



RESTORING CONNECTIONS

transforming the world one relationship at a time

formerly the Center for Spirituality at Work



Harvest Time - An important message from the director

Autumn is so special. During harvest time we gather up and appreciate the very best of the fall crops: apples, pears, cranberries, pumpkin, squash and sweet potatoes. We enjoy the full color of our trees and cooler days. So much to be grateful for! And yet, if we look out at our gardens in November, they are fading and, in some ways, even forlorn. The trees have surrendered nearly all their leaves and the hours of daylight are shortened. There will be a dormant period before full blossoming again in the spring.

Autumn harvest time is a great metaphor for all we want to share with you in this newsletter. I hope that you will enjoy as I am, the wonderful blessings of all we have accomplished together. At the same time, I know you will grieve along with me some of the dying and letting go.

We have grown together and served so many people during this calendar year, even despite the pandemic! Our Soul Care Mentoring program for women in prison and during re-entry has served over a hundred women and continues to respond to the needs.

You also generously provided 33 survival backpacks to women in re-entry from prison, surrounded three unsheltered women with material and emotional support that led to stable housing and furnished two apartments with beautiful second-hand furniture, handmade quilts and kitchenware.

Our Elder Wisdom Committee has picked up the challenge of being a healing influence serving nearly two hundred individuals while doing collaborative work on community mental health issues, providing tools for overcoming division in our society and helping us to mourn the loss of loved ones while we also remember all they have taught us.

Our fifteen-month Formation Program continues to prepare individuals to provide Soul Care with special emphasis on responding to the soul care needs of individuals who are unsheltered, people who are incarcerated or in re-entry, homebound elderly people, those who are indigent and terminally ill, youth without families or permanent homes and migrant people and refugees. Together, we started a new cohort in June and graduated a cohort in August who began their training more than a year earlier. Volunteer faculty and student interns contributed five hundred and thirty service hours!

At the same time, the pandemic has brought us loss, faced us with financial challenges and fostered a discernment process about the commitments we can realistically make. Amanda Lopez resigned as executive director in April to respond to the need for her home presence with children involved in so much distance learning. Jasmine left us in August as Making Choices has been on hiatus since March and Maureen, who had stepped in as executive director, resigned in September. On October 2nd, the Board reappointed me as executive director. We have decided not to renew our lease in the office building as we have discovered our various teams and staff members can work effectively while officing virtually.

The Board of Directors took a realistic look at Making Choices which has done so much good over the years (mentoring 750 women) but has never been financially sustainable. With the prison locked down due to the pandemic, finding funding for the program became impossible. As a result, the board decided to close the Making Choice program. Three other programs directly connected to Making Choices have also been closed—the backpack program, the speaker's bureau and the advocacy work at the state capitol.

These decisions were not made lightly and actually were less decisions than a financial reality. We will be holding a special gathering of everyone connected with Making Choices (probably online) in January. We want to celebrate the amazing contributions of each person.

Letting go is always hard. When we started Making Choices in 1999, there were virtually no programs being offered for the women in Denver Women's Correctional Facility. Now, not only are there a wealth of programs, but there are other organizations offering strong programs focused on decision-making and life skills. Increasingly we were in competition with these other programs. In the midst of our sadness, we draw strength from the Vincentian ethos that has always guided us. Our responsibility is always to serve those needs which are unaddressed and to affirm others who are doing good work.

And so, in upcoming issues we will keep you informed about other venues for providing backpacks for women in re-entry. There are many. We are a member organization of Together Colorado, a non-partisan advocacy network of 220 organizations and we will be able to keep you informed of legislative matters and ways to still be involved in advocacy at the capitol through Together Colorado.

Our mission, *to unite diverse people for spiritual transformation and social justice*, remains. We hope that you will continue to feel a part of this important work and we hope that you will continue your financial support, especially as we go through this transition. Each one of you has helped this organization to grow and to adapt to changing circumstances over the past 24 years. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or to discuss additional ways in which you might be involved. We have some exciting opportunities coming up in the next few months and I hope you will read on.

In thanks-giving for you,
Vie Thorgren



Statement from the Board

The board of directors has faced difficult decisions since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is with a heavy heart that your board announces the necessity of terminating our Making Choices program which has been suspended since March. Due to Department of Corrections protocols, it was not possible to set up virtual mentoring. In addition to this decision, made at the October 2, 2020 board meeting due to financial restrictions, the members regrettably voted to end the popular backpack program, speakers' bureau, and the advocacy initiative. At that meeting, Vie Thorgren, our founder, was named Executive Director.

Restoring Connections will continue to focus on the Spiritual Direction Formation Program, Soul Care inside and outside DWCF, and Elder Wisdom. We realize it is sad to eliminate programs that have meant so much to our mentors, teachers, volunteers, donors, and especially the justice-involved women with whom we have worked. Nevertheless, we confidently hope that our friends and donors will continue to support the ongoing programs of Restoring Connections.

Martha Karnopp, Chair
Corky Thompson, Secretary
Christine Maher, Treasurer
Janet Williams, Board Member
Susanne Pilla, Board Member
Kay Taylor, Board Member

Formation Program for Soul Care Accepting Applications

The Formation Program for Soul Care is now accepting applications for the next cohort to begin in June 2021. Over the past 30 years we have trained more than 600 individuals on 6 continents. The Formation Program is committed to ensuring that people in poverty and all those who are marginalized in other ways have access to soul care. Along with special skills for cultural competency, there is a strong emphasis on trauma care as well as ability to work with addiction and mental health issues and specific training in secondary trauma.

Program graduates are utilizing their skills providing soul care for people who are unsheltered or in transition from homelessness, former victims of human trafficking, justice involved women, terminally ill indigent people, refugees and migrants, abuse survivors and wounded veterans.

The program provides continuing education units. A cohort requires a minimum of 12 participants to be viable. For further information contact Vie Thorgren,

vie@restoringconnections.org or check our website www.restoringconnections.org

Finding God in our Present Darkness - an online morning of reflection offered by Elder Wisdom



When: Saturday, December 5; 10:00-11:30 a.m.

Registration: Required by Thursday, December 3

Cost: Free-will offering

Presenter: Vie Thorgren

How to Register: [Fill out Zoom's registration form by clicking here](#). After completing this online form, you will receive an email with the Zoom meeting link.

You can [make a free-will offering online by clicking here](#) or mailing your donation to Restoring Connections at P.O Box 102168 - Denver, CO 80250-2168.

We're entering into the months when the days seem shorter and we wake up to darkness and meet the dark returning in late afternoon. Additionally, this is a time when the divisions in our country, the economic challenges, the racism, the losses, the isolation, and the unknowns all feel especially overwhelming. We don't like to be in the dark. We long for the light. However, darkness has always been the place of spiritual transformation. The entire universe sprang forth from the dark. Each one of us was formed in the dark of our mother's womb. How often the dark times in our lives give birth to new insights, new directions, new and more abundant life.

So what does the spiritual tradition have to teach us about how to be in the dark? What can we learn from the spiritual masters about waiting in the dark? And what might the present darkness teach us about ourselves, about reality, and about transforming love?

Please join for a time of reflection that will include a presentation and time to share in breakout groups.

Soul Care Mentoring for Justice Involved Women

Restoring Connections has been offering Soul Care for women in prison and during re-entry since 2001. Soul Care focuses on the deeper reasons why a woman ended up in the criminal justice system. It helps the women address the trauma they have experienced and assume responsibility for the harm they have caused. Reflecting on their experience, discovering their own response to the divine, learning how to forgive, how to seek forgiveness and how to find meaning in their present circumstances are all part of the process. The Soul Care Mentors make an ongoing commitment to women they serve in which the mentor typically learns and grows as much as the woman she companions.

Mary, one of our Soul Care Mentors would like you to know a bit of her experience:

I began serving residents in county jails and prisons 15 years ago. I entered this ministry to meet and understand those who are often forgotten and marginalized. I have benefited from this work as I was able to learn to see the whole person made in the image of God. My capacity for criticism and judgement has been replaced by an attitude of love.

June has served 28 years of a 45-year sentence. She suffers from mental illness, including self-harm. She is often heavily medicated if I meet with her in the evening. June has learned about her illness and is able to predict when she needs extra help. She requested a transfer to the Mental Health Unit at the prison, as she felt her illness becoming worse. She was able to get the help she needed in the unit, and was doing much better when she returned to general population a few months later.

My soul care experience with June has brought me face to face with mental illness. It helped me grow in my understanding of the humanity of mental illness, and expand my compassion, not only for June but for all who suffer from mental illness. I was able to deepen my experience by visiting June in the mental health section of the facility and learn how residents are processed and cared for during their stay.

Your generosity to Restoring Connections has enabled me and others like me to gain knowledge of spiritual direction (soul care) as it impacts the incarcerated. On behalf of those we companion, I want to thank everyone who has supported this important program.

Remember Restoring Connections on Colorado Gives Day December 8, 2020

This year, your contribution is more important than ever! We hope you will ensure the continuation of our mentoring services to the most abandoned and to the formation and training of volunteers for service.

Donating online through Colorado Gives on December 8 gives us access to an additional incentive fund which makes your donation go even further. We recommended you schedule your donation in advance to be processed on December 8.



[Click here to donate through Colorado Gives](#)

Outstanding Volunteers

Restoring Connections is a community of volunteers who share their talents in many ways. This November we would like to acknowledge the efforts of:



Karen Wilson, a Soul Care Re-entry Mentor providing exceptional weekly care for a woman released during the past couple months. Karen is confronted with the special challenges of mentoring a woman who is unsheltered. She brings exceptional creativity, patience, networking skills and a deep level of presence to her mentee.



Chris Aragon, a member of the Elder Wisdom Committee is always willing to be of service. His service orientation has aided the development of Elder Wisdom. His compassion and ready response to exigency has enabled us to assist with the shelter needs of justice involved women.

We extend our appreciation to Karen and Chris who model for all of us the Vincentian commitment to Charity and Justice.