



*Members of Omega West Dance Company and Carla De Sola (foreground), who is explaining gesture as a means of prayer at the evening of Taizé songs and old chants at Old St. Mary's Cathedral, San Francisco, CA. Father Thomas A. Kane and De Sola collaborated to publish the beauty of the evening as a film *Movement Meditations*. (GTU Archives)*

14. Teaching and the Sacred Dance Guild

CDS: To continue with teaching and the role of the Sacred Dance Guild: The Sacred Dance Guild is an interfaith organization that started around 1955 in New England, mainly with dancers of various Protestant backgrounds, who performed in churches in that area. [For a more extensive background, see their website at sacreddanceguild.org.] They invited me because I was Catholic and they wanted to understand more about dancing in a Catholic liturgy. I led them in many aspects of dancing in a Catholic church for that week of the annual Festival of Sacred Dance. I believe it was held [in] the Boston area. I began by creating exercises for them in the local Catholic church based on the beautiful stained glass windows they had. I was asked to teach for them (with other staff) for many years, in many differing locales, and consider myself a long-time member by now. The Sacred Dance Guild has become family.

The Sacred Dance Guild [Festival] has warm-up technique classes every day, dances including rituals, workshops on all aspects of dance, and leaders from differing cultures. They present a concert for the public at the end of the festival. It is such a wonderful organization, and one of their festivals took me to Canada—there is a significant Canadian contingent—and my colleague Sandra Rivera and I reconstructed dances from the [*Missa Gaia*/] *Earth Mass*, developed at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City (which I will mention in more detail) to music of the Paul Winter Consort. We were both flown in to teach aspects of the dances, and it felt wonderful to be passing on dances set to such beautiful and significant

music and themes. I have been to Toronto and other Canadian venues at least a couple of times in connection with the Sacred Dance Guild, as well as for other occasions. Of great importance to me personally was the year I created and performed a dance to honor my husband, Arthur, of whom you have heard so much, who died in 2008. Since the Sacred Dance Guild has a public concert at the end of the week, a liturgical dancer has the opportunity to perform on stage instead of mainly in church. It is exciting to have the benefits of a lighting person and a sound technician to add to the presentation of your dance. It was a deeply moving experience for me to create and perform this tribute to Arthur (who loved working with lights, by the way). It turned out to be a one-time experience with people whom I felt, as mentioned previously, were extended family. Though the Sacred Dance Guild is comprised of many different types of dancers with varying levels of technique and visions, it is a family with great appreciation for one another. One summer when the Sacred Dance Guild met in Berkeley, at the Pacific School of Religion, I arranged that they would have an excursion into San Francisco one night in the program. It happened that Omega West Dance Company (which I direct) was in residence at Old St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco, and I created, with some of Old St. Mary's musicians, a whole evening of Taizé songs and chants, with dance participation all the way through.

Taizé is a small village in France, an ecumenical community whose way of life centers around the music they create, [which is] known simply as Taizé. It was developed after World War II as a way for Protestants and Catholics to live and work together, with the music [and the] words, [which are] written in different languages. It is a very meditative experience, and I wanted the same effect for the dances based on this music. I choreographed movement sequences that could be repeated over and over again, and enter into your bones, so to speak, bypassing your head. We created many dances to their songs. In a normal Taizé service, people would learn only two or three dance prayers, but for the Sacred Dance Guild, we taught a great many, and the service flowed on and on. It was a beautiful experience to devise a service from beginning to end with movement based on these beautiful Taizé chants.

Another time, again for the Sacred Dance Guild, I devised, with the Omega West dancers, a labyrinth ritual, which we danced at night on [the] grounds of the Pacific School of Religion. I happened to have a labyrinth made out of parachute material. We flew it in, flying down the campus, flying in this huge labyrinth, and then placing stones all around the edges to hold it down. There was a choreographed dance ritual, and then everyone was invited to dance through the labyrinth to the center and out again—a beautiful, wonderful evening with young and old all participating.



At the Sacred Dance Guild Festival, 1998, there was a “Roast” of Carla De Sola. A letter from Toni’ Intravaia who edited the SDG Journal for many years, to De Sola said, “July 30, 1998. Dear Carla, first congratulations on being you! As you noted not only from the “Roast” (which should really be called as Toast) but from all the people you ever come in contact with, you are loved and looked up to in the dance world, and most especially in the Sacred Dance World!”(GTU Archives)