



WOMEN and CRIMINAL JUSTICE

GOLDEN STATES OF GRACE: PRAYERS OF THE DISINHERITED

(Photo Exhibit by Rick Nahaims
www.goldenstateofgrace.com
is showing at the Fullerton Art
Exhibit until January 17, 2007)

While depictions of middle-class religion can be found in virtually every form of media, rarely seen are the sacred worlds of those marginalized by society: the outcasts, the fallen, “the other.” Ironically, these are the ones for whom religion was first formed, but who now worship as a means of refuge, finding redemption, and forging community where they would otherwise have none. “Golden States of Grace: Prayers of the Disinherited” aims to give image and voice to some of these groups, people who because of the world, society, or themselves, have been all but silenced. Some of the groups practicing alternative forms of spiritual expression in mainstream religions and who are being documented by this project include:

* Jewish addicts in Los Angeles recovering through the merging of Torah study and Twelve Steps at Beit T’Shuvah.

* A Muslim community in Santa Ana composed of survivors of Khmer Rouge’s Cambodian

genocide.

* The Immaculate Heart Community, a religious community of men and women.

One of the groups documented was Women of Wisdom at California Institute for Women (Chino-Corona), a group grown from the ranks of Sister Suzanne Jabro’s organization, Women in Criminal Justice. This is an “inside/outside” spirituality group for female prison inmates and the women from the outside who join them in forming a faith community. The circle is inter-faith and multicultural as dictated by the women in prison themselves. The group is composed of approximately ten women from the “outside” and forty women on the “inside” who are currently participating in this monthly evening of dialogue, ritual, and listening to the Spirit within and among them.

Photographer Rick Nahmias would like to thank Sisters of St. Joseph Ministerial Services for supporting the circle of women in prison at prayer.



THE CIRCLE Women of Wisdom

“The Spirit is powerfully present to us when we gather. Everyone feels the connection, inspiration. There is no preparation only presence. There is no homework, only inspiration. There is no black-brown-white, just people. There is no preferential seating in this group to insiders or outsiders, just women. No Catholic-Protestant-Muslim-Jewish-Native American, just women of faith drawing on our common wellspring as women,” says one of its leaders. Every month, this formal gathering of female inmates and women from the outside welcomes participants, no matter their faith, into what they call “their alternative circle of grace.”



LESLIE

Women of Wisdom

“My glass will always be half full. My spirituality is what makes it so that every day I wake up and it’s a new day, and every night when I go to sleep, I have lived it to the fullest. My spirituality allows me to appreciate the beautiful sky, and to see the humanity in every person that I touch. Just like my crime, being involved in violence—I remember saying to someone ‘It probably seems odd to you that I would say that I’m non-violent.’ And they said, ‘Not really; people who have experienced violence are probably the strongest advocates against it.’”

Convicted of two counts of first-degree murder in the late 1960s, and now well into her fourth decade of incarceration, about ten years ago Leslie has found herself embracing indigenous worship. ❧

Submitted by Suzanne Jabro, CSJ