

A Devotional

More than eighty years ago, I lived in a beautiful wooded area of rural Missouri, a mile from the nearest neighbor. Our house stood on a hill overlooking the Osage River with a panoramic view of the countryside.

My sister and I were engrossed in the presence of nature's wonders in our daily lives, particularly those involving the river in the summer, and snow in the winter.

One summer evening when I was about six years old, our family was having a picnic on the island in the river below our home. It was nearly sunset with a lovely display of color. I had found a beautiful muscle shell. Suddenly I had the urge to look into the sky and lifted the shell into the air said aloud: "God, thank you, this is for you".

None of the family gave any indication they had seen or heard me, nor did I tell them. I have never forgotten my first personal religious experience. You see, I had no previous religious training such as family prayer and teachings or Sunday school instruction; although my parents identified themselves as Protestants and both had been exposed to Christian values as children.

So I am left with the conviction that my urge to thank god for my blessings came from some member of the Trinity – and was the first step on my journey to becoming a Christian years later.

Betty Radmacher
Member,
Christ Church United Methodist

P.S. "Never mind who calls for thee. The bell tolls for thee".

A Mandel Quote

Excerpt from Mandela Inaugural Address
As quoted from Marianne Williamson

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate,
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves,
“Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?”
Actually who are you not to be?
You are a child of god.

You playing small does not serve the world.
There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to manifest the glory of God that is in us.
It is not just within some of us, it's in everyone.
When we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fear our presence automatically liberates others.

We are reminded that we all have different skills and abilities, which when blended all together, form the actual presence in the world. When we promise to share our “gifts”, we promise to become God's physical presence here on the earth.

Perhaps today or this week, you will find yourself in a situation where your gifts can be employed on behalf of someone else. Perhaps God will lead you to a certain place, at a certain time, to use your skills, experience and resources in ways that will show God's compassion and grace, mercy and love to other people. Whatever those moments are and wherever it may occur, pray that God will open your eyes and spirit to such an opportunity. Be His hands and feet, His voice and heart to those who need to be reassured, embraced and encourage.

Who knows? By doing this you may help someone else to reconnect to God, so that they may also use their grace gifts to help others and expand the Kingdom of God.

Darrell Obert

My Faith Journey

As I look back over my years, I was formed in a Christian home. I remember, as a small child, my Grandfather Gray, a tall, white-haired man, praying over meals at our Gray reunion each year. Three of my older brothers attended church and Sunday school. When I got old enough they took me with them. I officially joined the church when I was in the 8th grade. I was promptly given a 5th grade Sunday school class to teach in the furnace room. I had to dust the coal dust off each Sunday. That began my bible study, and it's still going on.

I went to a Teacher's College, founded by the United Presbyterians, now a Baptist University. During my first two years as a teacher, I taught in a small town that had only two churches, a Methodist Church at one end and a Quaker Church at the other. Each held church every other Sunday and I went every Sunday.

I met Charley while teaching there. He came from a long line of Methodists. His Uncle, Charley Turelty, a District Superintendent and a 50 year minister, married us and baptized all five of our children as they came along.

We moved to Arizona for health reasons. We have always felt that the Lord looked after us. Now, with all our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren grown or growing up, and Charley waiting for me in Heaven, my eyes are bad and I cannot drive. I must find ways to still be useful and work on keeping my faith strong. One of the biggest developers of my faith is music! With God's help, I find that phone calls are my best outlet to brighten other people's lives. That is where God uses me best!

Bea Crawford

Presence

Being in church for worship on Sunday is a “mind-altering” experience for me. It’s a time to be in the “presence” of God, a time to celebrate and praise God. It’s a time to communicate with God through music, prayer and reflection. Sunday, without church and worship, is an empty time in my life; a time without meaning or purpose. I begin looking forward to Sunday morning sometime on Saturday. Sometimes it is Saturday morning, sometimes Saturday evening. Whenever it begins, I find myself thinking about how Sunday morning will look, what clothes I will wear, when will I leave home for church, what songs will be sung, what scripture will be read and what will the morning sermon (I prefer “message”) will be. And, those few times I am not in church on Sunday morning, my mind and spirit moves to church at or about the time the worship service is beginning.

As a Methodist, I have been “trained” to expect worship to last sixty minutes. Fifty-five minutes or so I okay, but NEVER more than sixty minutes. Some time ago, however, I realized there is no “required” time limit on Sunday worship. I’ve attended other worship services “outside” of Methodism where the service has lasted seventy-five to ninety minutes and found them to be rewarding, refreshing experiences. Those present come with enthusiasm, excitement, anticipation; they come prepared to experience the presence of God in their lives; just like I do.

The worship experience, whether it is sixty minutes or longer, leaves me with a sense of comfort, a sense of well-being. Worship leaves me “prepared” to re-enter the world and live life fully. The bible refers to Sunday as the “seventh day”, the end of the week, a day of rest. For me, it is not just the seventh day; it is the first day of the coming week, a time of excitement and expectation. Come with me, be present in church and experience the renewal that worship brings.

David West

Devotion

When we Methodists join a church, we vow to support it with our prayers, presence, gifts and service. There is an important purpose to this, besides the gifts, which is the financial portion, our tithes and offerings. To me, this is a thin, but strong, chain which connects us to God and we grow spiritually when we follow through on this vow. Our presence, attending worship on Sunday and other activities of the church, praying, both in worship and at home strengthens our relationship to Christ, our Savior. If we are physically able, the service we do is how we show and grow in our faith. There are varied ways of service; the committees vital to our church affairs, the choir, ushering, teaching in Sunday school, volunteering in the office or at the holiday activities.

Another of the blessings of fulfilling the vow is our connection with our church family. These precious persons, who sustain us in times of our sorrow, rejoice in our successes and times of joy, are the backbone of the church. True, some leave our fellowship and other dear ones have passed in Glory, but that spiritual chain holds us all as we worship, serve and pray together.

Prayer: Lord you know our strength and frailties. Lead us in the ways that we can serve our church and fulfill our vow of support and commitment. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Maylene Waln

Devotion for November on gifts

Suggested reading: Acts 2:41-47

"In all this I have given you an example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Acts 20:35

I was sorting old books to give away and found one that's a keeper, a Golden Book, "The Jolly Barnyard." My mother read it to me, over and over, when I was little. There are full color illustrations of animals and on the last page, there's a picture of Farmer Brown's birthday cake with bright pink frosting.

But it's not just the pictures; it's the story that makes the book significant. Farmer Brown celebrates his birthday by giving each animal its favorite food, giving a little extra and giving the best. As a result, he has a wonderful, joyous day.

As a church we celebrate when we give to others. Like Farmer Brown, we want to give each individual what that person needs the most and likes the best. Perhaps a friend needs a word of encouragement; a stranger needs a smile of welcome or a person at the food bank needs cereal for her kids.

In Acts 2: 41-47, we read how the first churches celebrated together, sharing food, encouragement, and prayer. We are "People Caring for People," carrying the tradition of the early church as Jesus calls us to care for one another.

Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the fellowship of our friendly church and for joy we receive when we give.

Thought for the Day:

Doing something for another person makes a regular day into a day of celebration.

Prayer Focus:

What unique encouragement or concrete help does someone need from me today?

Related reading: See John 21:15-17 where Jesus uses the analogy "feed my sheep," for serving one another in the church.

Anonymous

John 20:21b-22

As the Father has sent me, so I send you... Receive the Holy Spirit.

With these words, Christ gives us our charge to continue His work, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and to reflect God's love, mercy, and healing to the world.

Through Christ Church's ministry, worship and teaching, we follow Christ, proclaiming and demonstrating His love to the broken world using the pattern He has set for us. We build on His foundation in His way to bring the values of His kingdom to the world around us.

This is our reason for giving, not simply to build up Christ Church, but to advance God's kingdom and transform our community and the world.

Adapted in part from N.T. Wright, "The Challenge of Jesus"

Don and Janet Waugaman

Ezekiel 36:26

“A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh”.

A routine mammogram...that's all it was. Not! Several days after having that routine mammogram, the Women's Health Center called to let me know I needed to be scheduled for a biopsy. It wasn't a maybe! It was **for sure!** I thought to myself, “How can it be **for sure**. There must be some mistake”. It was a **for sure** and things accelerated from there. A biopsy, two breast surgeries, 8 chemo treatments (over a period of 16 weeks) and 15 radiation treatments (15 to go) has been a challenging and amazing journey. People I never knew, who had been touched by breast cancer, surfaced in my life. Every single person I encountered in the course of my treatment, reached out to me with unconditional love and acceptance. The chemotherapy nurses and doctors were amazing. My mentors throughout the chemo (my husband Dave, Bernice Edwards, Bethyl Pearson and Becky Cowart) sat with me through my chemo treatments and kept me talking or entertained.

It was amazing to watch those who had their support “buddy” and those who didn't. For those who didn't, the mood was overwhelmingly somber.

I cannot imagine going through a “chemo-journey” without support. I received countless cards from my family, church family, exercise buddies and people who found out via the grapevine and wanted to let me know I was being thought about. I was indeed humbled with each card and gift and dinner I received. The comments I have heard suggest that those with a positive attitude get through the treatments a lot better than those who don't. I believe it! Having support helps to keep one positive.

In Ezekiel 36:26, Ezekiel relates the word of the Lord: “A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh”. A heart of compassion for others. Jesus' ministry was a ministry of compassion. Reaching out to others is what this game called “Life” should be all about: offering a listening ear, a shoulder to cry on, a helping hand, a kind word, a card, a meal, a place for acceptance and love. That's what this journey has been about for me.

The “Chemo” community, for the most part, is a caring, loving community that realizes the journey is long and not always comfortable. Some people withdraw inward and some reach out. I found that reaching out, being in service to others, listening, helping...is what fulfills me. There are so many little things we can do to be in daily, moment by moment, service to those around us. Often something as little as a smile, holding a door, offering to help is all it takes to “make someone's day”. As individuals professing to be members of a community of faith, we need to “walk the talk”. We need to have our “heart of stone” turned into a “heart of flesh” as we serve those we are being called to serve!

Blessings,
Sally West

All my life I'd been told that I can't control what goes on in my life and even though I know I must let God, it's sometimes a power struggle. I want to be in charge. However, have you ever lost something and felt your heart drop to your toes with the realization it is gone forever? Why would one jump to that conclusion and not believe God, the ever-loving, faithful provider, would intercede? Is it because we forget God is with us and we only need to speak to Him and serve Him?

Eight years ago I received a call that my uncle had passed away in Nebraska and I quickly prepared to drive back. I'd probably never been so well-organized in such a short time and the car was packed the evening before my early morning departure. Just after locking the house I realized I'd not left a note for the neighbors so I quickly did that. I got into the car and headed out quickly asking God for travel mercies.

Just before reaching Benson I reached over to the passenger seat to get a hanky from my purse. Purse wasn't there; must be on the back seat. I pulled off at the next off-ramp to get it. Well, it wasn't in the back seat and although I never put my purse in the trunk I presumed I must have done so. You're so right! It wasn't there either and that's when panic set in, realizing I had set my purse on the trunk in my rush to get a note to the neighbors. I immediately turned back to hopefully retrieve it. How can you find a black purse on the freeway when you are going the opposite direction? I wouldn't have wanted to have my blood pressure or heart-beat tested at the time. Other than praying when my daughter and my husband were dying, I don't believe I've ever prayed so hard and so constantly.

That was the longest 40+ miles and my heart beat faster each mile. My hope increased as I left I-10 to head north on Houghton Road, but there was nothing on the road that resembled my purse. Just as I'd almost given up on God having listened to me, about one-fourth mile from my home, I saw this black thing lying in the middle of the street. Could it be my purse? If it is, it's undoubtedly empty and if that's the case, there is no way I can get to Nebraska since I'd have no proof of identity necessary to withdraw money from the bank.

Why wasn't my faith stronger and why wasn't I more trusting of humanity? That WAS my purse and not one item was missing! Granted, this was about four o'clock in the morning; it was dark and it did look like a piece of tire lying in the middle of the road. Who would stop to pick it up? No traffic was coming; I dropped to my knees and thanked God. He not only led me back to the purse but he also managed to keep me from getting a speeding ticket. The mantra, "Haste makes waste" is so true! I actually slowed down to have a cup of coffee before starting out again.

From that day forward I've always said the three letters on my license plate, "AWJ" stand for "Always with Jesus". Thank you God for your unconditional love and care.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble". – Psalm 46:1.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we may need to be reminded that your spirit is with us always. Give us a gentle little nudge if we forget to be grateful for your daily, unceasing and unconditional love. Help us to be your servants through our gifts, service and prayers. Amen.

Georgia Carmichael

Gifts

"You were there when I needed you." A friend said that to me very recently, many of us have heard the same; I had no idea that I did anything to be of help to her. Sometimes our gifts to each other are as simple as our presence. Sometimes it is much more like work. When our lives are going smoothly we think nothing of lending a helping hand and often we receive nothing in return. When we ourselves need help and we reach out to help someone else, we suddenly find our own problems have become very small. God gives us grace when we need it and we can then give His grace to others. One of our greatest gifts is the giving and receiving of God's strength.

Cathy Bol

God is always there, no matter where there happens to be.

Gifts

When I was asked to write a few words to be used in a devotional book, I thought of my ten years as receptionist at CCUM. I could not believe I would be getting paid to do this job. I felt like I should be paying the church to let me work in this office. I learned a lot about Gifts, Prayers, Service and Presence during those days.

I first thought about **GIFTS**. When I saw those offering and pledges coming through the mail or being dropped off by those who were unable to be in church, for one reason or another, I was so impressed. I thought how dedicated these people are to their congregation and to their commitment. and most of all, to their Lord. What a witness to me. I realized that we are a witness in all things. We never know who is watching us. We may be the only Jesus with "skin on", that the world will ever see.

Then I thought about **PRAYER**. I have always believed in prayer. Many of us have been in a situation where we did not know from where our next meal would come, or we have faced the fear that our child may not get another breath, or we have not known if we would have shelter the next day, etc. Some of us belong to the "sandwich generation", caught between taking care of our children and our elderly parents. We Pray....

Then there is **SERVICE**. I was invited to become a part of the Stephen Ministry which helped me understand the outreach with every Christian is blessed. In our own corner of the world we can share the love of God; be it at the preschool, the church office, the pulpit, the choir, or as a youth. We are blessed every day with endless possibilities and we need to wake up in the morning thanking God for a new day. How wonderful is that!

Last, but not least, there is **PRESENCE**. We are always in the presence of the Lord, but we must acknowledge Him. When we attend the Worship service in the sanctuary and worship with those who have come for the same purpose, the blessings we receive refresh and spur us on to "good works". How awesome is that! I could never be thankful enough that a girl I met in high school, on the city bus, invited me to church one day when I shared her bus seat. God is so good.

Georgia Love

God's Grace

Reverend Jim Stewart, a Senior Pastor of Christ Church, now retired, always had a story in his sermon that reflected his southern heritage telling of God's love for us.

A man from the north was visiting the south for the first time. He entered a restaurant and ordered breakfast. The usual; juice, coffee, eggs, bacon, home fries and toast. Soon the waitress brought his order. He looked at it suspiciously and sure enough he noted something strange on his plate. A mound of white that was not mashed potatoes. What's this he asked? Why Honey, replied the waitress, those are grits. I didn't order any grits, said the man! Honey, said the waitress, you don't order grits. They just come!

God's eternal gift of grace is ever present in our lives. We can only try to return his love with our prayers, our presence and our service.

Anonymous

Faith, Trust and Obey

In Exodus 1:8-2:10, we learn how Pharaoh felt threatened by how quickly the Israelites multiplied and he gave orders to the midwives to kill all newborn boys born to the Hebrew women. The midwives refused to obey the Pharaoh since their trust was in God and they allowed newborn boys to live. This most likely took a great amount of courage, but the midwives were very strong in their faith.

When the midwives refused to obey Pharaoh's orders, he then ordered newborn boys to be thrown into the Nile River. During this time, a boy was born to a Hebrew woman of strong faith in God. She placed him in a basket on the river and we all know how the Pharaoh's daughter found the baby, took him in as her own child and named him Moses.

Moses was chosen by God. Before Moses could begin his ministry – all these events had to take place first: people having faith and trust in God and obeying His calling. Their faith in God was tested, but it was strong and they chose to obey God.

Every day our faith and trust in God is tested. Events happen in our lives that make us wonder where God is. Has he forgotten about us? Has he left us? We all, at times, wonder – where are you God?

In Romans 12: 1-8, we learn that we are all parts of His one body and we each have different work to do. It also talks about our gifts and how to use them to the glory of God.

I believe God calls each of us to use our gifts and when we trust and obey His call and have faith, we often change the way we think and transforms us into new people.

In my life, God called me to be his servant by becoming a Stephen Minister and then a Stephen Leader. I have used this calling to minister to others and hopefully strengthen their faith and trust in God.

I have two quotes that I really like: Faith makes things possible, not easy; and, sorrow looks back, worry looks around and faith looks up. These should remind us to always have faith and trust in God for the work he does in our lives, and in our church – whether it be like Moses' beginning when the midwives spared his life or our own daily lives.

We must have faith that God will guide this church and members through at least another fifty years of service to His people. God is calling each of us – will we answer? It won't be easy, but with Faith, it is possible.

Gretchen Lofgren

I am so blessed. First by being born into a Christian family. My parents were Texas farmers and ranchers. I always say that I came from a "God dependant family", meaning that they realized that everything they had was a gift from God. They realized that He would provide but that they/we were responsible for being good stewards of his resources and to use them wisely and work to the best of our ability. God's share went back to him through the church, he would provide for us and we were to share with others.

My parents always encouraged/insisted that we try to do as many things as we had opportunity or necessity to do and to do it to the best of our ability – to find our GOD GIVEN GIFTS and TALENTS. They always said to learn as much about whatever you are doing as possible because knowledge is something that cannot be taken away except under rare circumstances. One of their favorite sayings was, "If something is worth doing it is worth doing your best". This was the same for paid work or volunteer work as there was no difference in God's eyes.

They taught me the importance of conversation, PRAYER, with our ever Loving Heavenly Father just as with my loving earthly family. No one ever promised us that life would always be a smooth and straight road. I, like most of you, have experienced these little detours and bumps and curves in the road of life. In 2005, I hit a major speed hump. There were days that I could only pray, "God I need a little help here". Then when the family came to the hospital they would bring bags of cards that you, my church family, had sent saying you were praying for me. This gave me the strength to begin to pray for the many doctors that were working together to make a diagnosis...later when I had the opportunity to share this with some of the doctors, they told me they had also been praying for me. Through prayer and their use of their GIFTS, the doctors were able to make a diagnosis of an autoimmune disease, Polyarteritis Nodosa, and begin treatment. Because of my gifts of adaptation to the abilities I still have, organizational skills and determination, I am still able to serve Him. Thankfully I have this opportunity here at Christ Church United Methodist.

Blessings to all of you for helping me with your prayers, feeding us and your many expressions of love and concern.

Matthew 7:7-12 and Roman 8:26

Betty Clapp

I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Rev. 2.19

For a number of years I have been visiting one of our homebound church members. We first met in a Disciple Bible Study. Then her health declined to point that she needed the care of a nursing home. She has been in 3 different ones over the years, the latest being a small adult care facility where she receives excellent care. She spends most of her time in bed because of severe arthritis and other physical ailments, and her memory comes and goes. However, she always remembers me, and the first question out of her mouth is always, "How is my church doing?" She wants to hear all of the news of everything happening at Christ Church. Recently she lamented that she felt she could no longer uphold her vows made when joining the church because her physical condition prevents her attendance at services. Her finances have been depleted by the care she has required and she can no longer do things to help around the church. I reminded her that there is a fourth part of the vows we take when we join the Methodist Church – the very first part of these vows, which is to uphold the church with our prayers (then our presence, gifts and service). Her eyes brightened, and she said, "Oh, I do pray for my church, our pastors and all of the members every morning and every night!" I knew that was true, because as we pray together at the end of each of my visits, she unfailingly begins the prayer with a long list of things for which she is grateful – Jesus, her family, caregivers, friends, her church, etc., and always prays that God will bless our church. Before leaving, I often tell her of specific prayer requests at church, and she promises to pray for those, too. Each time I visit, she teaches me new lessons in gracious acceptance of whatever life brings as well as showing me how to continue to be a vital part of our congregation even when one is homebound. I pray that each of us might uphold our vow as well as this wonderful woman does.

Prayer: Loving God, remind me of ways to serve you faithfully no matter what my current circumstances are. Help me to focus less on what I don't have and more on what I do have and use those gifts to bring glory to you. Amen.

Sharon Stites

Prayer Chain

My life has been richly blessed by being a link in the Christ Church Prayer Chain. It is through prayer that we communicate with each other at the deepest level of our being. Behind all words, all thoughts and feelings, there is an inner core of prayer where our hearts are united in the presence of God. It is amazing how the power of prayer works in His mysterious ways! In His fullness, we have received grace upon grace.

We may have different ways of connecting with God. We may have different beliefs, use different words, but prayer is a power that reached out to God's entire universe.

As those on the Prayer Chain pray, there are others who put "feet on our prayers" – taking action – reaching out in spiritual compassion and love. Jesus, the Master Teacher, taught us to love one another.

Love and prayer in action is a power drawing us nigh unto God.

An ordinary chain is as weak as its weakest link, but a prayer chain is as strong as its strongest link – every link united from here on earth to God in Heaven.

It is my prayer for each of you that God will fill your hearts with the light of His love that you may abound in grace by the power of His Spirit. Amen and Amen.

Juanita Robinson

Prayers – Presence – Gifts – Service

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. Acts 6:8

I write to prayers, presence, gifts and service because that's what Stephen Ministers promise to do. A Stephen Minister is first of all a person of faith who seeks to glorify God in all that they say and do. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.* Mark 12:30

Christ Church Stephen Ministers depend on God to help us be an active part of the church congregation and to demonstrate confidentiality to our care receivers. We also offer a listening ear and prayer for anyone who has a special need. All Stephen Ministers develop their special gifts and talents and show their strengths as they go through many hours of training before being commissioned as a Stephen Minister.

Growing up in a Baptist church on the south side of Tucson, I learned from Sunday school teachers and my pastor the importance of knowing God and praying to Him. God grew to be an important part of my life. I developed a personal relationship with Him and my prayer time became a part of my spiritual life. As an adult, my prayers strengthened and I found people would ask me to pray for them during a difficult time they were experiencing. Did God have a plan for me to become a Stephen Minister so I could take one on one assignments and pray for others? Yes, He did! When I became a member of CCUM, I completed the Stephen Ministry training and six months later I became one of the leaders of Stephen Ministry. That was in 2004 and I continue to be active today.

I tell others about Stephen Ministry as often as I can. God has also deepened my relationship with him through the Walk to Emmaus. I am passionate about both of these acts of serving God and would gladly discuss either with anyone who's interested.

John 12:26 says: *If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moments notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me.*

Kaye Jay

Law vs. Relationship

Reading: Ruth 1:1-18

Why did Ruth cling to her mother-in-law, Naomi and refuse to leave; and why did Orpah decide to return to her native land? Ruth had a heart-to-heart relationship with Naomi and leaving her was unthinkable. Orpah initially had stayed because the law required it. My walk with the Lord was like Orpah and her sense of duty to stay with her mother-in-law. I was abiding by the Christian code of conduct and doing all the right things, going to church, praying, reading my Bible and serving.

All changed about a year ago when I experienced God's presence and felt an indescribable longing to seek and come to know Him better. An ever deepening relationship continues to grow and I seek His presence and spend time in communion with Him.

Getting to know God is causing me to move from operating out of a sense of duty to being motivated by my love for Him. It is like the story of the maid who faithfully served her employer because it was her job. But when they fell in love and became husband and wife the relationship changed dramatically. The woman still did the same tasks, but now no longer from a sense of duty, but because of a desire to please her beloved.

This is the change God is working in me.

May we all desire and seek the Lord and know Him in a deeper way than we ever have before, so that in relationship with Him we are equipped with His wisdom, His strength and His grace to move forward in confidence with His design and will for us and for our church.

Respectfully submitted,
Pat Prokopp

I did not recognize them, yet their faces wore the same familiarity of so many that had crossed the threshold of our church office the past two weeks: the worn look of the downtrodden and discouraged, no longer hopeful or expectant of anything except more of the same, the answer, “no, I am so sorry, we are unable to help with rent or utility bills at this time”. I had fielded many calls of a similar nature over my few days of volunteering at the reception desk, but these people had taken the time to come in, to plead with eyes of need and urgency.

Surprisingly, however, they were seeking assistance, not for themselves, but for a friend, the single, desperate mother of three small children, whose electricity had been shut off because someone she had trusted had misused her credit card and maligned her credit. Her appeals to the utility company and various agencies that promised hope had been denied, and so her error in judgment, in trusting someone she loved was costing not only her, but her children. She had no stove on which to prepare a hot meal, no lamps to light for even the simplest tasks or for protection, not electricity to preserve what little perishable food she could secure.

I made the usual offer: would some non-perishable food help, or blanket, or a voucher for the community closet? No, they said, she needed her electricity turned back on.

I knew I was not supposed to, but my heart ached to help them. I knew I had cash in my purse, and I knew I could: there was enough for her to at least make a payment on her bill. On the other hand, we have learned, through painful experience, that sadly when we help one, others less kind can come in and expect the same, and even jeopardize the safety of other working in the office. I had to firmly remind myself of this office policy.

Still they stood there, silently refusing to be dismissed without something they could cling to. The phones kept ringing, and they could see I was busy, but they remained. Without a word, they insisted that I DO SOMETHING. They were not in any way threatening, not demanding. They just WERE.

As I finished the last phone call and completed writing the message, I realized that there was one thing I could do for them. I told them I would pray for this mother, and so would the pastoral staff. I asked for her name and solemnly, they spelled it out completely for me. I made sure that they knew that I was serious about praying and that our pastors were also.

Was it enough? I have no way, of course, of knowing. But I did exactly as I promised. I made sure the pastors knew of this mother’s plight and I immediately began to pray for her and for her children, thinking, “There but for God’s grace go I”. I pray for her still, because she needs it and it is the one sure thing I can give her.

Jesus loves the little children, and every time I see this mother’s name on my prayer list, I recall this as I pray for her. It takes only a second for me to lift her up and I believe with all my heart that He hears and He answers. If I had been the only sinner in the world, He would still have died on that cross, for me. For my Jesus, helping this mother defines who He is. He is Lord.

Linda Woodall

Worship

Why do we worship? Have you ever thought about it? I never really thought much about why – just that we were supposed to when we became a Christian. According to John Ortberg's book, *If You Want To Walk On Water You've Got To Get Out Of The Boat*, I learned I need to worship. I need to worship so I won't forget how Big God is, so I won't lose a sense of wonder and gratitude, and so I won't forget God is in control. If I stay in the moment and respond in worship I will be richer for the experience. I will be able to hear God's call to step out of the boat on faith and trust him. Because I choose to worship and respond, I will be different, my sphere of influence will be different, and the world will be different.

Father, thank you for worship time. May I always see the wonders in the world and give thanks for your goodness. Make me ever aware of your presence so when asked to step out of the boat on faith I need not fear the outcome because you are soooooo Big and in control. I ask these things in Jesus name, Amen.

Lorene Sparks

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.”

“I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.”

The Merton statement puts us right where we are, in the midst of everyday life. Every day life is all we have. We don't have our yesterdays except in our dreams and memories. We don't have our tomorrows except in our ambitions and dreams. What we do have is the assurance that Jesus the Christ, the son of God is with us for the whole Journey.

James D. Stewart

MY THANKSGIVING PRAYER

By Ardith Powell

I've found the common daylight sweet
And it is music to my humble ears.
Thank you Lord our God.
Our world is full of richness and plenty,
Shared by all the harvest will feed the hungry,
As your blessings are showered upon us daily,
The sun awakens the seed of giving within us.
Help us to be compassionate, caring and always growing
Nurturing one another in loving and knowing.
And Lord, on this our blessed Thanksgiving Day
We are most grateful and thank you
For your love and generous bounty.
Amen.

Our Crosses

A lot of people at our church know why Eddie and I make the crosses that we give away, but for those who don't I would like to explain. Back in 1982 we were living in Huntington Mills, Pa. I was seeing a doctor, a wonderful Christian man named Dr. Grant Clark, who was treating me for a terrible pain that would come and go. He treated me for everything he could think of and then sent me to a surgeon in Bloomsburg, Pa. for an exploratory. The day of surgery, Dr. Clark met me in the hall and prayed with me and told me that he would be right with me through out the surgery. Eddie and our 2 sons were waiting. When the surgery was over he came out of the operating room crying. He told my family I was full of cancer and that I had about 6 months to live. I had made Eddie promise to tell me what they found because I really believed that they would find cancer. Dr. Clark wanted to tell me but Eddie said he had promised to tell me. I told Eddie that the Lord and I would work it out together. We did...I believed he would heal me, and he did. It has been over 4 years now. Each time it came back I went through Chemo and would go into remission. About 2 months ago I had to go through 33 radiation treatments for breast cancer, but I thank the Lord everyday for each day he has given me and Eddie and I make the crosses to thank him for what he has done for me. Since then, I've been making the "cross in my pocket" which I try to give to each new person who comes to our church.

Thank you Lord for all you have done for us.

Dottie Davies

Outside Our Boundaries

Read John 21:15-19

Jesus said to (Peter), "Feed my sheep."

-John 21:17 (NRSV)

One Saturday afternoon, six people met outside our church. We held hands, said a short prayer, and then drove to a homeless shelter to serve an evening meal. After passing through an electronic security gate, we followed a worker down a gloomy hall and into a large room with chairs and long tables. Smells of recent institutional meals blended together. A stack of hard plastic trays waited to be filled with food from serving containers covered with foil.

In the small serving area, our church group put on clear plastic gloves and hairnets. People gathered and lined up against a far wall. I stood in front of the mashed potatoes, and we started serving at a quick pace. Looking into the eyes of the homeless, I saw love and kindness. When I handed them their trays, most said, "God bless you." I've never been blessed so many times – not only in words but by women and men who perhaps understand the harshness of life better than I do. They served me by their presence.

Our lives can be enriched by circumstances and by people who have walked a path different than ours. When we serve others outside the boundaries of our comfortable routines, we too receive a blessing.

Prayer: O God, spur us to move outside our comfortable boundaries to serve persons in need. Amen.

Anonymous

Devotions 2008

Christ Church has been my whole spiritual life, in fact it has been the biggest part of my life as I've spent 43 years here starting in my late 20's! You do the math!! This goes back to my children being born/baptized, deaths in the family, a low time through my divorce in the mid-70's to the highest point of marrying my best friend Sam 24 years ago. Through it all, my friends have stuck by me as has God.

God is my constant and often I find myself on my knees thanking him for the wonderful life I've been given. One time I didn't know where our next meal would come from to feed my children. A friend called that afternoon and asked if we would come to dinner! God is so good.

One time on my 40th birthday, the children and I were having dinner. There was a knock at the door and there was a dear friend from this church wishing me a happy birthday. To this day, we still remain good friends. God is so good.

One Sunday after church, a dear friend asked me to breakfast. Six months later we were married and remain so! God is so good.

There was a time when our family experienced some bad car accidents. Stephen Ministry was right there with food and love. God is so good.

Christ Church has its ups and downs but the Holy Spirit remains and touches those in our time of need and in our high spots.

Isaiah 58:9-11 (NIV). This is my favorite scripture I share with you.

Then you will call, and the Lord will answer, you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

If you do away with the yoke of oppression with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noon day. The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame.

Praise be to God always.

Peggy Scalzo

Prayer is Expected

In Matthew 6:7-13, the disciples ask Jesus "How do we pray". Jesus responds "When you pray". There is no if you pray, prayer is expected. Then follow his instructions which begin with adoration of our Creator, Father in heaven, confession of our sins and weaknesses, thanksgiving for all that we receive through his eternal grace and our supplication and humility before him.

We petition for our daily bread. We are totally dependant on him for our bread for this one day. Martin Luther said that our bread is for the nourishment of our bodies but also means our home, hearth and family, marriage, companionship, job, government and peace and all that prepares us to receive God's spiritual guidance and know of his love.

God cares for us. Our Creator in all his glory and majesty makes sure that we have our daily bread that we may know him and draw closer to him through our daily prayers, our presence our gifts and our service.

Prayers – Presence – Gifts – Service

“Praise God in his holy house of worship. Let every living, breathing creature praise God!”
(Psalm 150)

I would like to deal with the PRESENCE part of our vows. PRESENCE, of course, means being in attendance, and in this case, it means being PRESENT in worship and for other acts of service.

The writers of the psalms repeatedly tell us that we are to praise the Lord in the Assembly of God's people. This is usually given in the form of a command, not a suggestion. Then there is the fourth commandment: “Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy”. God wants us to set aside a day each week in which we are to gather with a sacred group of persons who have come together with one goal – to worship God and to lift each other up in prayer and to hear again and again the word of God read and declared. Our PRESENCE in worship on a regular basis, with others of like mind is what we are commanded to do. God does not want us to attend worship because God has told us to, but because it is only through regular worship that we are fed, that we can carry on through the other six days. In other words, it's good for us! We cannot be whole persons without worshiping the God who created us, saves us and sustains us. God commands it of us because it is the best thing we can do on the best day of the week.

Just being PRESENT isn't enough. Our minds and hearts must also be engaged as we actively participate. We must sing the hymns, no matter what our voice sounds like. That means to “enjoy” each text, not just the beauty of the music. It means to actively listen to each and every word of the scripture readings of the day. We have heard these ancient texts over and over and as a result we often don't really hear the sacred words as if for the first time. We must be PRESENT as we hear the words of scripture and the preached word. These are other ways of offering our PRESENCE.

Beyond worship God wants us to be PRESENT to serve others. This is our calling, this is our ministry. We do this through all the many outreach ministries of Christ Church and other ministries in the community. How many of these are you involved with? We do this in the way we treat our family and all those with whom we come into contact every day. We must always ‘be in ministry’, always be PRESENT, 24-7.

“God blessed the seventh day. God made it a Holy Day” (Genesis 2:3), and we must too!

By John Neve, Director of Handbell Ministries

Rejoice and be Glad

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:24

Yet, I get so caught up in the cares of the world such as bills, taxes, health concerns, family squabbles, work and chores. I forget to be glad and rejoice. Woe is me. Yet all of you probably face similar situations.

Here in Tucson in late October, we're experiencing lovely weather. There's relief from the baking heat of summer. Soon the leaves on deciduous trees will turn brilliant colors. Skies are usually clear.

Fall, like each season, has its own unique characteristics. Citrus trees will soon bear fruit, God's abundant bounty.

It is a wonderful time to express some of that joy and gladness I experience when I turn those cares, concerns and decisions over to God. To take them to the foot of the cross and lay them down as I should be doing ALL times of the year.

And just take time – to commune with Him and worship Him

His love for us is unfailing.

He is always with us and won't forsake us. Life is so much better when we let God into our lives and His hand touches them.

Dear friends in Christ, won't you join me today and all days in rejoicing and gladness in this season and all seasons?

Susie Hathaway

I am so thankful that Christ Church United Methodist is a praying church. Prayer is our life line, our support line, our praise line, our direct line to God Almighty through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Whenever great sadness, great difficulties, great everyday plodding or great celebrations and joy happen I have felt gifted by the prayers of our church family.

In closing I will quote Philippians 4:6-7 – "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

RosaLee Murray

Servanthood and Stewardship

A towel is a symbol of service. By serving each other, and as in the scripture (Luke 10:25-37) Christ calls on us to serve the stranger and be The Good Samaritan.

When we joined our church we took our vows to be prayerful and to be present in church and church activities. To be supportive of our church with tangible gifts and by using our personal gifts in service to others in need.

Each of us needs a towel of servanthood to give graciously what we know is true in our hearts and what is in our pockets as well.

Galatians 6:9 tells us "So let us not grow weary in doing what is right for we will reap at harvest time if we do not give up."

There is so much ahead for each of us and our church and as Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "All that I have seen readies me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen."

Love and blessings,
Ardith L. Powell

Service / Servanthood

CALVARY GREETINGS

From International Advocates for Christ Ministries

Serve with Gladness Psalm 100:2 Serve the Lord with Gladness

We have a glorious invitation to come into the presence of our Lord. It is the one thing to be called to "make a joyful noise: but to serve Him, is to stand beside Him and to stand with Him! What a tremendous invitation we have from GOD Himself. The invitation allows us to come into His presence and sit with Him and serve with Him. This is an invitation to be a part of the things, in which God is passionate. This is an invitation to share in His plan of salvation to the whole world. We are to serve Him because of His great love for us. We are to serve Him because of our love for Him. We are to serve Him in obedience to our church, to His commandments, and to His statutes. We are to serve Him because of all the things that He has already done for us, as well as the many things that He is about to do for us. Faith is the key to everything that God expects from us. We are to believe that He is everything that He says He is. When we take that step of faith, we come into His presence with joy and gladness! We come to Him to serve Him out of a grateful and thankful heart! God is a great God and He has so many blessings in store for us. I look forward with great expectation to our divine reunion in the Celestial city (when our global ministries of servanthood are completed) and we hear THE GREAT I AM say WELL DONE, GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT. The prize for claiming Lordship in Christ Jesus and "making disciples of all people" (THE GREAT COMMISSION) is Eternity with THE MASTER. Amen...humble, Joe Jameson (a recovering Pharisee)

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Anonymous

Stewardship

Jesus said, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven." (Mt. 6:19-20) Well, we can't say Jesus didn't warn us. The thieves have come and for many of us, stolen irreplaceable treasure.

At a time when our nation is in its worst financial crisis since "the great depression" I am challenged to write about our Stewardship commitment and call upon each of you to be a good steward on behalf of our church. A Steward is one to whose care is committed the management of a household. In this instance, "Gods' household" a serious responsibility as well as a personal accountability. We must face this challenge with love in our hearts and an up-beat servant attitude.

In the past years we've called such responsibility, "Promises to Keep" – "Consecration Sunday" – "Growing a Community" (using sermons on prayer, Grace, service and even personal letters to one another to express the meaning of Christ Church ministries). In the words of Heidi Husted's Sermon on the Amount, "Stewardship is a lifestyle God has called us to and it includes money." There's that "M" word that's affecting many of our lives in this difficult time. But with determination we will get over this terrible sink-hole in the road of life, as we continue on our journey with God.

Jesus was never truly specific about money though he spoke often about it. I've chosen (3) examples for us to consider: (1) When Jesus was asked about paying taxes to Caesar, he replied, "Give to Caesar what is Caesars' and to God what is Gods'". (Mt. 22:17, 21) Perhaps a reference to tithing. (2) The poor widow who put 2 copper coins in the temple kettle. She gave out of poverty all she had and Jesus praised her for her generous heart. (Luke 21:2) (3) Mary took a pint of pure nard (expensive perfume) and poured it on Jesus' feet, then wiped His feet with her hair. (John 12:3) And Jesus praised her extravagant love and humility.

Three extremes, obviously the decisions are yours. But before you make your commitment to Stewardship, let me tell you a heart-warming story: "Little Timmy loved Sunday School but his Teacher was always making the kids memorize scripture and Timmy simply couldn't memorize. Then one Sunday the teacher assigned the 23rd Psalm to the children. She gave them several weeks to memorize this popular Psalm and then invited the parents on the Sunday the children were to recite it.

Poor Timmy – whatever would he do! Well, the day come and each child proudly stepped up to the microphone and recited the Psalm and all the parents applauded. Finally, it was Timmys' turn. He nervously approached the microphone and then calmly and distinctly he said, "The Lord is my Shepherd.....and that's all I need to know." Then he sat down. There was silence, then a few hand claps followed by a standing ovation. (I don't recall the author of this story and I've not memorized it exactly) but like Timmy, "The Lord is my Shepherd" and that's all I need to know. In this one beautiful Psalm, God has given us: A relationship, provision, rest, refreshment, healing, guidance, love. Challenge, assurance, faithfulness, peace, hope, consecration, abundance, blessing, security and eternity. If you follow along in your bible, every few words will explain these gifts.

Now remembering our Stewardship responsibility, what will you give to God?

Deloris Yockey

Let's Take a Few Moments

The vows we take when we become members of the United Methodist Church are really asking us to live in a way that will strengthen our lives and those around us.

When asked to write a devotion for this booklet, I thought, no problem. As is the case so many times, when I reviewed our vows and promises, WOW, it is "work" living up to our vows/promises.

Let's take a few moments and look at our four promises/vows. We have said we will be faithful with our gifts, presence, service and prayers. Consider our gifts, many of us will think money. There is so much more to giving of our gifts. To me, gifts include the use of our special talents. Those who help with repairs around the church, those who are spending hours knitting, crocheting and sewing prayer shawls and prayer quilts for our members, family members and friends, cooking meals, helping to distribute food to those in need, working with our children and youth, playing a musical instrument, singing in one of the choirs, the list can go on and on—people using their gifts.

Our presence, I believe means being on our campus. For those of us who are able to be here during worship services and during the week at events, yes, we need to be present. I have taken that to another level----I believe there are many of us who cannot be on our campus, for a great variety of reasons. I believe those who cannot be physically with us, are with us in spirit. I often wonder how many of our members are in their places of residence on Sunday morning praying for us as we gather for worship. Please take a moment to think about our faithful members who cannot be physically present with us but are with us in their thoughts and prayers.

Our service-----helping others, attending meetings, working in our church and in our community. Again, my mind goes to those who can no longer be in service. They have finished their service commitments to the church and community. There is an opportunity for those of us who are still able---- we must continue the work and serve in all areas.

Our prayers----take a few moments to think about this vow. WE can all be in prayer. I have a friend who prays at stop lights. What an opportunity. We can pray anywhere, any time, there are no special "props" needed. The Scriptures tell us to pray without ceasing.

I invite you to take a few moments to review the vows of membership we took as we joined the church. I believe we can all take part in each one of our vows. For some, we may need a creative twist to the traditional way of thinking, but the possibilities are endless. Think creatively about how YOU can fulfill our vows and promises to faithfully participate in the ministries of our congregation. There is a place for each of us. Peace to each of you.

Sue Gemoets

Thank You for My Life

Dear God, thank you for my life on this earth, however challenging or not.

Thank you for giving me free will to love and be loved, to make my own decisions, to learn from my mistakes, to laugh when I am happy, to cry when I am sad.

Thank you for my family, my pets, and for every other living creature I meet along my journey.

Thank you for giving me the strength to overcome adversity, to do what's right for the benefit of others, and to rise above negativity.

Thank you for giving me hope for an end to world suffering, pain and war for a better world filled with light and everlasting love.

Author unknown

Submitted by Ruth Ann Shores

The Lilac Child

By

Elizabeth Hoover

January 1987

She was twelve years old that month of May when it was time to remember mothers, and she came to me with a wee little lilac bush in her hands as her special offering.

With loving care, we planted it at the corner of the house by her bedroom window so that she could watch over her gift as it grew and bloomed as she dreamed her way into young womanhood in her pink-walled room. And I watched, too, when I looked through the ruffled curtains or straightened the pictures of young movie idols which adorned her walls.

We waited and watched. Springs came and went – cold springs, warm springs, and indifferent springs. And the lilac bush grew and grew, but held back its blooms and its fragrance each year. And we did not know why.

The twelve year old became a young woman, and she wore a blue dress to a school dance and then a black velvet dress with a wide, white collar, and they danced together and she fell in love. She found her heart in little pieces in her hands one day, and we cried together, locked in one another's arms on her bed, and looked at the lilac bush which never bloomed.

There were angry times then, misguided times, unfulfilled times, and the winters were too cold and too brittle and too long, and the numbness stayed inside of us. Spring never seemed to come and the color of lilac was gone forever, we thought from our lives.

Then one spring, on a brilliant April day with sunshine that melted the most frozen places in our hearts, she became a bride, in tulle and lace and white daisies and yellow roses. We said goodbye to the pink-walled room and the posters in the wall. Inside me, I felt deep shards of pain, but I held myself together until they drove away into their new life before I shed my bittersweet tears.

And then I remembered. I went out to the corner of the house, outside her bedroom window, and I looked through my tears at the lilac bush which had bloomed for the first time on her wedding day. And in that delicate purple blossom, I saw the unbroken ties of love and faith and hope and trust that would bind us together all down the years, ties that distance and time would not sever.

And I knew then that the lilac bush had slept all those long years, waiting to bring me its first blossoms on the days I would need them most.

The Play

1.

The weary man with a low and stately pace
Began to quench its fire in the vast bowl
Of the distant hills,
As with reluctance yielding the stage of the universe
To night, whose hand rung down the curtain
On the panorama of the day.
The choral cast of stars appeared,
Dancing among the gathering clouds
Who squatted on the frame of mountain peaks.
The agile lightning flashed upon the stage,
Pirouetting madly from peak to peak,
The mutterings of the thunder its accompaniment.

2.

A fool watched the play with easy eye
And said, "Behold the magnificent, blind power
Of the universe, my slave.
Up from the soulless machine have I struggled hard,
Till by my might the secrets of all the earth
And every star I know."
A distance off, a wise man watched with humble gaze
And raised his eye to heaven, stretched out his hands
And prayed, "Oh God,
How great is thy creation, yet how much greater thou.
My wisdom is as nothing to the all, yet help me
To use it well in serving thee."

3.

Over all the scene there crept a quiet
As the lightning ceased, the thunder stilled,
The moon and stars stood mute.
From out the trackless stuff of eternity
A voice with quiet power spoke and said,
"Oh, fool, so limited thy vision
Thou canst not see the play must have an author."
The fool heard nothing but felt strangely ill at ease within.
The voice again spoke.
"Oh servant mine, because thou dost trust and believe,
I shall ever walk with thee."
The wise man bowed his head, his heart and soul at peace.

Edward P. Murray, 1951

We Are All Ministers

By Acel Scott

In church on Sunday, October 19th, all ministers were asked to stand. Have you ever considered who the ministers are in our church? WE ALL ARE! We have our ordained pastors/ministers and then the lay members. We all serve as an agent of God and we come in all shapes, sizes and colors. Some work on committees in the "business" of the church; some minister to the people who utilize our Food Bank; others minister in the community as witnesses in living an exemplary life. We minister to the children in our Pre-School. We have Stephen Ministers who help in the time of need. Everyone who is friendly to newcomers becomes a minister. Do you help cook meals for special dinners, teach a class, serve on a committee, plan programs, work in the Church office, make phone calls, call on those in the hospital and/or care homes, provide music for special programs as well as regular church services? The list goes on and on!

Without all of our ministers we could not function as a Church.