

# Women's Theological Center



Quarterly Newsletter

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Dear Friends,

*This has been an exciting and critical year for WTC. We have made great strides in making our work in spiritual leadership replicable through a training series. We are also making it accessible by creating a Study/Action community of partners and staff which can carry out ambitious plans to grow the work as widely as possible. In this issue of our newsletter, we share more details about where we are in that process, as well as several essays that reflect on different aspects of Spiritual Leadership as we are coming to name it. We hope you enjoy hearing more about this exciting work and look forward to finding more and more ways to involve each of you.*

*Thank you for your ongoing interest and support!*

## Spiritual Leadership - On Purpose and In Practice by Claudia Castañeda, WTC Partner

After more than a year's involvement in developing the WTC curriculum for *Leading From Spirit*, it came to me that I could actually practice spiritual leadership in teaching university courses in Women's Studies. I had already made the connection between spiritual leadership and teaching in terms of identifying the ways I could use my gifts and live my purpose in the classroom. But I had not really thought about the classroom as a place where other dimensions of *Leading from Spirit* could be effective. Once I figured all of this out, I began to make more connections between my teaching practice and spiritual leadership.

Having been out of the classroom for the past two years, I had partly forgotten what I once learned through bitter experience: the mode of continual criticism so fundamental to the university's way of "doing knowledge" is both necessary and profoundly insufficient. It is very important for students to know how to take apart – or "deconstruct" – the injustices and ways of the world that are given to them as "natural" or "normal" or "just plain fact." But while criticism may seem like a form



Claudia  
Castañeda

WTC Partner

of empowerment, it too often produces an experience of *dis*-empowerment for students. University teaching often builds layers and layers of criticism that show just how messed up the world is. As students come to consciousness of this mess, they often also come so thoroughly to accept the picture we give them that they become completely overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problems and can't imagine how to act, what to do or how to effect transformative change.

In my teaching I have tried to emphasize how important it is to both know how to take things apart *and* how to put things together, to imagine the worlds that we would want to live in and to create ways of bringing those worlds into being. But some-

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how we end up spending more time on the problems than the vision, and working toward a more just world remains too often an implicit assumption rather than an active practice. What I have learned through spiritual leadership, particularly in the process of developing the concept with Donna, Meck, and others, is that it matters what place you *start* from. In spiritual leadership, the starting point is always: what world do we imagine and long for? What does that world look like in terms of the internal, the interpersonal, the institutional and the cultural? What means can we develop for bringing that world into being in those four dimensions of our lives?

This approach has already begun to transform the classroom in ways that go beyond popular education or



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Boston, October 22 and 23, 2005

Registration: \$275 ▼ Early bird and WTC members: \$245  
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feminist models. Even if we are required to stay within the parameters of the university in terms of offering students a grounding in certain kinds of authors, theories, and so on, reading books and articles in terms of what the author longs for and how she then addresses that longing and then linking this to our own longings makes for a much more empowering and inspiring mode of engagement. When I imagine stepping outside the boundaries that are imposed by the university system (which aren't all that firmly policed in any case – I am a bit of a rule follower by training!), the possibilities for empowering students through spiritual leadership become even more expansive. What would it mean, for example, to establish course requirements in a way that draws out each student's gifts and purpose?

Of course there are challenges. I have some thinking and gestating to do concerning how to engage with spirit explicitly the classroom. Talking about this with Meck as I write this paper, I realize that I am worried about the students who will balk at the very mention of spirituality and about the presumed (and ultimately false!) secularism of the university.

But in fact, next week's reading by Gayatri Spivak on the events of September 11, 2001 in New York (there are other September 11ths!) is precisely about how we can't separate secularism and spirituality, and how we cannot move forward in a politically progressive way if we are unable to appreciate the power of spirit and the many forms it takes. Linking spirit with justice is a fundamentally important task, especially at this point in US history. It isn't only desirable but *necessary* to engage with spirit critically *and* passionately in the university, as a matter of justice.

One of the wonderful things about a spiritual leadership perspective is that it allows for periods of gestation or even standstill in the process of transformation. The point is to be aware of where we are, the kind of world we long for, and what we can, need, and want to do to bring the two together. Practicing spiritual leadership is just that: it's not about having to be one way or another, or to follow a specific spiritual doctrine, or conforming to a preset timeframe; it's about *engaging in the practices* that we find on our ongoing and always changing paths towards the future worlds we dream together. ♀

## Spiritual Leadership Development: the Project and Its Funders

This year, much of WTC's time and energy has been focused on our Spiritual Leadership Development Project: a project designed to increase the capacity of individuals and organizations working for justice to be effective in their efforts through the development of their spiritual leadership.

This project involves

- creating a training series in the 4 dimensions of spiritual leadership: the internal, interpersonal, institutional and cultural;

- developing the community of WTC partners who can help WTC create and deliver programs in spiritual leadership; and
- establishing and supporting Study/Action communities that can sustain individuals as they continue to develop and apply their spiritual leadership to their work for social justice

Funding for this multi-year project is strong. Already, we have received

- \$8,400 from Haymarket Peo-

ple's Fund

- \$14,330 from Boston Women's Fund (including a mini-grant to learn more about curriculum design)
- \$10,000 from the Carpenter Foundation
- \$10,000 from the Clowes Family Fund
- \$2,500 from the Stupski Family Fund through WTC member Marsha Morris to do this work with women of African descent

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## The Infinite Dialogue: Facilitating from Spirit by Christopher McMullen, WTC Partner

Christopher  
McMullen

WTC  
Partner



*There's no secret to balance. You just have to feel the waves.\**

Leading from Spirit. What is there to say? A difficult question asked by people who push me – in the best sense of that word. Difficult in that spiritual leadership is more of a feeling for me than a concept. Like walking, or cycling, or surfing, it is something you do, not something you explain; something you share, not something you impart. It is especially difficult as I have a complicated relationship to both of those words, interpretations

\* all quotes from Frank Herbert, author of Dune.)

that inform non-traditional definitions of each. They define a feeling and a state of being that can be expressed in action to promote learning and growth.

*Spiritual* for me is a connection to Self (capital "S") – that formatted energetic Being that is the template and engine of our physical existence. It also refers to our connection out from our Self to Others (to their capital "S"). The divisions are not absolute: I am primarily MySelf, but contain elements of Other-Selves. Others are primarily ThemSelves, but contain aspects of Me. We are fractals in an infinite universe: without these Other-fragments we would not be able to perceive these Others, let alone be in relationship with them. Spirituality then, is connection both to Self and to the Infinite, often by way of Others. Any activity involving Others can therefore be spiritual: gardening, teaching, loving, conflict resolution, herding, dancing. All that is required is an inter-Being connection of Selves. Here we come to the

second concept: leadership.

Again I depart from the definition held by the majority of my contemporaries in this time and in this culture. (As this is not a philosophical discourse, I will rest on the common definitions of both "time" and "culture." In the background, my Spirit laughs...) *Leadership* is most definitely a quality and not a position. The quality of leadership is best expressed physically by a quote I heard on a news program. It was a brief interview with an animal trainer for Ringling Brothers circus, who was asked how he got the Shetland ponies to do the tricks that they do. "I don't teach them anything; I just encourage them to do what they would do naturally." The wisdom of rewarding Beings for acting from their essential selves is obvious. But where is leadership in such a relationship? Is it in the trainer? In the ponies? In the "instinct" of the ponies, or their essential Spirit? Part of me answers that it is in all of those places; another part of

(continued p 6: Infinite Dialogue)

(Project: continued from page 3)

To date, the first module of the *Leading from Spirit* training series — an overview of Spiritual Leadership — has been completed. It was piloted with WTC partners last August and has been delivered to almost 100 participants over the course of this year.

We have just piloted the training that focuses on the Internal Dimension of Spiritual Leadership with partners. In November, this will be offered to those who have taken the overview training (see details on back page).

The trainings have been attended by health care providers, counselors, social activists, students, clergy, administrators, educators, parents, writers, and artists. Participants have shared enthusiastic responses about their participation (see inset).

The final three trainings in the series are at various stages of completion. It is our goal to have all trainings ready to offer to the public by the end of this calendar year. ♀

## Participants rave about *Leading from Spirit*

While participants in WTC's new training program have great things to say about the spirit of honesty, safety, trust, and joy they experience within the community of learners, equally important is the difference the training makes in their capacity for making social change. Here's what they've said:

- [It] helped me set an intention to be more patient with others in their spiritual walking and needs
- [I was given] an understanding of how a connection to my own spirit can influence and sustain my work
- This training gave me some new tools that I will immediately implement in my life/work
- [I was encouraged] to go deeper and work with myself in ways that are transformational and move toward wholeness and connection (with spirit and justice) which I long for
- I feel more connected to my story, and more aware of how I can choose to be a transformative agent in interpersonal relationships
- The training offered me a new way to do my work that meets the goals
- I want to meet but doesn't harm my "spirit"
- This training gave me new insights into leadership transformation and helped me to value the importance of spiritual leadership in all aspects of life, including the components of it such as awareness and openness to others
- This training filled my curiosity, made me stop to appreciate everyone's gifts, it celebrated women's abilities, respected their stories and ways of thinking. It was a journey to remember
- Helped me to see that I always have power in any situation. I can always be an agent of transformation in any situation
- I return to work with new skills, a renewed sense of purpose, and more joy

## Donor Appreciation: 1000 times thanks

The following individuals and groups have generously given \$79,171 since January 1, 2004. We are deeply grateful for their support. (We've had some computer glitches, so if your name is not here and you believe it should be, please let us know.)

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# In Search of Beloved Community

by Donna Bivens, WTC Co-Director

Donna  
Bivens

WTC  
Co-Director



In the past few months, WTC was invited to participate in two programs that looked at the theme of Beloved Community. The first gathering called *Towards a Beloved Community* was a collaboration between The Institute for Democratic Renewal/Project Change ([www.projectchange.org](http://www.projectchange.org)) and our organizational partner Tools for Change ([www.toolsforchange.org](http://www.toolsforchange.org)). It was attended by WTC partner Claudia Castañeda.

I was honored to attend the second gathering, which was called *The State and Future of Anti-Racist Community Building Work* and held at the Children's Defense Fund's Haley Farm in Tennessee. Beloved Community was not a planned theme of that second gathering. However, Project Change director and activist Shirley Strong shared her passion for the use of the concept in determining "where we go from here" in promoting an anti-racist community-building agenda. As she shared her thoughts, it resonated with all of us.

While the concept of Beloved Community has a long and universal history, the term as offered by Shirley came out of the work of Martin Luther King and the African American liberation movement. I found the concept of Beloved Community to be a welcome piece of the puzzle in WTC's quest to articulate its spiritual leadership model. Those of us committed to human liberation have such a deep need to come to shared vision of what we are trying to create and to

move away from the trap of being defined by and focused on what we oppose. For me, Beloved Community offers an answer.

At an airport on my way to the gathering, the novel *The Known World* by Edward Jones caught my eye. I'd heard of the book but had not been drawn to it before. I didn't buy it, but the title and the idea of a Black slaver stayed with me throughout the event. I watched others and myself at the gathering as we struggled to move beyond our "known world" in our social justice work. And it occurred to me that the power of Beloved Community is in its willingness, commitment and ability to move beyond the known world. Beloved community as explored at that gathering meant continually opening up to the unknown world and expanding our awareness to see who and what is feared and excluded and learning to face, embrace and take responsibility for all of who we are as a humanity.

Beloved community meant stretching ourselves to see ourselves in each other. We gave each other the benefit of the doubt. We supported each other to notice much growing we all had to do. The deeper we got into the complexity and challenge of *really* believing in human equality and liberation, the more I understood the profundity of the concept of Beloved Community.

Though so much of my own personal clarity about spiritual leadership development came from two courses I took that looked at the leadership of Dr. King, I was not grabbed by the concept of Beloved community until I had that chance to have deep dialogue about it with that wide diversity of anti-racist activists and educators. The group began to name some of the core values of Beloved Community:

- radical inclusiveness
- profound justice orientation
- creative flexibility
- deep democracy
- commitment to the struggle for wholeness

- mutually transformative and redemptive: naming the power dynamics among us and working compassionately with each other

While we did not have time in our few days together to fully agree on those values, we made a great start by living them in our time together. They are values that are widely shared by the WTC community: board, partners, staff and members.

Applying WTC's conception of spiritual leadership, Beloved Community is more dream than vision. Dreams are more unwieldy: more at the mercy of the unknown, as likely to become nightmares as to stay with their beauty, more fluid, less controllable and basically ungovernable. The world of the dream is the world of spirit.

What a dreamer Dr. King was! And what a dreamer was the Beloved Community that gave birth to him and I'm proud to say to me: African American community. The dream is what allows you to find a home in the *unknown* world. Don't get me wrong: he dealt well with the known world. He clearly identified and confronted the triple evils that needed to be confronted in the name of Beloved Community: racism, poverty and materialism, violence and militarism. If we just focused on those three we would be addressing major barriers to maintaining Beloved Community.

But what amazed me as we talked were the shadowy barriers that were presaged in the movement during the 50's and 60's that now stand full blown before us: religious chauvinism, the fear of the complexity of human sexuality, the gender boxes we try so hard to maintain even as "men" threaten to destroy our world to show they are "men" and "in control." All of these were foreshadowed in the movement and people may

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*(Beloved Community—from previous page)*

have felt compelled to push them aside to stay focused on the work at hand. But human liberation demands we all grow and open even as we know there are times when, because we are only human, we cannot take it all in.

In our time together, I experienced us considering how to bring about justice by splitting open our known worlds and entering the unknown worlds that Beloved Community asks us to dream. One amazing book that elder activist Grace Boggs recommended to us was *Race and the Cosmos: An Invitation to See the World Differently* by theologian Barbara Holmes. Dr. Holmes brilliantly demonstrates that if we take seriously the wisdom of the new physics, we must open to the fact that the world is not the machine—the known world—that the western mind wanted it to be. She insists we must accept our interconnectedness—that we are each other. We must also reframe our understanding of darkness—whether dark people, or dark emotions or unknowable realities—because, as she relentlessly points out, the Universe is 90% darkness and that can't be all bad! At any rate it's our reality and it's where birth and creativity root. We must move beyond limited victim and perpetrator polarities and take full responsibility for both in each of us—individually and collectively—as we find new paradigms of power and of vulnerability.

Since I returned from the gathering, I've been a bit obsessed with Beloved Community. I've devoured Dr. Holmes' book and then read Dr. King's last book *Where Do We Go*

Transformation and  
community; all welcome.  
Leading From Spirit.

Christopher Messinger  
WTC Partner

*From Here: Chaos or Community.* Those two books helped me really see the wilderness we've been wandering in since his death almost 40 years ago differently.

I've also read Jones' *Known World* and taken on its investigation of the idea of *individual* freedom in a reality of systemic oppression. Though I love the book, my dreaming nature also needs to explore ideals of *collective* freedom that I find in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and in African American history that insists that we confront unknown dreams and nightmares of *collective* freedom in that same system.

This Beloved Community that I experience in African American culture has at its center a relentless collective confrontation of "the American dream" with the nightmare some have had to live to make it possible. To paraphrase Robert Frost, African America's wrestling with the American dream has perhaps been its lover's quarrel with the world. I sense that we're being called to reclaim, share and expand our dream and experience of Beloved Community more widely than we'd ever imagined. Now more than ever we must divest of victim identity and bring our spiritual leadership to this quest to create and maintain Beloved Community.

I feel like now I'm living the dream that made it possible for me to be here. I'm thrilled to see how our ideas of spiritual leadership resonate with our old partners and new acquaintances. I'm so excited to see WTC as part of national and even international communities that talk about their work using terms like Beloved Community and spiritual activism.

Personally, I'm claiming myself as a U.S. person—something I resisted in my younger years. I'm seeing myself at the same time as a citizen of the world and a child of the universe. With many kindred spirits surrounding me, I'm looking at huge expanses of dark unknown and challenging myself to choose love over fear in the face of its immensity. ♀

*(Infinite Dialogue — from page 3)*

me answers that it is irrelevant. Leadership is shared in that it is distributed throughout the system, manifesting as awareness of the intersection of inherent nature and a desired outcome. The quality of leadership is to draw out a needed quality from the bearers of that quality in order to realize a desired state or action. In other words, to pull from each Self that quality which is needed in the moment, for unselfish purposes generally related to growth. At its essential core, leadership is all about growth and development. And that is an inclusive definition of both growth and development, not an exclusive one.

An example from the human realm: Martin Luther King and the 1963 March on Washington. While King is often credited with the march, it was always and obviously a collaboration and a convergence. A. Philip Randolph had conceived of the march back in the 1940's; Bayard Rustin planned the march and handled much of the logistics. Students and workers and everyday people had already spoken with their bodies in protests throughout the south. King at the march became a tangible representation of a leadership that was demonstrated by hundreds of thousands who showed up on the Mall, and the tens (hundreds?) of millions who had had previously spoken in word and action. The leadership of the individual was an expression of the leadership of the group. Spirit is the quality of Being; Leadership is to manifest that Spirit in action.

*Some waves throw you. But you get  
back up and go on with it. Seven  
times down, eight times up. You can  
balance on strange surfaces.*

Leadership, for me, is nearly synonymous with facilitation. Not the same, but similar. Both involve a focus on group development and (hopefully) transformation. Both tend to be identified with one or a few people in a

group even though the qualities of leadership and facilitation will manifest throughout the group. At their best, each is about Others and being of service to them. Indeed, I discovered Spirituality through facilitation: each aspect enhancing the other. Once I entered the loop, all that was needed to continue growing was to learn with an attitude of openness, honesty, and candor – and of letting go, not having to hold onto the role of “leader” or “facilitator” nor being confined to a plan that doesn’t reflect the reality in front of me. Facilitation is a natural arena, by my definition, to experience Spirit and express Leadership. Not to mention, to express Spirit and experience Leadership! For those for whom this concept is new, I will attempt to share my perceptions of this.

In action: I am delivering a course on civil rights and diversity. A White Male in class is arguing against what I am teaching. He is a business owner and explaining how he conducts his business – problematic ways of handling his business and workers given civil rights law. Primary Me has to hold the space and instruct; Essential Me is observing his comments, recognizing patterns of oppression and silencing. But he also expresses another aspect, one of concern. I know I have to instruct him, and the instruction must avert the silencing and discounting contained in his example that I am trying to correct. And I realize, right then, that I am not reaching him. At the break he continues, two of his White Male colleagues trying to help him understand. While a surface observation would reveal him to be confrontational, behind that I see the lack of understanding and a wish to learn. He’s trying to leap out, I’m trying to reach in, and both of us are failing...Then my co-facilitator steps in: she says a few words and –he’s open! It is almost like she has lifted a shell off of him and he discovers that he’s not alone, that he is surrounded by people and they are trying to engage him. We’re both shocked at the suddenness of the shift, but I jump into the opening: we are now connected, both able to listen and

speaking, able to truly dialogue. I speak again; he listens and now understands. He can fathom the intent of civil rights and feel it both as an employee and as an employer. He is balanced on a new surface, possessor of new understanding. The wisdom to open him did not come from me but from another Self: the skill on bridging the opening did come from my Self. As a system we acted and as a system we grew. Living in connection, we are able to learn in connection, from Others, and grow. He leaves not with a legal mandate but a Spiritual one, one based on concern and respect.

Spirituality is my connection to the Essential Me. In facilitation, this Essential Me can serve as anchor, referent, or touchstone in the midst of the most amazing and disturbing group processes. Primary Me is the Being holding the space of facilitator: Secondary Me, or ‘Other-Me’ is the universal library to which I can petition for needed know-ledge and wisdom. Other-Me manifests and bridges to the Others present, keeping them real in my reality and connecting me to them. It can be disturbing, this connection: I am connected to people with whom I sometimes would rather not engage. Worse, they resonate with parts of Other-Me I would rather not see or identify with. But this connection is always there whether I acknowledge it or not. And it is precisely this connection that allows me to connect with the Others. Without it they are truly alien: no more understandable than a virtual band on the Internet is comprehensible to plankton. With it, we are able to shift, to grow: to connect with new parts of our reality and thus, with disconnected parts of ourselves. The Other is no longer alien: We are all Me.

*Gather up enough people and you get a big ball of knowledge..!*

Facilitation is to engage Others so that they feel their own connection and from there, grow. The goals can be many: problem solving, conflict



### **Leading from Spirit goes to Michigan!!!**

On September 26 and 27, WTC will offer a *Leading from Spirit* retreat at the beautiful Leaven Center in Lyons, Michigan. We hope many WTC members and friends in the mid-West are able to attend. See details on back page or go to [www.leaven.org](http://www.leaven.org).

resolution, strategic planning, education, visioning. Facilitation is the same: I am there to help people do what they are naturally capable of. It is almost a sham, a great cosmic joke, a paradox. I give them nothing – well, almost nothing! – and in return they produce amazing things. Alchemy! I am a midwife with all that term implies about procreation, agency, and service. My only power is to suggest when to push and when to breathe. All that studying, all those credentials, all of that knowledge and experience and luck and it comes down to suggesting Others push or take a breath. Such a small vintage from such an extensive harvest! It is humbling and makes you meek, which makes the power more powerful. I think this is what the Taoists mean when they speak of doing through non-action, but I’d have to find a Taoist and ask to be sure...

*Paired opposites define your longings and those longings imprison you.*

Another example is in order. A peace center, somewhere in the world (it matters not where). A dialogue. On one side victim/survivors of an ongoing political conflict. Regular visitors to this place – sacred as only such a place could be – to engage in their own healing. “Their own” being, for them, their Selves and any Others from this conflict defined as

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“victim/survivors. Casualties from an unresolved practice of oppression.

The opposite of this pairing are ex-combatants, people who have killed or who have helped to kill Others in this self-same political conflict. Beings who have acted to end this particular system of oppression. They have been invited to the sacred space at the same time as the victim/survivors, unbeknownst to the victim/survivors until shortly before the ex-combatants arrive. You can guess the reaction of the victim/survivors, particularly as several of them would be killed back home if it were known where they were and what they were doing. (This is also true of the ex-combatants, but this is a point best highlighted at another time). The ex-combatants are from one community in the conflict; the victim/survivors represent ‘all’ of the communities, including some groups more peripheral to the conflict.

*You can balance on strange surfaces...* My co-facilitator and I have to hold the space for those victim/survivors who volunteered for this dialogue. It is a process that begins where you think it might, involves dynamics that you can guess (if your Primary Self doesn't know, ask your Other-Self: a little spiritual quiz for you!). All of your training has prepared you for this moment. And none of it has prepared you. “Where am I and how do I get out of here?” is a familiar question from both individuals and groups stumbling into such terrain. No map will help you for this is unseen land no matter how many times you've been there. Here's your wave; now, ride... Oh, and you must find a beach on your own.

The journey is unimportant as each wave is unique. The balancing? I know who I Am, at least in this moment, and can connect with who They Are: Sacred Beings in a Sacred Space. What would I need if I were They? As I am They, I already know, so I give it to them, gently and sparingly, in a way that allows them to find it from themselves next time. I disappear, for I am no longer needed: they have it in themselves. I am a witness to the birth, not

the Mother, not even the Father. Only a midwife: *Push;...now Breathe...*

The storm: They/We tumble across the ocean on a mad tsunami. I am because I tumble. This is challenging because I don't know which way is up most of the time, and my body aches from old pains. And somebody threw me here! (Names changed to protect the culpable...) I am because I hurt, but I can use that hurt to center. It is no accident that the most spiritual people have survived the worst trauma. “Religion is for those who are afraid of going to Hell; Spirituality is for those who have already been there.” I did not know the quote at the time but it fits... I am in the company of spiritual warriors, each of us armed only with our Selves. And our desire to find a beach...

“They” flounder; “They” right themselves. The beach is when One Self, a real-life mother and ex-combatant, says to Another Self, victim/survivor mother who lost child and health, “I am sorry for your loss,” words uttered pregnant with emotion. Self to Self, Mother to Mother. The paired opposition slips and for a moment two Beings *Are*, connected. No blessing, no baptism, no ritual can match this. Even in memory I tremble and lose words... Center to center. We are *somewhen* beyond Time, somewhere outside of Space. Here is where Spirit dwells! I am intensely here, yet this “here” is infinite... How can a finite being experience the infinite? I don't know, but it just happened. That it happened once means it may happen again. Later today, perhaps, or tomorrow. With these Others or with some other Others, or just with my Self. Spiritual Leaders can bring Themselves and Others here intentionally, and back out again. Just add wave...

Spiritual Leadership, then, could be defined as leading yourself across unknown terrain using the Self as map, compass, and vehicle in the company of Others. The truly gifted Spiritual Leaders do this in ways where Others can follow and learn to do the same. Facilitation: Openness to being Led to Spirit by Others while presenting

Yourself as leading those Others. Autonomy – or more accurately, interdependence – masquerading as dependency and management. “*You can do just so much managing of others...*” Eventually the Others break out from the enforced pattern and return to their nature. Spiritual Facilitation is where you use Nature to return to Nature.

Back to *our* conflict as the large group of victim/survivors reconvenes: questions and questioning. Some of the old fears and comments come back. The group discusses the dialogues, analyzing and digesting what happened and what didn't happen. Then the new arises: an apology for holding onto the old fear, for doubting the process. “Something good did come out of it? Then I'm sorry for doubting them and saying we shouldn't participate.” An apology for clinging to the flotsam of the broken past and not risking the beach. Then another new ripple: concern over the departed ex-combatants, wishes that they return home safely. I am speechless; it's like a blessing, a baptism, and a birth all rolled into one. Another wave has carried us to some unexpected place very far from where we joined it... They have just rehumanized a hated and feared Other, and added them to their community. And I have received a jewel of infinite worth...

As “facilitator” I leave the sacred space. With me I carry pieces of Others, enhanced and updated. Their pain is my pain, their learning is my learning. I am sticky-paper floating through the universe, picking up the experiences of Others with my Other-Selves. I get heavier, becoming more centered yet less self-centered. And more *Self*-centered. So I guess I would add that facilitating from Spirit is realizing that it is all me, just not all about me. That it's the act of balancing when you are both surfer and wave, neither of which knows where they are going, but feeling how to get there. ♀

# Navigating Between Power and Powerlessness: a Skill of Spiritual Leadership

by Marian (Meck) Groot, Co-Director

What does the WTC mean when we say that a critical skill of spiritual leadership is the ability to "navigate between our power and our powerlessness in order to create social justice"? When a participant asked this question at a recent *Leading from Spirit* training, I realized again that unpacking this concept is very complicated. As we've worked with it, and included it in the training, I've known in my bones what the concept means. But breaking down this kind of knowing into words that describe actual actions and practices is a much more difficult process.

I found help with this when I read Lilli Nye's sermon titled "Martin Luther King and Beloved Community," in which she beautifully captures my understanding of the tension between power and powerlessness:

King's whole adult life was stretched between two truths, the truth of the revolutionary vision that possessed him, and the truth of the limits that plagued him. He strove to live and speak, to move and motivate from the spiritual truth of human love and human potential for good. At the same time, he was confronted at every turn by the frailties of human nature (not the least his own) and the realities of human life in a world wracked by suffering, divisiveness, injustice, and evil.

What I love about Nye's description is the way she shows how power and powerless are a part of the human condition, as well as of systems of inequality – such as racism, milita-

rism and imperialism – which we seek to transform. It was this dual focus that my co-facilitator, Lisa Owens, and I worked together to clarify for participants in the training and which I want to return to in this essay.

As human beings, we experience the vulnerability of childhood, sickness, accident, loss, and ignorance. At the same time, we also have the experience of our power as we grow into a measure of autonomy, master a range of skills, manifest intention. These kinds of power and powerlessness are a part of the human condition.

Each of us also experiences the relative power and powerlessness that we gain through our rank in the systems of inequality that humans have created. Those of us who hold institutional rank experience a measure of power that comes from having more status than others. As a white person, for example, I have systemic rank that results from being part of a group that has greater access to resources that provide comfort and security than other groups have. Those of us who lack institutional rank experience a measure of powerlessness that comes from not having equal access to those resources. As a *woman*, for example, I experience a degree of powerlessness in a society that gives men rank and which not only surrounds me with messages that say women are not as intelligent, strong, fast, or able as men but bases decisions on those beliefs. Additionally, as a lesbian, I experience vulnerability in a society that is phobic about women-loving women and victimizes us with stigmas, marginalization, physical harm, etc.

At the same time, however, as a woman I can claim the power I have access to because of what I know *as a woman* – things that men cannot know



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even though they have greater rank. And, *as a white person*, I am limited by my status as white because I do not have the experience that comes from other cultural ways of seeing or from being a person of color in this society. In short, whatever our rank, we have a measure of power and powerlessness. How these work together is different for each of us depending on our relative rank.

Though I feel some confidence in laying out the complexity of what is meant by power and powerlessness, what is more difficult to convey, is what it means to *navigate* between them. I shall try by using an example.

In November, Donna and I delivered the first public *Leading from Spirit* training to a diverse group of fourteen individuals. Though we had piloted the training with our partners and had made numerous revisions, some of the material we had created was still in formation. It was the afternoon of the second day. Donna began to give our presentation on the states of consciousness that we compare to the stages in the life cycle of the butterfly. As I listened, I began to see that Donna was taking the analogy in a direction that was new to me and which I did not believe "would work." I found my stress level going up as I began to worry about whether

(continued next page)

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or not participants would become confused. As the co-trainer and co-designer with Donna, I was concerned that what we presented be clear and useful to participants. And in my role, I had the authority to exercise my leadership on behalf of my concern for participants. I considered the differences of rank between Donna and myself in terms of "race," and while I knew that it can be problematic for a white person to correct a person of color, I focused instead on the partnership that Donna and I have forged between us over 15 years of working together. As I considered whether or not to speak, time was passing. If I was going to do something, I felt I would need to do so sooner than later. At the mercy of time, out of concern for participants' learning, and with confidence in the equality of our relationship, I opened my mouth and voiced my concern that where Donna was taking this wasn't going to work. Donna stopped, listened, and then carried on with the presentation in the way that we had originally crafted it.

Later, after participants had worked with the presented material in small groups and had come back together to discuss, one of the white women asked, "Well, how do we really practice spiritual leadership? I can see better what it is, but how do you DO it?" One of the women of African descent then asked if Donna and I could go back to that moment when I interrupted Donna's presentation. She seemed to be suggesting that there was something there that could inform us about DOING spiritual leadership.

As I reflect back on the moments before I spoke up, I see that I was attempting to navigate between my power and my powerlessness. Since then, I have learned a lot from what I couldn't see or forgot to pay attention to in that moment. The meaning and impact of what happened in those few minutes at the beginning of that presentation have continually been

unfolding. I realized afterwards that I was not thinking about what effect my words might have on participants of color witnessing a white woman correcting a woman of color publicly. I also saw afterwards that my approach to the situation came out of my cultural style which is direct and blunt and, while it may be appropriate when I am among my own, does not show respect to people used to less direct approaches. I also realized that while I held a deep concern for participants' learning, I was also motivated by my compulsive need to "do the right thing."

While Donna and I were sharing our experience of that moment with the group, someone asked what we could have done differently. We were both clear that we couldn't have done anything differently in that moment, but if we are mindful and intentional, we can only do something differently next time, based on what we learned this time.

At one point while writing this, I couldn't see anymore that I had been doing my best to navigate between my power and powerlessness in the moment of speaking to Donna. Because I learned so much in the aftermath, I began to believe that that was an example of failed spiritual leadership. And as I kept writing – with input from others – I learned again what I said in the training itself: we learn as we go and build on what we learn.

At another point, I thought I was finished writing (finally!) and showed what I had to Donna for her feedback. Instead of getting the "this is great" that I was hoping for, Donna told me, "This is not how I remember things. Of course, I wasn't inside you at the time, but most of what you say you saw before you spoke, I understood as something you learned after we explored it together. This does not show your vulnerability."

I knew she was right and I began to think I wasn't up to the internal work required to identify *how* she was right. I first felt overcome by powerlessness

in this. But, slowly, I have found myself willing to tap into my power to do the work required to make social justice real. Through that process, I can see that in earlier drafts of this writing, I was avoiding showing readers what I couldn't see in the moment: my compulsive need to be right; and my ego need to be seen as an effective anti-racist white person, a skilled teacher, someone who knows how to navigate competently between my power and my powerlessness.

From this experience, I learned again that by compulsion, I want to know whether or not I did "the right" thing – again, my powerlessness. Yet by the power of grace, sometimes I am able to give over to a higher/wider/deeper power. I can only do what I think best in a given moment – given my consciousness in the moment. No one can see everything. We do our best. It's messy. We learn as we go. There is no formula. As with any spiritual practice, each individual has to find the way for her/himself, based in purpose, personality, culture, and relative rank. No one can tell you what you need or how you have to proceed. As with riding a bicycle, no one can tell you how to find your balance. In that way, this work is esoteric (that is, driven by something inside of us, not something outside of us). This is not so much about inventing a practice as finding one that already exists inside of us.

I did not realize how revolutionary this concept of navigating between power and powerlessness was until I complained to my partner that I was having trouble writing about it. She said that wasn't surprising. In her experience growing up white, female and Christian, she wasn't taught anything about navigating between her power and her powerlessness. She said she was taught only that unless we are all-powerful, we are powerless; unless we are all-knowing, we know nothing; unless we are perfect,

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we are completely depraved. Thus, in her experience, we don't navigate between these; rather we are told we must choose one or the other.

As I reflected on this, I wondered if this is why Donna expresses frustration that white culture has an aversion to (maybe even a phobia of) learning. If Laura Ruth's assessment is correct, recognition of my need to learn would imply that I don't already know something and therefore I must not know anything. In this cultural mode, it becomes important that I shut out any thoughts of my own ignorance if I want to be powerful in the world. To admit my ignorance would mean I must know nothing. And if I know nothing, I cannot be worth the position I hold or the salary I am paid or the respect I am given. So it is best to pretend to know.

White culture seems to operate from the belief that to the degree that we have power, we must not allow ourselves or others to see our vulnerability. On the other hand, if we are weak, we must not allow ourselves or others to see our power. This seems to be the set-up in a world that cannot hold the complexity of being both powerful and powerless at the same time. Navigating between our power and powerlessness is exactly that: it is not about "either/or"; it is about "both/and". And it is an ongoing process of acting according to what we know, and then learning and acting anew. ♀

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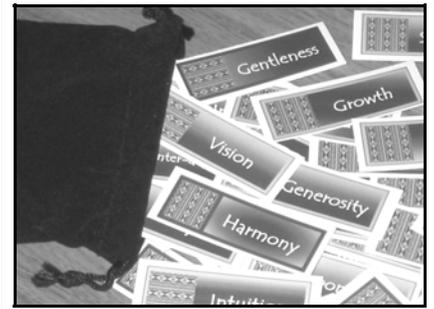
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