

INSIGHTS ON THE JOURNEY: TRAUMA, HEALING, AND WHOLENESS AN ANTHOLOGY OF WOMEN'S WRITINGS

Compiled and edited by Maureen Leach, OSF

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Special thanks to all the women who have shared their stories:
sharing what they have learned
on their own journey from trauma to healing,
and serving as midwives of healing and wholeness for others.

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Prologue

By Maureen Leach, OSF

Is there a universal truth about inner healing? Some suggest there are no universal truths: each person's journey to inner healing is unique. And yet there is certain universality to healing.

This book's disclaimer is to claim beyond a shadow of a doubt that this is not an *"if only"* book. This book is not meant to tell the reader, that *"if only"* you follow a certain practice, you will know inner healing. This book is not meant to purport that *"if only"* you tell your story, keep a secret, confront a certain person, forgive someone, help others, put yourself first, stand on one foot and proclaim certain words, meditate more, or go to this or that self-help group that you will know healing. Any of these practices may or may not be helpful for the reader. Any practices the authors share are because they are personally meaningful and are not meant to say that you have to follow the same route, or you don't "really want to be healed."

Because each person's journey is unique, a particular strategy may be helpful to you, or it may remind you of something entirely different that is more helpful, or it may confirm that this is something that doesn't fit for you right now. Some of the sections of this book may sound like the author is giving advice, which is not the goal. For example, in my own writing I am recounting the advice I give to myself or the practices that work for me.

If I tell you that reaching out to others is what gives me life, it may prompt you to take a break from reaching out for a time and find some space for you.

If I let you know that reading enlightens me, you may decide that right now you don't want to hear about anyone else's pain.

If I reveal how healing it is for me to be at a ranch and spend time with the horses there, it may remind you of how much it helps you to sit at home and have your cat cuddle up next to you.

If I convey to you how expressive movement, dancing, drumming, healing music, hiking, or swimming bring me to a deeper level on the healing journey, it may spark your desire to slow down and do nothing to get to a similar place.

If I make it known that a warm bubble bath by candlelight nourishes me, it may lead you to go get a pedicure.

If I rely on a tried and true list of healing activities, you may prefer a more spontaneous approach to discovering life-giving practices.

If I bring to light how beneficial it has been for me to share my story with another human being, you may be at a point in your journey where you need to distract yourself from dwelling on the story.

I may need to remember, and you may need to forget.

The point is that I needed to find what worked for me, and I hope that this book can be instrumental in finding what works for you and in walking in solidarity with others who may do things differently.

I have invited others to be a part of creating this book so that you may benefit from a variety of perspectives. Some use poetry; some use prose. Some will share personal stories, and others will add perspective from their walk with people who were healing from the inside out. One may tell of a dramatic one time experience of healing, while others may tell of a long slow process. Each tells a unique story.

Spiritual guidance quotes are interspersed throughout the chapters in quote boxes that include words of Wisdom from a Spiritual Amma, Jean Springer. At first her words were clumped together in one chapter, but it seemed more appropriate to let the messages shed light on various chapters. This way the spiritual guidance is set within the context of the lived experience.

Affirmations and one-liners are phrases that can be placed on a mirror, the refrigerator, or a post-it note. They can even be useful as a marquee on your screen saver. You can find affirmations hidden in letters from friends. They can remind you of your inner strength and support system at times when stress levels are high. Look for affirmation and one-liner boxes throughout the book.

A part of the journey to inner healing involves sharing with others – not staying alone in the pain – not staying forever in the pain – learning that life is bigger than what we have suffered.

Knowing, naming, and feeling the pain are often important steps along the way.

If after reading this book you want to write your own chapter, I would love to hear from you. Send your response to: pcebooks@yahoo.com.

Chapter 1

Boundaries, Secrets, and Truth Telling

By Maureen Leach, OSF

You Have to be Careful

*You have to be careful telling things.
Some ears are like tunnels.
Your words will go in and get lost in the dark.
Some ears are flat pans like the miners used looking for gold.
What you say will be washed out with the stones.*

*You look a long time till you find the right ears.
Till then, there are birds and lamps to be spoken to,
a patient cloth rubbing shine in circles,
and the slow, gradually growing possibility
that when you find such ears,
they already know.*

Naomi Shihab Nye, © 2007

I first heard this poem at a workshop on working with trauma survivors. It speaks so clearly of the dynamics between secrets and truth telling. Who has not known the pain of sharing something that was not well received? Finding the right ears is a lonely search. Traumas or hearing about traumas trigger extreme responses in people. The tendency of many survivors is to tell no one about a trauma or to tell everyone. Finding the right ears is a process of establishing effective boundaries. How do I create a boundary that works? It needs to be something less stern than the Berlin Wall, something safer than a leaky dike in Holland, something less transparent and more permeable than the glass sides of an aquarium; something that will allow me to enter space with another — without being trampled.

*The first step is to
befriend our lives,
befriend our bodies.*

What would it be like if there were no rules about what could be said? What would it be like if I didn't have to keep secrets in order to protect people? What would I say if I were totally free to say whatever I wanted and I knew that whatever I said would be heard by the right ears? What if I knew it was safe to say what was longing to be said in the depth of my being?

Maybe you have someone in your life that has the right ears. If you have not yet found that person, you may consider writing your story. You may trust yourself to be those ears as you put pen to paper to tell your story. If it is right for you, start a healing journal.

You could include:

- ❖ What you would say if you could say anything and know only the right ears would hear
- ❖ A list of things that help if you are having a hard day
- ❖ A list of resources available to you
- ❖ Fun things to do when life gets heavy and you need a break from the inner work
- ❖ A list of people that you can call upon for support
- ❖ Ways people have helped you on the journey
- ❖ Quotes from books, songs, or people that have helped you on the journey
- ❖ Poems
- ❖ Affirmations
- ❖ Dreams
- ❖ Techniques for dealing with triggers - things that work for you, helping ground you in the present
- ❖ Signs of progress or growth to lift your spirit when you are feeling down
- ❖ Reflections on what is being born in you

On Birth:

*Birth is such a simple story -
One that happens
within the lives of each of us.
I have watched a foster parent
give an infant unconditional love.
I have listened
to a husband faithfully birth his dying wife into Life Eternal.
I have seen a sparkle in the eyes of a grandmother
as she spoke of the birth of her newborn grandchild.
I have seen lights of hope in people as they faced fear or loss
or confusion or illness.*

Words of Wisdom from a Spiritual Amma - Jean Springer

Slow Down

Inner healing happens slowly. People often feel an urgency to have complete and total healing and have it quickly. Yet, more often than not, the process is slow.

People have told me what inner healing is supposed to be like, and I have tried to pretend I had arrived without going through the work to get there. In the model that people described, forgiveness was the ultimate goal. But that formula doesn't work for me. In fact, putting the goal as forgiveness may not be the way to go at all. Perhaps premature forgiveness is merely an acceptable name for denial.

*Perhaps
premature
forgiveness
is merely an
acceptable name
for denial.*

Setting the right pace is important in the healing process. There needs to be a balance. Too much focus on the trauma leaves me wallowing in pain. Inadequate focus causes me to bury feelings that will explode later.

I have an 8 ½ by 11 sign that says SLOW DOWN. It was created for a conference where I was serving as a simultaneous Spanish/English language interpreter. The purpose of the sign was for the interpreters to inform the speakers that we needed time to catch up with what they were saying. Years after the conference the sign still serves as a useful reminder to me during my own life's journey. It says:

Slow down, my friend.

Take time to notice the present moment
and what it holds for you.

Take time to notice what is beautiful around you.

Slow down and taste the food and savor the goodness.

Take time to believe in yourself.

Take time to tell your friends how much they mean to you.

Take time for quiet;
let your inner spirit connect with your Source.

Take time to be grateful for what is going well.

If things seem to be in a state of turmoil,
take time to remember when things were better.

If you are really lonely,
take time to remember sacred moments shared with friends.

If you are feeling miserable,
take time to acknowledge that feelings don't last forever.

If you are feeling powerless, respect the place where you are,
and when it is time move to your place of inner strength.

If you are feeling afraid, name your fear,
let go of any blame associated with it,
search your memory, and tap into a space where you felt safe.

If you are feeling frustration, anger, or rage – notice the emotion,
decide what you need it for, and when it no longer serves you
let it go.

If you are feeling anything, celebrate the ability to feel.

If you are numb,
know that it is the body's way of telling you to slow down.

If you are dealing with
grief, trauma, or intense feelings of any kind:
slow down.

Slow down enough for your dreams to awaken in you.



*Know my love
surrounds you and
my belief in you
is unbounded*

Learning and Unlearning

By Maureen Leach, OSF

Life is a constant flow of learning and unlearning. I learn things that serve me for a time and then there comes a time to let go and move on.

There may be rules I learned about how to keep safe that work perfectly well for a time and then one day they get in the way.

Take the analogy of a car. Basic safety tells me to get in and buckle up. Added safety measures may include locking the doors and having the windows up. Yet, in August 2007 when a bridge collapsed in Minneapolis, all new rules came into play. The news reports said that on a bridge that is about to collapse, everything is turned around. Then safety requires that the seat belt be unbuckled, the doors unlocked and the windows down.

*I make mistakes and I try again.
I have a sense of humor
and I can laugh,
but I don't laugh so much
that I forget to go deeper.*

It is important to me not to be rigid about following what worked in the past and to be open to what the present moment requires. This is where discernment enters.

When I was in Guatemala, I suffered from severe diarrhea caused by amoebas. I was given medicine that caused gastritis. I was instructed to avoid fresh fruits and vegetables that may have been washed in contaminated water and to avoid spicy foods that would irritate the gastritis.

When I returned to the United States, it took me a long time to let go of those rules. I could walk into a grocery store and go up and down the aisles for over an hour and leave with less than \$10 worth of groceries. Rules upon rules seemed to be paralyzing me. One person said not to eat any sugar, that it would cause depression. So, a rule against eating sugar was created and added to the rule against fresh fruit and vegetables that was added to the rule against eating spicy foods. And then there was the rule of trying to live simply in spite of the exorbitant cost of things in the United States. Those rules piled on top of rules were overwhelming. I came to think of food itself as being unhealthy. If I ate, I got sick, and of course it was my fault for not guessing the right thing to eat. I had this terrible habit of blaming myself for everything that went wrong.

One day, a wise woman taught me to put those rules aside and know that I could bring them back out again if I returned to Guatemala. She declared that I could eat whatever I wanted and I would not get sick. When I doubted her, she said that if I did get sick it would be her fault and not mine. Sure enough it worked. I started eating and gaining back some of the weight I had lost, and I learned to trust myself again.

It wasn't until years later that I began to work with the Federation of Returned Overseas Missioners that I realized that many missionaries experience trauma going into a grocery store and are overwhelmed with the number of choices and the cost of things. I learned that it was a common experience for those returning to feel paralyzed in a grocery store. The lesson was that sharing with others made me feel much less isolated and able to have a sense of solidarity with others who return after living in other countries.

I heard other missionaries discredit their own experiences of trauma because others had it so much worse. It was clear that each of their experiences counted no matter how short or long they were. Yet, it took a long time for me to have that same compassion for myself. I heard people saying, "You should be over the grief by now, you were only there 2 years." I added my own voice of judgment saying, "You were not the one who was kidnapped and tortured, why are you experiencing so much trauma?"

On Change:

*We are constantly asked to stretch
beyond our self-imposed limitations and
embrace a wider perspective, a deeper possibility.
I see in the lives of people I meet, a unique unfolding of their
lives and their direction through the responses they make to
what life asks of them.*

Words of Wisdom
from a Spiritual Amma - Jean Springer

I learned to ignore the inner and outer voices that were judgmental and allowed the grief to have its own timetable. When it was time, I let go, and the following poem speaks of the process.

Rules Long Past and Fears by the Wayside

Black on yellow
Glaring me in the face
"Watch for ice on the bridge"

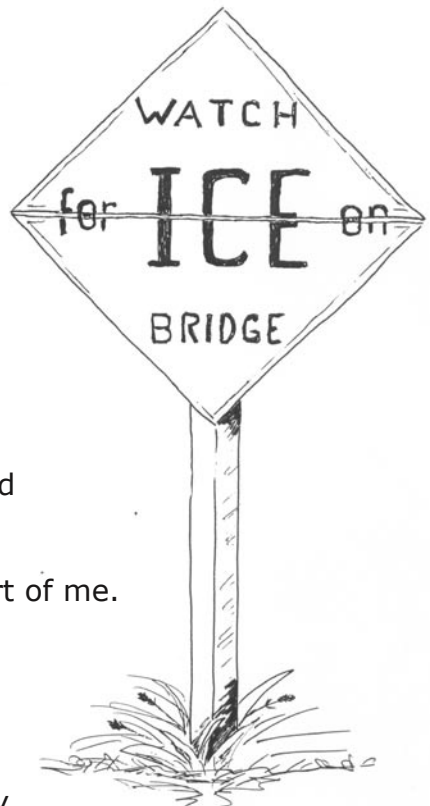
I need to be very careful
I know what it is like ...
To be rear ended in an ice storm . . .

Protect yourself,
Caution,
Beware,
Jach tel cu taj,
ja wil ha pa,
ten cuidado,
be on guard

The message comes
in every language that has been a part of me.
WAIT!
It is the time when wild flowers
Are about to bloom.

It is over 80 degrees outside.
Fold up that sign, I don't need it today
Save the fears for a cold wet winter day.
'Tis spring and fear of ice serves me not.

Maureen Leach, OSF
What was done in the past is long past, and things are different now.



I mentally fold up the "Watch for Ice on Bridge" sign and with it the fears - countless fears that are past their time. Without that bright yellow and black sign, I can be bold in new ways.

Yet, signs speak once again. In northern San Antonio on Bitters Road, there is a sign that says "Operation Slow Down." It is accompanied with a sign that proclaims my speed as I drive by. It wouldn't hurt me to reflect on that sign every day. How fast am I going today? How willing am I to participate in "Operation Slow Down"?

How willing am I to "Drive Friendly" in this world of ours? "Drive Friendly" seems to be a sign that is unique to Texas. It means to move over to the shoulder so that those who want to go faster can pass. Paying attention to "Drive Friendly" signs tells me to set my own pace and not to expect others to go at my pace or to judge myself according to the pace of others.

Another famous Texas sign is "Don't slow Texas down", which seems to mean that if you are going the speed limit or less, you should stay in the right lane. Sometimes even doing that does not prevent drivers from tailgating and flashing their lights. If I notice someone too close on my tail, I often turn on my 4 way flashers. This is my way of announcing to the world that I need a little space.

Balance knows when to pay attention to the signs that say: "Drive Friendly" and "Don't slow Texas down" and when to focus on: "Operation Slow Down" and "Watch for Ice on the Bridge." Balance knows when to let go and move on and when to step back and proceed with caution. Balance finds its own rhythm of holding on and letting go.



*I am so glad that you follow your heart and soul,
even when it takes you into entirely new directions.*

A True Story That Really Happened
Holding On and Letting Go –

We built a fence
A fence to keep the chickens in
We couldn't go deep
The rocks would not let us
The raccoon took advantage
Of our shallow walls
In he came and killed the chicken and
Maimed Ricardo, the rooster

Aye, Ricardo, will you ever feel safe again?
The raccoon is dead
The death penalty he received
Shot three times for his terrible deed
But death of a raccoon will not make Ricardo feel
safe again
I feel no sorrow for the raccoon
I never met
I only know compassion for the
one eyed rooster I tenderly hold
Me, a Franciscan,
serving whiskey to a rooster
A rooster who could not feel safe
But, who let me hold him –
Until safe I felt
Safe – holding another's pain
While letting go of my own.

Maureen Leach, OSF



Author Biographies

Maureen Leach, OSF is a Dubuque Franciscan Sister. She is on the core team of the peaceCENTER. She serves as a Spanish/English Interpreter for the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. She is also a Licensed Massage Therapist. Her mission as a massage therapist is to promote health and healing in the world through massage.

Nancy Olinger owns and manages a ranch east of San Antonio, Texas, where she raises cattle and horses. Her spirit of adventure and creativity knows no bounds, and her mind has the artist's eye for imagination and detail. Her hands create visual stories reflecting her own free spirit. Whatever she creates, paints, or sculpts, one can be sure that it will be an expression that is unique . . . and uniquely Nancy.

Jean Springer is the Spiritual Amma of Eremos Center of Contemplative Life. From the womb her life has been directed by the Spirit. Raised Baptist and living next to the Baptist Church, much of her time was spent within the influence of the church. As a teenager she longed to become a missionary, but it took becoming Catholic and entering a missionary community of women to make the desire a reality. Eight years in South Africa gave her a hunger and thirst for a contemplative way of life. She searched all over the United States for a community which would affirm and support the calling. Lebh Shomea House of Prayer in south Texas honored that search. The 10-year ebb and flow in relationship within that community gave her another desire. Seeing so many people seeking God within silence and solitude, she moved to Austin in 1992 to respond to her longing to provide a space where people could step back from their everyday lives on a more regular basis to listen to the Spirit. She has served as a spiritual Amma at Eremos since its inception.

Polly A. Fowler, a native of Laredo, Texas, has been writing music and poetry since she was 12 years old. A former English teacher and school counselor, she retired from the educational system after 34 years and in 2004 began her current practice as a psychotherapist. For the past 35 years she has been the director of the St. Pius X Folk Choir where many of her musical compositions have been included in liturgical worship. For Polly, her music and her poetry give voice to the soul, so often touched by pain, yet always seeking hope, healing and connections to all that is life-giving.

Catherine Na is a native San Antonian who has served in pastoral ministry and community development. Her poetry springs from her own experiences; she shares it with us in belief with the philosopher that "what is most personal is also the most universal".

Martha K. Grant finds healing in the arts, both visual and written, sometimes combining the two in her hand-dyed and screenprinted fiber creations. www.marthakgrant.com. She was so inspired by the idea of this book on healing that she is planning on writing her own. Watch for it to come out one of these days. She believes that sharing her story may bring healing to others.

Tina Karagulian has twenty years of experience assisting adults, children, and adolescents process life's transitions and gain strength of self through art, play, journaling, meditation and traditional counseling. She walks with clients as they release emotions and limiting beliefs, and then assists them to consciously change those beliefs to ones that empower. As an artist she understands the power of creativity and expression in the healing process. She began drawing as a child and fell in love with the peaceful feelings that came to her while she would draw. As an adult, she has come to honor how art can express deep emotions that have no words. Through her own creative process, Tina has healed losses she has experienced during her life, and also been able to show her joy and passion for living. She often sings spiritual music that uplifts her while she paints, and her intention is to bring that love and peace into each work of art. www.tinakaragulian.com

Naomi Shihab Nye is a Palestinian-American who believes deeply in exchange, dialogue, mutual support, among groups in conflict and also that literature can make a crucial contribution to connection among human beings. Her most recent book is, ***I'll Ask You Three Times, Are You OK? Tales of Driving & Being Driven***. She has published more than 20 other books of poems, essays, and stories. She has been a visiting writer in hundreds of schools and communities since graduating from Trinity University. Her novel ***Habibi*** has been translated into various languages, including Hebrew, and used in middle schools across the country.

Patricia R. Farrell, OSF, LCSW, is a Franciscan Sister from Dubuque, Iowa, and a licensed clinical social worker. She received a B.A. in English and secondary education from Briar Cliff University in Sioux City, Iowa, and an MSW from Loyola University Chicago. Her special studies in the area of trauma include levels 1 and 2 of EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and Hakomi Integrative Somatics Training for the Treatment of Trauma. She has been working in cross-cultural settings from 1974 until the present, traveling in Latin America and doing trauma trainings in Guatemala and Colombia. During twenty years she lived in Latin America and experienced first hand both the military dictatorship in Chile and the civil war in El Salvador, which eventually led her to study clinical social work in order to be prepared

to work with immigrants and refugees suffering from trauma. Part of her studies included an internship at the Marjorie Kovler Center for the Treatment of Survivors of Torture in Chicago where she also served for three years as a volunteer translator and therapist. Other recent work experiences have been at Latino Counseling Services, a program of the Counseling Center of Lakeview in Chicago, and Capacitar El Salvador where she worked as a therapist and a trainer in multi-cultural wellness education. She currently lives in Omaha, Nebraska and works as a bilingual therapist at the Juan Diego Center and at the International Center of the Heartland.

Brenda entered the military after graduating from college and spent 14 years in service (active duty and as a reservist). In 2001 Brenda began her life with a religious congregation of Roman Catholic sisters and is currently waiting to take her final vows in order to become a fully professed sister. She is presently doing cross cultural ministry in a rural setting.

Patricia S. Castillo, L.M.S.W. has been the Executive Director of the The P.E.A.C.E. Initiative since its inception in 1990. She works tirelessly to educate the community on issues of domestic violence. She has received numerous awards for her work including: Recognition from The MA.T.C.H., Program (Mothers and Their Children - Women detained in Jails) of the Bexar County Adult Detention Center for her work with the women inmates from 1984-2004; The Humanitarian Award from The ASERVIC (Association for Spiritual, Ethical, and Religious Values in Counseling) organization for her "commitment, dedication, support and leadership in the cause of justice for all people especially those women, children and men trapped in violent relationships."; The Santa Maria Justice Award to Patricia S. Castillo, L.M.S.W., from the Center for Legal & Social Justice, St. Mary's University Law School; 2005 Inductee into the San Antonio Women's Hall of Fame in the area of Civic Leadership, as well as the Women's Advocate of the Year from the University of Texas at San Antonio-Women's Studies Institute. She works mostly in San Antonio, Texas and has also worked in Acuna, Cancun, Mexico City and Monterrey, Mexico as well as Honduras, Guatemala, Brazil, Russia, China, several states in the U.S, and the Navajo Reservation.

Elizabeth Cummins, OSF is a spiritual director and bereavement counselor in private practice in Phoenix, AZ. Besides hiking in the desert, she enjoys herb gardening, vegetarian cooking and reading. Liz is a member of the Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque, IA.

Catherine Laraya Cuasay is proud of her Philippine heritage which immersed her in art, dance, music, poetry and theatre through her childhood. Her work as a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and Expressive Therapist has been leavened by experiences with bereavement groups, couples in conflict, children coping with divorce, developmentally delayed adults, formerly battered women, seniors in geriatric rest homes and partial hospitalization programs, homeless women and children, incarcerated adults, runaway teenagers and trauma survivors. She currently lives in San Antonio remaining avidly involved in community ritual and music ministry as well as hosting an array of workshops and retreats. Catherine holds a vital belief in the power of the arts to transcend culture and language barriers and ultimately to transform wounded lives toward healing.

Dana Clark has spent her life creating music. She is a singer-songwriter and music instructor who plays piano, guitar, flutes, mandolin, sax, and other instruments. She works as Music Director at the Unity Church of San Antonio, Texas, and plays in the band 'Lewis and Clark (Musical) Expedition' with her husband, guitarist and bassist Kevin Lewis. To find out about their music, go to www.lewisandclarkmusic.com.

Michelle Balek OSF, or Shell as she likes to be called, is a member of the Dubuque, IA Franciscan Community. Her BA in Sociology/Social Work prepared her well for her many ministries over the years. She was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador, and has served in the IA Department of Social Services; Catholic Charities in TX and IA; as a Pastoral Associate in an urban parish; on the National Staff of Pax Christi USA; and as the North America Region Coordinator for Franciscans International, a Non-Governmental Organization in consultative status with the United Nations. She recently completed her graduate studies at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, VT, earning an MA in Sustainable Development. She currently serves as the Delegations Coordinator for the Foundation for Self-Sufficiency in Central America (FSSCA).

Glee Miller has been a Catholic minister for 30 years, 13 of those, working in an inner city hospital as a chaplain. Her specialty during those years was Perinatal Loss, helping parents deal with the loss of a baby who died too soon. After retirement, she continues to work as a spiritual director, member of the parish RCIA team at St. Brigid Church in San Antonio, Texas and as an adult educator, teaching others how to minister to grieving parents. She is a certified Lay Minister, holds a Master's degree in Theology and has earned a Doctorate of Ministry for her work with grieving parents. Glee is married to a Baptist minister and together they have four children and seven grandchildren.

Narjis Pierre was born in Australia, and given the name Heidi by her parents. At the age of three the family moved to Switzerland, where she completed her formal education and began her professional career in 'special needs' care. At the age of 29 Heidi left Switzerland, friends and family and went traveling in South America; her path took her northwards into the south of Texas and to a Muslim community established in the Hill Country. There, the journey turned inward: Heidi became Narjis and took on the active learning of 'Islam' and stepped on the path towards understanding mind, heart, self and soul, in another word: sufism. She married an American Muslim, and raised three children. She is engaged in the Muslim community (co-founder of SAMWA - San Antonio Muslim Women's Association), as well as being in dialogue with other faith communities in San Antonio. She presently works at a retirement center. Narjis Pierre authored the 'Hajj Journal' which is available from the peaceCenter website. She is on the Board of the peaceCenter.

Nancy Meyerhofer is a Dubuque Franciscan who has served in various missions, eight years in the United States and nearly 30 in Latin America.

Sister Margie Hosch, OSF is a clinical member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. She co-authored the Wholeness Holiness Retreat with Sister Dorothy Heiderscheit, OSF, who together gave the retreats to their Franciscan Sisters of Dubuque, Iowa. She has teamed with sisters of two religious communities including Sister Connie Fahey in conducting the retreats in South Carolina. Her experience includes providing individual, family and marriage therapy, group therapy, conducting days and weekends of spiritual renewal and giving individual directed retreats.