarian. I've taken shamanic journeys, met my power symbols that exist to show me ways to more deeply understand the plan of the Creator.

I faced the oldest prohibition of Judaism, the existence of idols, at an Interfaith conference at the City of God, which was founded by the Hare Krishnas. I learned that statues represent an aspect of God. There is only worship of the One God (Krishna) the Most High. The comparison for me was the mezuza, which serves as a reminder to worship and love one God. Love of God is all there is. Love of God is love of self. When I love myself then I love all of God's creation, unconditionally.

Searching for this truth of love at The New Seminary took me along adjoining paths of psychological and philosophical healing and "wholing." In Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' *On Death and Dying*, I learned how to be with the dying and counsel the living in the presence of death. From Ram Dass and Paul Gorman (*How Can I Help?*), I learned to serve rather than impose. *A Course in Miracles* taught me that God's plan is love, and that I am not separate from God.

As the healing and "wholing" began, I studied Shiatsu and also became a Third Degree Reiki practitioner, using the Radiance Technique©. The Shekinah, the indwelling spirit of God, now leads my hands and guides my work.

So, Mom and Dad, I am all you wished I could be...and more. I am a Jew with a deep love and respect for my history, traditions, and religion. I am a Jew who is *so sure* of my relationship with God that I am willing to reach out and minister to people of all faiths.

I believe that God empowers, guides, and encourages us to remove the blindfolds we put on and helps us see all the glorious possibilities and paths. That was the experience I told my Mom and Dad about. As an alum of The New Seminary as well as its Director, I can say firsthand that all of our Directors, Staff, Board and Advisors are committed to making this kind of experience available to everyone, to help open the way on whatever spiritual paths they walk.

This quarterly newsletter, *The New Seminary News*, is one of the many ways the seminary will continue to be of service to help our students and readers discover possibilities and paths. We hope that you enjoy reading it and that it will inspire you to learn more about and support the activities and programs of The New

Directors Corner, Cont'd: As students of our Second Year class prepare for graduation and ordination in June at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, and those in our First Year prepare for their End-of-the-Year Retreat, I wish to extend my gratitude to our Staff, our Board of Trustees, and our Advisors, whose diligence and hard work has helped to ensure the

ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS FOR CLASS OF 2006

Our new fall class is forming now. We are taking applications for the class of 2006, which begins this September 11.

Our program is a two year, comprehensive program in Interfaith Ministry, with Spiritual Counseling. In the first year, our students study all the world's religions, different forms of psychotherapy, and take part in a personal development program designed to help them know themselves more deeply and fully. At the end of the first year, they participate in a year-end residential, intensive retreat and exam, followed by a Spiritual Initiation into the Ministry.

The second year emphasizes the practical side of ministry. The students learn how to create the tools of Ministry; how to create weddings, baby namings, funerals and memorial services, sermons and worship services, as well as learning about and practicing Spiritual Counseling skills, and compile these into a Minister's Reference Manual, which they will hand in as their final thesis. This is followed by a final retreat and graduation/ordination at The Cathedral Of St. John the Divine in New York City in June.

We invite you to call for an application packet, at 212-22-3711, or go to our web site and download the information from www.newseminary.org.

Russian Easter Eggs

By Aleksa Pacuska

The Russian Orthodox Church is part of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. There are many differences between Western Christianity and Eastern Orthodox practices. Among those are the Orthodoxy's use of an older, better preserved form of the liturgy, which is identical to that given to the Apostles; the principle that God is only knowable through nature and the innate spirit of man; that man is not born with original sin; and that every bishop is an equal, living icon of Christ and all of his Apostles.



The most important Feast day in the Orthodox calendar is Easter; perhaps the most charming Orthodox tradition we know is that of the exchange of Easter eggs. In the West, we are aware of this tradition due mainly to the work of Carl Faberge and his masterpieces: the Imperial eggs. Few realize the depth of the artistic, religious, and cultural history associated with this tradition.

The Russian tradition of using the Easter egg to symbolize Russian Orthodox Easter originates with 10th Century writings of the Orthodox Church in Constantinople wherein the exchange of eggs after the Mass by the Patriarchs is described. They always exchanged red eggs because the Orthodox Church retained the story of Mary Magdalene, who is said to have brought an egg to the Romans the morning of Easter with the proclamation, "He is risen!" When the Romans did not believe her, tradition has it that the egg turned red in her hand. According to other sources, the tradition emerged as the result of a tale that a Rus* man, en route to a market to sell eggs, saw a man bearing his cross and being derided; when he attempted to help the man, the basket of eggs turned red.

The egg is a symbol that has near universal recognition as a symbol of transition from non-existence to life, joy, happiness and sun, which brings warmth and revival of the nature. It also represents the creative fire that gave birth to all things. Ancient Rus tradition holds that eggs are exchanged in the spring to celebrate the reawakening of the earth, a tradition that is very much in keeping with the symbol of the egg in Christianity.

Russians use two different types of eggs, *pisanki*, which are heavily ornamented using paint, jewels and enamels; and *krashenki*, which are simple eggs of one color and no additional ornamentation. Eggs can be made of any substance — from porcelain to birch, wood, *papier-mâché*, gold or even real eggs. The earliest eggs were hens' and goose eggs; other materials evolved as Russian artistry evolved.

Amongst Russian royalty, the tradition is known as early as the 17th Century, when after Easter service, the Tsar would give the boyars and other Russian nobility eggs as presents and would receive baskets of eggs as gifts from the people — eggs were given out in groups and colors that symbolized the position the nobleman held in society. Faberge eggs have also commemorated the birth of children and the ascension to the throne of some of the members of the Romanov Dynasty.

While it may seem strange, likening the ascension to the throne to the ascension of Christ to heaven, it is not unusual considering the position the Tsar and Tsarina held as pillars of Russia and the Tsar as a holy father himself, albeit not an ordained one. The subject matter of Faberge eggs ranges from landscapes to icons, and during the First World War, white eggs painted with red crosses were given to the wounded.

The tradition is a long and rich one symbolizing not only Russia's pre-Christian past, but the very heart of its Christian past, and the link between the two; its artistic growth and traditions, its faith, and its society. Without question, the Egg is the most significant symbol of the most significant Feast day of the Russian Orthodox Church. Eggs commemorate the church, the land, and family. They symbolize the connection of the people to God, and the symbols people hold deep in their hearts.

*The Rus are one of the peoples who inhabited the pre-Christian city-state principalities known as "Kievan-Rus," and it is from the word Rus that the name "Russia" derives.

Aleksa Pacuska holds a Master's degree in Russian Area Studies from the George Washington University. She is a watercolorist and a practitioner of the medicine traditions of her Wampanoag great-grandmother. She lives and works in the Washington DC metro area.

Review: The Passion of the Christ

By Leila Sesmero

Screenplay Benedict Fitzgerald and Mel Gibson; directed by Mel Gibson; starring Jim Caviezel (Jesus), Maia Morgenstern (Mary), Monica Bellucci (Mary Magdalene), Rosalinda Celantano (Satan), Ivano Marescotti (Pontius Pilate), Mattia Sbragia (Caiaphas); 120 minutes; Aramaic, Latin, Hebrew; subtitled in English. Reviewed by Galina Krasskova, Barbara Stout, Elizabeth Morton, and Leila Sesmero, students & alumni of The New Seminary.

Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* is generating blockbuster revenues as well as unprecedented outrage about the theological and historical accuracy of his portrayal of the last twelve hours of Jesus of Nazareth. One month after its explosive release across 4,000 theater screens in America on February 25, *The Passion* continues to generate sizeable revenue and stir passionate debate.

Gibson claims his screenplay is a true representation of the Gospels. The movie begins in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus is interrupted from prayer by Satan. Later he is dragged before the Jewish High Priest Caiaphas and accused of blasphemy. Caiaphas dislikes what Jesus has to say and demands death by crucifixion. Faced with the possibility of a riot, Pontius Pilate, reluctantly orders Jesus be taken outside the city and crucified. From this point on blood and suffering convey Jesus' agony as he struggles to Golgotha, a torturous death march that Gibson devotes nine minutes to. Strong close-ups with sound effects including one showing the first nail driven into Jesus' palm sent palpable quivers the cinema audience. The final scene seems almost like an apology to the audience. Jesus rises quickly from the crypt, wounds healed but a hole in his hand still evident. Suddenly the credits roll.

Outrage was the common sentiment among our review group, whose theological roots include Catholicism, Judaism, Buddhism, Mormonism and Heathenism, but we began looking deeper into the meaning of this movie, from an historical and theological perspective. The desire to see a story that glorified reconciliation rather than violence was expressed. There was anger about Gibson's claim over the accuracy of his screenplay and outrage about his unkind references to Heathen traditions during advance publicity interviews.

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Alumni Profile: Reverend Laurie Sue Brockway

An In-Depth Look

As a journalist, Laurie Sue Brockway spent two decades investigating and reporting on women's issues and specializing in women's sexuality and relationships. She was Editor-in-Chief of *Playgirl*, *Women's News*, and *Single Living* magazines, wrote many books, and her stories appeared in hundreds of newspapers and magazines. So, what transformed this celebrated "media Goddess," into a minister, educator on the Divine Feminine as well as an authority on women's empowerment and spirituality?

Journalism "was a soul job for me. It was my path," Brockway says. "But I'd come to a point where I needed a transformation. I needed to express more spirituality through my work." She had already begun to write about spirituality. She did a "soulful" issue of *Single Living*, traveling to California to interview Deepak Chopra and Dr. Judith Orloff, as well as covering a Tantra workshop.

Two months after taking the reins at *Single Living*, her father became seriously ill. When he passed away several months later, instead of finding a priest, Brockway had to figure out how she would bury him. It led her to what would become her new soul job.

"My mother is Jewish, and I didn't know much about my dad's faith," says Brockway. "I knew I had a great-great grandmother who was Native American, and that my father was a lover of nature more than a person who prayed." So she gathered family and friends together to participate in a service at the cemetery, developed his eulogy, and delivered it graveside.

"My uncle brought a Methodist minister with him to the cemetery," Brockway recalls, "but I didn't let him speak until the end. Afterwards, he called me aside. I thought he was going to scold me for doing something sacrilegious." Instead he asked if she had ever considered becoming a minister. He said she had a special gift.

She didn't envision herself as a Christian minister, or a rabbi. "The truth is I really didn't feel called to one religion," she says. "But I heard something I needed to hear at just the right moment." The minister had planted the seed.

Brockway learned while developing her father's eulogy that he had been an army medic, a healer. She knew that in Native American tradition it's appropriate to take on the mantle of the parent who has passed. She decided to take on his mantle as a healer. She also remembered that the rabbi who performed her first marriage, Rabbi Joseph Gelberman, had founded an interfaith seminary. She called him, went to see him, and enrolled. "So, my father's parting gift to me was that he made me a minister" she says.

"When I realized The New Seminary offered not just a religious base, but a deeply spiritual base for learning about religion, I was very turned on to it," Brockway says. During those first few months she recalls "sitting in class alternating between elation and crying. I couldn't believe the emotions coming out of me —

there was pain, awakening, realization, and deep joy. It was one of the most amazing times in my life. I felt I had come home."

Then came the task of "merging who I'd been with who I was becoming." Because of her journalistic expertise in relationships, Brockway felt called to wedding ministry. She also found herself drawn to exploring the Goddesses of the world's religions.

From the research she began in seminary came her book, *A Goddess Is A Girl's Best Friend* (Perigee Books, 2002). Simultaneously, she built her wedding ministry.

"I specialize in creative Interfaith and non-denominational ceremonies, and in empowering brides and grooms." She does this so well that she's been featured in *The Daily News*, *Newsday*, *Beliefnet* and *Bridal Guide* and the *New York Press* selected her as "Manhattan's Best Wedding Ceremony Provider." Brockway's newest book is *Wedding Goddess*, a book for brides due out from Perigee Books/Penguin in spring 2005.

My New Seminary Journey: The First Year

By James Speights

My decision to enroll in The New Seminary was purely Spirit-driven. My Pastor, Reverend Jim Webb, wholeheartedly yet mistakenly, recommended it as the place for me to pursue my ministerial studies. You see, Reverend Webb is a New Seminary graduate, but is affiliated with All Faiths Seminary. So Jim really intended I go there. An incredibly astute man, he even wrote my letter of recommendation to The New Seminary without realizing it. Then one Sunday, he introduced me to an All Faiths student as a fellow classmate. When I told him I was at The New Seminary, he laughed and said, "Then that's where God wants you to be."

I held on to my New Seminary application for some time, wrought with fear about the commitment involved. After soul-searching conversations with the seminary's Associate Director, Reverend Deborah Steen-Ross [also known affectionately as Dean Deb] and Reverend Webb, I finally completed it. The minute I mailed it, I felt I had just done something that seemed right.

Since starting seminary, my progression towards a better higher self has accelerated. If you really do the work — really read the books, and journal — deep introspection results. The process has caused me to reevaluate my personal and professional values. I am now integrating a Spirit-Based approach to everything I do. The accelerated transformation from shadow self to higher self has been extremely difficult; I am sure it will get harder. But I like the change. It affirms that I am truly where God wants me to be.

James "Jay" Speights is a Public Affairs Consultant living in Washington, DC. He is President of The New Seminary's Class of June 2005.

Celebrating Our Divine Mother

By Reverend Laurie Sue Brockway

As we stand poised on the threshold of a changing world, it seems a fitting time to remember the Divine Mother Goddess who helped *bring forth the world*.

We are at a point in history that calls both women and men to celebrate — and elevate — the energy of the feminine, along with the masculine. Spiritual law tells us that in order to find balance in our world and be whole and complete unto ourselves, we must *embrace both the masculine and feminine* aspects of ourselves. Acknowledging and embracing *both* our Divine Parents can help us on that journey.

Who is the Goddess?

Goddess History dates back to the earliest civilizations. It's well documented that ancient societies worshiped feminine forms of God— typically as mother, earth, nature, and the Holy Spirit, or as deities who personified feminine attributes. Our earliest ancestors saw the Divine Feminine as the source of all that is and they depended on her to sustain their very lives. Her power was expressed in the images and stories of literally thousands of Goddesses from cultures around the world.

Worship of the Divine Mother permeated ancient societies. Her temples abounded. Ancient Goddesses were treated with the reverence modern religious culture now offers to Jesus, God, The Father, Allah, Krishna, and Buddha. They were seen as the source of life, of death, of regeneration; they were called upon for everything from ensuring fertile crops and easy childbirth to attaining wealth, health or, even, a peaceful death.

As time marched on, many of the early Goddesses became archetypes for the west. Nike has her own running shoes. Athena's name is on everything from a pheromone product to Greek diner menus. Along with Venus — a world-famous Goddess, and archetype of love, sexuality and beauty — they have been relegated to "mythology."

However, many of the world's cultures continue to worship, honor and pray to female deities. The Hindu, Buddhist, Tibetan, Native American, South American, and African cultures are among those that always have, and continue to, commune with the Divine Feminine.

Everything Is Male and Female In Nature

The Hindus teach us that it is the creative summary of both the male and female principle that collaborate to create the Divine essence of all that is. And so do the Taoists, who show us the feminine and the masculine principle that feed

one another and make up the whole in the symbol of Yin/Yang. Tibetan Buddhists do the same with their most sacred objects, *dorje* and bell. The bell represents the feminine and the *dorje* is the male principal. No worship service is ever conducted without use of each, together, one held in each hand. The Gods and Goddesses personified in many traditions also have opposite sex consorts and cohorts who are considered "complements."

In fact, in many systems of belief, you cannot have one without the other. Just as you can't have day without the night, you can't have masculine without feminine.

When we really understand that the Divine nature of all that is contains *both* the masculine and the feminine principles, it begins to make sense that men and women each contain those Divine principles; that the energy of the Goddess exists within all of us. From the highest place of knowing, we do not have to assign a gender to the Divine and we do not have to put a name and face on energy so sacred. But in our

lives as human beings, with human personalities and beliefs, I truly believe that considering both God and Goddess helps us identify the dual (and multifaceted) nature of divinity.

Toward Balance and Peace

As we desperately seek balance and peace on our planet, many of us are searching for what has been missing in modern life. Could it be we have been bereft of our spiritual link to the The Sacred Feminine — not instead of, but *in addition to*, The Sacred Male? It seems our world is crying out for its divine "Mother" and seeking a spirituality that brings both divine parents to the table, not just one, or the other.

We are all children of God, Goddess, All There Is, and we are all feminine and masculine in nature. *As above, so below*. It is in acknowledging that these qualities exist in all of us that we begin to create and find balance in our relationship to ourselves, to one another, and in the world we live in.

Copyright 2004, Rev. Laurie Sue Brockway—Reverend Laurie Sue Brockway, a graduate of The New Seminary, is author of *A Goddess Is a Girl's Best Friend: A Divine Guide to Finding Love, Success and Happiness* (Perigee Books, December 2002). For more information visit www.GoddessFriends.com.



"Lakshmi, Hindu Goddess of Fortune"



Isis, Egyptian mother goddess, hailed for her healing, magic and resurrection powers"

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Spirituality and Children

By Reverend Francesca Fortunato



I am pleased to introduce *Spirituality and Children*, a quarterly column that will focus on issues related to faith, religion, and the spiritual development of children.

In 2003, I was ordained as an Interfaith Minister by The New Seminary, the world's first Interfaith seminary. I currently serve as Director of Children's Ministry at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, an "interfaith-friendly" Episcopal

church, in New York City, dedicated to serving as a "house of prayer for all people." As Director, I develop Sunday School curricula, recruit and train volunteer teachers, create as well as lead ritual for children's worship services, counsel children and their parents, and serve as Head Teacher on Sunday mornings.

I have worked with children in secular settings since my teen years — as nanny, daycare worker, pre-k teacher, ballet teacher, acting teacher, and counselor. In 1992, I began teaching Sunday School at Middle Collegiate Church on New York's Lower East Side and "turned pro" as a religious educator in 1998, when I became the Director of Children's Ministries for the Holy Apostles Episcopal Church. I continue to lend my expertise to The New Seminary's Continuing Education Program by teaching workshops on children's spirituality.

I strive always to lead children in the direction of a joyful, hopeful and celebratory faith. Although I serve in a Christian church to convey the teachings of Jesus, and Christianity is my own path, I emphasize embracing many paths in a way that goes far beyond mere tolerance.

Working with children in a religious context continues to be a joyful and rewarding experience for me. The idea that children are our teachers has become something of a cliché, but I have found it to be true. In the *Spirituality and Children* column, I hope to impart some of what I have learned from working with children in religious settings for the past 12 years. I will address your questions about the religious education of children, in houses of worship and at home; interfaith family dilemmas, those regarding holy day observances and other sources of conflict; and how to convey one's own spiritual perspective without imposing beliefs on children. I invite you to send your questions to me via email at FMFortunato@aol.com. I also invite you to visit my website www.revfrancesca.com to learn more about my work.

I look forward to your questions and our dialogue. Until then, I leave you with my Children's Abbey Benediction. The words are taken from the Christian Bible, however, other Interfaith ministers have confirmed that it is suitable for people of all faiths.

Be watchful.

Stand firm in your faith.

Be courageous.

Be strong.

And let all that you do be done in love.

Amen

Positive Connections

News from the Interfaith Community

By Rebecca Amani Booher



Greetings and welcome to *Positive Connections*! The media feeds us a daily diet of news about pain and suffering, intolerance and hate. But there is also good news to tell and *Positive Connections* will bring evidence of this and the positive impact people of all faiths are having on the physical, emotional, and spiritual lives of individuals and society-at-large. Each quarter, we will present news that conveys the good that comes from reaching beyond our individual differences. If you have a "positive connection" to share, please let me know about it at amanirb@redjellyfish.net so that we can all share the good news. Many blessings!

From Arkansas to Liberia Ambassador S. Prince Porte of Liberia visited Batesville, Arkansas, this year to thank Presbyterians for helping feed the people of his war-torn, famine-stricken country. Churches raised money in just five weeks to buy 176,000 pounds of rice to feed more than 30,000 of the hundreds of thousands of Liberians suffering from extreme hunger and malnutrition. The rice was grown in Dewitt, Arkansas, and shipped to Liberia in October.

Spiritual care for the sick Many know that hospice provides spiritual care for people with terminal illness. But what is there for folks who are just plain sick, but have no spiritual connection? Home-Based Spiritual Care™ will provide multi-faith, pastoral care for people who have left the hospital. Based in Canada, the program includes representatives from a wide variety of religions as well as atheists and agnostics, who make home visits to provide spiritual support. www.homebased-spiritualcare.org/home.htm

Interfaith efforts to curb "moneytheism" Globalization is here. It connects people and products; it can also exploit people and resources resulting in increased poverty, isolation and environmental destruction. Interfaith groups are mobilizing to insist that deeper spiritual values be taken into account as our world grows smaller. Contact the New York Labor-Religion Coalition for details about one of these groups at <http://www.labor-religion.org>

Hello, Peace! A toll-free telephone service has been set up to connect Arabs and Jews in an effort to bring about dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance and peace between these children of Abraham. Calls can be placed from Israel, Gaza, The West Bank as well as from other countries. Read about some of the dialogues already begun at www.hellopeace.net

Novena Project First Year Students at The New Seminary have initiated a special Novena Project for those in need of prayer. When a prayer is posted on the group site, students from the largest class in The New Seminary's 20-year history will add their voices to that of the person who has committed to repeating the prayer for nine days. If you have a prayer request, please contact Jim Speights at jimspeights@starpower.net and it will be posted.

Chaplaincy Circle The Chaplaincy Circle launched by The New Seminary's Class of 2005 for students who have a need to talk in confidence, or are in crisis. Certified and licensed therapists attending The New Seminary are available for counseling. Those who are interested in the Chaplaincy Circle should contact Jim Speights at jimspeights@starpower.net

Interreligious Peacemaking Forum in Moscow In early March, President Vladimir Putin addressed a forum of more than 300 religious leaders from across the former Soviet Union, gathered to discuss religious tolerance and ways to unify their traditions and better deal with war and terrorism. The group included representatives from what are considered the "traditional" religions of the country: Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Buddhism.



Astrology 101— The Wheel of Life and The Rising Sign

By Reverend Maria Rodriguez

Astrology is a subject that both excites and baffles society. The roots of astrology can be traced back 6,000 years. For many centuries the world's great leaders made important decisions only after receiving the sage wisdom of their astrologers. Why has astrology stood the test of time? What does all of it mean? In this quarterly astrology column, I will help shed some light on these questions and more.

Let's start with the basics — Astrology 101. The astrology wheel is the foundation of astrology. It consists of twelve sections, called houses. Each section defines a particular piece of the puzzle that creates your personality.

When a chart is cast, all of the pieces of the puzzle come together and the tendencies of the person for whom the chart is developed, comes to light. An astrology chart is like a finger print. It tells an individual's story. Each house has its own natural zodiac sign; its own ruling planet; and meaning. (See *Astrology Key Words and What the House Natural Houses Represent*)

The three most important houses of an astrology chart are as follows:

- The first house, which shows the rising sign (also known as the ascendant). It is the mask you wear.
- The house of the natal sun. The sun represents the ego.
- The house of your natal moon. The moon reflects your emotions.

In this issue we will focus a bit on the rising sign. The rising sign is the mask you wear, the face you show to the world. It is also an important indication of how you will live your life. Every two and a half hours, the rising sign changes. In order to cast an exact astrology chart, an astrologer needs to know the exact time of birth and the exact location. Once you know your rising sign, read as much as you can about it and you will begin to see its impact on your life.

Look to the houses and you will begin to understand what makes you tick. We are not just our Sun signs. Look up your Moon sign and see why a practical Virgo wants her love life to be a mystical experience. Chances are they have a Pisces moon. More in the next issue....



The Zodiac Wheel

Starting with middle left slice we see Aries the Ram. The sign below is Taurus the Bull. Next is Gemini the Twins, Cancer the Crab, Leo the Lion, Virgo the Virgin, Libra the Scales, Scorpio the Scorpion. Sagittarius the Archer and Capricorn the Goat are followed by Aquarius the Water Bearer and last but not least Pisces the Fish.

Astrology Key Words

And What the Natural Houses Represent

1 - Aries — Fire, Cardinal Sign

Ruling Planet is Mars - 1st House: The individual personality. The "mask" you show the world.

2 - Taurus — Earth, Fixed Sign

Ruling Planet is Venus - 2nd House: Values and Possessions.

3 - Gemini — Air, Mutable Sign

Ruling Planet is Mercury 3rd House: Communication

4 - Cancer — Water, Cardinal Sign

Ruling Planet is the Moon 4th House: Your foundation and origins

5 - Leo — Fire, Fixed Sign

Ruled by the Sun - 5th House: Pleasure, creativity, romance and children

6 - Virgo — Earth, Mutable Sign

Ruling Planet is Mercury 6th House: Work, service and health

7 - Libra — Air, Cardinal Sign

Ruling Planet is Venus 7th House: Partnerships, relationships and commitment

8 - Scorpio — Fire, Fixed Sign

Ruling Planet is Pluto - 8th House: Sex, death, material loss or gain

9 - Sagittarius — Fire, Mutable Sign

Ruling Planet is Jupiter 9th House: Higher education, travel and spirituality

10 - Capricorn — Earth, Cardinal Sign

Ruling Planet is Saturn - 10th House: What you aspire to; your calling in life.

11 - Aquarius — Air, Fixed Sign

Ruling Planet is Uranus 11th House: Friends, associations and organizations

12 - Pisces — Water, Mutable Sign

Ruling Planet is Neptune 12th House: The unconscious; your "karma"

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Review:

The Passion of the Christ

Although the movie seems accurate, everyone agreed a conservative fundamentalist Catholic perspective is evident. Gibson is accurate giving Pilate's portrayal a favorable spin; however, he attempts to reinforce Pilate's image as a "good guy" by adding his interpretation of discussions with his wife Claudia. Mary Magdalene is portrayed as the prostitute Jesus saves from stoning, perpetuating a story heard for 1,500 years; modern scholars are now beginning to discover a different truth about the Magdalene.

The role the Jews played in killing Jesus is an essential issue related to the theological and political environment in which this drama unfolds. Starting in the 12th century, Jews were repeatedly accused of untruths grounded in a simplistic interpretation of the Gospel, including murdering Christian boys and drinking the blood of Christians. Does this movie perpetuate anti-Semitism? Caiaphas is definitively anti-Jesus, and the Gospels do show the Jews present demanding crucifixion. The Jewish Hierarchy is shown one-dimensionally. Nonetheless, the movie does not seem to be *intentionally anti-Semitic*. It just lacks intellect, historical perspective and a sense of responsibility.

The last twelve hours of Jesus' life is about betrayal, agony and sacrifice. Gibson did not invent the story, he merely interprets it from a narrow fundamentalist perspective, leaving out the essence of the message of the Gospels, which is about forgiveness, extracting instead, an exaggerated interpretation of a bloody, violent, gory story of human suffering.

The Passion of the Christ reveals to non-Christians like me, the visceral connection between 2000 years of sacramental wine to the immensity of human suffering The Son of Man symbolizes. I recommend Christians and non-Christians go to see the movie.

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The New Seminary News

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Calendar of Events

APRIL, 2004

An Interfaith Temple Lecture Loving What Is: An Introduction to the work of Byron Katie, presented by Carol L. Skolnick. Sunday, April 18, 1:00-3:30; West-Park Presbyterian Church, 86th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, New York, New York. All are welcome.

Worship Service led by Second Year students. Sunday, April 18, 3:45-4:30; West-Park Presbyterian Church, 86th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, New York, New York. All are welcome.

Premarital Counseling Instructors *Rabbi Roger Ross and Father Giles Spoonhour*. Premarital Counseling covers the basics of Interfaith questions for couples, differences in philosophy, and how to raise children as well as basic differences in the couple's personalities and communication skills (Class is open only to Second Year Students and Alumni of The New Seminary; may be taken via correspondence.). April 24, 9:30-4:30; Skyline Hotel, 725 10th Avenue at 50th Street, New York, New York, Fee \$45.00

MAY, 2004

An Interfaith Temple Lecture Ministers Married to Each Other: How to Find Your Soul Mate and Make It Work, presented by *Reverend Steve Goldstein and Reverend Pam Blair* Sunday, May 16; 1:00-3:30; the Chapel at West-Park Presbyterian Church, 86th Street and Amsterdam Avenue, New York, New York. All are welcome.

Worship Service led by Second Year Students Sunday; May 16, 3:45-4:30; West-Park Presbyterian Church, 86th and Amsterdam Avenue, New York, New York. All are welcome.

The New Seminary Open House: Thinking about ministry as a path? Join the Directors of The New Seminary at the May Open House to hear about training programs. Wednesday May 19, 7:30-10:00; TRS Studios, 44 East 32nd Street, 11th Floor, New York, New York. Call The New Seminary at 212-222-3711 for further details.

Conversations With God Instructor: *Father Giles Spoonhour*, will lead this one-day course based on the best selling books of the same name by Neale Donald Walsch, and will cover the following four statements: We are all one, There's enough, There's nothing we have to do, and Ours is not a better way, ours is merely another way. Father Giles Spoonhour a teacher of New Spirituality as taught by Neale Donald Walsch. (Class is open to the public; may be taken via correspondence.) Saturday, May 22, 9:30-4:30; Skyline Hotel, 725 10th Avenue at 50th Street, New York, New York.. Fee \$50.00

JUNE, 2004

Ordination and Graduation Ceremony The New Seminary Class of 2004. Sunday, June 13; 2:00-4:00; The Cathedral of St. John the Divine, 112th Street & Amsterdam Avenue, New York, New York. All are welcome.

The New Seminary Open House Thinking about ministry as a path? Join the Directors of The New Seminary at the June Open House to hear about training programs. Saturday, June 19, noon-3:00pm; TRS Studios, 44 East 32nd Street, 11th Floor, New York, New York. Call The New Seminary at 212-222-3711 for further details.

For further details about any of the events listed, call The New Seminary at 212-222-3711. Or visit www.newseminary.org for further details.