

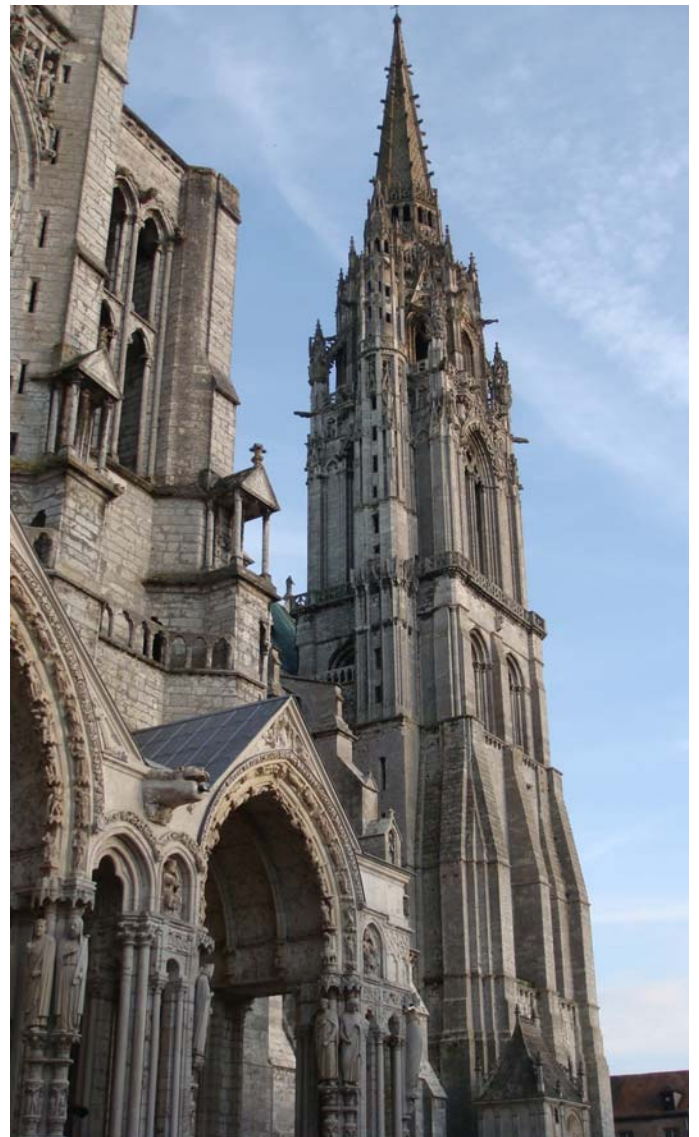


Learning About Sacred Geometry

WPC member Maryann Rinsch spent time in Chartres this summer learning about the structure of the universe. Here is her story.

I went to Chartres, France, this summer to attend a Wisdom University seminar on Sacred Geometry, an area that has fascinated me for some time. This New Chartres School is a gathering point for a contemporary international Wisdom community, the members of which are taking a modern version of the most comprehensive learning system known to civilization – the seven Liberal Arts. It was the sixth in a series of seven yearly programs designed to honor, and in some sense paraphrase, the famous Wisdom School at Chartres, started in 1206 AD by Bishop Fulbert. In 2007 this modern Wisdom School became a branch of a graduate program in philosophy and divinity by a Northern California school. Fortunately, the classes were in English!

The week was devoted primarily to Sacred Geometry, with emphasis on how it was expressed in the construction of the Chartres Cathedral. We also had a good dose of history. We learned that the Druids established this as a sacred healing site thousands of years before the time of Christ. A sacred healing spring was venerated on this exact site, which was thought to be a convergence of earth energies. The spring still exists today as a well in the underground crypt. The church, built between 1193 and 1250 AD, took only 57 years to complete – an amazingly short period of time for such a monumental task. The master builder had only compasses and string and a “floor” of damp plaster to design the proportions and dimensions of this new style church. It was constructed slightly off the “square” to facilitate the resonance of sound and music flowing upward through the cathedral. People could stand for hours singing and listening to the services and not tire.



The Knights Templar were said to have brought Sufi master architects from Jerusalem to Chartres to teach them how to build Gothic arches. These were traditionally used in Islamic architecture, as the pointed arch was stronger than the curved one.

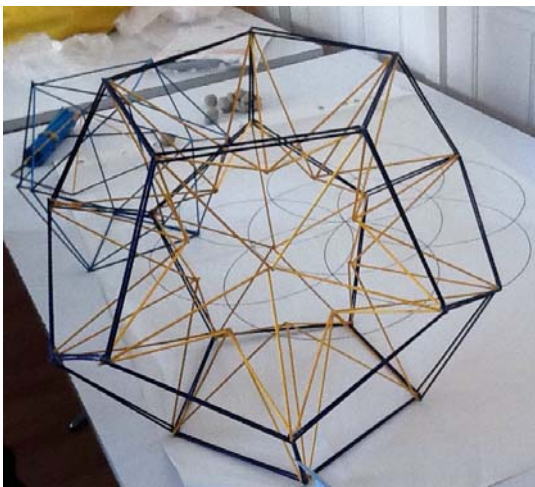


My Faith Journey

The Sacred Geometry lectures and construction classes were fascinating. We worked with Platonic solids, drawing and making toothpick forms and even made a huge tetrahedron that we could all stand in. We learned that Sacred Geometry is the form beneath our being that points to a divine order imbedded in all manifestations from the invisible atom, the strands of our DNA - a chambered nautilus - to the galaxy within which we spiral. All life forms as we know them emerge out of timeless geometric codes. Absorbing this information into my heart as well as my mind gave me a strong assurance of a Wisdom that created the universe with such precision that it is awesome and that this Wisdom also guides the unfolding of events, including my life. It was apparently what I needed to hear, as it grounded my assurance that in spite of all the current “news” to the contrary, all will be well.

A big part of the enjoyment was learning and sharing together a new depth of experience as the week progressed. We had several deep discussions over lunches with the faculty that I really enjoyed. I felt closer to the faculty and realized more fully their dedication to their students.

Several spiritual traditions had been established in the previous years, including my favorite, walking the famous labyrinth, by candlelight. We had the Cathedral to ourselves at sunset for two hours to meditate and walk the “Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela,” with the background of tenor voices singing Gregorian chant. I came away with a new commitment to try to represent the Loving Heart of Christ, in service to God’s people – which is all of us.



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Standing for the Doxology today I was captured by the memory of hearing it for the first time. I was 16, standing behind a tall chair in a Gothic dining hall, sun streaming through leaded glass windows. Before we sat down to Sunday lunch at the Emma Willard School, we thanked God in song. I think I became a Protestant in that moment, thrilled by the soaring music, the power of the words and the community of voices.

A Roman Catholic since birth, I was totally unfamiliar with all other Christian religions. I was struck, I think, in that moment with the experience of participatory worship — being a part of a traditional worship, as opposed to an observer. In those days, the distance between a Catholic congregation and the altar was vast.

That feeling of being in the center of worship rather than on the outskirts continued through singing in the chapel choir in boarding school, reading the Bible for the very first time at Emma and more at Wellesley. Young Catholics don’t read the Bible. They have it interpreted for them.

My commitment to Catholicism waned and ultimately died, after I got married for the first time, after college, in the Catholic church at home in deference to my beloved father.

Once I turned my back on Catholicism, I felt as many lapsed Catholics do, that there was simply no place left to go after casting oneself out of the bosom of “The One True Church.” Yet, the family disease of alcoholism took up space in that spiritual void.

I wrestled with that demon for 15 years. It poisoned my first marriage and nearly destroyed my life. Through the grace of God I found Alcoholics Anonymous 41 years ago and quickly realized that, although I had abandoned God, He had never abandoned me.

Years later, newly sober in AA, I faced the prospect of a second wedding. For many reasons, not the least of them my drinking, my first marriage had been a disaster. So I approached the idea of marriage with great trepidation. A church ceremony was out of the question—the memory of the first extravaganza was depressing. Equally unappealing was a judge’s chamber. My late father had been a Supreme Court Judge in New York State, and I knew how appalled he would be by my divorce and remarriage.

Friends suggested the perfect setting—the large rock in the Pacific opposite their beach house.

There was no way I could associate that location with any wedding—(mine or others!)

But who would consent to marry us on a rock in the Pacific? A Jewish friend suggested a Presbyterian minister he knew. So, on a Friday morning in July, at low tide, I found myself reciting vows I had written to my husband, Jim, facing the Rev. Charles Doak, Associate Pastor of WPC, in rolled-up white ducks, a silver cross hanging on his black turtle-neck. (This was the 1970s, after all.)

After our daughter, Justine, was born, Jim, who had served as an acolyte in the Episcopal Church through his boyhood and found a personal God in the clouds flying fighters in World War II, insisted that she be baptized. Chuck Doak to the rescue again, although he had a 10-year-old boy to baptize as well—Michael, born in my heathen days, not having had the privilege when he was a baby.

That began our religious adventure as a family. My one recollection of Protestants when I was growing up a Catholic was that Protestant parents dropped their kids off at Sunday school, then went to play golf. I disapproved, so that when the kids went to Sunday school, Jim and I began going to WPC, and fell in love with it. All the significant moments in our life together have been sanctified by this wonderful church, including our beautiful farewell to Jim in 2009.

My mother had been a Presbyterian before she converted to Catholicism to marry my father. So I feel my becoming a Presbyterian is like “throwing one back.”

*--Keven Bellows
Sunday, July 17, 2011*



Mission in Partnership

Last summer I was one of twelve delegates from the Presbytery of the Pacific who journeyed to Nicaragua to meet with our partners in the small village of Nueva Vida, about an hour and a half outside of Leon.

Life in the village is simple. The roads are dirt; chickens, dogs, and pigs roam freely. There is electricity until it rains, and it rained all but a couple of days; water comes from a hand pumped well. Children are happy and smiling; the community supports and embraces one another. Our first night Rosario, my host mom, welcomed me saying that I was now a part of their family, that I should make myself comfortable and let her know if there

was anything I needed. Her warmth opened the door to what I hope will be a lifelong relationship with her and her husband and their five beautiful children.

In Nicaragua we worked on an office space for the cooperative, led a vacation Bible school for about one hundred kids, and began planning a youth encounter for the summer of 2012. A group of us started investigating possible causes of chronic kidney disease and renal failure that occurs among many adults and children in the village.



This trip was different from many mission trips in that the emphasis was mission in partnership. For centuries the Church has been sending missionaries throughout the world to share the gospel. This sharing has taken place through preaching, teaching, building homes, hospitals and schools and so many other wonderful projects. But partnership has been missing, and that has kept the maximum potential from being reached. So often the approach to these trips has been to go to a location, see a need, create a solution, implement it and then leave. On the surface this doesn't seem so problematic. But upon a closer look, we can see that often these good works have created more problems than they've solved. The greatest cause of these problems has been the overall lack of partnership.

Partnership happens when two groups come together to listen carefully and fully to one another and to address needs, desires and wishes while at the same time keeping God at the very center of the relationship. Through this coming together, we first build a relationship, *then* work with one another to discover their needs and ours. Letting our actions arise from a relationship allows space for empowerment, development and equality. Rather than entering into a place determined to do one thing or another, as partners, we first listen to the needs at hand and then agree upon the specific action to take. Instead of assuming that we know what is best for “them,” we listen respectfully. We set aside our desires, and we commit to a relationship of great depth, great understanding, and great faith.

As the partnership idea continues to develop, I am excited to see Westwood Presbyterian Church adopting this understanding and implementing this model in the way we do mission. Partnership is a slow and arduous process. It is demanding, and it requires much. It demands that we understand the community first, that we spend time getting to know one another not just through work, but through presence, through sharing of life experiences, through sharing of faith.

If we reflect a moment on the actions of Christ Himself, we will see that often before addressing a community or correcting habits, He took time to get to know the community, to understand who they were and why they did what they did. While doing this, He took time to walk the streets of villages meeting people along the way. He sat down at table to share a meal in an effort to develop relationships and thus partner with the community. In thinking about mission these words are helpful to hold onto, *"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."*

--Travis Overbeck



Dear WPC Family

In my mind I scan the 365 boxes of the now finished 2011 calendar. It has been an incredible year for me and for our church. While there have certainly been highs and lows, God's faithfulness has been overwhelming. The words of Ted Loder speak to me both about what has been, as well as what is yet to be.

God of history and of my heart, so much has happened to me during these whirlwind days:

I've known death and birth;

I've been brave and scared;

I've hurt, I've helped;

I've been honest, I've lied;

I've destroyed, I've created;

I've been with people, I've been lonely;

I've been loyal, I've betrayed;

I've decided, I've waffled;

I've laughed and I've cried.

You know my frail heart and my frayed history – and now another day begins. Help me to believe in beginnings... so that I may not just grow old, but grow new each day of this wild, amazing life you call me to live with the passion of Jesus Christ.

As we step into 2012, may we receive each day as a gift from God and live each one with the passion of Jesus Christ. *New Year's blessings...Lynn*



Where Do We Go

With the New Year approaching, some of our elders shared their New Year's resolutions for themselves and for our church.

In 2012, I want to. . .

Continue to work as a member of the Vision and Planning Committee to create an exciting and vital plan that will guide WPC in our collective work as Christians and in our spiritual lives.

Spend more time in prayer and with my favorite people --the WPC congregation. *--Betty Glick*

Develop a comprehensive database of the WPC community.

Expand and deepen the intellectual and spiritual growth of WPC Adult Ministries programs for an increasing WPC congregation, and extend our offerings to the larger community through sophisticated public relations and marketing solutions.

Find someone else (after 20+years) to take over the Christmas decorations. *--Caryl Carothers*

Personal: To consider what it means to worship God on Sunday mornings and the other 6 ½ days of the week.

For the Church: To be tolerant of others --- everyone adjusts to change differently. *-- Martha Kadue*

In 2012 I want to try harder to worry less, comforted by the fact that God has a plan and certainly knows better than I do how life should unfold. I commit to spending a few minutes each morning asking God to direct my day, and then a few minutes each evening to reflect on the day.

My resolution for WPC in 2012 is that the church continue to grow, and in particular that we continue to add to the diversity of our congregation. My hope is that we expand programs that make WPC unique, like consistently excellent music and programs that combine intellectual and spiritual interests, and work to do an even better job of letting the community of potential newcomers know about these programs.

-- Nicholas Hays

Winston Churchill said: *It is no use saying, 'We are doing our best.' You have got to succeed in doing what is necessary.* It is difficult and unpopular doing what is necessary, to be firm when you would rather be congenial and liked. I would like to put my faith in God to help me do those things that are hard to do but essential. *--David Ho*