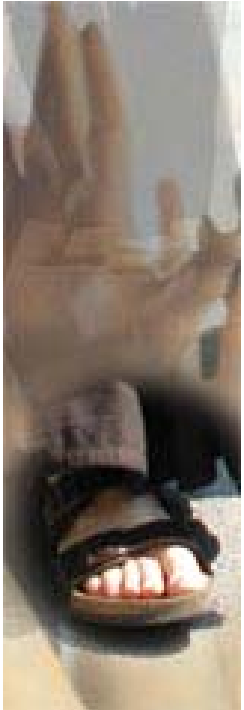


JPIC Reflections

This brochure is one of a series on various themes in justice, peace and the integrity of Creation. You may read them on our website: www.sbfranciscans.org.



You are invited to download them as well from this website and to use them as a way to quickly bring a Franciscan perspective to your discussion group, prayer group or social justice dialogue.

We only ask that you would credit the authors of these brochures as you use this material.

“Jean’s joi de vivre carries a prophetic edge for me. She crosses my path as a servant of God, challenging me to be open to the fullness of life available in each day.”

Gail Priestly

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What box have you defined for yourself?
What is it that keeps you from venturing outside your box?
When was the last time you ventured outside the ‘box’? What happened? Where was Christ for you at that time?

ACTION:

Call or write a friend or family member who has been a prophetic inspiration to you. Let them know how you have appreciated their living outside of the ‘box’.

PRAYER:

Loving God, of peace and justice, be with us as we work and pray towards changing the hearts of all who use violence as a way of showing our love and concern for our siblings, Water, Air, Plants and Animals, in the created world.

Justice, Peace & the
Integrity of Creation

LIVING OUTSIDE THE BOX

by Gail Priestly

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PROVINCE OF
SANTA BARBARA



LIVING OUTSIDE THE BOX by Gail Priestly

Jean is one of my favorite ladies. She dresses with a chic awareness of color, never mind the safety pins holding things together. She always wears make-up; her mouth a bright, wavy squiggle. And then there's the hat; sometimes a special hat, like the tall green striped one for St. Patrick's Day, or a beret decorated for the season's holiday; Santa pins, miniature pumpkins, Easter chicks. Jean is a living, breathing celebration.

Jean loves parties. In the Dining Room on Christmas Day she showed me her collection of pictures taken with Santa, one at a senior party, another at a party for people with HIV. "When I hear about a party," she comments, "I say, 'Let's go!'" "My friend," she shows me another party picture, "The one sitting there. She says, 'Now only take one cookie.' But I love cookies! I take all I can!" Jean has told me that her son lives in Pacifica, her granddaughter in Pleasanton. "They want me to move into a home, but I won't do it!"

Jean lives in a single room in a hotel. "A terrible place," she says, "drug dealers, thieves!" Her cart is her constant companion, filled with treasures she dares not leave in her room. Today there's a small, ornate, broken picture frame. "See what I found! Isn't it beautiful! It was just on the sidewalk."

Jean lives outside the box. No safe, respectable board and care home for her. She'll take the streets of the Tenderloin, thank you very much!, where celebrations mean more than a Safeway cake and a token visit from family. Freedom! Celebration! Wearing green nail polish on St. Patrick's Day and charming an elderly gentleman volunteer in the Dining Room into bringing tray after tray of corned beef and cabbage! Her world is not as safe as she would like, but her need for security and propriety is eclipsed by her need to be free to celebrate life. To celebrate life is life for her!

Jean lives outside the box. She walks some of San Francisco's meanest streets, and she knows that they are mean. She does not deny the danger. She speaks of those who would harm her with anger and disgust. The strength of her joy cancels out labels like "victim" or "needy". She revels in her freedom; and so she journeys with her treasures from one celebration to the next.

Francis also lived outside the box, reveling in a life that confounded the accepted categories of his day: cleric, monk, husband. This was not done out of disrespect or rebellion but through personal fidelity to an overwhelming experience of God which the established order could not contain.

Jean's joi de vivre carries a prophetic edge for me. She crosses my path as a servant of God, challenging me to be open to the fullness of life available in each day.

What narrowness of intent or propriety or fear or sheer busy-ness draws the box I function within smaller and smaller? I cannot will myself out of this box. My will is often what constructs this box; endless categories of purposefulness.

Looking to Francis, I am encouraged to pray! Looking to Jean, I am encouraged to play! And courage-it takes courage to live outside the box. It is a labor of the heart opening to God's holy patterning in the depth of my being and within the particular circumstances of each day. It is the courage to admit with Francis, "No one showed me what to do" [Testament, 14]. It is trusting in the ongoing revelation of God and turning anew to a pattern of living "rich unto God" (Lk. 12:21).

Francis and Jean, servants of God at the edge; God waiting, wanting to break into human experience as never before; help me to breathe beyond the box, to let heart be broken, to experience true joy.