Sharing the Good News
from the pen of the Mission Interpreter



July 24, 2022, Vol. 2, Issue 27

Inner Flourishing

Mood changes and periods of happiness or sadness are part of being human. However, overall outlook, which certainly can be influenced by environment, is also a product of personal choice. Abraham Lincoln is quoted as saying, "Most people are about as happy as they want to be." It might not be quite that simple, but the difference between increasing joy and happiness and becoming ever more anxious and distressed has to do with inner flourishing. Those who evolve into gracious, considerate human beings have the innate ability to continuously elevate and deepen their lives. Pastor Victor Parachin writes about five ways to elevate spiritual health, and, in the process, become a happier, more content person.

First, prioritize spirituality. Think about how you can improve your spiritual health and growth. Commit to daily prayer, spend time in silent meditation, join a Bible study, volunteer in your community, go on a pilgrimage. Author Linda Monitello writes: "For many years I have traveled to Trappist, Ky., to be a guest of the Cisterian monks for a weekend or even a whole week. The monks have taught me we all need time in silence with the Lord, no matter where we are. We need a place of quiet so we can better communicate with God."

Second, fertilize gratitude. St. Paul admonished us to be thankful in all things. Amid life's difficulties and complications, continue to look for ways to appreciate the many good things in your life to ensure that you remain open, spacious, positive. Daniel Cozort, a retired religion professor, was struck head-on by a car while riding his bicycle on a rural road in Pennsylvania. The accident left him paraplegic and in pain. When asked by a psychiatrist if he were angry or depressed, his response was, "Neither." He later wrote that the person who hit him had made an error in judgment or attentiveness, something he had done many times. She, too, had suffered some injuries in the accident and also had to deal with the fact that she was at fault. He also said he was grateful for having had all his physical capacity for almost 60 years and was especially grateful that he had not suffered brain damage.

Third, cultivate solitude. Solitude can be defined as "the quality of being alone or remote from society." No TV, no phone, no internet. An important aspect of solitude is silence—listening to God or simply being in God's presence. Jesus spent ample time in solitude and encouraged his disciples to do the same. It is strongly supported in Scripture: "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10); "Let him sit alone in silence." (Lam. 3:2); "Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him." (Psalm 37:7.

Fourth, embrace change. Avoid remaining frozen in place. Be open to changing your mind, your direction or even your relationships. Diana Lu writes: "Sometimes we find ourselves in circumstances that work against our best interests. When we can no longer have the chance to grow or are stymied in what we are capable of achieving, or when a situation is toxic to our emotions, then we should leave." It may simply mean changing how we approach a situation, but it could also mean physical relocation, or ending certain social ties or activities that are unproductive or emotionally damaging. It might mean finding a new job, hobby, different kinds of entertainment, new friends.

Fifth, expand compassion. Mother Teresa urged: "Have great compassion for people…especially be kind and loving to the poor. Do you want to do something beautiful for God? There is a person who needs you. Here is your chance." Nurse Sandra Clarke was led to expand her compassion when she opted not to stay with a dying patient while she checked on other patients. When she returned he was dead, having died alone. She started No One Dies Alone, a program of compassionate presence that provides dignity and respect for those in the final hours of life.
There is time for spiritual elevation and growth amidst our busy lives. A bit of wisdom from Jesuit priest and author Henri Bouland: "Never say you haven't enough time. On the whole it is those who are busiest who make time to do more. We don't lack time, but the desire to use it to better purpose."

Adapted from *Living Lutheran,* June/July, 2022