



Association for the Integration of the Whole Person

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A Newsletter Is Born!

This inaugural issue of the AIWP Newsletter marks the beginning of your chance to read provocative articles by members of the AIWP community, full of healthy controversy, unusual viewpoints, and encouraging words to remember as you proceed on your life path.

Our purpose is to keep you abreast of the many exciting pursuits of our members, and to offer a forum for you to discuss, query, explore, and develop ideas and practices for which you have passion.

We invite your feedback, so as you read, please be aware of your responses and, if you like, note them down and send them along to us. We solicit your contributions, in the form of letters and articles, as well as materials you may have explaining what you are doing and why. We have limited space, but we will try to acknowledge everything we receive in upcoming issues, however briefly.

We invite positive approaches to life issues and situations, as well as critical and impassioned opinions and beliefs. We welcome dialogue that offers opposing viewpoints and perspectives. Please know that our publication reaches about half a million people in one way or another. Of course, you have permission to replicate anything that appears in this newsletter, and we encourage you to do so—spread the word, and know that the words *you* contribute will ripple out towards undreamed-of shores.

Our goal of being both inspirational and challenging, supportive and iconoclastic, requires a fearless outlook and perhaps a dash of naiveté. We trust that you share these characteristics, and that you will take this opportunity to sound off, remind, reflect, cajole, speculate, stimulate, and ponder.

So check out our features, meet some of our people, surf through some web sites, and review a few books. You'll find ideas to encourage you in your journey, and maybe some notions that inspire you to explore paths you haven't yet investigated. You'll find some familiar names and be introduced to a few you will doubtless be hearing more about in the future. Then let us know what you think/feel/like/hate/want. We'll listen.

You're perfect with your imperfections.
- Melvin Maier Suhd

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Our Kind of People . . .

In each issue, we will spotlight a few of our members in service, describe their activities, and let you know how to reach them.

Mia Young

Mia organized and leads North Bay Horse Rescue and Welfare, a nonprofit agency that rescues abandoned and ill-treated horses, nurses them back to health, and finds adoptive or foster homes for them. Ordained in July, 2000, Mia sees her responsibilities as a minister as conveying the spiritual connections between equines (horses, donkeys, and mules) and humans. "By working and educating people, I can show them that equines, as well as all other creatures, can be spiritual teachers," she says. This young nonprofit agency gratefully accepts donations, and can be reached at (707) 874-1850, P.O. Box 1224 Occidental, CA, 96465.

John Cottone

John Cottone, a holistic health consultant with diplomas in naturopathy and medical herbalism, has taught optimum health programs throughout Australia, Europe, Hong Kong, Russia, and the USA. His preventative illness and healing programs have been presented at orthodox, traditional, and spiritual centers specializing in physical and mental illnesses, nervous disorders, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation. He developed the Deep Tissue Muscle Therapy massage program and founded the Ka-Tone Health Education System. In 1990, John took a 4-year sabbatical to further develop optimum health programs focusing on "food as medicine," utilizing the vegan and live food diets, and specialized yoga therapy for exercise, treatment of muscular/skeletal disorders and postural alignment. From 1994 to 1996 he directed the Health Educator Program at Hippocrates Health Institute in Florida. He has been an ordained minister of AIWP since 1978, and is a doctoral candidate in holistic health at the University for Integrative Learning. He practices in Wellington, Florida, and can be reached at (561) 798-3829.

Natalie Rogers, Ph.D.

Natalie Rogers, founder of the Person Centered Expressive Therapy Institute in Santa Rosa, CA, is the author of two books: *Emerging Woman: A Decade of Midlife Transitions* and *The Creative Connection: Expressive Arts as Healing*.

Person-Centered Expressive Therapy integrates the philosophy of Natalie's father, Carl Rogers, with expressive arts modes. The person-centered approach emphasizes qualities of empathy, openness, honesty, and congruence. It is based on a trust in the inherent impulse toward growth in every individual and group. Expressive therapy uses the expressive and creative arts—movement, art, music, writing—in a supportive setting to facilitate growth and healing. These methods touch into and release the creativity in each of us, revealing our own special truth and beauty.

The PCETI training program is a course in four levels, which build to create a deep self-understanding and an expertise in the use of expressive art that can be applied in a wide range of professional settings. As Natalie says, "The creative process is like freedom. Once you've tasted it, you cannot do without it. It is a transformative force, enhancing self-esteem and self-empowerment."

Natalie received her doctorate in psychology from Summit University and was ordained by AIWP in 1990. PCETI can be reached at P.O. Box 780, Cotati, CA 94931, telephone (707) 664-9828.

"Missing Persons" . . .

We've lost track of the people listed below; if you know where we can find them, please let us know.

Joseph Alexander	Susan Cohen	Kurt Goerwitz	Kryisia Kristianne
John Arnold	Pat Collins	Essie Goldress	Carol Landsberg
Joseph Bagnall	Diane De La Vega	Ruben Gonzalez	Chuck Latimer
Trish Barnett	Kathleen Delaney	Aileen Goodson	Linden & Neil Leavitt
J. Bartell	Carol Delfino-Beighley	Lynne Gordon	Harold Lemke
Darlene Beaver	Edith Dolan	Ian Grand	Katherine Levin
George Bennett	Jason Doty	Zina Grand	Chris Lewis
John Blazer	Lois Drake	Johnny Gray	Henry Lichenstein
Norman Bleicher	Alta Dubkin	Katherine Greer	Kitty Lichenstein
Harry Blumenthal	Lauren Ekroth	Kathy Gronau	Nancy Little
Drue Bogdonoff	Rena Ellis	Philip Gronau	Russel Lockhart
Lexie Booher	Arthur Engbritson	Benjamin Hedges	Bartolo Lucente
Douglas Booth	Ginger Evans	Justine Hill	Dawn Lynn
Janette Bradbury	Joan Farber	Edward Horodko	Carmel Malbrough
Brett Brady	Kelly Field	Arthur Huff	Mark Mathewson
Edward Brandhurst	Hugh Fitzpatrick	Michael Hughes	Edward Maupin
Ruth Brice	Anne Foster	Mildred Jackson	Corrine McDonald
Albert Bright	Jack Friedman	Timothy Jackson	Grant Mcfetridge
Charles Britt	Cynthia Furst	Margo Jennings	Arthur Melville
Melody Brotby	Loretta Fury	John Johnson	Tulsi Milliken
Anne Cannon	Cathy Gabrielle	Charles Johnston	Debra Neal
Lorraine Cazier	Edward Garren	Gail Jordon	Mary Oberkamp
Janice Chase	Linda Giella	Faye Kennedy	Kay Ortman
Stephen Clein	Phyllis Given	Maya Korenn	Cassie Oserin

The most visible creators I know of are those artists whose medium is life itself. Without brush, hammer, clay, or guitar, they neither paint nor sculpt—their medium is being. Whatever their presence touches has increased life. They see and don't have to draw. They are the artists of being alive.

- Joshua Stone

Spirit of Life Institute, San Francisco, California

Love, safety, community, mystery . . .

Wherever we are on life's path, we continue to strive for deeper meaning, for a richer experience, for more aliveness. We might be thriving or we might be struggling. We might be satisfied with some aspects of our life yet know that more is possible. Spirit of Life Institute draws upon that knowing. Each program is designed to enhance our natural ability to be fully expressive human beings—to be happy, vital, and loving. The programs at a glance:

- Discovering Relationship: Celebrating our interconnectedness (a Saturday and Sunday)
- Living the Principles: Integrating new practices (2-hour meeting held monthly for 12 months)
- Journey to the Center: Embracing life's mystery (a Saturday and Sunday sleepover)
- Return to the Center: Exploring our unique contribution (Friday evening, Saturday and Sunday at a retreat center)
- Individual Counseling: Deepening self-discovery (weekly)

Spirit of Life Institute is a nonprofit organization committed to deepening and expanding our awareness of how interrelated we all are. It grew out of the work George Moscona has developed over the past 20 years. George, an ordained minister of AIWP since 1976, received his M.A. in psychology from Goddard College, is a licensed professional counselor in the State of Louisiana, and is member of AIWP's advisory board. The Spirit of Life Institute can be reached at (415) 282-7179; e-mail: SOLinst@aol.com; or at www.solinstitute.org.

Honoring 100 Years of Carl R. Rogers! His Life, Our Work, A Global Vision

Host: Saybrook Graduate School

Dates: July 25—28, 2002 (July 24 pre-conference day for person-centered trainings or day-long institutes)

Place: University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA

The sponsors, Natalie Rogers, Maureen O'Hara, Valerie Henderson, John Vasconcellos, Tom Greening, Bob Lucas, Georgia Berland, and Robert Schley, envision an international gathering where participants will honor Carl by sharing their expertise in the many fields he influenced. For more information, contact coordinator Robert Schley via e-mail at crrogers2002@saybrook.edu, or by phone at (415) 435-9200, ext. 6160.

PurposeFull Living Program, Mount Vernon, Washington:

Why am I here? What do I believe? Why do I believe it? What do I really want out of life?

"It often takes a life-threatening illness such as cancer before many people begin to seek answers to these questions.

"I know, because it wasn't until I was facing almost certain death from acute myelocytic leukemia 17 years ago that I began to work through these and other questions in search of healing and understanding.

"My life totally changed (and I believe was saved) by undergoing a process of self-discovery and personal transformation that I am now committed to sharing with other people.

"Along with Dr. Glenn Warner, one of the oncologists who treated me, my wife, Nan, and I have founded Northwest Ontology Associates (N.O.A.) to help others find their own answers. N.O.A. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the development of the total human being. We offer a variety of programs to help people seeking wellness, wholeness, and more balanced lives. Our PurposeFull Living Program is for cancer patients, survivors, family members, caregivers and friends who wish to clarify their life purpose. It offers support and information with a unique focus on body-mind-spirit connection through the practice of the Socratic method of dialogue. We also provide information to assist you in exploring a range of complementary and alternative cancer treatment modalities."

Michael Mahaffey, the author of the above, and Nan Monk have developed the PurposeFull Living Program, a nonresidential group program in Mount Vernon, Washington. The three phases of the program include

Phase One: Getting to know my human condition,

Phase Two: Exploring my Spiritual Purpose and how it can influence my life, and

Phase Three: Integrating my Spiritual Purpose into my everyday life.

Michael and Nan were both ordained as ministers of AIWP in 1997. They can be reached at Northwest Ontology Associates, 18157 Periwinkle Lane, Mount Vernon, WA 98274, (360) 422-5904 or (800) 893-2436, e-mail www.northwestoa.org.

AIWP's Educational Programs—UIL

What Is the University for Integrative Learning?

From its beginning, AIWP has fostered innovative educational programs that promote its philosophy and values. The University for Integrative Learning (UIL) is the latest generation of a pioneering effort in alternative higher education that began in 1968, so we consider UIL to be 32 years old even though its name is new. UIL interfaces with AIWP, a religious organization, and follows its philosophy and values while maintaining a completely nonsectarian perspective.

The University for Integrative Learning is devoted to personal wholeness and the educational freedom that comes from honoring each individual's uniqueness within the context of lifelong learning. If you are excited by the prospect of a degree program that upholds these ideals, then UIL may be the right choice for you.

"Where learning is sacred and experience counts."

The Birth of UIL in Alternative Education

A contemporary foundation for the University for Integrative Learning was laid in 1964, when the elementary and secondary departments in Harvard's School of Education and the Union for Research and Experimentation in Higher Education began to develop innovative and alternative programs. As these programs expanded along diverse paths, the umbrella organization for UIL--the Association for the Integration of the Whole Person--joined forces with the movement for alternative education when AIWP was founded in 1975.

UIL Mission Statement

The University for Integrative Learning serves a spiritual learning community in ways consistent with humanistic educational philosophy and psychology. UIL places individuals at the center of their own learning processes in relation to all aspects of life.

Guiding Principles and Values

- Every individual is a unique and complete being: spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical.
- Freedom of individual expression is an inherent intellectual and spiritual birthright.
- Learning is a lifelong process.
- Lifelong learning is both a right and a responsibility that cannot be ignored without denying life at its root.
- Active, cooperative, interdisciplinary learning is encouraged throughout life.
- Everyone deserves equal access to advanced educational degrees.
- Equality and diversity are actively fostered in regard to race, sex, class, age, ethnic background, sexual orientation, and different abilities.
- The community is honored as a valuable resource for learning.
- Relevant life experience is a valid, credit-worthy part of academic degree programs.
- Lifelong learning allows shorter enrollment periods for each degree level.
- Theory, practice, and critical understanding must be integrated to provide a holistic assessment of learning experiences.
- The relationship between learners and mentors functions best in an atmosphere of safety, trust, and respect, including power-balanced dialogues that nurture individual and interpersonal growth.
- Academic degrees, learning, and life itself are essentially spiritual/religious experiences, in harmony with each individual's personal beliefs.
- Human diversity, pluralism, and all nonviolent belief systems are honored in accordance with the credo of UIL's parent organization, the Association for the Integration of the Whole Person (AIWP).

The Connection Between AIWP and UIL

The Association for the Integration of the Whole Person (AIWP) is recognized by the federal government as a 501(3)(c) non-profit religious entity. The University for Integrative Learning of AIWP is a nonsectarian spiritual university that values human diversity and maintains that all learning and degrees are religious in nature.

Religious: "a cause, principle, or system of beliefs held to with ardor and faith."

Spiritual: "of religion, sacred, devotional, or ecclesiastical; not lay or temporal."

Top Ten Benefits of Enrollment at UIL

1. You are honored as the most powerful player in your learning process.
2. You design your own course work and degree program.
3. You choose your own teachers, academic materials, and style of expression.
4. You receive personalized, ongoing attention from your own university provost.
5. You draw on the resources of the world's biggest campus: your community.
6. You receive credit for on-the-job training, independent study, tutorials, workshops and seminars, religious studies, and all other relevant life experience, in addition to receiving credit for course work completed at other universities.
7. You enjoy the financial ease of affordable enrollment fees made possible by UIL's nonprofit status.
8. You can take advantage of year-round enrollment to fit your personal and professional needs.
9. You have all the time you need to complete your degree, without incurring additional fees.
10. You are supported by the strength of an internationally respected university that is deeply rooted in the founding tenets of alternative education.

Ten Things You WON'T Find at UIL

1. Grades.
2. Required courses.
3. Discrimination of any kind.
4. Scheduling conflicts, because you create your own schedule.
5. Rules about how you express yourself.
6. Exorbitant tuition fees.
7. Time limits for degree completion.
8. Additional fees for work beyond contracted enrollment periods.
9. Unnecessary paperwork--only what's absolutely essential.
10. Hoop jumping!

Open to the experience of a university that will deepen--not dampen--your dreams. Give yourself the opportunity to validate your life learning in the context of a self-designed program that is based on your background of experience, your unique needs, and your personal career and educational goals.

Discover the difference of UIL as a cutting-edge, internationally recognized university that honors interdisciplinary and community-based learning, intellectual creativity, personal life experience, human diversity, and self-directed study within a context of trust, mutual respect, and spiritual freedom.

Celebrate the support of a university where love of life meets love of learning, where the individual comes first, and where the traditional stumbling blocks to higher education are removed so you can achieve your desired level of academic success in a humane, self-empowering way.

Accreditation

As a nonsectarian spiritual university, AIWP's University for Integrative Learning is exempt from regional accreditation practices. Since its inception, AIWP has supported the Constitution of the United States in its stated mission of maintaining a separation of church and state. This separation of church and state gives people the freedom to be true to their spiritual values in all aspects of life, including the pursuit of their educational goals.

AIWP upholds this constitutional freedom in the design and execution of its degree programs, while consistently adhering to a rigorous level and quality of learning that demonstrates equivalency with other internationally respected universities. AIWP established the University for Integrative Learning to serve a world population in the same spirit as its predecessors: Oxford, Cambridge, the Sorbonne, and various University Without Walls programs.

Accreditation is a form of certification found only in the United States. Accrediting agencies are private corporations that assume responsibility for determining the acceptability of secondary and higher education programs. In contrast to the United States, all other nations charge the government, the public, and educational institutions with the responsibility of determining the quality and acceptability of universities and colleges.

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Speaking Out: A Forum for AIWP Ordained Members in Service

We look forward to hearing what you think of this article—please let us know.

Gay Marriage? Absolutely!

By Cat Saunders, Ph.D.

This is not an essay full of facts and figures. If you want to read up on the history of marriage and its long legacy of discrimination against one kind of people or another, you'll have to go elsewhere. What you're going to get here is a piece of my mind, straight from my heart.

Actually, I doubt if anything coming from *my* heart can be very straight, since I'm bisexual. However, I promise you that this essay will be gut-level honest, no holds barred. I may be criticized for saying all the things I'm about to say, but that's too bad, because there's a horrible abuse of privilege going on in relation to marriage, and it makes me sick.

The truth is, I think it *is* sick that my gay and lesbian friends are denied the legal right to marry. This is bigotry, pure and simple, and it needs to stop *right now*. Denying two women or two men the right to marry is as cruel and absurd as it was to deny two people of different races the right to marry.

In this state (Washington), 1998 legislators even passed the highly redundant and incredibly homophobic "Defense of Marriage Act," which outlaws marriage between two people of the same sex (this was already illegal). Personally, I think they should have called this law the "Denial of Marriage Act," since it denies roughly ten percent of the population the right to enjoy the legal privileges accorded to the other ninety percent.

Maybe I'm missing something, but doesn't the Constitution of the United States guarantee everyone's right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? Seems to me that this guarantee alone should be enough to legitimize gay marriage, since it's mighty hard to feel very free (liberty) if you don't have the right to marry the person you love (the pursuit of happiness).

Marriage as an Institution

Since I'm arguing for the expansion of marriage rights, it may surprise you to know that I'm no big fan of marriage. As a woman who has been married and divorced twice, and who has since enjoyed a long-term partnership with a man (since 1987), I tend to share Mae West's infamous take on marriage: "Marriage is a great institution, but I'm not ready for an institution yet."

Aside from my personal bias, I must also confess that in my twenty years as a professional counselor, I've rarely seen marriage improve a relationship. To be fair, I've seen a number of healthy relationships stay strong and vibrant after marriage, so of course it is possible.

On the flip side, however, I've seen couple after couple hit the skids or go on automatic at some point after they invite the institution of marriage into their lives. Of course, there's no telling what would have happened if these people hadn't gotten married, since there are no control groups in human life. However, most people underestimate the extraordinary power of marriage, with all its socioeconomic and religious underpinnings, not to mention its intergenerational family legacies.

Marriage brings with it a whole gamut of personal and collective hopes, dreams, fears, and expectations. Anyone who doesn't think so has probably never been married, or may simply be oblivious (perhaps blissfully so) to the complex inner workings of this ancient institution.

Meat to the Lions and a Circus of Laws

One of my spiritual teachers said that marriage is "like meat to the lions." That's a pretty intense statement, so I've thought a lot about it in the last twenty years since she said it. One thing I see is that the state sanctions marriage in order to control people's lives in some way for the benefit of society (i.e., the regulation of "legitimate" children, the ownership of property, or the dispersal of monies after death).

Some would argue - and in current society, perhaps rightfully so - that marriage isn't only for the benefit of the state, but also for the benefit of its participants. For example, only legally married couples are allowed to pass along Social Security benefits to their partners, and in most cases, insurance coverage can be extended only between spouses. In this and many other respects, unmarried couples - whether gay or straight - are financially penalized by current marriage laws.

I realize that if there were no government-sanctioned marriage, people might have to be more proactive in regard to financial rights and responsibilities. It may mean that domestic partners would have to draw up their own legal paperwork to assure protection of their needs and rights (as my partner and I, and many other unmarried couples, have done). Frankly, I think this setup would be a lot less messy than our current circus of laws surrounding marriage, community property, child custody, and estate dispersal. I think things could actually be much simpler if the governments stayed out of the marriage bed.

When I was a child I assumed that I'd get married, because that was what everyone else did. Once I left that kind of automatic thinking behind, however, I came to believe that this country's separation of church and state should also apply to marriage. To me, marriage is an affair of the heart, and I don't think the state has any business regulating affairs of the heart. Marriage can best be honored by religious, spiritual, and otherwise deeply personal commitment ceremonies, separate from the clutch and claw of government control.

For better or worse, I acknowledge that I appear to be a minority voice in holding this position, so I'll return to my defense

of gay marriage, now that you know that it's not so much marriage itself that I'm defending, but every adult's *right* to marry, regardless of sexual orientation.

The Privilege of Choice

Although my overall network of friends includes a variety of sexual orientations, my inner circle is noticeably *underpopulated* by heterosexuals. I didn't plan it this way. In fact, I never really paid much attention to it until I started thinking about writing this article a year or two ago.

Here's the breakdown: I'm bisexual and I'm partnered with a straight man. My best woman friend is also bisexual, and she's in a long-term relationship with a woman. My closest male friend is gay, and he's also in a long-term relationship. Of three other close women friends, one is lesbian and partnered for 19 years, and the other two are straight and currently unattached. That makes three heterosexuals out of a total of ten people.

This means that if you consider my inner circle of friends and their partners, three straight people and two bisexuals have the right to marry - but only if we choose partners of the opposite sex. The two of us who are bisexual, along with the other five who are gay or lesbian, cannot legally marry someone of the same sex. This is not an equitable situation.

I realize that the percentage of non-heterosexual people in my inner circle of friends doesn't fit the statistical norm. However, I think I can safely say that all of us consider ourselves "normal" and most definitely believe that each of us deserves the same rights as everyone else. Ironically, and perhaps understandably, it is my gay and lesbian friends who would like to be married. My partner and I want no part of it, and my other close women friends who are straight are happily single right now.

This brings me to the crux of the matter: It's much different to choose *not* to be married if you have the *choice*. That's the nature of privilege: it allows you to *say yes or no* to something because the choice is a *given*. My gay and lesbian friends don't have this privilege, and frankly, I think this situation is deplorable. I don't know how anyone can be so arrogant as to deny other adults the right to *make a family* - in every sense of the word, including legally, with whomever they choose.

A Call for Well-Lit Minds

I wish that for one year, every homophobe, every anti-gay legislator, and every one-way fundamentalist would be required to experience, firsthand, what many homosexuals experience, to some degree, every day of every year: intolerance, ridicule, hatred, and legal discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Perhaps if the roles were reversed, homophobic people could get a taste of their own oppression and find out how it feels to get dirty looks because *you're one of them*, how it feels to be disowned by your parents because your lover doesn't fit their profile, how it feels to be denied child custody rights because of your sexual identity, or how it feels to be fired from your job - despite workplace protection laws - because coworkers are "uncomfortable" around you.

The brutality of discrimination is pervasive. Sometimes the situation seems hopeless to me, since I know that bigots rarely turn into icons of acceptance overnight, and in fact, may never soften their stance at all. However, something inside me refuses to give up on even the most diehard homophobes, because I believe that somewhere in their hearts lies a nugget of gold, a cache of compassion trapped inside an icy envelope of fear. You just never know what stroke of luck, what kiss of kindness, what twist of fate might serve to melt that icy envelope.

Some day - and I hope it's soon - homophobes and bigots won't be running the show, and their prejudices can then be entertained and accepted as merely one position among many, rather than the dominant paradigm. After all, even homophobia makes sense within the framework of the minds that give rise to it.

Unfortunately, these minds may not be very well lit. The point is, well-lit minds are *inclusive*, not exclusive, because it is the nature of light to shine equally on all things and all people. Therefore, dimly lit minds should not be sitting in legislatures, deciding the fate of millions of ordinary citizens who simply want the freedom to love, cherish, and legally commit to whomever they choose.

When my gay and lesbian friends can marry, and when people like me can walk either side of our bisexuality with impunity, then I will stop writing about this cruel denial of rights. Until then, I'll add my voice to the fray.

This article was originally published in *The New Times*, Seattle, WA, July 2000.

About the Author: Cat Saunders, Ph.D.

Cat Saunders is the founder of Heartwings Foundation in Seattle, WA, and has recently established SOAR (the School of Absolute Responsibility), in which people learn the principles of responsibility and respect through individual coaching and small-group classes. Cat is the author of *Dr. Cat's Helping Handbook: A Compassionate Guide for Being Human*. She was ordained as a minister of AIWP in 1993 and received her doctorate in psychology from Summit University. To learn more about her book, read Cat's controversial series on death, or find out about her telephone consultation services, visit her Web site at www.dr.cat.org.

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "There are as many religious beliefs in the world as there are human beings. This is as it should be." Unfortunately, everyone believes they "possess the truth." This leads to conflict. However, if we accept that we are all pursuing the truth, then we can honestly search our hearts for the peace and salvation we all seek.

- Arun Gandhi, grandson of M. K. Gandhi, in support of *The Way of Spirit: 30 Visionaries Share Philosophies, Paths & Practices* by Susan Averett Lee

"After 25 Years"

The year 2000 marked the twenty-fifth year of AIWP's official existence. From the outset, the hopes and desires of those of us who formed it included the production of a regular newsletter that would expand into a journal. The journal would share information and news of the wonderful services in which our congregation leaders and their associates were engaged. It would contain thought-provoking essays from a variety of sources, leading to higher levels of consciousness. Now, a quarter of a century later, THIS is our inaugural issue. This is the first of many newsletters to come. With your help, each will add substance, until it grows into a significant spiritual publication shared with a broader audience.

After 25 years, there are now 1000 congregation leaders, ordained to spiritually serve others in ways in which they have been duly qualified. Our leaders estimate that we touch over a half million people. Because one of our basic foundations is that we are each unique and worthwhile, how we reach people is only limited to honoring that principle.

In this and subsequent messages, I will try to articulate the substantive elements of my own belief system. I fervently pray that there are no attempts to replicate my evolving set of values, but that my openness is seen as a model for confidently expressing your own beliefs within the framework of the credo we all agreed to honor.

The openness of our credo allows us to work toward interacting with all people as unique and worthwhile, but it is not a panacea for achieving that goal. Many among us function comfortably juxtaposing more defined systems with our openness. Many others prefer more structure in performing their spiritual services. AIWP has no lock on the benefits of religious service, nor do we see ourselves as members of "the Chosen Way." We do, however, enjoy the freedom, benefits and exercise of our beliefs equally with those of more ritualistic faiths, thanks to the foresight of the founders of this country. By acknowledging that we were a country based upon freedom of religion, the founders were wise enough to separate religion from state or government control, guaranteeing that no sect would have power over any other faith. We are the only country that has built this liberty into its laws, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

*- Mel Suhd, Founder
Association for the Integration of the Whole Person*