

THE CIRCLE

The Circle Women's Centre

Brescia University College, London Ontario

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It was nothing less than magical when the Planning Circle, re-working our Mission Statement last winter, came to unanimous agreement with the phrase: The Circle is a space – no longer a forum, a centre, a meeting place. Instead, those words were re-packaged into one, The Circle as “a space that can be entered actively, imaginatively.....where the seed of the sacred is released, shared and celebrated.”. It was this insight that invited the Editorial Circle to take up the theme of “sacred space” as a topic for reflection in our newsletter this year.

Believing is Seeing

There is hardly a person who has not visited (either actively or imaginatively) some sacred space – one of those far-away places like Delphi in Greece, Stonehenge in England, Knocknarae in Ireland, the Chartres Cathedral in France, Guadalupe in Mexico or one of the closer-to-home sites like Point Pelee, a local church, an historic burial site, a Native Sweat Lodge. These places have been visited and revered by generations of people whose deepest longings have often been satisfied by these pilgrimages. The pilgrim touches the earth, feels that tangible, numinous presence, and carries home the awe-some experience of sacred space, a memory that can be rekindled again and again.

Many individuals, while continuing to recognize and honour the collective sacred spaces designated by others, are aware of the equally resonant experiences of sacred places closer to home. In fact, we have begun to name spaces that hold a sacred quality for us. Someone recalled a comment made by a participant at the Finders Keepers Conference in '95: “As soon as I stepped off the escalator in the hotel, perceived the sights, heard the sounds and sensed the atmosphere, I knew I was in a new space, a sacred space.”

Some years ago, a local women's group met outside of Lucan under a circle of tall trees. They proudly called the space “their cathedral.” At a recent workshop in Woodstock, women recounted a litany of local places that hold the sacred quality, where they go habitually to be



infused with fresh awareness. As one woman expresses it: “a place where, through no effort of my own, I am able to touch the Web of Life, to know the interconnectedness of all beings, to be entirely at home in the world.”

It's as though everything becomes luminous and there's only a thin veil between what we know and what we can begin to imagine. Such experience is prompted by the sheer physical beauty of a place, by an experience of intimacy, or by a solitary experience of what it means to be human. “A deep awareness of being in a place where I know I belong in all of my humanity leads me to a place within myself where I can contemplate the Divine.” That is sacred space!

Another step in the process of recognising sacred space is learning to view, in a new way, what is present every day, what is right before our eyes. Discovering the sacred in the familiar is like finding the hidden image in one of those 3-D pictures (ironically called Magic Eye). To see what is not at first visible, “you need to blur your eyes and look less hard.” There are spaces that have to be believed to be seen! An invitation echoes to us residents of southwestern Ontario to don our “magic eye” and to perceive the wonder of our geographic location – held as we are by the splendour and power of the Great Lakes. And to what appears to be even more obscure, is the sacredness of the ancient river (now called the Thames) that winds its path through our whole region.



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Editorial Circle

Sheila Caplar Cheryl Ebel Anne Marie Madziak

Patricia McLean Pat Mooney Loretta Pellizzari Kim Young

We are still gathering used books for our grandiose book sale event! Drop them off at the centre!



On Our Shelves...



The Red Tent

by Anita Diamant, St. Martin's Press

"This is not your fault, or mine. The chain connecting mother to daughter was broken and the word passed to the keeping of men, who had no way of knowing. That is why I became a footnote..."

It has been suggested that *The Red Tent* is what the bible would be like if it was written by a woman (Boston Globe); for it gives back to women what history has lost- woman's side of the story. Brilliantly recreated by Anita Diamant, *The Red Tent* is the biblical story of Dinah and her mothers, Leah (her birth mother), Rachael, Zilpah and Billah, the four wives of Jacob. Though she is voiceless and victimized in the Book of Genesis (34), Dinah is now the narrator of her own story and becomes a powerful medium for a new perspective on biblical women.

Dinah begins by telling her mothers' stories with pride and reverence, having heard them over and over again within the red tent. She recounts the marriages to Jacob of her mothers, and the many births soon to follow. As the only girl of 13 children, Dinah is allowed to remain within the women's world of the red tent, where her mothers would "trade secrets like bracelets, and these were handed down to me." The red tent is portrayed as a place of laughter, joy, honouring, repose, storytelling, menses, birthing and tears. It was their sacred space, a place where the wisdom of women could be shared and passed on, generation to generation.

The reader is taken through Dinah's happy childhood, to the tragedies of her adolescence and womanhood, her call to midwifery, and her new home in a foreign land. The events of Dinah's life only give further opportunity for Diamant to explore the timelessness and universality of womanhood—"readers begin to feel a part of a sacred sisterhood" (Ms.). Through Dinah we experience how women would fend off unwanted sexual advances, feel desperate to get pregnant or want to delay conception; we experience the thrill of attending birth, the pain of needing to abort and the celebration of menstrual blood.

Originally released in 1997 with no advertising budget, *The Red Tent* has turned into a phenomenal publishing success, due to word-of-mouth support from readers and independent booksellers. With her wonderful prose and attention to detail, Anita Diamant vividly recreates the ancient world of the red tent. It is a world readers can dreamily enter into...but only to return and ask "how much has been lost?"

The Holistic Garden —Creating Spaces for Health and Healing by Karen York -

"Whatever form it takes, the healing garden affords us the opportunity to gaze inward and outward in an intimate communion that renews us physically, emotionally and psychologically." Chapters on organic gardening, herbs, the importance of trees, water in the garden, naturalization, growing good food, gardening for the senses, and rooftop gardening.

Altars and Icons— Sacred Spaces in Everyday Life by Jean McMann -

this book is dedicated to the sacred spaces created by ordinary people on their tables, shelves, mantels, window sills, dashboards, etc. A wonderfully eclectic look at modern altars!

Return Blessings— Ecofeminist Liturgies Renewing the Earth by Diann L. Neu -

sixteen liturgies designed to celebrate

 **NOTEWORTHY!**

Come & Join Us for our  Red Tent Event!

see next page for details

- The Circle wishes to acknowledge the tragic loss of Dr. Sandy Kirkley and her husband, Michael. Dr. Kirkley was an exceptional surgeon, professor and researcher at Western. She was the loving mother of two sons.
- Ms. Magazine celebrates 30 years of advocacy, dedication and commitment to women, our issues and our voices.
- Ten years after the Canadian Human Rights Commission ruled that Bell Canada's female operators had suffered pay discrimination, Bell has yet to pay up. Money owing, including retroactivity, interest and pension adjustments, has grown to approximately \$50 000 for each woman, most of whom are now unemployed since being laid off by Bell.
- A world-wide community building, social change movement is spreading rapidly with great success. Known alternately as World Cafes and/or Conversation Cafes, these grass roots gatherings are aimed at teaching people how to engage in meaningful conversation in ways that protect the principles of equal voice and shared responsibility for bringing about change. Be on the lookout...they might be happening in your community.



Events at the Circle...



Renew your Membership!

Open Circles

...a tapestry of story, laughter, silence and the mystical experience of women gathered, where we can reflect the *sacred in our lives*. Last Wednesday of the month, Merici Lounge, Brescia UC, 7:30 p.m.

Present your 2003 membership card for free admission. Non-members: \$2.00 **Everyone Welcome!**

- 30 October** Celebrating Samhain – celebrate the original Halloween! COME in COSTUME!
27 November Becoming a-Custom —exploring new ways of celebrating and passing on spirituality to our children.
29 January Your Body as Sacred Space

Special Fall Events!



Red Tent Event

Saturday October 26
10am—3pm, Merici Lounge

“Women wanted daughters to keep their memories alive”

History has been told by and about a limited segment of our population. In honour of **Women’s History Month**, come join us in hearing and telling *the rest of the story...*
Herstory

Join facilitator Anne Marie Madziak along with guests Mary Lou McKenzie, Eleanor Donnelly and Anne O’Neil for a relaxed and interactive session of story sharing.

Circle members \$10, Non Members \$12, Girls -free
Bring a bag lunch, refreshments provided.

Proceeds go to the Circle Library

“...history is not whole until the whole people become a subject”
-Nelle Morton

Circle Fundraiser Fall Book Sale!

17 November 2002

Brescia UC Auditorium
1 p.m.—4p.m.



Fiction, spirituality, feminist, self-help, children’s books & much more!

Ritual of Re-Membering



Friday December 6th
Noon
Mother St.James Auditorium
Brescia University College

Join the Planning Committee
Call 432-8353 x288

Watch for info, re:
All City Events

Feminist Spirituality Program

Submerge yourself into our week-long program designed to promote awareness & deepen your experience of the sacred. A variety of creative activities and interactive explorations will embody our program’s theme:

“Women & the Earth”

...and beyond

Brescia presents BREAKFAST FOR WOMEN featuring Dini Petty. Oct. 24 7:30am - 9:00am, London Convention Centre, \$60.00 (a portion is tax-deductible). Proceeds go towards scholarships and bursaries for London women at Brescia. ? 432-8353 x213 or scorig3@uwo.ca.

Off the Map: Women in Theology; 9 Oct - 13 Nov, at Huron University College led by Susan Snelling. \$125.00. Part II in the spring. ? and registration: 438-7224 or www.uwo.ca/cstudies.

Enlightened Possibilities: Prosperity & Yoga Retreat—22-24 November, offered at South Lake in the 1000 Islands Yoga, meditation, circle group exercises, discussion, special meals. \$399.95. ? Kelly Oliver, 519-421-7685 or koliver@rogers.com

Journey to Ourselves: A Women’s Mid-Life Group, 1 Oct—3 Dec., at 125 Woodward Ave., London, led by Stephanie Smith. Flexible fee scale. ? and registration 433-0183.

Workshops at King’s: *Creating Sacred Space*, 6 Oct. 10—3pm, with Theresa Bryant and Yeshe Wangpo. \$35. *Beginners Meditation*, with Theresa, Sun. 3Nov. 10-3pm \$35. Retreat *The Spirit of Simplicity* 30 Nov. 10-3pm with Theresa \$35. ? And registration 433-3491x4450

Middle Eastern Dance with Artemis who is available for workshops, presentation and/or demonstration. ? Diane at 659-3850.

Spirit of the Earth, “The Living” Centre— many fall programs & events on achieving wellness and spiritual fulfillment. Details in newsletter. ? Call Lorena, 652-9109 OR centre@spirit-earth.com OR on the web www.the.livingcentre.com

Poetry Writing, 6 week course with Cornelia Hoogland. starting October 2, 6-8pm at The Arts Project \$135.

Medaille Program & Retreat Centre. “*Transforming our Hearts to Create a Culture of Peace & Nonviolence*” a 2 day workshop with Sr. Mary-Ellen Francouer Nov. 9 9am—Nov 10 3pm \$85. *Winter Solstice: A Celebration*. Dec.20 at Program Centre at The Mount. RSVP by Dec. 16.

Donations only. *New Year’s Eve—Our Journey Continues into 2003*, Dec. 31 5pm—1:30 am at Medaille \$25. ? and registration 432-9379.

Reiki Workshops led by Sharlene McLearn. Levels 1, 2 and Master Teacher. Scheduled for Oct. and Nov. ? and registration 439-6834 or www3.sympatico.ca/bmclearon.

capacity for relatedness



presence to all beings

Forging Links

WALKING IN SOLIDARITY

For those who haven't ever heard about Santa Angela, I will start by telling you about this place that has stolen my heart. Santa Angela provides health services in a very poor sector on the outskirts of the city of Chiclayo, Peru, called Quinto Sector. The centre provides basic health care through health promoters and community outreach. Sta Angela also runs a soup kitchen, a literacy class for women and a children's program aimed at helping kids improve their self-esteem and therefore their chances of survival. This one small centre which started 15 years ago with the Ursuline Sisters' help, is now the core to the community. In a village where the average family earnings is \$5 per day, these community services are extremely important.

Three years ago, it was a rather naive need to answer a call to serve the poor of our world that lit the first flame in me. Twice now I have traveled to Peru, spending time with the women who never cease to amaze me with their commitment to making their community a more dignified place for their children to grow up. Now, I find myself more interested than ever in finding ways to live in solidarity with the people who have become my friends.

During my visit to Peru this past June, I worked with Janet, who runs the Children's Program. Together, we developed a program that will connect 20 Grade Three children from St. George's parish in London with 20 children of the same age in Quinto Sector. The Peruvian children told me how excited they were to be making a Canadian friend. It struck me listening to these little children whose smiles said it all: friendship really does light up the world. Sharing one goal that all God's children will share in the world's banquet - is to me - the true meaning of solidarity and friendship.

The Peruvian women I have come to know give perspective to my life. I am grateful to know these incredibly wise women who see the world as something to be conquered. I admire their strength and courage, and thank God for my fortune of knowing them.

Lina Bowden

spontaneity in action



Visit Our Newly Updated Circle website!

www.uwo.ca/brescia/womencentre

Our new site offers you: upcoming events, Open Circle topics for each month, a list of our resources, our story, valuable links, and much more!

www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/whm/ - Status of Women Canada's *Women's History Month* website

www.islandnet.com/Room/enter - A Room of One's Own: short stories, poems, art and reviews by, for and about women.

www.utoronto.ca/womens/fempub.htm - a link site to over 30 feminist on-line magazines.