



skyline

EARTHLINES

Sanctuary

Summer ~ 2018

Happy summer solstice! This seems an appropriate moment to share with you all the light we will be celebrating this coming Monday, June 25th, when we honor graduates of The Lioness Tale Prison Project. It has been awhile since I communicated with you about the growth of LiT-uPP, and this coming week of long sun seems an opportune time to share with you these “lights:” these amazing women living inside prison walls.



We have entered into our ninth year of LiT-uPP at CCWF. Several hundred women have been through an introductory LiT-uPP workshop where *The Lioness Tale* provides a doorway for them to enter their own stories. We introduce them to the Enneagram, and to Gestalt Awareness Practice, but most of all we provide a safe space for them to make contact with themselves, to feel their grief and their pain and to enter a process of self-remembering and compassion.

Through Panther Awareness Development (PAD), we have provided women

who want to be guides and facilitators for the program with proficiency in the basic skills and tools needed to accompany others on this inner journey. Some of these women have gone on to intern with the senior LiT-uPP facilitators and we will be honoring them at this graduation as well.

We have welcomed people from the outside community to come into the prison and participate in LiT-uPP and PAD groups led by senior inmate facilitators. We call these folks PAX (yes, bringers of peace and also community support) who are now prepared to be resources for LiT-uPP, both at CCWF and other possible facilities.

This Monday we are inviting many women who have completed a LiT-uPP or PAD group to join us in this celebration. We will be gathering in the Chapel. The Warden will speak and also the Rabbi. I wish you could all be there with us! But since you cannot, I want to share with you the words I have prepared to share with all of them:

It seems appropriate that we are holding this celebration today in a sanctuary.

This community that we are gathering here at CCWF through this LiT-uPP program functions in many ways as sanctuary.

Actually we can see all three meanings of sanctuary in our LiT-uPP groups.

First, there is the meaning of sanctuary as a sacred place, like this chapel we are in. LiT-uPP is a place where we gather as a loving community, where we support each other in making contact with the deepest and most sacred dimensions of ourselves. It is a tribute to everyone involved, that no matter what an individual's spiritual orientation or tradition is, there is this respectful support for honoring these inmost depths, allowing ourselves to be healed and nourished by waters of the Spirit from whichever river those waters might flow.



Secondly there is the meaning of sanctuary as refuge. This concept has existed in many cultures. In medieval Europe every church offered sanctuary or refuge to those people fleeing the law. It's interesting to consider this notion of sanctuary here in the context of prison. Even here, where the law reigns in every aspect of an inmate's life, there is a place where she can come for refuge, for a sense of safety and shelter from the storm. In LiT-uPP people are not identified by their crime but invited into their deepest identity as persons of value, worth and capable of connecting with their innate human dignity.



Third there is the meaning of sanctuary as a wildlife refuge or preserve. This might seem like a bit of a stretch, but we all need places where we can make contact with the complexities and the wildness of our human natures, where we can feel the depth of our grief, our loss, our rage and our love; Where we can come into contact with the wisdom of our bodies as well as the wisdom of our hearts, minds and souls.

I think that the poet Mary Oliver speaks particularly eloquently to this meaning of sanctuary in her poem Wild Geese:

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountain and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.



Dear readers, we will go on from here to continue with our celebration. To you I want to extend all of our gratitude for your support over the years, allowing us to “announce your place in the family of things” to these women hungry to know that they have not been forgotten by you, or the greater family of the world. Thank you.

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Wild Geese, by Mary Oliver

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