

CFRA Newsletter



An introduction and some history...

Over 30 years ago the Sisters of St. Joseph operated a peace and justice center called the Center for Reflective Action. This center offered education and advocacy for peace and justice and it also published a newsletter that covered social justice issues. In time the Center closed, but the work continued on in many other ways.

The Center for Reflective Action has been reborn! This time not in a physical space, but in the new frontier of cyberspace. From the framework of our spirituality, we can use the gifts of technology to explore and examine social justice issues. Today's technology can be a gift and at the same time a curse. So much information; at times - overwhelming. One of the goals of the cyber Center for Reflective Action is to sift through the multitudes of confusing and sometimes questionable information and data to offer guidance for reflection and action.

The initial offerings of the Center will be a newsletter focused on social justice issues in a concise and focused format for individuals who are looking for a simple way to gain entry into an issue and begin to both understand it and evaluate how they might be able to become more involved.

This first issue focuses on the “**Blessings of Diversity.**” Hopefully it will be helpful in the exploration of the Chapter commitment to address the issue of racism and how to bring forth the energy of our charism that “that all may be one” to the issue.

The women that are guiding this rebirth of the center include past **Center for Reflective Action** coordinators Patty McDonnell and agreee Teresa Foley; Peace and Justice Coordinator Denise Granger, Carol Allan, and Theresa Bessette, a partner in mission. This newsletter includes an edited copy of an article written by Lorry Villemarie to whom we offer our thanks for her permission.

We look forward to hearing from you! Please let us know what was helpful, what you would like to see in the future, and other ideas. We seek and welcome your input! If you would like to write a reflection, be a part of the committee, and/or have suggestions for resources please contact the committee at cfra0003@gmail.com

The Blessings of Diversity A reflection by Terry Foley and Denise Granger

The beginning of a journey toward addressing racism must begin in prayer and reflection and an effort to act with the intention of what Pat Bergen, SSJ calls the charism of “unioning love”. Theologian and Episcopalian priest Cynthia Bourgeault calls this “finding identity in collectivity...unfathomable unity, activating reconciling work”. Fr. Richard Rohr describes God's “relationship itself, a dynamism of Infinite love, Divine Diversity”what we might call the “Great Love of God.” This work together has the goal that our Buddhist neighbors would describe as letting go of the illusion of separateness. Or as Chief Seattle said many years ago: “Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are one strand within it.... all things are bound together. All things are connected”.

Communities we live in are most whole when our diversity is celebrated and blessed. All are encouraged to lean into this spiritual journey and find this blessing. Julian of Norwich

reminds us that “The love of God creates in us such a “oneing” that when it is truly seen no person can separate themselves from another person...and in this sight of God all humans are one”. Let us begin our journey in unioning love.

“ We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color.”

—Maya Angelou



Cosmology and Differences

Excerpts from an article by Sr. Lorraine Villemaire, SSJ

Simply stated, the three cosmological principles are:

Identity - tells what a subject is interiorly. Identity automatically interacts with the environment and has the capacity to change when in communion with another entity.

Communion - occurs when two identities communicate with each other.

Differentiation - two identities in communion become something different.

Everything in the universe came into existence through the cosmological principles. They are the basis for evolution that operated for millions of years and continues today.

This evolutionary process happens automatically with nature but not with human behaviors. Because people possess free will, some actions regarding nature are [sometimes] dysfunctional.

Our generation has become more conscious of destructive practices. Consciousness is an internal awareness of new ways of being that could liberate us from these destructive behaviors. What would individual behavior look like if the cosmological principles were the basis of human behavior?

- ❖ Everything is connected, inviting people to be more open to communicate with entities.
- ❖ Differences are appreciated and seen as gifts, not dividers.
- ❖ Everyone accepts and respects all people, no matter our differences.

I've become so aware of these principles in my daily life. In many instances, I recognize them when they happen and feel challenged when they don't.

Sr. Toni Nash ended her dissertation on Cosmology with these encouraging words:

We are being called to a radical interdependence with the beings and processes of the cosmos. If radical interdependence becomes the foundation

of all our actions, we will be tapping into the creative energy of the universe to address the challenges of our combined crises, finding new partners with whom to collaborate, and living into a vibrant future for the whole Earth community.

Most especially, I'm grateful to move one step deeper into my loving relationship with this Divine Mystery. [The original article: The Gift of Cosmology can be found by clicking here.](#)

A Common Language

The meaning of words and the messages they convey are laden with the influences, the impact of culture, conditioning, our place in time, and many other factors. What we hear can be quite different from what was intended.

We seek to create, as best we can, a common language from which our exploration and discussion of issues of diversity, bias, prejudice, and racism can evolve. Here some definitions that can be used as a foundation for our journey.

Identity - tells what a subject is interiorly. Identity automatically interacts with the environment and has the capacity to change when in communion with another entity.

Communion - occurs when two identities communicate with each other.

Differentiation - two identities in communion become something different.

Diversity-difference, variety, multiformity, the nature of the universe, including things, people, and communities.

Bias- preference, strong indication of mind, opinion about something or someone.... Often times without good information

Prejudice-a pre-formed judgement, often without reason or with faulty or insufficient reasoning. Often based on stereotypes and often negative about groups of people but not always. Stereotypes deny the individuality of persons.

Racism-the individual, cultural and institutional beliefs and discrimination that systematically oppresses people of color.

DIVERSITY MAPPING ACTIVITY

What follows is an eco-map based activity. Eco-maps or diversity maps are used in social work and community nursing; they offer a tool with which to examine the diversity ones daily life. This activity offers an opportunity to look at our relationships with individuals and with groups. The tool can help one to think about how intense the relationship is and consider if the energy in the relationship is mostly from them or toward them or is a mutual relationship.

Taking a look at the degree of diversity in our daily lives provides an opportunity for reflection on personal goals we can set in order to develop, deepen, and expand relationships with diverse members of our immediate community. This can be a gateway to how we might be able to deepen our “unioning love” for the dear neighbor.

The Activity

This exercise is personal; for your reflection only.

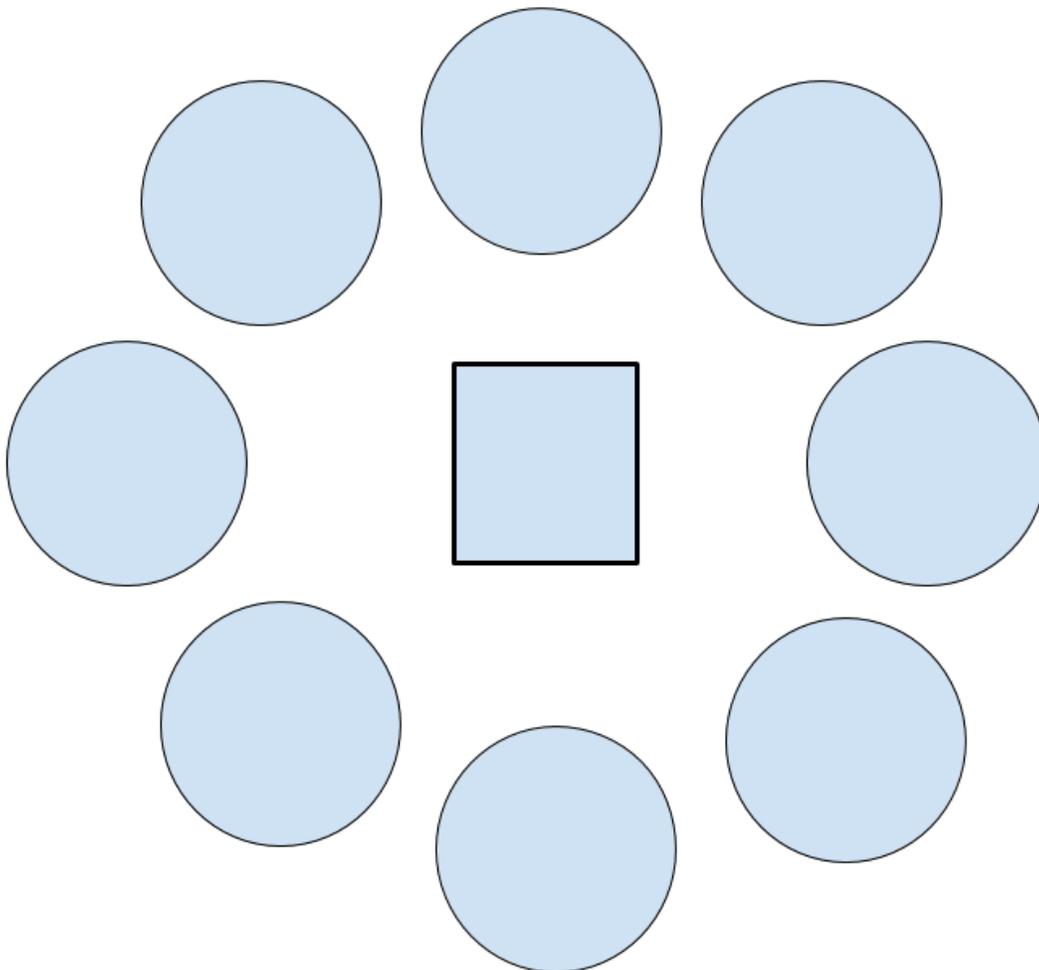
Find a quiet, calm space and 20 minutes of uninterrupted time.

Grab a pencil and a blank piece of paper.

The exercise and instructions are on the next page.

Diversity Mapping Exercise

- 1) Write your name in the center square
- 2) In the outer circles, write the places that you visit on a regular basis; groups that you belong to, other people and places that you interact with. Include home, school, work, restaurants, gym, place of worship, civic organizations, book clubs, community centers, volunteer organizations. Add more circles if you need.
- 3) Draw lines between you (the square) and each circle. The type of line represents the relationship that you have:
 - Solid line** represents a positive relationship.
 - Dotted line** represents a neutral or difficult relationship.
 - Hash marks (#####)** represent places where there is diversity.
- 4) Review and reflect. Take time to think about ways to strengthen existing relationships and add diversity to your world.



Resources

Literature, poetry, films, music, art, song, dance, and food all offer ways to tap into and appreciate the many blessings of diversity. Today's technology makes this accessible to many. Here we offer a list of resources that can add rich and colorful threads to the ever expanding tapestry.

Books

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

The House on Mango Street is the remarkable story of Esperanza Cordero.

Told in a series of vignettes – sometimes heartbreaking, sometimes deeply joyous—it is the story of a young Latina girl growing up in Chicago, inventing for herself who and what she will become. Few other books in our time have touched so many readers. [Review from Good Reads.](#)

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents by Julia Alvarez

Uprooted from their family home in the Dominican Republic, the four Garcia sisters – Carla, Sandra, Yolanda, and Sofia – arrive in New York City in 1960 to find a life far different from the genteel existence of maids, manicures, and extended family they left behind. What they have lost – and what they find – is revealed in the fifteen interconnected stories that make up this exquisite novel from one of the premier novelists of our time. [Review from Good Reads](#)

The Nickel Boys by Colson Whitehead

The story of two boys sentenced to a hellish reform school in Jim Crow-era Florida. Based on the real story of a reform school in Florida that operated for one hundred and eleven years and warped the lives of thousands of children. [Review from Good Reads](#)

The Water Dancer by Ta-Nehisi Coates

*“Coates balances the horrors of slavery against the fantastical. He extends the idea of the gifts of the disenfranchised to include a kind of superpower. But *The Water Dancer* is very much its own book, and its gestures toward otherworldliness remain grounded. In the end, it is a novel interested in the psychological effects of slavery, a grief that Coates is especially adept at parsing. . . . In Coates’s world, an embrace can be a revelation, rare and astonishing.”—Esi Edugyan, *The New York Times Book Review**

Ordinary Light by Tracy K. Smith

From the Pulitzer Prize-winning poet: a deeply moving memoir that explores coming-of-age and the meaning of home against a complex backdrop of race, faith, and the unbreakable bond between a mother and daughter. [Review from Good Reads](#)

The Peace and Justice office has a comprehensive list of other books and articles and websites with other fiction choices. This link provides a link to a list of 25 Books by Contemporary Black Authors: [25 Books by Contemporary Black Authors](#)

Here is a link to a list compiled by the Huffington Post of 23 Books By Latinos That Might Just Change Your Life: [23 Books By Latinos That Might Just Change Your Life](#)

Websites

The Revolutionary Love Project The Revolutionary Love Project envisions a world where love is a force for justice and wellspring for social change.

Better Angels Better Angels is a national citizens' movement to reduce political polarization in the United States by bringing liberals and conservatives together to understand each other beyond stereotypes, forming red/blue community alliances, teaching practical skills for communicating across political differences, and making a strong public argument for depolarization. There are local branches in western MA.

Podcasts

1619 A New York Times podcast in 6 episodes that intertwines the personal story of the author Nikole Hannah-Jones and her family and the history and impacts of slavery in America since the first slaves came in 1619. You can access the podcast from this link: <https://www.nytimes.com/column/1619-project>

Movies

Hidden Figures The real-life story of the black women mathematicians that worked at NASA in the 1960's and were instrumental to the success of the space program.

When They See Us The Story of the Central Park Five. Available on Netflix.

Just Mercy World-renowned civil rights defense attorney Bryan Stevenson works to free a wrongly condemned death row prisoner.