



Searching for truth and beauty, preaching through the transforming power of the arts

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Gathering 2019: A Difference in Scale

“Fabulous!” was President **Pat Daly**’s evaluation of both the event and the wonderful hospitality of the Pallottine Renewal Center staff in Florissant, MO which welcomed thirty-eight Dominican artists from three continents to their twenty-first annual Gathering., July 28-31 2019. “I have been going to Gatherings for twenty years and never before experienced the depth of sharing that **Margaret Ormond** evoked during her keynote,” Pat declared. Superlatives ranging from “phenomenal” to “spectacular” corroborate Pat’s evaluation. Reporting to **OPalette**, **Fran Belmonte** also struggled to identify the distinctive element initiated by Margaret Ormond and palpable throughout, “a spirit not so much of difference, but of degree: anticipation and delight in each others’ company, catching up with life and work, willing cooperation in sharing each others’ art, concern for those unable to attend.” All these blessings are, in fact, characteristic of all Gatherings. “After the keynote, however, a bursting forth of freedom and intensity was even more evident.” The openness with each other that Margaret “cracked open” in her interactive keynote prevailed even through business meetings and Board re-elections by acclamation . . . difficult to convey in words, but palpable nonetheless—growing with each expenditure of heart energy from the participants.”

“Cohesive” was another adjective used to describe the way each part of the program enforced the Gathering theme. “The prayers designed by **Joann Daley**, **Liz Sully**, and **John Mascazine**, elicited a processive empowerment as each day’s reflection gyroscope into the next activity culminating in the Eucharist celebrated by **Rudolf Lowenstein**. **Gathering cont.** p.3

Sheila Flynn: Fra Angelico Honoree

At the Gathering’s concluding liturgy, President Pat Daly made the eagerly awaited announcement: the Board’s choice for the coveted Fra Angelico Award: **Sheila Flynn, OP**. Her selection was remarkable because she had received 100% of members’ nominations— a first in DIA history. Other unusual facts also distinguish this honoree. Born in Ireland, educated and professed in the Order in Australia, and a leader of Dominican education there, Sheila earned a National Diploma of Fine Arts from the University of Johannesburg and has had her art work exhibited on five continents. Twice profiled in Global Sisters Report, she is best known, perhaps, for her outstanding service to South African victims of HIV-AIDS. Although Sheila’s work as a fine artist and a teacher of art has been featured several times in **OPalette**, most DIA members had never before met her in person.

Visibly and volubly stunned to receive the honor, Sheila exclaimed, “I did not think you even knew me!”

No one at the St. Louis Gathering can ever say that.



Sheila’s wholehearted participation
Sheila cont. p.3

Letter from the President

There is no one particular aspect of the 2019 Gathering that was my favorite because I savored every single moment. There were, however, two annual events that did have a different ring for me this year.



The first was the Virtual Gallery. This year, two aspects were added. A hard copy binder featuring all art work was compiled and available throughout the Gathering. This enabled attendees to take a really good look at the art work and to ask questions and/or chat with the artist. The contents of the binder will be sent to the DIA Archives at the McGreal Center at Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois. In addition, the Virtual Gallery is now on our DIA Website (www.diartsop.org) which enables those who, for whatever reason, could not attend the Gathering to view the Virtual Gallery on their computers. The great thing about viewing it on the Website is that, if you wish, you can click the “Pause” button so you can spend more time with a particular piece of art. Chatting with the artist is a mere phone call or email away.

The second event that was different for me was the open Business Meeting with Membership. Although no subject was off the table, when the question of future Gatherings arose, it was as if someone opened a spigot because suggestions gushed forth. I certainly got exercise running the mic around the room and Elizabeth Slenker’s hand must have been cramped after taking the voluminous notes that she did. Creativity flowed and we have a plethora of ideas and possible themes for future Gatherings. Many thanks in advance from the folks who will be serving on those Planning Commissions.

Take care of yourselves and be well.

Peace, *Pat Daly*

Artistic “Outlier” Strikes an Inner Chord

Keynote speaker **Margaret Ormond** was no stranger to her Dominican audience in St. Louis— or in any of the more than eighty countries she has visited throughout her international career in religious leadership. Yet she felt compelled to begin her address to this audience of artists by declaring herself an “outsider” in the world of art. It was soon apparent, however, that as a “weaver of words” she did indeed deserve the title “artist.” It was also apparent that as a Dominican she had done her homework. Illustrating her power point presentation with the eloquent works by visual artists Frida Kahlo, Corita Kent, and Pablo Picasso, she also cited other artists like composer Shostakovich and novelist Julian Barnes as examples of artists who “tell the truth and tell the story, living and growing through their art.” Then she enhanced these historical references with personal stories of her own multicultural experiences visiting museums in cities and barrios and participating in the music and dance of Latin America and Africa. From this comprehensive appreciation of the arts in general she proceeded to focus on encouragement of DIA artists to do what it takes to develop their talent in response to universal human yearning. The Dominican artist, in particular, she stressed, is called to feed the poor who hunger for beauty.



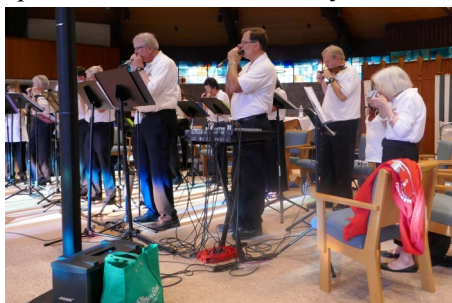
Nevertheless, it was not the speaker’s compelling vision of art as gift and vocation that effected her most striking impact. It was Margaret’s *interactive style* that keynoted the spirit of the entire ensuing event. Margaret avoided the usual impersonal format-speech from an expert followed by a Q&A session. She interrupted each brief input of information and/or inspiration by asking an evocative question, encouraging thoughtful and deeply personal responses. “Is there a conflict between ‘Ars gratia artis’ and communicating political and religious messages through art?” “Have you recently experienced a moving homily? How did it reveal truth to you and to the world?”

“When has your creative work served to move to tears or to wipe them away?” Cumulatively this dialogic format engaged participants in a unique experience of honesty and wisdom. Apparently, Gathering 2019 had a two-way impact: Pat Daly will not let Margaret Ormond forget her off-camera final statement: “I was in leadership for eighteen years, but for these eighteen years I did not understand the *depth* of DIA until now. I will spread the word.”

Gathering con't. from p.1

Anita Smisek at the piano, **Irene Mary Diones** on guitar, and **Andre Marie Fujier** on percussion punctuated singing of the Dominican *Magnificat* and *Laudare* with robust liturgical joy.

The spirit of unity extended beyond St. Louis to the Sparklll Dominican leadership who generously hosted the festive gala meal. The Gateway Harmonica Club of St. Louis who provided the entertainment dedicated their performance to the memory of **Elizabeth Slenker's** sister



MaryAnn who had been first chair of the group. A unique harmonica concert soon morphed into a hearty sing-a-long and then to spontaneous dancing.

When people like Andre Marie Fujier recognized familiar folk tunes, they danced spontaneously. Others could not resist a polka, and Rudolf and Anita executed theirs like two professionals. Thoma participated by tapping her recently acquired cane while others enforced the music with clapping. No one sat still. At the end of the evening, The Gateway Harmonica Club declared the chapel acoustics and the intensely responsive audience "absolutely fabulous."



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Sheila, con't. from p.1

was in evidence throughout the entire event: Sunday evening when the Virtual Gallery opened, Sheila's stunning abstract paintings appeared there; on subsequent days, she delivered a homily, conducted a workshop, and celebrated her Fra Angelico award by pitching in with the kitchen clean-up crew.

Sheila's homily revealed this hyperactive artist's deep contemplative dimension. Commenting on Moses' encounter with the burning bush, she compared artistic inspiration to his indescribable privilege. The artist's spiritual experience, like that of Moses, she reminds us, is initiated by God. The creative contact is direct, without intermediary. Like the face of Moses visibly burned, and later the face of Jesus transfigured, the artist's contact with God has consequences. "There is a fire within us. . . and it is an awesome responsibility for us to share it."

**Anita Smisek:
Spirit of DIA**

Anita Smisek, singer, dancer, music publisher had already won the Fra Angelico Award for her professional achievements, but she received the Spirit of DIA Award for a more unusual accomplishment, a feat expressed in the spontaneous song that accompanied her acceptance:



"I'm just a girl who cain't say no!"



**A GLANCE AT THE
WORKSHOPS**



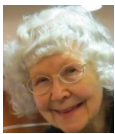
**Top: Photography
Illumination
Just Be**

**Bottom: Book Marks
CHA CHA CHA**

Not pictured: Icons

What Have You Been Up To Lately?

A Glimpse of DIA Artists at Home and Abroad



In the gathering space outside the Motherhouse chapel in Adrian, Michigan, **Pauline Opliger** is hanging another painting with scriptural citation in calligraphy to inspire the resident sisters.



A few miles away, **Nancyann Turner** celebrates twenty years of the Rosa Parks Youth Program which serves the children, teens, and parents of Detroit's East Side with a program designed to bring out the best in each other. Here they are learning to use the arts to express both love and self-esteem and build community,



Barbara Schwarz is repeatedly packing her bags with clothes, art materials, and enough stamina for a keynote and three workshops in as many states. Through the Dominican High School Preaching Conference and the 17th Annual Preaching Conference of the Dominican Youth Movement USA (DYMUSA), she continues to train and inspire young people to embrace visual and performing arts as indispensable tools in the art of preaching.



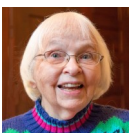
In Toronto, Canada, at the Annual Parliament of World Religions, **Joe Kilege** is presenting "Garden of Respect," on the design and installation of a Zen Garden.



Judith Engel is enjoying the opportunity to implement "Catechesis through Art," a project which involves selecting, purchasing, framing and hanging fifteen artifacts in the hallways of the Diocesan Office of Religious Education. "Catechesis through Art" brings together pieces from 13th-21st centuries by African, Haitian, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Native American artists.



Nancy Murray is "vacationing" at the Rio Grande Valley Respite Center of Catholic Charities with refugees from Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador.



Elaine DesRosiers has a new dramatic presentation, "Mary of Nazareth," which was commissioned by St. Gabriel Parish in Fern Creek, Kentucky and presented there and at two other locations.

Never Too Late

"It was not until I retired at age eighty-four that I was able to begin devoting time to drawing and painting. Sister Elaine DesRosiers introduced me to DIA and encouraged me to become a member and attend the Gathering at the Pallottine Renewal Center. There I was suddenly in the midst of artists, musicians, and other gifted Dominicans who had become a family within a family, sharing their God-given talents and loving it. . . . Having lived for years simply on the periphery of the world of Art, I am now steeped in creating beauty through the mediums of watercolor and acrylics . . . and I know that I, now a member of the DIA family, have ahead of me a future of color and new friendships."



Joel Gubler



Vicki Perfect: Art and Artist Evolve

Vicki Perfect's Artist's Statement explains:
 "Carved from New Mexico alabaster, mounted on Ohio granite and elevated on a Salem limestone slab, the stone carving depicts the unfolding of being and becoming, the essence of my emerging life and a catalyst for my eventual disappearance. The passion of inner strength

and the felt knowing of inner struggle stand in relationship to one another creating a unique truth that is the foundation of my "personhood" and more importantly the essence of my "spirit presence" today.

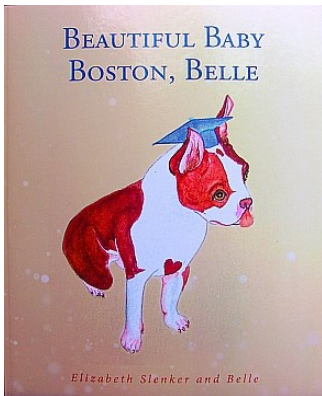
It has been an ongoing pilgrimage. Each new threshold has been poised to engage new practices, challenge skills and develop strengths to move beyond being the self absorbed me, the compensating borderless me and the independent, less than humble me; always intending to unfold the next threshold of becoming.

The *Ever Evolving "I"* attends to the lack of symmetry and the tug of war I daily encounter with being and becoming. I elected to befriend both deficits. I chose a chocolate brown alabaster devoid of hidden fault lines yet riddled with fissures that demand attention without destruction and add to the creative energy necessary to move back and forth between the two life forces. The oversized eye represents an existing preoccupation with "seriousness" that often tempers joy in the moment.



This art experience has given me a greater appreciation and compassion for the struggle of being and becoming unique to each of us. The truth of who "I am" is non-binding, subject to the sediments of spiritual practices I employ, fermented in the DNA of environments in which I travel and

resurrected through relational experiences and memory always with the God given intention to create and unfold the **Ever Evolving "I"**.



Beautiful Baby Boston, Belle

By Elizabeth Slenker and Belle 71 pp Christian Faith \$18.95

There's no other way to say it: Since retirement, Elizabeth Slenker is 'going to the dogs'—in style! Her book's subtitle, "The Story of a Boston Terrier's First Year," announces the book's closely-curated subject matter and models the author's gift for clarity and precision. Having raised six Boston Terriers, Elizabeth has a fund of daily observation on which to "draw." She uses this experience not only to chronicle a new puppy's entertaining antics, visually and verbally, but also to display the wit of an experienced owner who can anticipate most of the terrier's strategies for getting what she wants.

On the opening page, the newborn Belle makes clear that she is a puppy-of-color: "My two sisters and one brother . . . were red, but I was brown, and my black and white brother was different from all of us." Such specificity suggests that this children's book will really be a political satire (a la *Animal Farm*). But Elizabeth refuses to demote her four-footed protagonist to the role of a faceless allegory. Her talent for pictorial drama sustains sufficient suspense for the question: "Who will triumph in the daily contest for control which we call early childhood education?"

Elizabeth's bold illustrations capture every mood, gesture, posture, and contortion in this dog's repertoire with almost documentary realism. Anyone who has ever lived through house-training a puppy will relive the exasperating experience. At the same time, the first person voice of the pup narrator transforms the tale into the more appealing genre of fantasy.

Recommendations: For the person who has everything—including a dog or a grandchild—**Beautiful Baby Boston, Belle** makes an ideal gift. Adults contemplating retirement also can draw inspiration from Elizabeth Slenker's personal story. Training therapy dogs, visiting hospitals, and teaching children to read to dogs at the library will enrich any retired volunteer as well as those she serves.

“Energy Circle”: A Communal Reflection on the Keynote

A day after Margaret Ormond’s presentation, Sheila Flynn facilitated a communal reflection “to share the things that caught our heart’s attention.” Her appreciative recap of Margaret’s themes underscored them, providing in itself rich material for a life-long artists’ retreat. Then she invited the artists into the Energy Circle, an exercise designed to tap into the energy Margaret’s talk had released. Pieces of colored card shaped to fit a large circular tablecloth were distributed, a wide variety of materials was made available and each artist was encouraged to create a unique work of art. Eventually all these pieces were united to form a striking mosaic. The Energy Circle culminated in a DIA production of a symbolic artifact.



Thereby Hangs a Tale

Ann Eigenbauer, a longtime active DIA member and energetic promoter of other sisters’ art, recently discovered hidden treasure in the baggage of Sister Carolyn Bellas who arrived at Sparkill after many years in St. Louis. As Ann assisted the new arrival in her unpacking, she drew from a trunk twenty quilts, each more beautiful than the other. Next, in two small albums in the trunk she found photos of at least twenty five pictures of more quilts. Immediately Ann exclaimed: “No one in New York has ever seen these! In my mind I began to picture where each one could hang.” When I asked her permission to display her work, her eyes lit up and she told me that she had always wished to see her quilts hanging. She is still ambulatory on her walker, so when I began working, I had someone bring her down, not to watch, but to supervise my choices. ‘Ann, keep it simple,’ she kept advising when I went a little overboard. In the end, everyone who came to see Sister Carolyn’s ‘retrospective’ was amazed and many wrote comments in the book I put out for that purpose. “About nine quilts now adorn a meeting room; the rest can be seen in the albums on request. Later Ann was told that Carolyn did quilting as a form of prayer.



DIA's HIDDEN ASSETS

DIA contact lists include some dues-paying members who challenge name –recognition. However, they contribute invisible vitality to our mission though never enjoying a Gathering. From time to time, **OPalette** will try to show our appreciation. One such member, **Ruthann Williams**, whose degenerative disk disease precludes travel, has a personal narrative that demonstrates how the arts once saved her life, introduced her to the Dominican family, and enhanced a series of ministries literally “all over the map” and all over the arts.

Born in Connecticut, she grew up in San Diego, Omaha, Tucson, and Memphis. Although she once sold her paintings, pastels, and photography at local outdoor art shows, Ruthann identifies herself chiefly as a writer. “I’ve always been a writer. I had my first poem published when I was nine years old,” she remembers. “The poem just ‘happened’ and I wrote it down. It was printed in the Girl Scout magazine. *The American Girl*.” Throughout her adult life, Ruthann seems to have had a talent for imagining/ discerning divine purpose in disconnected “happenings” –good and bad— a habit which sustains a relentless self-confidence.

Until her twenty-fifth year, Ruthann had no need to “earn a living.” But when marriage turned out to be a “bad happening” despite a seven-years struggle to make it work, she suddenly had to find a job. Having followed the geography dictated by her husband’s work, she was in New Jersey.

After she suddenly found work at an art gallery, “happenings” gradually morphed into to blessings. “Right at that time, the elderly man who owned *NEW JERSEY MUSIC AND ARTS MAGAZINE* was looking for someone to buy it. The gallery owner said: ‘I’d love to buy the business, but I wouldn’t know what to do with a magazine.’ Having edited my high school newspaper, I immediately volunteered. Soon after that, someone “happened” into the office who wanted to place an ad but didn’t know how. So I designed his ad and he told friends and before I knew it, I was an ad agency. Then through that job, I met an advertising executive with connections at Caldwell College. When their art department suddenly needed an instructor for a course in advertising and public relations, he recommended me.”

After seven years in the college community, having secured the requisite annulment of her previous vows, she joined the congregation. In ministry she continued to travel to retreat centers in Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Connecticut, and Mississippi, and her published pastoral writings have been translated into Chinese, Spanish, French, and Portuguese.

So that’s how art brought good “happenings” to Ruthann Williams. Health, regrettably, was not one of them. Before settling into Saint Catherine’s Health Care Center, she surrendered most of her art supplies to the Activities Director.

A Place of Their Own

The Dominican Sisters of Mission San Jose are happy to announce the opening of a Studio for our Sister Artists! In 1948 a building was constructed on the Motherhouse property for the production and bottling of our Olive Oil. Since the mid-60's it has not been used for that purpose. With three artists currently at the Motherhouse, a refurbishing of the first floor



of the Oil House into studio space has been most welcomed by **Sisters Brigid Bray, Margarita Sondofer**, and Rebecca Shinas. When the door is open or the lights are on do visit the artists continuing the Dominican Tradition of Preaching through the Arts!



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DIA Artists Enhance Retreat Experience

In recent years, as contemporary theology increasingly stresses sources of revelation in addition to The Word, artists, poets, and musicians have been providing and/or enjoying many creative retreat experiences. Several DIA artists suggest the variety of these alternatives to traditional retreat formats.



Mary Anna Euring explains how one such retreat evolved from her art work: "As a member of the Asian Art Association, I have been painting with a group of women drawn to the contemplative nature of Asian Brush Painting. We come from all walks of life and various countries, follow different religions and are deeply spiritual. Using only the simple tools of rice paper, ink and brush, we strive to capture the essence, *CHI*, or life of the subject in the painting. . . . We paint in silence and allow the brush to lead us spontaneously in new and surprising ways. As in contemplation, we desire to be the person we were meant to be, seeking an open, pure mind and realizing that our spirit, character and personality come through in our paintings. . . . The retreat that I facilitated. . . based on the writings of the Sufi poet Rumi brought us together to paint in a contemplative setting. We meditated on his writings and shared what they meant to us personally. Filled with the spirit, we then went to the studio and silently painted. . . . The reality of us Christian, Muslim and Jewish artists enjoying each others' company and doing what we love to do was, for me, an experience of 'communion found in diversity' and epitomized the words of Dostoyevsky that we are so much in need of today: 'The world will be saved by Beauty.'"



Mary Ellen Robertson, Grand Rapids OPA, serves as spiritual director for Anywoman Retreat. Based on the book, *The Spiritual Exercises Reclaimed: Uncovering Liberating Possibilities for Women*, (Katherine Dyckman, et.al.) this retreat presents its feminist perspective on the Ignatian exercises through music, dramatic reading, and prayer.



For over twenty years, Dominicans and their associates have been drawn to retreat at the birthplace of the Order in southern France. This year, DIA **Mary**

Pat Reid was among the group of twenty-eight sisters, scholars, historians, archivists, and various formal and informal lay associates who shared a daily schedule of prayer, meditation, and history as they traveled to spiritually significant medieval sites. Mary Pat's enthusiastic account emphasizes how the program differs from both tourism and a typical retreat experience: "You get the flavor of



St. Dominic's time because you are actually living in a building from that age. Visiting the sites proves more than spiritual; it also demands a certain strength. I'd have to say, it's a strenuous retreat. Walking on cobblestones and huffing and puffing up and down the path to Prouille, you can almost feel the physical difficulty of the first friars as they walked miles through the Pyrenees." The group interacted with two communities of French sisters: the nuns in the cloister at Prouille with whom they prayed and the active Holy Family sisters in whose convent they stayed and who provided the exceptionally delicious meals. Staying in their medieval house was for Mary Pat also the week's most interesting artistic experience. "Out on the balcony at night, just looking up at the stars was wonderful for people who live near cities and can rarely see the stars." Each year, the number of lay people participating in the Fanjeaux program expands, and with it their enthusiasm for its immersion in Dominican spirituality.

BOARD NEWS: At the Gathering Joe Kilikevics announced his resignation from the board. Mary Pat Reid was nominated and elected to replace him.