As a member of the LGBTQ community, my experience is that spirituality for us is certainly evolving. In light of shifting cultural values, we benefit from the influence of long-deserved rights finally being accessed. At its core, the place where the Divine Source never ceases to dwell has remained intact. Yet, the landscape of journeying with who (or what) is ultimately life-giving has indeed changed for LGBTQ citizenry.

Multitudes of my sisters and brothers who identify as LGBTQ have left our childhood religions due to blatant discrimination and condemnation, while countless others are returning by invitation (not as prodigal figures). This is a direct result of an augmented awareness that we are now more welcomed than before within some religious denominations; that our place at the table is just as cherished as our counterparts. On the other hand, there is still unwavering homophobia and ostracization to greet us within the confines of our worshipping communities. The experience altogether of these simultaneously occurring realities has imbued LGBTQ people with a spirit of both fortitude and compassion. For each person, including myself, there is a comingling of courageous determination to transcend dogma, and authentic empathy for the plight of all outcasts.

This leads us to an important and frequent question: What, then, does this spirituality look like in everyday experiences and daily living? The answer is diversely interpreted due to the myriad ways in which LGBTQ people are modernly expressing their connection to the Inexpressible One. Humbly and personally speaking, I define spirituality as the deliberate art and science of living in the moment with God and all creation. It is intentionally breathing in the ever-renewing Life of the Divine Creator who companions with us inextricably. And, it is mindfully exhaling a release from those previously mentioned condemnations that the outside world and established institutions frequently offer. The recognition that God is discovered and revealed upon many unique paths engenders a liberating, lifelong invitation to perpetually seek the Divine Presence.

This understanding directly impacts LGBTQ individuals and those who love us. It empowers us to embrace spiritual transformation as we move from certain death (of former tenets and beliefs) into a renaissance of sorts, where authentic spirituality begins to emerge and solidify. Religious affiliation then, while still holding value for many (I am a passionately proud Catholic of 39 years), is surpassed by the intuitive rhythms of spirituality and its healthy expression, thereof. Unequivocally, religion still informs and adds grace to the story of the LGBTQ community and its dynamic mantle. However, the natural reflection of it is more often noticed today in the self-actualized and compassionate tending to of its citizens, worldwide. We believe the viability of this unique spirituality will continue to deepen, extend roots, and even transfigure as God, the Divine Source, the Way of the Universe continues to nourish and elevate it. It is beyond exciting and inspiring to witness this next chapter as it unfolds!
We are One

By Greg Cochran

“Sixty-two percent Western European. Twenty-six percent Irish.” These results were not surprising as I read my Ancestry.com DNA sample results. Knowing that the Celts migrated from Western Europe to the British and Irish islands, and with a good Irish name like Cochran (and my mom a Kelly), this made perfect sense. But it’s that twelve percent left over that intrigued me – a mix of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal); Great Britain (England, Wales, Scotland); Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Denmark); Jewish Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland); and Italy, Greece, Albania. Wow!

In their song, “Citizen of the World,” Ellis Paul and Vance Gilbert start with these lyrics:

I’m an American
Was born of Scottish blood
I got a Frenchmen’s eyes and ears
I got the walk of a British thug

There’s an African in my skin
Seminole are my kin
I’m a man of a thousand faces
Many nations, creeds and races *

These words ring true and we could each substitute our own unique heritage. This song title and its lyrics also ring true to my faith. I was taught growing up that we are all one – created by the same Creator. Everyone belonging to an all-embracing Truth – a Truth human expression cannot contain.

We are one.

Why do these three words create so much anxiety, defensiveness, and fear? Fear mixed with pride is a strong motivator especially when we feel our ego is threatened. It is our ego’s addictive elixir. It pushes us toward narrowing our world and grabbing for control.

The narrowing and grabbing invites us to chase the god of “better than” – this allows degrees of divisiveness and forges “us versus them” perimeters. It’s easier not knowing another’s story – defining others with broad strokes. It’s more convenient – safer – painting with a bigger brush.

Then do we not believe what we claim within our foundational belief?

What we say is Truth?

We are one. This is celebration-worthy!

We are one. Created by the Creator; created within Mystery; created from Love to love – to love one another and all of creation; created uniquely… out of Hope; created from the One; created as one.

We are citizens of the world.


The 21st Century “Nativity Story”

By Patricia Kirk, OSB

An asylum-seeking Afghan woman (referred to here as “S.”) who was eight months pregnant came to our monastery January 1, 2010. How she arrived in the U.S. remains a mystery, but Allah/God surely was with her. Molly, our development director, had received a call from United Way seeking a place for S. We contacted some friends working at a nearby hospital who welcomed her there for care. Good thing, as S. began with pain and bleeding on her second day with us. The baby arrived on the sixth, the Epiphany. In the few days before the baby was born, S. had an OB-gyn doctor and two student lawyers working with her – all gratis. Emmanuel/God with us in action!

Molly told us that S. would be with us temporarily, which became 2 ½ years. Having a baby in our midst and learning about Islam from S. was a gift and a blessing, not just for us but for all who come to our monastery. S. is a practicing Muslim, praying five times a day. She joined us for prayer when able and taught us the similarities between our scriptures and the Qur’an.

S. is now a student at Towson University and works part time there. She and her husband have two children. We, the “grandmothers,” see them often.

We have welcomed three other women (two of whom are now married with children) at the monastery, plus a family needing temporary space. Hospitality! Welcoming the stranger beginning with Abraham and Sara to today’s migrant stories calls forth a new “Yes.”

Now, six years later, others have been helped by the Asylee Women Enterprise. With the support of other religious communities, volunteers, staff and donors, A.W.E. now resides/thrives at St. Anthony’s Parish in Baltimore. Emmanuel/God with us in mystery!
Editor’s Note  BY ROBBIN MARCUS

The subject of this issue, Citizens of the World, leads me directly to an issue I am passionate about – working with refugee girls who come to the US from a number of war-torn nations. Atlanta, and more specifically the small town of Clarkston, GA, is a hubbub of refugee activity. Chosen in the early 2000s by the International Rescue Committee as one of the best places in the US to send refugees (due to a large stock of vacant garden apartments), Clarkston has boomed into a fascinating, diverse refuge for people from all over the world. All of these people struggle to learn a new language, and a new, overwhelmingly abundant way of life.

Early on, it was noticed by a group of volunteers teaching young teens English on Saturdays that the girls were reticent, less likely to ask questions, and more likely to fall behind. Statistics in the public schools backed that up – refugee girls from countries in which women are subservient were dropping out at record rates. These volunteers in GA decided that changing their focus to intensively tutoring young women in English was the wisest (and most asked for by the families) course of action.

Thus, the Global Village Project was born. Global Village is now an accredited girl’s middle school, with a team of wonderful teachers and volunteer tutors who work with the girls every day. Tuition is free. Every girl is assigned a mentor, who helps her throughout the rest of her schooling and often helps the entire family navigate our complex American system – from paying rent, to filing taxes, to buying their first car.

My mentee, Ehsoe Moo, comes from Myanmar – a country she has never seen, as she was born in a refugee camp in Thailand. Her people, the Karen, are being ethnically cleansed from their homeland. It has been my great pleasure and privilege to work with Ehsoe and her family. Such hard-working future Americans impress me daily. They are now homeowners with full-time jobs, contributing mightily by working in a chicken processing plant – a job average Americans don’t want to do. This summer, five years will have passed and citizenship is around the corner. Ehsoe is a junior in a competitive high school with straight A’s. We are college shopping!

Success stories like this are woven into the fabric of America. I pray that we continue to cherish each and every one of the threads that make up that beautiful tapestry we are lucky enough to call home.

Wishing you the best, always.
- ROBBIN MARCUS

Contributor Bios:

Gordon Creamer earned his MA in Spiritual and Pastoral Care from Loyola University Maryland. He has been involved in programming and operations in healthcare since 2001 at various assisted living, skilled nursing, and hospice communities. Gordon has facilitated numerous retreats and workshops that focus on creating opportunities for participants to explore and enhance their spirituality and well-being through various media. Enhancing the journey of adults, individuals with memory impairment, and members of the LGBTQ community is a passion for him. Gordon facilitates the collaborative LGBT ministry at St. Ignatius Catholic Church in Baltimore City, which is called Embracing God’s Gifts. In the last several years, he has fostered support groups and programs for caregivers and those who are grieving losses. Gordon is also a certified spiritual director, who welcomes all in discovering the spiritual life as a means of healing, growing, and thriving.

Sister Patricia Kirk, OSB is a Benedictine Sister of Emmanuel Monastery. Her primary ministry is prioress of her community but she also does spiritual direction.
OUR MISSION
To encourage and support spiritual wellness in daily life through innovative programs and resources.

CORE VALUES
BRIDGING: Inviting people from different backgrounds and experiences into community while honoring each person’s uniqueness.

REFLECTING: Taking time amidst the busyness of life to explore faith, find meaning, and grow into wholeness.

DISCERNING: Helping one another listen for, become open to, and respond to the lived experience of God.

WELLBEING: Tending the spiritual life as an integral part of wholeness in people and communities.

REACHING OUT: Becoming more compassionate, creative, contemplative, and joyful in our relationships and our world.

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