Columns
Spirituality



I am often surprised at how God's spirit works in my life. Movements are expressions from deep prayer and guidance of the Holy Spirit. (Courtesy of Jean Marie Fernandez)



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I began dancing about 25 years ago. This inspiration came to me at a time when I was mourning the sudden death of my mother. It was a period of intense loss.

On hearing the sad news, I immediately flew to Singapore to be with my family navigating through the funeral services and celebrating the life of my mother.

After a month at home, I returned to San Francisco thinking that all was well and that I needed to go on with life. I realized that my journey of grief had accelerated. I was deeply impacted by death, and I found myself spiraling back to overwhelming emotions. My grief turned into deep sorrow, isolation and confusion.

One day alone outside of the convent, I saw the morning sun rising beyond the horizon. I watched the beauty of the sunrise and mystery of light unfolding before my eyes. Wow! Only God can make a sun rise.

I prayed through my tears and lifted my sorrows toward the sun — taking in the energy of light, love, and warmth. I kept watching the sunrise, seeing the sun's golden rays giving color to the clouds.

At this moment, I began to move — raising my hands and stretching open arms in embrace of the sky. I experienced an amazing grace in this "Aha" moment, a deep sense of interconnectedness, inhaling and exhaling the breath of life and not death. My burdens seemed lifted, and my body felt lighter. Nothing else mattered except that I was ONE with God, together with Mom and my beloved family.





Sacred movement is prayer. When I do not have the words to say, I simply dance as directed by my heart. (Courtesy of Jean Marie Fernandez)



Raising my hands and stretching open arms in embrace of the sky, I experience an amazing grace. (Courtesy of Jean Marie Fernandez)

I began getting up early and waiting for the sunrise to awaken the dawn of a new day.

After many weeks I felt consoled, at peace, and once again had found "my home." I was being healed through dance and wanted more of this experience. In the daily ritual, my prayer took me to a place where heaven and earth met. This was when I found purpose and meaning in liturgical dance.

Sacred movement is prayer. When I do not have the words to say, I simply dance as directed by my heart. Dance is a natural gift from God, a "calling," which I can't keep for myself — in responding, I spread the Gospel in storytelling gestures of sacred movement. This gift shared with others keeps me humble because "I must decrease, and God must increase."

Before I dance, I spend time in contemplation/meditation. Sitting still, I seek guidance from the Spirit, letting my rhythm and movement flow from it when I am fully alert in spirit, mind and body. God does more in me that I can ever imagine or accomplish; liturgical dance is not a performance but a prayer expressed from deep within my soul.

Inspired by our congregation's Inter-Continental Assembly experience (held in eight geographical regions around the world, in preparation for our 2021 chapter) and our chapter theme logo "Drawn by love, passionate for justice," for my dance I chose the song "Holy Mystery" by Monica Brown. I danced in solidarity with our suffering world, asking blessing and healing for our global community. The dance conveyed the multiple crises of the pandemic and the social and political unrest in our country and around the world. It was a pivotal moment of transformation.



Embracing lightness but grounded on earth, I make room in my being to gather the fragrance of the earth and to lift all to God. (Courtesy of Jean Marie Fernandez)

I do yoga and tai chi daily and meditate twice. These practices integrate and enhance more deeply the spirit of dance and promote a healthy and active lifestyle. Health and spirituality go together; holistic living integrates mind, body and soul.

The words of Scripture come alive in me when I am performing a worship dance. "I live and move and have my being in God" (Acts 17:28). I am totally free and move with love when I dance. This is what it means to praise God. Silence is the language of God; it is love without words.

Embracing lightness but grounded on earth, I make room in my being to gather the fragrance of the earth and to lift all to God. I become a symbol of breath prayer in motion. This sacred moment fills me with mystery and gives a direct line of communication with God.

It also provides a connection with the heartbeat of the universe that reflects God, becoming an unexplainable cosmic experience. My whole being has evolved into something new — creation spirituality.

I am often surprised at how God's spirit works in my life. Movements are expressions from deep prayer and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Dance brings me to a deeper place within my soul. New personal insights emerge, and I can create a more

humane world. My cultural ancestry, my Indian heritage, does contribute to my expressive form of liturgical dance.

When I can let go and simply "be," I become my best self. Dance allows me to be creative, imagine possibilities, and form friendships in new ways. I genuinely believe that dance reveals the soul and take refuge in the aspirations of St. Mary Euphrasia: "May every beat of my heart be a prayer."

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Exodus 15:20 describes how Miriam, the sister of Moses, took a tambourine and led the women of Israel into a dance, after witnessing the parting of the Red Sea.

Other Biblical records of dancing occurred after David slew the giant Goliath and the women sang "to one another in dance" (1 Samuel 29:5). King David also danced before the Lord as he brought the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:14). And in Psalm 149:3, "Let them praise God's name in the dance: let them sing praises unto God with the timbrel and harp."

My favorite image is the encounter of two women, the visitation of Mary and Elizabeth. Both women praise God with their whole being — don't you think they danced? "My whole being proclaims the goodness of the Lord" (Luke 1:46).

I am involved in three liturgical dance groups. Dancers of Universal Peace is an ecumenical group who meet virtually to share through dance the rich heritage of diversity, cultures, and language. The St. Agnes Church Dance team dances together four times a year according to the Catholic liturgical season (e.g. Pentecost, Holy Thursday, Christ the King, and the feast of the Epiphany). And since the pandemic began, with a Felician sister, I recently started a dance prayer group of 12 women — an inter-generational/inter-congregational group of women who meet weekly on Sunday mornings.

For me, sacred movement is a joy-filled, graceful prayer meditation. It becomes effortless and fluid when I am present in the moment. It brings me to stillness, to listen with the ear of my heart and to have a heightened sense of interconnectedness to all the cosmos. I am who I am through dance.



The St. Agnes Church Dance team dances together four times a year according to the Catholic liturgical season. (Courtesy of Jean Marie Fernandez)