

Grace Notes in Miniature

For Tuesday, May 12, 2020

Dear friends:

My missalette tells me that today is “Canada Health Day” and makes me think of how fortunate we are with our health care system and the connected chain of Public Health experts we have across Canada who have been advising our political leaders and helping to keep us safe through the Covid-19 isolation. As Canadians, we tend to have a lot of “faith” in the services available and are perhaps closer to being a united front than we have been on any issue for a long time.

We are paying a lot of attention to our physical and mental health; we have been advised to keep track of a number of symptoms, take our temperatures, pay attention to hygiene – especially the washing of our hands. Last week being Mental Health Awareness Week, we have been blessed with lots of consciousness-raising concerning our mental well-being. That leaves our spiritual health.....

After many years of denying the role of spiritual health in physical healing and recovery, medical professionals are now starting to acknowledge that our spiritual health may play a significant role. A study by Christina Puchalski, MD, MS from Baylor University in 2001 acknowledged that:

Spiritual commitment tends to enhance recovery from illness and surgery. For example, a study of heart transplant patients showed that those who participated in religious activities and said their beliefs were important complied better with follow-up treatment, had improved physical functioning at the 12-month follow-up visit, had higher levels of self-esteem, and had less anxiety and fewer health worries¹.

There are several more recent articles and studies cited alongside hers, showing that



this is an area of clinical interest. It is pretty much accepted that

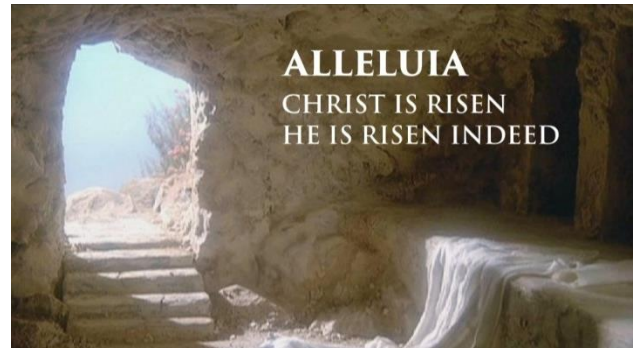
“Spirituality is integral to whole -- or holistic -- patient care in that it helps to address individuals' understanding of illness and change. Spiritual perspectives and practices can provide a context wherein anxieties about physical and mental functioning may be faced, felt, and understood.”²

Furthermore, there are many recognised benefits to mental health of religion and spirituality.

“Religion gives people something to believe in, provides a sense of structure and typically offers a group of people to connect with over similar beliefs. These facets can have a large positive impact on mental health—research suggests that religiosity reduces suicide rates, alcoholism and drug use. [Similarly] Spirituality is a sense of connection to

¹[Christina M. Puchalski, MD, MS: The role of spirituality in health care](#)

² <https://www.medpagetoday.com/columns/focusonpolicy/14725>



something bigger than ourselves—it helps a person look within and understand themselves while also figuring out the greater answer of how they fit in to the rest of the world. In other words: It helps people understand *their interpretation* of the meaning of life.”³

Within our Board, we have put much effort into developing Christian Meditation as a prayer form for all students. It is considered important enough that it is included in the Learn at Home site on the Board’s web page (See: <https://learnathome.hcdsb.org/christian-meditation/>) Such a mindset fits very well with our stated objective in “Renewing the Promise” that we accompany every person in our community and lead all to an encounter with the Lord.



The Examen is a prayer technique wherein one reflects on the events of the day and tries to see God’s presence and will for us. As commonly practised it is a prayer form described by St Ignatius of Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*. He considered the Examen a God-given gift and believed that God would want it to be shared as widely as possible. Ignatius (baptised Iñigo in Basque Spain) had much opportunity to spend in reflection when, after a successful start to a military career, he was bedridden after having his leg shattered by a cannonball at the Battle of Pamplona. During his recovery, he experienced a conversion and chose to follow religious studies and life, ultimately joining with his friends, Peter Faber and Francis Xavier to form the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits. One of the few rules of prayer

for the Jesuits is to practise the Examen twice daily—at noon and at the end of the day. It calls on us to take some meditative time to:

1. **Become aware of God’s presence.**
2. **Review the day with gratitude.**
3. **Pay attention to your emotions.**
4. **Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.**
5. **Look toward tomorrow.**

You can find some further explanation and some ideas on how to develop this prayer at:

<https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/>

You may enjoy this musical meditation on Scripture – although you may want to divide it into shorter segments as it is over three hours in total! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BriCF4tCgEY> . Or you may find this shorter version more useful. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5r9skkZtN0> There is a fair amount of evidence that playing music like this, even as the background to work or study, can help us be less stressed and may improve our receptiveness.

Peace be with you...

Gillian

³ <https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/December-2016/The-Mental-Health-Benefits-of-Religion-Spiritual>