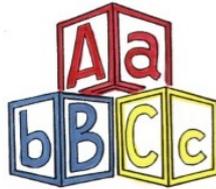


Back to Basics



The **A**BCs of
A **F**aithful Life

A **G**enerous Life

An **E**xpectant Life

A **P**rayerful Life

A **R**esurrection Life

PRAYER JOURNAL

2016 – 2017

St. Monica's Episcopal Church
Annual Giving Program

Welcome!

This is our third annual giving Prayer Journal. I believe that when we are considering our financial contributions and our gifts of time and energy to the mission of St. Monica's, the MOST important thing we can do is pray. This Prayer Journal is written entirely by fellow parishioners of St. Monica's. I have been blessed just reading the reflections as they came in. I know I will be doubly blessed when I actually "pray" with them.

It is entirely appropriate, and a bit daunting, to be praying about our contributions to St. Monica's on the day we remember and celebrate St. Francis. Of course, he's one of our favorites – we love the blessing of our animals, and the stories about his relationships with all of God's creation. But that's only half the story of this beloved saint. When Francis heard God's call, he gave everything – even the clothing he was wearing – back to his father. The Bishop had to wrap him in his vestment to cover him up. Francis heard the gospel story of Jesus telling the rich young man to sell everything, give to the poor, and then follow Jesus. (*Matthew 19: 16-22*). That's what Francis did – literally.

Most of us are not called to give away everything, but we are called to do our part in the ministry and mission God has given us – to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ (*Book of Common Prayer, p.855*). And so at this time each year, we ask you to **prayerfully** and thoughtfully consider your contribution. This Prayer Journal is designed to help you as you pray and consider.



Some suggestions as you pray each day:

Sit comfortably, but so that you are alert. Light a candle to remind you of God's presence. Breathe deeply and slowly. Close your eyes and ask Jesus (or God, or the Spirit) to help you pray. Ask God to open your heart and mind. Then, when you feel centered, read the reflection and scripture for the day, breathe, ponder the questions, and pray.

Another way to use the Prayer Journal each day is together as a family. Perhaps before or after you eat dinner. Again, light a candle. Breathe. Read the reflections and scripture. Discuss the questions as a family. Pray.

You will notice that the Saturday and Sunday dates are on one page. You will do the prayer journal on the day you don't come to church (if you come on Sunday, do the reflection on Saturday). When you are in church, please be especially attentive to the readings and sermon, and reflect on God's message to YOU through them.

I hope you will enjoy the adventure of this prayer journal.

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sally".

A is for Abundance

In preparation for contributing to the Prayer Journal, I explored an abundance of thoughts about abundance. Each time I proofed a draft that I thought represented my best, I found that I was inundated with more thoughts of abundance and my piece was well short of my intent to express myself. Something was missing. This is the final draft in a series of literary approaches to prayerful thinking about abundance, thinking that led to discovery. In this final draft, I expand my experience with abundance beyond the original context of my prayer of acknowledgement of and appreciation for abundance received.

A Story: Abundance, of all kinds, flows two ways. It comes to me but I can also create it. Hallelujah! Praise and thanksgiving to God for blessing me with this important insight, not only to fulfill my writing commitment but also filling me with a joyful comprehension of abundance that comes from being deliberately mindful of the dynamics of the word. Abundance begets abundance.

This discovery took on brilliant clarity during a recent purge of my possessions, best defined as “stuff.” First, I found a big, strong bag with sturdy handles to fill with stuff that long ago outlived my needs. I was ruthless in my downsizing, choosing clothing long held as favorites. I packed up the selections, filled the trunk of my car and drove to St. Matthew’s House donation center. I felt good about the good stuff moving on from spaces over-crowded with my over-abundance of worldly goods. I was rejoicing in a refreshing freedom to seek “less is more” instead of submitting to the external pressures that conspire to convince us that acquiring more, better, bigger, newer, latest and greatest, et al should be a life goal, the measure of happiness.

What so fills me with gratitude is the intense mindfulness of being blessed by and thriving in abundance. Better yet, I can also create abundance beyond my own wealth. It’s all relative, isn’t it? Although 66 references to abundance in Scripture supported me in my effort here, these words of Peter Diamandis framed my thinking. “Creating abundance is not about creating a life of luxury for everybody on the planet; it’s about creating a life of possibility.” Something to think about?

For Reflection:

1. Think about abundance in your life. Has your awareness created abundance?
2. Does your abundance create possibilities for you that you haven’t explored?
3. Does your giving reflect your abundance?

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, for coming to us so that we will have life, and have it abundantly. Help us live into that abundance, putting aside scarcity and fear. Amen.

B is for Blessings

Each morning I begin my daily prayers with a trip to the Chapel of whatever hospital I am working at that day. I consider those Chapels quiet, sacred places that allow me to reflect and be grateful for all that I have and I begin my prayer the same way every day: "This is the day the Lord hath made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it."

I thank God for all the blessings that have been shared with me and then of course I ask for more of those blessings! Because of this, a sign I recently saw posted outside a Church spoke loudly to me: "Don't let what you want rob you of what you have!"

We are taught that all good things come from God and that God blesses us in so many ways.

As I began some research to write for our Prayer Journal, I discovered that the word Blessings is mentioned over 7,000 times in the Bible. An amazing number to show just how important that word is and how that word has been a significant part of my life at St. Monica's.

What a blessing it was to find St. Monica's in the first place. Garry and I had just moved to Bonita Springs and I was looking for an Episcopal Church. I knew of only one in the area and I also knew that was not the Church for us. My next step was to look in the yellow pages of all places and there it was; St. Monica's who had a woman Priest. A true blessing since we had come from our Church in Atlanta with women Priests. They were a significant part of my spiritual life.

Over the years, blessings have flowed through St. Monica's to us. Some of our blessings have been in the form of prayers and miracles. Other blessings have come to me by allowing me to give my time to some of the ministries St. Monica's offers. How blessed I am to be a part of our Parish Nurse Team, our Stephen Ministers, and our Healing Ministry Team. St. Monica's is not just a place to worship on Sundays; it is a significant place in our lives and community because of all of our ministries. We Have Been Blessed!

For Reflection:

1. What blessings are you grateful for that have come from St. Monica's?
2. Do your wants rob you of the blessings you already have?
3. Have you counted your blessings today?

Prayer: Numbers 6:24-26 "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."

Beth Moss

C is for Communion

We are invited into communion with one another. Aware of our own needs, we also become open and attuned to the needs of others. How are we called to meet these needs?

"Do this in remembrance of me" Luke 22:19

It is with these words which Jesus said at the last supper that I try to receive communion each week. As I drink the cup and eat the bread, I reflect on Christ's sacrifice and look forward to his return. I look at communion as more than just a memory. Weekly, I try to participate in this powerfully symbolic ceremony that molds my thinking and brings to life deeply spiritual truths. I feel it shapes my identity as a person of God and provides me with the assurance that I have been redeemed by the blood of Christ.

Am I worthy to receive?

As a believer I feel that I should share communion at every opportunity. Often I as many believers abstain from receiving as we sit in guilt and shame, wishing we were more worthy. It was taught to me as a youngster that I should abstain from receiving if I were struggling with some sin. This practice stemmed from Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32. There Paul tells us to examine ourselves before communing, for "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord".

My consolation is found in Jesus' words in John 6: Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him". The fact is that Jesus' blood cleanses me from sin when I feel guilty, that is when I need Jesus the most. When I am struggling, that is when I need.

For Reflection:

1. What do you think about as you are receiving communion at the altar rail?
2. Do you look around at the others standing or kneeling with you?
3. Do you truly feel forgiven and beloved when you return to your seat?

Prayer: Be present, be present, O Jesus, as you were present with your disciples, and be known to us in the breaking of bread. Amen.

D is for Duty

After our wedding, Hal and I had lots of thank you notes to write. I was the primary note-writer, and I admit that it took me a long time to get them done. I was so grateful for our friends and family and their thoughtfulness and generosity. But often, especially after a day at work, it felt like a chore, a duty, not an opportunity.

I think we sometimes feel that same way about our contributions to the mission of the church –for us, St. Monica’s. We know we should give generously. But there are so many other ways we want and need to spend our money and our time. I think the answer is a bit of reframing. To get the thank you notes done after the wedding, I tried to picture each person and the gift and the joy it brought to our lives. Note writing got easier.

For faithful Christians, I think reframing works as well. Why do we give? We give because God gives us everything – literally, everything we are and have.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3: 16-17)

We give because we make promises at our baptisms and each time we renew those vows. We give because Jesus, God’s Son, sends us into the world to make God’s Kingdom a reality. Our Catechism puts it this way:

“The duty of all Christians is to follow Christ; to come together week by week for corporate worship; and to work, pray and give for the spread of the kingdom of God” (BCP, page 856)

It is our duty. It is also our calling as baptized people. It is our privilege and honor, really, to give back to God and God’s mission at St. Monica’s, a portion of what God has given us. Reframing works. I feel blessed to be able to give to St. Monica’s and other favorite ministries because I know in my heart that what I have isn’t really mine. It is all God’s and so I’m only returning a small bit of what God has given me.

For Reflection:

1. Why do you give to St. Monica’s, and other charities?
2. Is making a pledge a duty or blessing for you?
3. Do you need to “reframe” so that your giving is joyful?

Prayer: Holy God, help us to become joyful, cheerful givers. Help us to live generously; acknowledging that all we have is a gift from you. Amen.

Kathy Schillreff

E is for Eucharist

During the weekend of August 20-21, "my family" held a big party. I have a very large family and the truth is that we really enjoyed the gathering. The night of the 20th, we did many things together: we talked, ate, danced and we even get to know each other better! At the end, although our bodies were exhausted, we felt refreshed and full of life. It was past 1 a.m. when we finished cleaning the parish hall. But the joy wasn't over: the next morning, we met again to nourish the spirit. At the end of the day, I was happy to belong to this family. This family is the Church, gathered by God our Father in a community that proclaims the love to all people: St. Monica's Episcopal Church. The celebration we shared was the "Fiesta Latina" and the Kick-Off weekend.

The stories of our faith family are embodied in our community life, and in the Scriptures we share in each service. Our food is the Real Presence of the Body and Blood of Christ, given for the sake of everyone. The experience of being together and being fed with the Bread of Life, is what we call Eucharist.

As a kid, it was the custom to attend Mass every Sunday. Over time, I learned that the Eucharist is more than a habit. *Eucharist* means giving thanks to God for everything he has given us, and this giving thanks is something we do together. I would never go to a birthday party just to look or listen. I wouldn't go only to receive a piece of cake. I would bring a gift, being prepared to talk and share food. After all, one of the most important things about the Eucharist is that it gathers many people who otherwise wouldn't be related to us. At least for one hour, we can call ourselves "brother" and "sister".

For Reflection:

St. Augustine said to those who receive Communion for the first time:
"Receive what you are, be what you receive".

1. What are we called to be as believers?
2. What does Jesus want us to do as a family of faith?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for making us your sons and daughters. Help us to realize who we are and to be the Body of Christ. Amen.

Hipolito Fernandez Reina

F is for Forgiveness

“So [the prodigal son] set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.” Luke 15:20

Perfection is an elusive little devil! No matter how hard I try to “get it right,” mistakes and missteps, both small and large, inevitably crop up.

I’m sending a lot of emails in my volunteer role as membership coordinator for a local non-profit. No matter how hard I try to proof these, I often find a typo or other little glitch right after I hit Send. The beneficial result of this struggle with technology and my own imperfections is that I am more forgiving of mistakes I find in emails from others.

This small example illustrates a much larger point. A little bit of understanding, based on my own imperfections, makes me more forgiving, tolerant and generous-hearted towards others. That’s good. God’s complete and total understanding of us and our limitations surrounds us with forgiveness and mercy even before we mess up. That’s Grace!

All of us need forgiveness every day. God’s Amazing Grace is a generous gift, not earned by perfect living. In grateful response, we are called to be generous of heart and purse towards our imperfect fellow humans and institutions. Especially in times of very stressful change, we need to forgive each other our imperfections as we are so generously forgiven.

For Reflection:

1. What mistakes have you forgiven today?
2. What mistakes has God forgiven today?

Prayer:

God of Amazing Grace, “...we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service...” and by practicing forgiveness with grateful hearts all the days of our lives. Amen

Prayer quotes from The General Thanksgiving, BCP p.101.

Ann Hoffman

G is for Grace

The Christian life is something we are granted by grace, something undeserved, through the work of Jesus. It is grace in which we stand, and grace that drives us to live each day as God wants us to live.

Jesus suffered on the cross as if he had lived our lives. God's grace compels us to obey Him, in gratitude for having delivered us from punishment and slavery of sin. I remember the first time I confessed. Not everyone has the advantage of having a father who is also a priest, but for me, this meant a burden, since in the eyes of others, I had to be perfect, but believe me... I was far from that.

After a long conversation with my father, including many tears, I remember the words that freed my heart of guilt: "You are my son and I love you." I keep hearing those words, especially in the most difficult moments of my life.

You know what? I've learned that love produces grace, and this grace we have received frees us and renews our lives. Therefore, since God's love is eternal, His grace is always available to anyone who with an open heart, approaches him.

Our Lord, after ensuring Paul the sufficiency of his grace, offered his seemingly paradoxical reason: "my power is made perfect in weakness". Then Paul embraced the path of weakness with renewed faith. "Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong". (2 Cor. 12:10).

For Reflection:

1. What can we do to respond to God's eternal grace?
2. How can we bring grace to the lives of other people?

Prayer: God of love and grace, you tell us we are your beloved sons and daughters, with whom you are well pleased. Strengthen us to truly live into those words. Amen.

Hipolito Fernandez Reina

H is for Happiness

So many things have been said about happiness. Over the millennia of human existence, people have pondered and written about and spoken of happiness. Researchers have even tried to study happiness—where it comes from, how to measure happiness and describing the many different kinds of happiness.

- What percentage of our happiness comes from our faith?
- Can we be happy even when faced with desperate situations?
- Why are some people genuinely happy and others only happy when they are most miserable?
- Is the pursuit of happiness truly an unalienable right? Should our government provide our happiness?
- Is happiness a spiritual event?

Many philosophers, theologians and poets have expressed, in various words:

There is no path to happiness... Happiness is the path.

There is no path to Love... Love is the path.

There is no path to peace... Peace is the path.

When we chase *things* in trying to achieve happiness, we only end up with a pile of stuff. Happiness is not found in consumerism.

Dennis Waitley observes, “Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace, and gratitude.” Most of us would agree with that. It requires us to be mindful of each minute and how we are living it.

So shouldn't all Christians, if they follow Christ in love, grace and gratitude, be the happiest people on earth? Shouldn't ANYONE, whether they are Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, be insanely happy, if they simply live with love, grace and gratitude? Christians do not have the exclusive right to experience happiness.

And how do we remain happy when faced with racism, hate, bigotry, terrorism and injustice?

Poverty, hunger, disease, war—all of these would seem to preclude happiness. Can we face despair with a happy heart?

“Happiness can be found even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the Light.” *Dumbledore*

For Reflection:

1. Is Christ the Light that overcomes darkness for you?
2. How does my participation in the ministries of St. Monica's help me to be mindful of the love and grace in my life?
3. Am I grateful? Am I happy?

Prayer: Read and pray Psalm 84 “O Lord of Hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you.”

I is Inspiration

“*Inspiration*” at its root means being filled with the Holy Spirit!

When we have a brilliant idea – that’s the Holy Spirit.

When we have a feeling that we should do something – that’s the Holy Spirit.

How are you being “inspired- filled with God’s spirit” to share the gifts God has given you? (John 14:12)

We all lead very busy lives: taking kids to school, taking care of parents, work. Where does the time go? What is God’s plan for you? Are you listening? Sometimes I think God needs to hit us over the head with a baseball bat for us to stop and listen to what God’s plan is.

That was the case with me. Nine years ago after a chance conversation with my Mother, I started what became Meals of Hope. I truly think that the *inspiration* was God calling me to serve. Today we have assembled and given away more than 34,000,000 meals, we distribute 2000 weekend backpacks of food to elementary school children each week during the school year, and we operate 3 food pantries weekly.

I am inspired every time someone who does not have food for their family comes to our pantries. I see the face of God every day. I see it in the look of gratitude and relief on the face of a mother after she is given food for her family when she had none; when a senior comes to me and in broken English says “God bless;” or after a young family receives food after waiting patiently in line in the rain or broiling heat for over an hour and the children skip to the car knowing that they will eat that night.

Inspiration: Filled with God’s Spirit to share the gifts God has given me and my family. Really, I am the lucky one. I get to see God at work every day. I am the one most blessed.

For Reflection:

1. Does God get your attention?
2. When have you been “*inspired*” to share the gifts God has given you?

Prayer: Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what you do love, and do what you would do. Amen

Steve Popper

J is for Journey

We are all on a spiritual journey. It may not be a conscious one, but we learn, experience and grow as we move through our lives. My journey was more an unconscious, random wandering for most of my life. But a number of years ago, Bill and I moved and had to find a new church. For years we wandered from church to church, finally not attending at all. But we tried one more time, and that time I pledged to myself that I would become actively involved in this new church. What a difference that made – I found new friends, learned new skills like arranging flowers and playing bells, and grew spiritually.

When we moved to Naples and made St. Monica's our church home, I continued to do those things I had come to love. But here I also attended classes, book clubs, Bible studies and retreats. I have always loved learning so these activities were very appealing to me. They opened doors for me that I could never have imagined.

During this time, Bill and I decided to try to really tithe, so we began slowly increasing the amount that we donated to church as well as other charities. As time went on, we have achieved our goal of giving 10% of our income to these worthy causes. The thing I find most amazing is that we have never actually missed that money – there always seems to be enough for us.

This journey has been like a roller coaster. It has been comforting – I know others have the same questions and doubts I do. It has been upsetting – wondering why I hadn't learned this before. It has been challenging – wondering what do I really believe and where do I go next. It has been ongoing – knowing that the more I learn, the more there is to learn. But what I can tell you at this moment is that this journey has been exciting. I love being on it and know it will never end as long as I am able!

For Reflection:

1. What has been the highlight of your spiritual journey?
2. When has your spiritual journey caused discomfort or challenge?
3. Was that time the beginning of growth?

Prayer: Gracious God, you are my companion on this journey of life and faith. Make me ever more aware of your presence in my life, and open to your call. Amen.

Betsy Smith

K is for Kingdom

My favorite Kingdom of God parable is the Mustard Seed – Mark 4:39-42. (Also Matthew 13: 31-32, and Luke 13: 18-19). The first paper I wrote in my first class in seminary was about this parable. I got an A.

For me it is about growth. When we plant a seed, we don't know what will happen. It could be a dead seed. Or there could be too much rain, or not enough. A bird or bug might eat it. Or it might send down roots, sprout, grow, and bear fruit. Jesus tells us in this parable that a tiny seed can yield big results – big enough to include other creatures in its bounty.

So this parable is about hope. It is about the future. We plant seeds of all kinds – by welcoming guests to worship, by offering wonderful Sunday School and youth programs, by enabling our J2A classes to make a life-changing holy pilgrimage, by building a Habitat home for a family we don't know, by giving a hard-working, low income family a box of diapers each month, by making soup, by packing meals at Holidays without Hunger, by giving a woman at the Shelter a gift card at Christmas, by golfing in or contributing to the St. Matt's golf-a-thon, by hosting 12-step groups in our parish hall, by having a Stephen Minister accompany a parishioner through a difficult time, by having clergy and others who inspire us to deepen our relationships with God. We plant seeds. We don't know what's going to happen to that guest, or that Sunday School child, or that pilgrim, or the family that moves into that home, or the mom and dad who can buy food instead of that box of diapers, or a family being nourished with a Meal of Hope, or that woman who gets back on her feet, or a resident of St Matt's, or the AA/NA/Al-Anon person whose life is healed, or the grieving parishioner, or any of us who hear a sermon that touches us, or are visited at a critical time. We don't know what might happen next. But we do know that God's Kingdom is a bit more real, a bit more visible each time a seed is planted.

The ministries of St. Monica's need your financial support, your prayer support, your time and energy to continue to grow and flourish. That is why, even though I will not be your rector in 2017, I will still be making a pledge and contributing financially. I value the ministry here, the people we touch, and the seeds we plant too much to not give. I hope you will join me.

For Reflection:

1. What seed have I planted?
2. What seed will I plant this year?
3. Is it possible for me to increase my pledge to help God's Kingdom grow even more?

Prayer: Gracious God, help me to trust that my contributions will make your Kingdom more and more visible in our world. Amen.

Kathy Schillreff

L is for Love

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. This is my command: Love each other. John 15:12, 17

Maybe I am turning into a cynic as I age. I haven't trusted politicians for years and the behavior of confessing Christians, especially in this election season, has confounded me. So the name calling and personal attacks lead me to believe that the two commands that Jesus told us – to love God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself – are not possible to keep especially in the realm of political campaigns or life itself. It's very easy to say the word "LOVE" and it maybe overused. However, in today's world LOVE is the only answer no matter how difficult it may seem. I have found this to be true in my personal life during very stressful times. Continue to LOVE no matter what.

True love is costly. A true lover gives the best he can offer and is willing to sacrifice everything he has for the beloved. God willingly paid the price for our redemption — the sacrifice of his only begotten Son. That's the nature of true friendship and love — the willingness to give all for the beloved. True friends will lay down their lives for each other. Jesus tells us that he is our friend and he loves us whole-heartedly and unconditionally. He wants us to love one another just as he loves us, whole-heartedly and without reserve. His love fills our hearts and transforms our minds and frees us to give ourselves in loving service to others. If we open our hearts to his love and obey his command to love our neighbor, then we will bear much fruit in our lives, fruit that will last for eternity. Do you wish to be fruitful and to abound in the love of God? **This is my command: Love each other**

For Reflection:

1. When has love been costly for you?
2. What loving service to others does Jesus' love for you free you to do?
3. What fruit is your life bearing?

Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you call us friends. Help us to love as you loved, so that others can know your love and friendship as we do. Make us open and generous with the gift of your love and light. Amen.

Bill Chairs

M is for Money

Money is not a subject that I expected to see in a prayer journal. Truth be known Jesus spoke more about money than any other subject and that really threw me.

The more that I thought about God and importance He puts on money the more it made sense. Money is one of those things that, when used wisely, is a means to an end. Every good deed that we want to do will at some point involve money – homes for Habitat, food for the hungry, school supplies for the children in Immokalee. All of these involve the prudent use of money. I look at money as a gift from God and as such needs to be used so that it reflects our faith and enhances our values. Here at St. Monica's, it's no different. Money and the prudent use of it drives and sustains all our wonderful ministries.

This is the time of year when we are asked, after reflection and prayer, to pledge and contribute monies to sustain our parish for another year. I ask and pray that all of us will be generous to a fault in our support of St. Monica's and all the good works it does.

For Reflection:

1. Do you see money as a tool of ministry?
2. What ministries at St. Monica's are most important to you?
3. Will you make a generous pledge to ensure that those ministries continue to flourish?

Prayer: Gracious God, your loving hand has given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor you with our substance, and, remembering the account which we must one day give, we may be faithful stewards of your bounty, through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen

BCP, p. 827

Matt Devlin

N is for Need

OW.....OW.....

I WANTED to re-tile my kitchen floor. But the maintenance guy says I NEED to replace my air-conditioning system. Given Florida's climate, the choice is crystal clear.

Do you live within a budget? Have you ever walked down the candy aisle with a small child? Or have you ever waddled out of an "all you can eat" restaurant with that uncomfortably overstuffed feeling? If so, you are familiar with the NEEDS versus WANTS dilemma.

Part of responsible living means choosing what we truly need before indulging a passing whim.

Often the better choice seems obvious and is fairly easy to make. Maybe the most delightful choices come when both NEEDS and WANTS dovetail (like when I finally bought my piano.)

Living faithfully challenges me to return to God a portion of my time, talent and treasure. I have come to consider such giving as a spiritual NEED.

In the gospel story of the feeding of the five thousand (John 6: 1-14) the disciples worried that there would not be enough food. The story reminds us that God always makes available everything we really need.

Retirement means more time and less money. My faith says that by relying on God to help me discern my true needs there will always be enough! Enough money, time and energy for me to help Christ's light shine in our world.

For Reflection:

1. Think of a time when you faced a "need versus want" decision. Which did you choose?
2. Is giving a spiritual need in your life?
3. Do you trust God to provide what you really need?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I thank you for your promise to provide everything I truly need. I ask for discernment to make the best choices for my life each day. Give me the courage and power to shine your light into our world. In Christ's name, AMEN.

O is for Offertory

The offertory is that quiet moment in the service when we sit back and prepare our gift for the usher to collect, and ultimately place on the altar. Some of us remember when that kept the ushers very busy—everyone had cash or a check to put in the plate.

Garrison Keillor once did a funny comic sketch of the Lutheran man who wrote his check at the last minute, after the pastor announced the offertory, and went to great lengths to avoid the embarrassment of having his fellow worshipers hear him tearing the check out of the checkbook at that time.

But for many of us, those days are in the past. Some of us write only one check a month, and others pay by clever electronic communications that mean we put nothing in the plate. We have the awkward task of looking at the usher and shaking our heads.

But just because we're not actively filling the plate with currency, we can still make the most of that part of the service. We're listening to the great music that has been prepared for that time in our worship and use it for prayer. How often do we find ourselves in a holy place surrounded by music and peace?

First, we can reflect on what our offering means. Whatever we give, whether the tithe specified in the Bible, or just the best we believe we can afford, we are really giving back. We can reflect on what God has given us, and bless our contribution as the plate is lifted up at the altar.

It's time for a prayer! The prayer begins with our thanks for God's gifts to us, from the gift of Jesus and the relationship with God that Jesus made possible. The prayer continues with whatever God has given us, specifically, in the week just past—health? A happy moment with family or friends? An experience of something we've read, or music we've heard, or a sunset that inspired us?

We may be so strongly reminded of God's goodness to us that we decide to add a little extra to this week's gift! For let us remember, there is no gift adequate to what we have received.

For Reflection:

1. What occupies your mind and spirit during the Offertory?
2. Could it be a time to reflect, to give thanks?
3. Can you envision that what you place in the offering plate represents YOU?

Prayer: Holy God, thank you for the quiet moments in our busy lives. Help us to use them to give thanks to you. Amen.

Barbara Metcalfe

P is for Prayer

We, as Episcopalians, have many opportunities to pray during our weekly (or more) church services. We pray for our human family, for all sorts of human conditions, for clergy and people, our country's leaders, for peace among nations, for the ill, and those having birthdays and anniversaries during the church week.

I am intrigued to know how many of us pray outside the four walls of our church. I personally find that I pray many times during the day. Sometimes it is a quick prayer thanking God for a beautiful day, or our new puppy, Archie. Many times I pray for the sick of St. Monica's, as well as friends facing frightening medical diagnoses. This is a long prayer because I pray for every name on the list. I pray for Kathy and Hipolito who bring joy and leadership to our church family. I pray every day for my beloved husband, Tom.

I have difficulty, however, praying for myself. This is something I am working on because there are many times I need help. I can only hope that the Holy Spirit conveys my needs to Jesus and God.

For Reflection:

1. Do you pray every day of the week?
2. Do you believe in the power of prayer?
3. Are you able to pray for yourself?

Prayer:

"Christ be with me,
Christ within me,
Christ behind me,
Christ before me,
Christ beside me,
Christ to win me
Christ to comfort and restore me.
May everything I do be for Christ."
(St. Patrick's Breastplate)

Susan Gibson

Q is for Quality and Quantity

Jesus says, “the first commandment is this: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”(Mark 12:28-34). That’s quality and quantity! Will we, can we, do it? With God’s help, yes.

How do we show our love for God? We show it in how we live our lives. As Christians we show our love for God by accepting God’s gifts, taking care of them, and giving back, in other words, being a good steward. Many of us think that stewardship simply means giving money to the Church. I know that is what I thought for many years, but it is much more than that. The longer I am at St. Monica’s, the more I learn about stewardship.

Recently I had the privilege of helping devise and tally results of a parish survey about our parishioner’s involvement in programs at St. Monica’s, as well as in the wider community, locally, nationally and internationally. Of 139 surveys returned, parishioners were involved in more than 80 local and national organizations and at least 5 international programs. This is in addition to involvement in St. Monica’s programs. Some of the support was time and talent, some financial. These are some examples of how we show our love for God.

For Reflection:

1. Am I showing my love for God?
2. How can I do more?
3. What is God calling me to give in response to his gifts and presence in my life?

Prayer:

Give us a reverence for the earth as your creation, that we may use its resources rightly in the service of others and to your honor and glory. Bless all whose lives are closely linked with ours, and grant that we may serve Christ in them, and love one another as he loves us. Amen.

Betty Gamel

R is for Resurrection

The story of the Resurrection might have turned out much differently without the generosity and courage of Joseph of Arimathea.

On that Good Friday afternoon, Joseph was bold enough to ask Pilate for Jesus' body and generous enough to bring the body to his own newly prepared tomb. These acts set the stage for the first resurrection, early on that Easter morning.

I believe that each of us probably has had one or more resurrection experiences. My experience of rebirth came through a medical detoxification and an extensive addiction recovery program.

This journey was the most difficult time of my life because I was certain that I would never achieve sobriety. But yet, with a skeptical determination, I "came to believe in a power greater than myself."

After several years and after relocating to New York City, I was drawn to The Episcopal Church. This was my time of resurrection. My continued involvement in the Church has given me many rewards.

I would like to more be like Joseph both in generosity and in my commitment to Jesus and his Church.

For Reflection:

1. Is there a time in your life that you can identify as a rebirth brought about by a gracious God?
2. Are you able to increase your generosity and your commitment of time and talent to the St. Monica's Church?

Prayer: Almighty and everlasting God, who by the resurrection of your Son our Savior Jesus Christ, established the new covenant of reconciliation: Grant that all who have been reborn into the fellowship of Christ's Body may show forth in their lives what they profess by their faith. Amen.

Don McCleary

S is for Sacrificial Giving

What is a sacrifice? What does it mean to sacrifice? There has been a lot of talk about sacrifice in the media lately (I'm writing in mid-August). This talk has made me realize that we use the word *sacrifice* quite glibly, not considering its true meaning.

At its root, *sacrifice* means "to make holy," "to make sacred." So, is it really a *sacrifice* to stay home on a Friday to finish homework instead of going to a movie? On the other hand, when a member of our armed forces is killed in battle, I believe that is a *sacrifice*, in its truest sense. That person has given his or her life for our nation – to make sacred the ideal of freedom and liberty for all.

Throughout Scripture we hear a lot about sacrifice. Ancient Israel had a lengthy list of sacrifices that were offered daily and at specific holy days. Skim through Exodus – its dizzying sometimes. We also hear about sacrifice from the prophets – Isaiah, Amos, Micah and others. By the time of the prophets, the Temple sacrifices had become empty of their real meaning. People made the sacrifices, but then lived their lives as though God and God's covenant did not exist. Micah's often quoted verse: ***"He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*** (Micah 6:8) It's loving God and loving our neighbor – fully, completely – that is the desire of God's heart.

Both ancient Israel and the Christian church from its earliest days (read Acts, and 1st and 2nd Corinthians), expected their people to give sacrificially – to give in a way that *makes sacred* the ministry that can be accomplished because of the gifts. We are asked to find a level of giving that jolts us from our routine and connects us profoundly with our giving. Hal and I did that several years ago, and when we did, and realized we still had plenty to "live on", increasing year by year till we were tithing and beyond became a privilege. I no longer think in terms of personal sacrifice, but I love that my gifts *make holy* the ministry of St. Monica's.

For reflection:

1. Is your giving "sacrificial" in the full sense of the word?
2. What do you make sacred through your giving?
3. Does your giving jolt you from your routine?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, you gave everything when you took our human nature, "moved into our neighborhood", showed us how to live, and then gave your life to save us. Deepen our understanding of sacrifice, and help us know the joy of sacrificial giving. Amen.

T is for Trust

Below are several passages that crystalize the meaning of TRUST for me as I try to incorporate TRUSTING GOD into my daily life.

The first Song of Isaiah – Isaiah 12: 2-6: Surely it is GOD who saves me, I will TRUST in him and not be afraid.

From the rite of Holy Baptism – presentation of the candidates: Question: Do you put your whole TRUST in his grace and love – Answer: Yes

Psalm 33: 21-22: Indeed, our heart rejoices in him, for in his holy name we put our TRUST. Let your loving kindness, Lord be upon us as we have put our TRUST in you.

Psalm 56 – Verse 3: Whenever I am afraid I will put my TRUST in you.

A continuing theme of all of these passages is TRUSTING in the Lord when you are afraid for whatever reason. To me it means TRUSTING in the Lord when your anxiety level is high and you fear the outcome of a particular situation is not good.

My faith has been strengthened over the last four years by letting the Lord deal with my anxiety and fear brought about by the many twist and turns with my heart health. It was not easy to relax and let God take this anxiety and fear when the many atrial fibrillation episodes first started. In fact, my faith was such that at first, TRUSTING God with this situation was not possible. My fear and anxiety were ruling my life at that time. I don't think it was until I had a very bad outcome with one of the episodes that I finally realized that God was protecting me all along or I would not be on this earth after that event. My heart at that time was literally "shocked" back into rhythm and my blood pressure recovered from a dangerously low level. I remember Rev. Kathy visiting me in the hospital the day of that episode and praying with me and Jeri. From that day on my faith started to grow. Now when I have an Afib event I try to relax and ask God to deal with the outcome. I put my TRUST in God and not be afraid. I try now to thank God every day for the many blessings I have and to keep our family healthy and safe. I now have a new sense of duty to not miss any weekly church service. The weekly service has much more importance to me today than several years ago. I want to thank God every opportunity I can for all the blessings we have. I know that completely TRUSTING in God is a journey. I pray I can continue to grow in TRUSTING God in all aspects of my life.

For Reflection:

1. When have you trusted completely in God?
2. Has your ability to trust God grown?
3. Do you give thanks for all the ways God has blessed you?

Prayer: Thank you, holy God, for the blessings of our lives. Help us to let go of fear and anxiety and to trust you more and more. Amen.

U is for Unconditional

God's love is an unconditional gift to us. God loves me! Wow! I have heard and read this all my life. The earliest I remember is singing the hymn "Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so".

It is still impossible for me to fully comprehend. I know I did not and cannot earn God's love. So what do I do?

I have tried to live a caring, sharing, serving life. I try to greet all whom I meet with a smile and a kind word. I am aware of being a good steward of all God's creation including nature and the environment. My prayer life includes praise and thanksgiving for my many blessings.

In the past several years I have tithed both my treasure (money) and time to the church. These have been some of the happiest years of my life. Things have lost their importance. People matter. The way we live and set our priorities says more about our faith than words ever could.

Thank you, St. Monica's.

For Reflection:

1. When did you first learn that "Jesus loves me"?
2. What does God's **unconditional** love mean to you?
3. How do you say "thank you" to God for that unconditional gift?

Prayer: Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your servants give you humble thanks

for all your goodness and loving-kindness to us and to all whom you have made.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life;

but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.

And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

BCP, p. 101

Barbara Myrick

V is for Voice

This can mean as far as our religious experience is concerned:

- A. Our silent talks and prayers with God
- B. Our communal voice in our readings and prayers in church
- C. Singing our thankfulness and praise

All of the above are extremely important but for me the act of singing is wonderfully therapeutic and instructional. We have a very good “singing” congregation at St. Monica’s which inspires the choir, bell choir, and musicians to practice and give of our best.

Having been a church choir member for over 30 years, I am constantly learning and deepening my faith and understanding of Jesus’ love for us all

Let us all rejoice using for instance one of our Choir’s favorites “With a voice of singing” and many other anthems and hymns. The range is extremely broad - from the introspective “Amazing Grace” to the outwardly praising “O worship the King all glorious above.”

I believe our heritage of Bible, Prayer Book, and Hymnal are wonderful in giving Voice to the grounding of our faith and we must not be afraid in using all these tools to bring the word to others.

For Reflection:

1. What are your favorite ways to use your voice of faith?
2. What is your favorite hymn?
3. How do you give “voice” to your faith outside of worship?

Prayer: Read and pray Psalms 145-150.

Hallelujah! Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing his praise in the congregation of the faithful. Psalm 149:1

Frank Shrewsbury

W is for Who, What, Where, When, Why

We ask lots of questions – about everything. It's how we learn. I have this memory of driving from Ramstein Air Base to our home when we lived in Germany. Stephen, about 3, was in the car seat in the back, and for the entire 25-minute drive he was asking, "why?" I would answer, and he'd say "why?" I'd answer, and he'd say "why?" On the one hand it was crazy-making. On the other hand – wow! – he's curious, he's learning, he's noticing the world around him.

When we pray and think about our lives as stewards to the bounty God has given us, we ask questions:

- **Who** is God in my life? **Whom** do I serve?
- **What** am I doing with all that God has given me?
- **Where** is the focus of my energy, my time, my money? Jesus tells us, "Where our treasure is, there our hearts will be." (Matthew 6:21)
- **When** am I an example of Christ's love?
- **Why** is it important to me to share my bounty with the St. Monica's and its mission?

When we ask ourselves and our families these questions, we learn a lot about ourselves. The answers tell us about our lives, our relationship with God, our relationships with those around us, and our relationship with creation. We discover what is really important. We may also discover that we spend a lot of time and energy and money on things that are not really that important.

I challenge you to take some time today and really answer these questions. Use the back page of this journal to write your thoughts and answers. In a few days you will receive information about actually making your pledge for the ministry of St. Monica's for 2017. The answers to these questions will guide you through that decision-making process.

For Reflection:

1. Who is God in my life?
2. Do my contributions to the mission and ministry of St. Monica's reflect what my faith and God mean to me?

Prayer: Generous and loving God, help me to grow and deepen my relationship with you, with St. Monica's, and with the world around me. Let my gifts to your ministry be a true reflection of all that you have given me. Amen.

Kathy Schillreff

X Marks the Spot

I don't know about you, but in high school I had a deep and abiding disgust for algebra. It is way too structured for my tastes and to me often seemed pointless. And it was almost always about that "X." And to get to that "X," you just had to do the magic formula in the right way. Then, *shazam*, you've got your answer and you get an "A."

When I see "X" again, however, I can simply look at the definition. The X can be that factor that will invariably have a significant impact on the outcome. I'd like to call this "X" by a much prettier name, how about "Grace." It is grace that we depend on that is the factor that will impact the outcome.

In a short period, I hope to be ordained. Part of the examination asks "to nourish Christ's people from the riches of his grace." For it is God's grace that has the impact on the outcome. It is upon God's grace that we must depend.

I think the same is true with stewardship of money. It's always been hard for me to depend on the riches of God's grace, but somehow throughout all my life, the riches of God's grace have always showed up. It is from this dependence on grace that I live.

For Reflection:

1. Where have you seen God's grace be an X factor in your life?
2. Have you seen it with your finances?

Prayer: Thank you Holy God for the riches of your grace, and for making us aware of those riches at the times they are needed most. Help us to learn to depend on your grace and to be generous in return. Amen.

Jonathan Evans

Y is for Yes!

As we celebrated the 25th anniversary of St. Monica's during the 2015-16 year, our motto was: **For all that has been, thanks be to God. For all that will be, YES!** This saying is attributed to Dag Hammarskjold, UN Secretary General and Nobel Peace Prize recipient.

In EFM we share our spiritual autobiographies near the beginning of each year. As each person finishes, after a moment of holy silence, we say that quote together, with the addition of "For all that is, thanks be to God," in between the 2 sentences above. Doing this for the 20 years I've been doing EFM has helped me begin to be truly thankful for everything that has been and is. The joyful things, of course. But even the not-so-good things help me grow or have something to teach me. And so I give thanks.

But YES! is the most important. That YES! is shorthand for: I trust God. I can and do depend on God. Everything will work out as it should. The future is in God's loving and generous hands. What, me worry?

When we make a financial pledge to the mission and ministry of St. Monica's, we are saying, "YES!" to God. We are acknowledging that everything we are and have is a gift from God. We are accepting Jesus' invitation to follow him, to be stewards of God's love and grace. *Making a pledge is a powerful statement of love and faith and trust and hope.* That's why we actually complete our pledges during our worship services. It's not a fill-it-out-at-home-and-mail-it-in kind of action. It is a moment when we say YES! to God, and then bring that YES! to the altar to be blessed.

For Reflection:

1. Does your pledge truly say YES! to God?
2. Is your pledge a reflection of the blessings God has given you?
3. Are you excited about the future mission and ministry of St. Monica's?

Prayer: God of that has been, is, and will be, thank you! Help me to say YES! Amen.

Kathy Schillreff

Z is for Zeal

To have great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an objective.

Ephesians 1:11-23 & Luke 6:20-31

We have all heard or read the scripture in 2 Kings that says, "...the zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this." As an exercise, try substituting the word *zeal* with any of these words and then recite the scripture again: *Passion, Ardor, Love, Fervor, Fire, Devotion, Eagerness, Appetite, Relish, Gusto, Vigor, Energy, Enthusiasm or Intensity*. How has this exercise changed your understanding of this scripture?

In the Epistle for All Saints', we read, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love (*zeal, fire, devotion, enthusiasm...*) toward all the saints." In the Gospel, we read Jesus' words known as the Beatitudes, "Blessed are...." and, "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

Perhaps Jesus' instruction is given as a guide for a healthy spiritual life; he is teaching us how to have *zeal (love, ardor, vigor, intensity)* for things that move us beyond our daily existence – things that are important for living a good, kind and peaceful life of prayer, service and love. This guide has spoken to many Christians over the centuries and those who had *zeal* for Jesus' words beyond their daily existence oftentimes have become known as *saints*.

Today we remember that all of the people we call *saints* did live their lives with *zeal* – with *passion, with love, with ardor, with fervor, with fire, with devotion, with eagerness, with an appetite for intense enthusiasm, with relish, and definitely with vigor and gusto!* They loved God and they lived abundantly. They knew God's presence and they prayed. They shared their lives, their love, their money, their material resources, their personalities and their gifts with others, with their faith community and the world.

We are called to do the same today in our world! We are called to strive forward with *zeal* to become the *living saints* of God. Try singing or reading the words to Hymn 293: *I Sing a Song of the Saints of God* and realize that they are everywhere we go because we *are* God's saints in this world, living our lives with *zeal* – with enthusiasm, energy, fervor, and love – *relishing* every moment we have an opportunity to serve others, our faith community and the world.

For Reflection:

1. Where do you meet saints today?
2. Where do you express zeal in your life?

Prayer: Loving God, help me to live with zeal for you, so that someday someone will say, "I have heard of your faith in Jesus and your love for all." Amen.

Ron Doiron

(Another) P is for Practice

"I will try this day to live a simple, sincere, and serene life, repelling promptly every thought of discontent, anxiety, discouragement, impurity, and self-seeking; cultivating cheerfulness, magnanimity, charity, and the habit of holy silence; exercising economy in expenditure, generosity in giving, carefulness in conversation, diligence in appointed service, fidelity to every trust, and a childlike faith in God.

In particular I will try to be faithful in those habits of prayer, work, study, physical exercise, eating, and sleep which I believe the Holy Spirit has shown me to be right. And as I cannot in my own strength do this, not even with a hope of success attempt it, I look to thee, O Lord God my Father, in Jesus my Savior, and ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Each morning, I read this Morning Resolve on the front inside cover of the Forward Day- by-Day, and then I read the daily readings for that day. I have been faithfully doing this since our Unbinding event which was about prayer, learning to listen to God, and daily reading. These help me to practice living faithfully and the more I practice the closer I come to God.

The end of our church service bulletins remind us,

"WHEN THE LITURGY IS OVER, THE SERVICE BEGINS!"

This special message is directing us to serve at St. Monica's, as well as in the community, spreading the word and love that Jesus sends us out to do. Remembering that "Christ has no body but yours, No hands, no feet on earth but yours, yours are the eyes with which he looks Compassion on this world" Teresa of Avila (1515-1582).

As part of my practice, I attend church service most week-ends, Bible Study on Friday mornings, volunteer at the Church and in the community. I am grateful and thankful for what God has given me and as in previous years I will tithe to St. Monica's for 2017. This will help St. Monica's to continue doing God's work in our community.

For Reflection:

1. How have you used your time and talents to help others this year?
2. How do you practice living faithfully?
3. How will you decide your financial commitment to St. Monica's for 2017?

Prayer: Almighty God, whose loving hand hath given us all that we possess: Grant us grace that we may honor thee with our substance, and remembering the account which we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of thy bounty, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Book of Common Prayer

(Another) **T** is for Transformation

There are many (maybe hundreds) of stories of transformations in the Bible, starting with Adam and Eve when they ate of the forbidden fruit. Another is Peter and Andrew who were transformed from simple fishermen into “fishers of people.” Your favorite story may be one of transformation.

I have experienced numerous transformations in my own life as I suspect you have also. Some may be very gradual and difficult to determine at the time, becoming apparent only much later and some may be very sudden and obvious.

As a small child, I remember my father giving me a penny to be placed in the offering basket on Sunday morning. As I got older the penny became a nickel and I felt very privileged. There were never very many pennies going into that basket as there was so little money in our home. My parents worked very hard to eke out a living from the hardscrabble farm we owned. I did not grow up learning to give much to the church.

Later, when I married, I learned that Christian Reformed farmers did not give much to the church either. As new Episcopalians, we were unfamiliar with the concept of pledging. I suggested we do it. My husband resisted doing it for years – until we moved to Minnesota and found ourselves in a little (75 total members) church that desperately needed every penny it could find. Not only did this church need our money but it definitely needed our time and talents. That's when our transformations took place.

We both became actively involved each in our own ways. We made lifelong friends and finally became full-fledged church members (At the same time, my husband's brother was busy setting a very good example for him to follow. I thank God for Royce's influence in our lives!)

Today, I am actively involved, giving of my time and talents. I do not tithe but I do come fairly close and give far more than I'd ever thought I could. St. Monica's needs us all to give of our time, talents and tithes. Please consider finding your niche and joining me.

For Reflection:

1. Think of an experience of transformation in your life. Was it gradual or sudden?
2. What transforming work is God doing in your life today?

Prayer: Holy God, help us to be aware of all the ways you are transforming us and our world. Help us to live into the ministry you have given us to do. Amen.

(Another) **G** is for Gratitude

“If you concentrate on finding whatever is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul.”
 Rabbi Harold Kushner

A short time ago, I was faced with an abrupt and self-perceived life-altering event; a real punch in the gut! I lost my job as a result of a corporate reorganization. The comfortable life style I had so diligently and painstakingly built for myself had come to a screeching halt. Having worked since the age of 12, how could this happen? In my 50's now, I should be well on route to planning my retirement. Over time, it became increasingly difficult to understand why certain things happen. You run the gamut of emotions; loss of control, fear of the unknown, anger, feeling hurt... what next? What IS God's plan for me?

This is when the real test of faith and gratitude come into play. While having a pity party for 1, I had to kick myself into shape. Why was my focus being placed on what I had lost, rather than being thankful for what I DO have in my life? I am grateful for the unconditional love and moral support from my beautiful partner, I am grateful for my family in and out of church, I am thankful for my health, my home, food, life, the ability to purposely make a choice to make each new day a learning and fruitful opportunity. I am grateful for my gorgeous surroundings and most importantly, GRATEFUL for the love of God and the faith in knowing that he will always guide me and place me where I belong. St. Monica's has been my vessel to God and this newfound-enlightenment. My ability to worship and newly discover a relationship with God is what is getting me through this very difficult time. I am grateful for the foundation this place of love and worship has now afforded me and will continue to reflect my gratitude in acts pleasing to God.

For Reflection:

1. What have you learned to be thankful for, that you used to take for granted (or even complain about)?
2. How will you reflect your gratitude to St. Monica's for the gifts of abundance in your life?
3. What opportunities, gifts and resources to help others do you possess and how will you share *them*?

Prayer: (From *Prayers for Living*) Gracious God, in the busy-ness of my day, I sometimes forget to stop to thank you for all that is good in my life. My blessings are many and my heart is filled with gratefulness for the gift of living, for the ability to love and be loved, for the opportunity to see the everyday wonders of creation, for sleep and water, for a mind that thinks and a body that feels. I thank you, too, for those things in my life that are less than I would hope them to be. Things that seem challenging, unfair, or difficult. When my heart feels stretched and empty, and pools of tears form in my weary eyes, still I rejoice that you are as near to me as my next breath and that in the midst of turbulence, I am growing and learning.

In the silence of my soul, I thank you most of all for your unconditional and eternal love. Amen

Linda Flores

AMEN!

We have been sharing in the journeys, words of wisdom, and experiences of our fellow parishioners for 5 weeks. What a blessed journey we've been on. We have been reflecting. We have been praying. Now we say **AMEN**.

("Amen" is how we give assent to what has gone before. It means, so be it, or truly, or yes.)

Now is the time for action. It is time to decide on our financial contribution to the ministry and mission of St. Monica's for 2017. This will be an important year in the life of our congregation. We will be in the process of calling a new rector. It will be an exciting year. St. Monica's will need your prayers, your presence and participation, and your financial contributions more than ever. It will not be a year of coasting or treading water. We will continue to do the work God has given us to do - to be a people and community where Christ's Light Shines.

We will complete our pledge cards during worship this weekend. We will present them at the altar to be blessed. That blessing is for all the ministry that those pledges will enable.

Thank you for your faithfulness and generosity.

Notes



G is for a Generous Life