



## Reflections for the Journey

SAINT JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH • ELLICOTT CITY, MD

### A Message from The Rev. Ann Ritonia

Dear Friends,

At the end of June, I had the opportunity to travel to Portugal with my four younger sisters. We left our children and husbands behind and reconnected in ways that can only happen when you are fully present with one another. While our trip was full of interesting destinations, activities, and good food and wine, the best part was experiencing this together. Each one of us set aside our work, our cell phones, and were mindful of the precious gift of time we gave to each other. Our trip reminded me of the many gifts our parents handed down to each of us and I appreciated the uniqueness of my siblings in ways that I had not considered in many years. As a result, we added a

new chapter in our family story, and were reminded of the importance of deep and abiding relationships that allow us to be the people we were created to be, our authentic selves.

This kind of experience does not require a trip to a foreign country (although this was great fun), but rather requires the investment of time and attention. I think this is one of the reasons folks found Jesus and his message so compelling. For three years he gave his followers, his disciples, and all those he encountered the gift of time and authenticity. He brought his authentic self to the table thus allowing those with him to be more fully themselves. He wasn't

seeking the next best thing or distracted by social media or what others were saying about him. Instead, he knew who he was, what he was about, and his purpose of bringing about the Kingdom of God.

Quaker writer and theologian, Parker Palmer, reminds us in his book, *The Courage to Teach*, that the two most important words in the human lexicon are *identity*

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## Rev. Ann's Message

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Rev. Ann Ritonia with her sisters in Portugal.

and integrity. Unless you know who you are and *whose you are*, we are hopelessly adrift in a world of hyper communication and hyped consumerism. Integrity for Palmer "requires that I discern what is integral to my selfhood, what fits and what does not—and that I choose life-giving ways of relating to the forces that converge within me...[Integrity] lies in relating to those forces [that make up my life] in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death."

These last few weeks it has felt so good to be in the moment and reminds me that I can make that happen every day with some intentionality, making time and space for those I love and care about, and time to reflect on how God is calling me to live my most authentic life.

One morning as I sat at an outside café with my sisters, enjoying their company and a delicious breakfast, I was a little sad as I observed a young couple who shared a meal but

were so glued to their phones they did not share a word of conversation or enjoy the beauty of the morning. In these days of Summer, it is my hope and prayer all of us find time for rest and re-creation to discover those things that bring us wholeness and authenticity to live lives worthy of the people God has created each one of us to be.

Blessings,  
Rev. Ann

***"I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant."***

***John 15:5  
The Message***

# Teaching Your Children to Pray

Excerpts of an article by Beth Ann Baus (printed with permission)



No one is born knowing how to pray. Children need to be taught how to think beyond themselves and their family and learn to pray for the needs of others. Here are some helpful guidelines from writer Beth Ann Baus to get your family started.

## The Prayer Jar

Children love surprises! Cut colorful paper into strips. On each strip write the names of people you want your children to pray for. For example, family members, babysitters, teachers, neighbors, and friends. Don't forget to put your child's name in there also; they shouldn't be

discouraged from praying for themselves. Then expand the net a little with names of important people and groups that you might not personally know (church and country leaders, firefighters, police, doctors and nurses.) Don't forget people you know who are sick or have specific needs; and if your child is in school, I encourage you to add the names of any children that might be considered a bully!

After placing the strips of paper in a container, plan a time each day to sit with your child and have them pull out three strips of paper. You can set your own ground rules for prayer time, but have them include three things:

- 1) Say something that Praises the Lord.
- 2) Say they are thankful for the person on the paper and why.
- 3) Ask God for something on behalf of that person.

An example of a prayer might look like this:

“Dear God, You are so good and loving! Thank you for our doctors and nurses. I like knowing there are people that can take care of us when we are sick. Please be with all the doctors and nurses and keep them safe. In Jesus name, Amen.”

Kids are bound to have questions. Reading Scripture from The International Children's Bible should prove helpful:

### What if I say it wrong?

Romans 8:26

### Why do I have to Praise God and thank God in my prayer?

Psalm 150:6; Philippians 4:6b

### Why do I have to pray for the bully?

Matthew 5:44

Spending time with your children in prayer will never be time wasted! As the years go on, you'll have children who are not only in the habit of praying—and praying with their family which is even better—but children who are closer to God.

## Finding Joy in Change

By The Rev. Dr. Katrina L. Grusell

People often say that "change is hard." Of course, it can be, depending on the circumstances and impact on our lives. As I've dealt with significant change in my own life, however, I've found that there is always the possibility for joy in change. This is true even as I continue to piece my life together following a difficult battle with cancer.

First, it's been helpful for me to remember the distinction between change and transition. Change is the nuts and bolts that are different. For me, that meant changes in brain functioning and my body, in my employment and ministry, and a shifting identity.

For our parish, recent change includes different staff, liturgical experiences, organizational functioning, and a shifting identity, as well. Change brings a perception of instability that always results in a time of transition.



Transition is the emotional process behind the change—and it has three very distinct stages. The first stage of transition is letting go of how things used to be and of our old identity. With compounded loss and multiple changes—as in a cancer diagnosis or the years of change and loss at St. John's—the pain of this stage is difficult and often takes longer to resolve than we expect.

Once we are able to accept that the past is over and begin mourning the losses, we enter the second stage of transition. This next stage is a "gray zone" between the old way of being and doing things, and the new way forward. This is a difficult, often long stage that can feel

chaotic and empty. It has resonances of wilderness—uncertainty, confusion, abandonment, fear, and grief. But it is also a creative time of finding new ways to address old problems; it's a time of discovery and new hope, as well. While it often feels as if the tectonic plates beneath us are shifting even more dramatically during the gray zone, as we take stock of the best of who we are and reclaim our core values, we begin to dream of future possibilities.

Finally, in the emotional process of transition, we reach a stage of closure, when we are clear about who we are in the now. Coming to terms with the variety and multiplicity of changes, we are able to create a road map for the future. We

embrace our new identity, and are able to see the possibility in who we are still becoming.

When people say, “I don’t like change,” it’s important to recognize the emotional process of transition behind it. The changes that cancer brought to my life four years ago were devastating. Untethered from the image I had for my life, I have experienced four long and difficult years of treatment, surgeries and therapies; learned new strategies; tried new ways of being, and tested new realities.

My time at St. John’s the last two years has been an important part of navigating through the gray zone of

transition. For me, the joy in change has included deeper self-awareness, clarity about relationships, and the small victories of a cancer survivor. Spiritually, I have a stronger sense that Jesus walks with me every step of the way. In my most vulnerable moments, in the deep pain of loss, Jesus Christ is with me in my isolation. He is present with me in supportive friends and guides me intuitively through difficult lessons, helping me experience the joy of this day and the hope of what might yet be. Again and again, I find things to celebrate as I approach each day with gratitude. As I move into a larger, half-time role at St. John’s as Associate Rector

for Pastoral Care, my heart is full of great joy as I turn the page of one difficult chapter of my life and begin a new chapter among you. In our congregation, there are many people who are in various stages of transition, in their own lives, and certainly in the life of the parish as things have shifted over the last five years. My prayer for all of us is that we are kind to one another, remembering that each of us carries emotional burdens and spiritual needs, and that together we will walk with hopeful hearts to the good work God now calls us to do. It will never be the same, but it can still be glorious.



## **We’re Here for You**

As we continue to transition through changes that are taking place at St. John’s, please know that the Clergy are here to listen to your ideas and concerns. Contact the Parish Office at 410-461-7793.

*The St. John’s Clergy (from left): Rev. Barnabas Lee, Rev. Dr. Katrina Grusell, Rev. Ann Ritonia, Rev. Stephen Hagerty, and Rev. J. Joseph Hart*

## “How are you? Joy-filled.”

By: The Rev. Stephen Hagerty

I want you to take a moment to think about how you answer a very common question. A question you are asked, hopefully, several times a day. And one you also ask of others; again, hopefully, several times a day. What is this question you are hopefully wondering? Simple. The question is this: “**How are you?**”

When I was in seminary, I had a classmate from Germany who was studying abroad for a semester. We got in the habit of sitting in the back row, which is how I got to know him a bit. This question (i.e., “How are you?”), at least the way Americans flung it around, baffled him. He took me aside once and said, “Stephen, when Americans ask me, ‘How are you?’, I notice that they don’t really seem to want to know. Why is this?” And that is when I explained that for many Americans (maybe most?), it is simply another version of saying, “Hello.” Again, he was baffled.

Or take another example. My father, whom I affectionately called, “Big Daddy,” (inspired by the indomitable Blanche Devereaux), in his later years got in the habit of replying to “How are you?”

with a wonderful one-word response, said unapologetically and with great ebullience: “Terrific!” Isn’t that a wonderful response and so rarely heard?

My “argument” so far—and I am using that word in quotes *purposefully*—is that far from being a meaningless question, this very simple and very common question is pregnant with religious overtones. Why do I say this? Well, think of how different the question is depending on which word you emphasize. (I will do this by putting the emphasized word in ALL CAPS.)

“HOW are you?”

I don’t take it for granted (and I doubt you do either) that the fact *that* we are at all is, well, kind of amazing. Except—general confession-time—we take this for granted *all the time!* I didn’t have a choice in my being born (and I feel comfortable saying you didn’t either) and I don’t have a choice as to whether I will die (again, sorry to be a downer, but neither do you). So, the “how” of “HOW are you?” is worth pondering a bit.

Or this version: “How are YOU?”

It is said so often that is has become kind of prosaic. *You are unique. I am unique.* But what if the “you” of each of us was understood as a gift. That the Source of all that is, was, and will be created this “you!” So, when we ask the simple question, “How are YOU?” Well, what if that was understood as a kind of blessing? As in: *how is it possible to acknowledge all this uniqueness confronting me all day long!?*

The last part of this “argument,” if it even rises to the weight of that word, is this. That when we are asked, “How are you?”, as disciples of Jesus, the Spirit can answer this for us. We are joy-filled. We are full of grace (#MotherOfGod). We are miracles running around pretending we are anything but beloved of God.

It is quite the powerful question this asking of, “How are you?” But maybe my classmate from Germany was right. Maybe we cannot bear the real answer to this question. Because if we could, our joy would be overwhelming.

# Recreating as Recreation

By: The Rev. J. Joseph Hart

So, we have all received the memo, “Summer has officially begun.” When I hear these words I exhale and say, “YES!”

Summer for me is a time to explore and be attentive to what this season invites us to experience. A key component of summer for me is the gift of recreating, both personally and spiritually. Part of my own spiritual practice is to continue my traditional daily routines of prayer, but also to engage in what I call seasonal spirituality: the gift of being in nature, of being in my garden and tending the blooms and yes the weeds as well. All of this brings me closer to God’s creation and in doing so allows me to recreate many gifts I have been given.

One plant I so enjoy growing are hydrangeas. Hydrangeas come in multiple varieties and colors from light pink to deep blue. I plant a few new ones each year. The picture to the right is from my latest harvest I shared with patients and staff at GBMC. They are quite prolific this year and add so beautifully to the summer color narrative.

As many of you know I am a painter. As a painter, I

believe God uses the colors and textures of summer to share the palette of how we are invited to see the world. St Paul in his letter to the Ephesians chapter 1:18 says, “*I pray that the eyes of your heart my be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.*” I love the phrase, “I pray the eyes of your heart will be enlightened”; I believe this is God’s great invitation in this summer season to see with the eyes of our hearts, to slow down and see! So much of life at times seems to pass us by due to the many excuses we all make, and in doing so, do not take the time to “smell the roses.”

To be enlightened is in many ways to be recharged, to breathe deeper, to more fully take in the world around you. Being recharged in this summer season allows us to “see” or envision life differently. In many ways this invitation of seeing with different eyes is not unlike being an artist. We artists see with different eyes, some of my favorite artists have shared a perspective on seeing or creating. Mark Rothko put it this way, “Art is an ad-

venture into an unknown world, which can only be explored by those willing to take the risk.” Indeed being open to seeing and experiencing life differently is in itself an invitation to being enlightened. So as these summer days unfold my prayer for all of us is to take time, to see with our hearts, and envision new possibilities for recreating our lives.



***Stop and smell  
the roses...or the  
hydrangeas.***

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