

## Woman at the Well

Theresa Washburn from Viroqua, WI

*Reflection given on the Woman at the Well (John 4:4-26) at the affiliation ceremony on July 24, 2008.*

The story of the Woman at the Well is so rich and deep with metaphor that one could sit with it for days and still not uncover all the layers of meaning wrapped into this tale of encounter. Today, I am going to dig into the pieces of the story that touch the affiliation journey, which we celebrate today. The three are carrying water, spiritual thirst and community as support for our burdens.

All of us can relate to this woman's daily trek to the well, in the sense that we have things to complete daily, not the least of which are laundry, dishes and house cleaning. But this chore of hauling water is really foreign to most of us. Certainly, it didn't strike me as deeply until my two years in Peace Corps (in the Dominican Republic) when hauling water transformed pictures in *National Geographic* to daily reality.

Hauling water isn't easy and shouldn't be done alone. I'd often watch the women head off with buckets on their heads or tanks strapped to a donkey; as they passed the other houses women would shout, "Hey, ya going to the creek?" In a flash they'd have their buckets and tanks, too, walking and talking together. While the walk there is easy, help becomes critical when one tries to lift a 20-gallon bucket to the top of her head, or the full tanks onto the donkey. Once home, it's helpful to have someone there when pulling it off one's head as well. In addition a woman doesn't want to be walking along the path alone with 20 gallons of much-needed water balancing precariously on her noggin. It's a vulnerable position and everyone knows it.

However, in this Scripture the woman went alone. We assume because she made bad choices in her life other women refused her company. I don't think she chose this, I think the other women didn't want to be associated with her mistakes.

When she arrives at midday, hot and tired, at least as I imagine it, there stands a man who immediately begins talking to her. Now I know, if I had gone to the river and found a fellow sitting by the water, I wouldn't have felt all that safe, particularly if I had a reputation like hers. I'd be on the defensive. "Could you get me some water?" "Get your own." I'd say.

But the unnamed woman engaged in conversation and within it she discovered love and forgiveness. He didn't judge: he asked her to stop the behavior. I always think of it in the same way I tell my daughter to stop doing something which is self-abusive. Not because I think she's bad, but I love her enough to want her to stop hurting herself.

That day, out on her daily routine she found somebody who cared enough to notice, to listen, to encourage and then to fill her spiritual thirst.

My journey to affiliation parallels this woman's journey to the well. I know I felt alone in my daily living. It was as if I carried an empty jar around asking in various places, "Where do I fill this thing?" It was in the midst of my work routine the answer came, "Here, you can fill it here." Like this nameless woman at the well, I didn't get it right away. "What, don't you want me to be 'holy'? Don't you want me to be more than I am right now?"

"Just do your best," came the answer.

How quenching my journey into affiliation was. Each time I met with my FSPA companion we dug a hundred feet into the questions I longed to ask. We listened



continued on page 3

## 2008 Affiliation Live-In

Thirteen affiliates in-process, three affiliates, two sisters, two friends, one novice and two affiliation co-ministers participated in the 2008 Affiliation Live-In. The week was spent listening, sharing, praying and laughing. While each person brought with them a unique and varied history, the group truly discovered "Unity in Diversity."

At the conclusion of our time together, nine individuals celebrated their initial affiliation covenant and two women renewed their affiliation commitment.



*Dawn Heckenkamp, left, and Lindsay McClead*



*Doris O'Leary, left, and Kathy Benish*

*"The sessions, tours, food, people and adoration were all meaningful to me during this Live-In experience."*



*Gene Portz, left, with S. Maryam Gossling*



*Trish Peebles, left, and Linda Kerrigan*

*"I appreciated re-connecting with the FSPA mission and inspiring individuals. I enjoyed learning parts of the history I never knew before."*



*Live-in group 2008:  
Front row, from left: Kelly Gansel, Julner Remy, Marci Madary, S. Kristin Peters and Lindsay McClead.  
Second row, from left: Joan Gerhards, Donna Mayer, Doris O'Leary, Deanna Trilling, Kelly Teachout and Charmion Petsche.  
Third row, from left: Dawn Heckenkamp, Kathy Benish, Linda Kerrigan, Karen Donaldson, S. Suzanne Rubenbauer, Leanne Spacek, Gene Portz and Trish Peebles.  
Fourth row, from left: Colleen Casey, John Maule and S. Maryam Gossling*



*From left, Kelly Gansel, S. Kristin Peters and Donna Mayer*



*Colleen Casey, left, and Deanna Trilling*



*Joan Gerhards, left, and Charmion Petsche*

*"I was overwhelmed by the sense of love, sharing community, vulnerability, strength, compassion, laughter and fun."*



*Julner Remy, left, and Leanne Spacek*

## *Welcome new covenant affiliates*



*Front row, from left: Jean Amlaw, Marilyn Hempstead, Lindsay McClead and Sandy Worthing. Back row, from left: Leanne Spacek, Gene Portz, Karen Donaldson, Kelly Teachout and Trish Peebles*



*Kelly Teachout, left, and Karen Donaldson*

## **Woman at the Well**

**Continued from page 1**

to the loving advice of Francis, and we gathered strength to return to daily chores of life. When I began meeting with my companion community, I felt relief as well. As difficult as it can be to follow through on my commitments, sometimes my group offers me the conversation I need along the way.

Affiliation has been living water for me offered up by the FSPA to douse the spiritual thirst so many of us have. Today as we witness these commitments and renewals, we stand with each other at the well offering the joy that comes with a supportive

community. We help one another lift those burdens, like heavy jugs of water, and assist each other taking them off as well.

I often imagine the woman's life after her encounter with Jesus. I would like to think she had company after his visit to her town. I want to picture her, walking along with new friends full of excitement about what she learned from the Son of God. I can see the hands of her new friends helping her with the load.

This is affiliation, sharing the load with each other. Thank you, FSPA, for opening your well of living water so that all who need it can drink.

## *Caring Hearts/Helping Hands*

*Jan Prokes from La Crosse, Wisconsin*

Are you able to be a friend to a woman in need, without passing judgment? We are Birthright. We will teach you whatever you need to know in order to follow your mission. We, at Birthright, are committed to the spirit of nurturing life. We are dedicated to the belief that women are important. Volunteers can work in the office or in their own homes. Office work can be planned to fit your schedule. Please call us at 608-783-0373. We are located in the Family and Children's Center at 1707 Main Street.

*George Meirick from La Crosse, Wisconsin*

AMOS (Advocating-Mobilizing-Organizing in Solidarity) is a relatively new interfaith, congregation-based coalition working for justice in the broader La Crosse area. FSPA has been a member organization since the initial covenant ceremony in November 2007. AMOS' mission is to deepen relationships within and among congregations and to empower people to act together to build a more just and healthy community by addressing underlying causes of poverty and inequity so everyone has a chance to succeed. The Justice, Peace and Integration of Creation Committee (JPICC) currently serves as the FSPA Core Team, and I am the representative for FSPA, serving on the AMOS board.

AMOS has recently identified four priority issues: hunger, restorative justice, health care, and the Hmong community. Each of these has a task force to direct and mobilize action. AMOS provides an excellent opportunity for sisters and affiliates to become involved in joint ministry opportunities by becoming involved in the activity and work of anyone of the four task forces.

More information about AMOS, its task forces and FSPA involvement will be provided in various FSPA communications in the upcoming months. If you would like to learn more about AMOS, or become involved in the work of a task force, contact me at 608-788-0428 or gwmeirick@yahoo.com.

### *2008 Franciscan Living Challenge:*

*By the end of 2008, affiliates and sisters will no longer use plastic shopping bags.*

*Marci Madary from La Crosse, Wisconsin*

I have tried to take this challenge seriously and am now in the habit of bringing my reusable bags to the store. While it is fantastic to know that I am not adding to the plastic vortex and hurting the Earth, I have a new challenge. This spring we adopted a puppy, Lily, who we take for walks everyday. During the walks Lily does "her business," and my pile of plastic bags from the last 10 years have been helpful to pick up and dispose of her poop. After just four months, I have used all of my plastic bags as well as those of family and friends. Now what? Believe it or not, there are biodegradable bags made to clean up after the pup. They can be purchased online at a number of sites including [www.dogpoopbags.com](http://www.dogpoopbags.com), [www.greenfeet.com](http://www.greenfeet.com), [www.arcatapet.com](http://www.arcatapet.com), [www.ecoanimal.com](http://www.ecoanimal.com) and many others. If anyone else has another idea of how to be Earth-friendly and a responsible dog owner, join the discussion board on FSPALive.

## *Living Simply, Living Franciscan*

Mary Ellen Dunford from Hiawatha, Iowa

### **#3 - The Poisonous Plastic**

PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastic, commonly referred to as vinyl, is one of the most hazardous consumer products ever created. PVC is dangerous to human health and the environment throughout its entire life cycle, at the factory, in our homes and in the trash. Our bodies are contaminated with poisonous chemicals released during the PVC life cycle, such as mercury, dioxins and phthalates, which may pose irreversible lifelong health threats. When produced or burned, PVC plastic releases dioxins, a group of the most potent synthetic chemicals ever tested, which can cause cancer and harm the immune and reproductive systems.

Most of us have unknowingly smelled the poisonous chemicals from PVC. It is the smell of a new car, new shower curtain, or a new child's toy. EPA studies have found that these smells are causing elevated levels of dangerous air toxins, which can persist for more than a month. Children are exposed to phthalates by chewing on vinyl toys.

Industries that produce PVC also pose an environmental injustice issue. PVC plants are disproportionately located in low-income communities. Communities surrounding vinyl chloride facilities suffer from groundwater and air pollution. Workers at PVC plants and residents living by PVC plants face lifelong health risks from exposure to cancer-causing vinyl chloride and other hazardous chemicals used to make PVC. These health risks include angiosarcoma of the liver, lung cancer, brain cancer, lymphomas, leukemia and liver cirrhosis.

In the next column I'll address PVC products commonly found in your home and what you can do to encourage companies to phase out the use of this poisonous plastic.

### *Congratulations!*

- Mary Ann Lipska on the celebration of her silver affiliation jubilee.
- Jean Amlaw, Karen Donaldson, Marilyn Hempstead, Lindsay McClead, Trish Peebles, Gene Portz, Leanne Spacek, Kelly Teachout and Sandy Worthing on their acceptance as covenant affiliates.
- Chandra Sherin and Dean Yohnk on the renewal of their prayer affiliation.
- Carole Hodgins, Mary Lee Folkedahl-Meehleder, Sheila Garrity and Bonnie Pilcher on the renewal of their covenant affiliation.

### *Pray for...*

- Margie Bleuer
- Marilyn Hempstead
- Barb Lawless
- Daughter-in-law of Bernadette Murray
- Son of Delrose Patzner-Hanson
- Mollie Williams
- All of the family members of affiliates who are serving in the military in the Middle East