



CATHOLIC WOMEN IN COLLABORATION

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WHO ARE WE?

Vision Statement:

CWIC is a network of Catholic women of the Archdiocese of Seattle joining our prophetic voices in proclaiming the gospel vision of church.

Inspired by the example of Jesus, we commit ourselves to identify the experiences of women, to affirm our gifts, and to encourage our full participation in the church.

We are sustained by the hope that the church will be transformed into a faith community that celebrates and lives the equality and unity inherent in our shared baptism.

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•
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•
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Reclaiming Body as Sacred

An Interview With Betsey Beckman

by Terri Gaffney

We are fortunate to have Betsey Beckman, a nationally known liturgical dancer and movement therapist, living and working in Western Washington. Betsey will be our facilitator at the next CWIC

gathering on January 20th at St. Pat's, Seattle. In preparation for our gathering, we talked with Betsey about the vision which animates her work, especially regarding women. We invited her response to this question: **From your point of view of body movement and liturgical dance, and in the light of CWIC's vision statement, how do you see women having a prophetic role in the church?**

Sadly, for many Westerners, being spiritual has meant being disconnected from the body, denying or ignoring the physical in order to concentrate on the spiritual. The truth is that if we take the time to honor ourselves, we women have a natural connection to our bodies. Our menstrual cycles can even connect us to the rhythms of the earth and moon. Through body connection we can discover a spirituality of wholeness. Women's bodies have been degraded, devalued, and objectified. We must reclaim the body as sacred gift.

The church needs reconnection to the body, blessing the body as the dwelling place of the Spirit. Women can bring this gift of connection. Women seem to have more ready access to their emotional lives than men. Women bring a gift of sensitivity.

We have a traditional image of God as male. The church structure is male. Mary has had to carry the feminine dimension, often depicted as a monument to niceness—too saccharine, too sweet, too pure to know anything about the struggles of our spiritual journey. We have these exaggerated polarities. At this point in time we can begin to reclaim Mary as a model of wholeness, a woman who embodies the feminine dimension that is strong and courageous, as well as tender and loving.



photo of Betsey Beckman by Paul T. Erickson



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In terms of the hope for “equality and unity” in the CWIC vision statement, the image I have is Paul’s vision of community as a body. No one part is more important than the other parts — the eye, the foot, all are equal. As we become more in touch with the sacredness of our bodies, we can share this gift with the rest of the body of the community.

There is a beautiful prayer from Teresa of Avila called “Christ’s Body” that depicts our calling:
*Christ has no body now on earth but yours;
 yours are the only hands with which he can do his work,
 yours are the only feet with which he can go about the world,
 yours are the only eyes through which his compassion can
 shine forth upon a troubled world,
 Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

My vision is that we as people would feel and embrace more of our emotional and physical selves so that we could feel more fully the range of our being: To feel the love of creation, joy, anger at injustice, and use this energy to make change. To weep and mourn at the sorrow and destruction in the world, and make room for all of our motions and emotions in worship.

Worship is often monotone — a one-feeling tone. Thankfully we have music to help us express and feel some of the deeper emotions our soul. But that is not enough. Worship is about all of life. If we’re joyful, let us clap our hands. We need more permission for fullness, for the energy of the Spirit. We need the Spirit moving, creating surprises, not getting stuck in the structure, but breathing new life.

Open Hands Meditation

*Betsey’s work is designed to evoke emotion and stir movement in us as audience or participants. Her vision is brought to life not by reading but by enabling us to have an embodied experience of the Spirit. Because of this, we are including a meditation exercise from her forthcoming book — **A Retreat with St. Dominic, St. Ignatius and Our Lady: The Body at Prayer** — to be published by St. Anthony Messenger Press in 1996, and co-authored with Michael Sparough, S.J., and Nina O’Connor.*

Our journey from Advent to Epiphany and through the liturgical year is one of making Christ incarnate/manifest/embodied in the world. We encourage you to use the following excerpt as a way to experience where God may be leading you/us in this birthing season of new-year beginnings. Betsey invites us into the story the moment after Mary has proclaimed to the angel of the Annunciation: “I am the servant of the Lord. May God’s will for me be done!”

Mary: And then, the angel left me. I never saw that angel again, and yet my whole life was made new. My hands were still trembling, but there they were, open, just as my eyes were open, just as my heart was open to that greater will. I must admit, there were many times later when I wanted to shout: “I should have asked your angel what was required of me before I said yes!” But in that moment, my yes filled the room, filled the world, and there was no turning back. I was open, open to grace, open to miracles, open to God. Are you willing to open? Let me show you the way. Pray with me...

When you pray, open your hands. Open your hands now. I know this might feel awkward at first. Praying with your hands closed or clasped is a lot safer!

When you open your hands, you are leaving yourself vulnerable, and you never know quite where God is going to lead you. If you need to, go ahead and close your hands, close them up tight and hold them to your chest. Do you feel the part of you that resists, that says no, that trembles at the thought of God choosing you?

We all have that part. But there’s another part, another energy that’s much deeper and stronger — the part that’s willing to go where God leads you. Now, open your hands and wait on the Lord. Notice what feelings stir in you, what prayer wells up. Breathe your prayer to God.

Can you imagine the angel of God standing before you, looking at you lovingly, light streaming toward you? Now when the angel of God calls you by name, stand to greet the angel. If your heart is trembling, you can close your hands into your chest again and take a moment to acknowledge your doubt, your fear. Remember, courage doesn’t mean feeling no fear, it means being willing to risk, to act, to move even when you are afraid. Your fear may be the nudge of the Spirit calling you beyond anything you’ve ever known.

So go ahead and prepare yourself by closing up tight. It’s like the flower that closes up shop at night, all petals holding on, folding in... preparing itself for bursting open at the first light of dawn.

Now, ready? Take a deep breath... and — o p e n. Open your eyes; lift up your heart. Let the light of God stream into your whole being, body and soul. Let the angel bear God’s message of love to you. Let that love wash away all worry. Worthy or unworthy, you stand in the light of the Lord. God has chosen you in your own unique way to be Christ-bearer. May you too say yes to the call!

Betsey currently directs the Movement Ministry at St. Joseph’s parish in Seattle, and also teaches her class “Body and Soul” at Still Point and for other gatherings of women. She has several books and tapes available, which can be purchased through Emmaus Road Bookstore by calling Debby Weidner at 788-5457.