

One Humanity

MANY STORIES



One Human MANY STORIES

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Community LIVES

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You've probably heard that if you knew another person's story, you couldn't help but love them. Each of us has known hardship and heartbreak, just as each of us has known joy. Some people have conquered unimaginable adversity while others seem to have been blessed with everything a person could want.

We have myriad stories to tell about our lives, yet a greater story overarches them all: We are all one. Despite the appearance of separate bodies, individual personalities, and different pursuits, we are one humanity. Like a prism splits sunlight into a rainbow of colors, we humans express God in unlimited ways.

One God, one humanity, many stories.

This has been our theme for 2019, with topics each month to illustrate aspects of the human condition. Our writers here offer their thoughts about how to live in the real world while affirming and developing our divine identity.

We have also added prayers from Silent Unity, the 24/7 prayer ministry that is always available to you (contact information is in the back of this booklet).

We hope these stories prompt you to reflect on your particular experiences and come to see them within the expanded context of our common humanity, our oneness.


Your Friends at Unity



WELCOMING GRACE

Rev. Margo Ford

*Grace is an upward pull
of the universe, lifting
me to the heights of my
divine nature.*



St. Augustine said: “What is grace? I know until you ask me; when you ask me, I do not know.” If we asked a dozen people their definition of *grace*, we might uncover a dozen different answers including, “I don’t know.”

Perhaps we were raised in a faith tradition that taught we had to earn God’s grace by adhering to specific rules and engaging in sanctioned behaviors. Grace was almost like earning points with God; enough points could ultimately get you into heaven. You could also forfeit God’s grace by disregarding those rules or behaving in “sinful” ways.

I believe there is an entirely different meaning of grace.

SEEKING THE MEANING OF GRACE

The Quest by Richard and Mary-Alice Jafolla explains: “The gift is yours from God simply because you are God’s child. You didn’t have to earn it, and you don’t have to prove you deserve it. It is yours unconditionally. It comes with being part of creation. It is the gift of grace.”

Monk and mystic Thomas Merton wrote, “Grace is not a strange, magic substance which is subtly filtered into our souls to act as a kind of spiritual penicillin. Grace is unity, oneness within ourselves, oneness with God.”

In Ephesians 2:8-9 we read: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the results of works.” And 2 Timothy 1:6 adds: “For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you.”

We are already grace-filled. We only need to remember all that this implies in our daily lives.




EXPERIENCING GRACE

I recently asked members of my congregation to share examples of ways in which grace had touched their lives so I could use their stories in my Sunday message. One woman wrote of receiving a cookbook from a new neighbor when she had just moved in and was feeling lost and alone. Another person described the enormous emotion he felt when a lost pet was unexpectedly returned to him. Still another reported that the answer to a serious dilemma came to her at just the right moment.

My only aunt died on September 17, 2004, at age 96. Her name was Grace, and I adored her. The *Daily Word* for that same day was Grace, and the words “I recognize grace as unconditional love” were a source of grace for me as I grieved her loss.

Receiving a phone call or letter when we’re lonely is a gift of grace. So is the sweetness of a furry pet’s gentle nudge or finding just the right gift for a dear friend.



Swami Vivekananda, a Hindu monk living in the 19th century, put it this way: “God’s grace is always blowing, but you must raise your sail.” In other words, we must be open, receptive, and welcoming to the activity of grace within.

EXPRESSING AS GRACE

Grace just is! We can also harness the energy of grace in service to others. We can make a phone call or write the note that brings a few moments of joy to a lonely person. We can grocery shop for a friend recovering from illness. We can listen when someone needs to express feelings of grief. We can buy a hamburger for a homeless man standing outside a fast food place. We never know whether that one simple act of kindness will become a precious memory in someone’s life, but it could.

Victor Daley, the Australian poet, was being tenderly cared for in a Catholic hospital as he was dying. One of his last acts was to thank the nurses for all their kindness to him. “Don’t thank us,” the nurses said. “Thank the grace of God.” Very perceptively the poet asked, “But aren’t you the grace of God?”

I invite you to remember the many times in which your life has been deeply touched by grace, and also the myriad ways in which you have been grace in the life of another. May you continue to experience and to be the upward pull of the universe, lifting you to the heights of your divine nature.



AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **GRACE**


As I walk a spiritual path, God's light is always shining. It is the light of God that illumines the way to peace, success, health, and abundance. Every day is a day when doors open to new opportunities and ways of living. My mind is open, free, and joyous as I remember my unity with the Source of all things within me.



LIVING LOVE

Rev. Sandra Campbell

*I am a living, loving
expression of God,
right here and now.*



The story is told of a farmer whose corn each year earned the winning prize at the state fair. One year, a reporter interviewed him and learned something interesting about how he grew his corn. The farmer told the reporter that he shared his prize-winning seed corn with his neighbors.

When asked why, the farmer explained: “The wind picks up the pollen from the ripening corn and swirls it from field to field. If neighbors grow inferior corn, cross-pollination will steadily degrade the quality of my corn. If I am to grow good corn, I must help my neighbors grow good corn.”

The same is true for the way we live our lives. If we wish to live in peace and harmony, we must help our neighbors do the same.


LOVE THY NEIGHBOR

Jesus demonstrated love’s power to bless and heal ourselves and all those around us. He said one of the greatest commandments is to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31). Jesus further commanded his disciples to “love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12).

Ancient and modern-day prophets alike have spoken about this concept of unconditional love for others. St. Francis of Assisi prayed: “Where there is hatred, let me sow love.” In his book, *Strength to Love*, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spelled out a formula for loving your enemies: “Hatred cannot drive away hatred; only love can do that.”

LET ME SOW LOVE

I took King’s words to heart at a time when I hated my job. At some point, I decided I could continue to hate it and feel miserable or I could find something to love about it.



I printed a statement in large letters and posted it in front of my desk. It read: “All I see is opportunity.” I didn’t agree with it at first, but I continued to affirm it until eventually I began to see opportunity. As the opportunities became more visible, I began to fall more and more in love with my work.

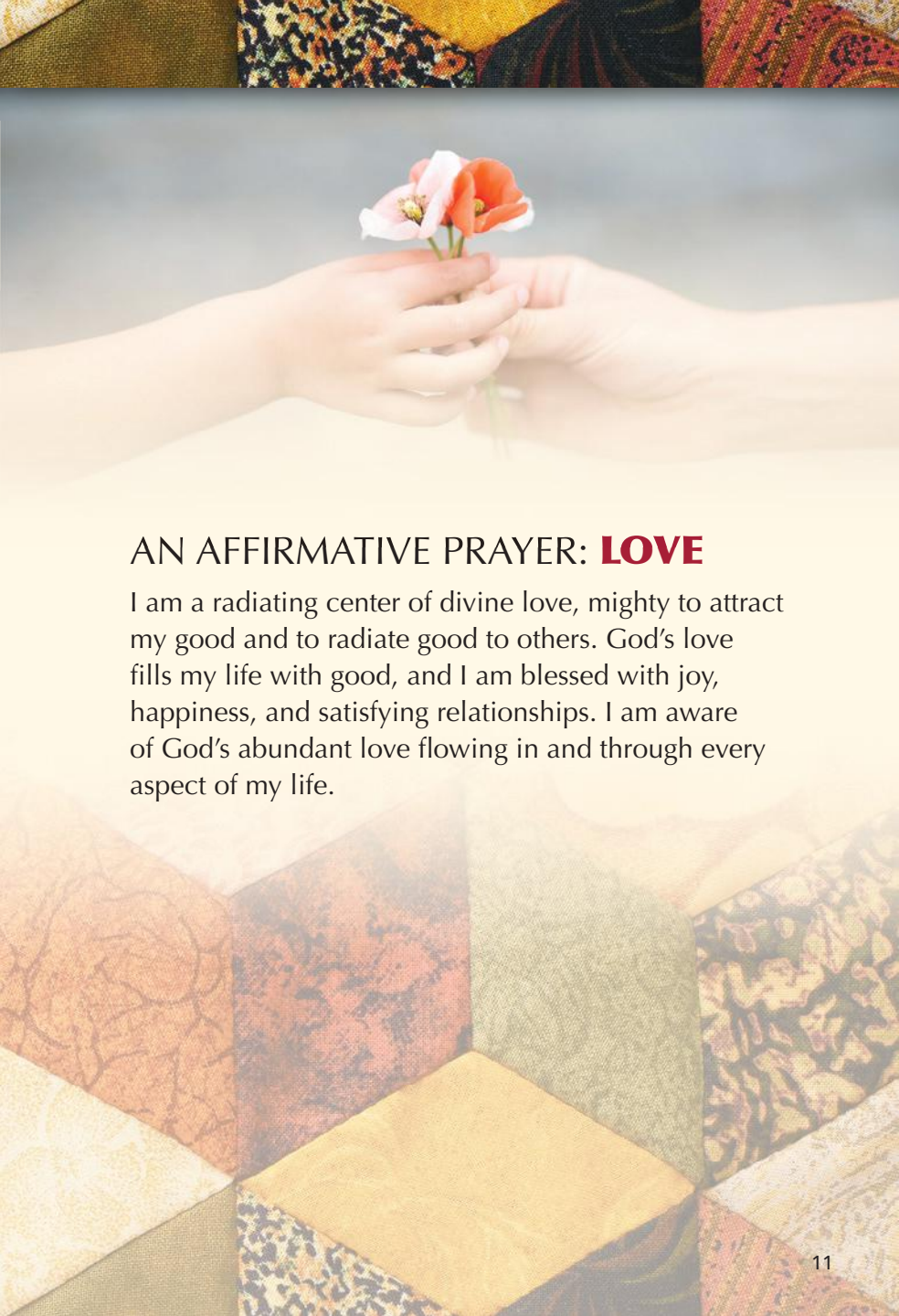
A more recent story of learning to love your situation is told by Anthony Ray Hinton in his book, *The Sun Does Shine*. After spending 30 years on death row for a crime he didn’t commit, Hinton was exonerated in 2015. He writes that when he was initially sentenced he asked to speak to the court and proceeded to forgive each one of those who held his life and his fate in their hands. He told them he didn’t hate them and that, in fact, he loved them. During nearly three decades behind bars, he taught his fellow death row inmates the power of unconditional love through Bible and book studies.

At one point, a white supremacist about to be executed was asked whether he had any final words. He was one of the men Hinton had befriended, and he observed that the very people he had been taught to hate were the ones who, in prison, taught him how to love.

LOVE HARMONIZES

As Unity cofounder Charles Fillmore wrote: “Love is the great harmonizer and healer ... love will bring your own to you, adjust all misunderstandings, and make your life and your affairs healthy, happy, harmonious, and free” (*The Revealing Word*).

If we choose to be happy, we must help others find happiness. If we desire to be loved, we must spread that love around.



AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **LOVE**

I am a radiating center of divine love, mighty to attract my good and to radiate good to others. God's love fills my life with good, and I am blessed with joy, happiness, and satisfying relationships. I am aware of God's abundant love flowing in and through every aspect of my life.



CREATING COMMUNITY

Rev. Kelly Isola

*I am open to a deeper
understanding of Spirit
within all people. We
are one.*





The affirmation for this month is a powerful and deeply transformative practice—if we take it on, if we are truly open to understanding Spirit within all people.

This type of work takes us to the edge of our knowing and probably to the edge of our comfort zone, because it invites us to understand all people, which would include those who think differently from ourselves, those with whom we don't agree.

UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING OF ONENESS

At the root of the word *community*, it's about our shared humanity, our connection—how we act and are with each other. Everywhere I look there are TV shows, articles, pictures, poems, reflections, and memes about the importance of community, proclaiming “we are one.” If I didn't know better, I would think we were starving to know oneness—how to experience it, capture it, and celebrate it.

I, too, am longing to feast at that banquet table of oneness, but I find myself drifting in and out of understanding what oneness really means. While I affirm we are all one, it can be tough to define, to manifest it, to “come from” it, and live it. Whose form of oneness is it?

Last time I checked all the people of the world hadn't gotten together to decide what we mean by oneness. What does it really look like—not as a theory, but *really* lived, down and dirty, in the reality of my everyday life where there seems to be divisiveness or differences around every corner?

I have discovered that most of us live oneness without even knowing it. It is anywhere we naturally express compassion, love, being of service, listening, and belonging.



INFINITE WAYS TO BE ONE

So how come I miss seeing that so often? Because it turns out we are collectively creating myriad expressions of that oneness. While its essence remains the same, it is always arising in different forms.

Perhaps this is because God, Spirit, the Divine, whatever you want to call it, is always happening, always emerging, always expressing. I look at my life and see that sometimes this oneness is offered in very sweet and tender ways and sometimes in challenging and difficult ways. In other words, the more aware I become of oneness in its infinite expressions, the better I am able to respond and live through that oneness as my awareness of Spirit keeps emerging.

Plato said that we are all born whole yet need each other to be complete. Everyone I know wants peace, love, joy, and a meaningful and abundant life—to name a few things—which are all aspects of oneness, I think.

Yet how can I help someone else find peace if I don't have an understanding of what it means to them? It's different





things to different people at various times in their lives. Because I believe in the interconnectedness of all life, then the fulfillment of peace is found in helping each person find their own peace—then *together* we bring it into manifest form.

THE CREATIVE FORCE OF ONENESS

As my understanding grows regarding what oneness is and how to live it, I realize just how interdependent we are. Oneness is dependent on the relationship I have with you, with earth, with the cosmos.

In our great uniqueness as individuals, we see that what connects us collectively is the creative force we call oneness—of which we are expressions. The experience of oneness only makes sense within the infinite diversity of life. The treasure of my uniqueness only makes sense in relationship to the whole.

Oneness is an ever-present, shining beacon focusing us on how we can play together for our well-being and for the whole of life. That's how we take another step toward the fulfillment of spirit expressing through our humanity. That's how oneness is really lived, down and dirty, in the reality of my everyday life. This is how we create community.

AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: COMMUNITY

I acknowledge that God is present in every person and experience. God's spirit of harmony, order, and understanding is at work in any situation. I deeply feel my oneness with all creation. All of my relationships are harmonized and loving, and I am at peace.



BEING ENOUGH

Rev. Linda Martella-Whitsett

*I rise up and reclaim
my true identity as
a sacred being.*





Sitting on Cocoa Beach in Florida, my bottom on wet sand, I enjoyed the spot where spent waves lap the land. Warm and foamy water flowed over the lower half of my body. With each receding wave, an accumulation of ocean refuse was deposited around me—lengths of seaweed and shards of shells.

I was close enough to the ground to see that among the broken bits were some intact shells, tinier than my pinkie nail. I began inspecting them and then collected them, amused by their diverse designs.

Within minutes I had collected about a dozen tiny half-shells that didn't come close to filling my open palm. Each one had held a minuscule life that contributed to the well-being of its environment. Small as it was, each one could hold countless grains of sand. I thought, *This is abundance*. I could count grains of sand and seashells for a lifetime and never reach the last one.

At times I have felt small in proportion to the population on planet Earth, and I have questioned what difference I could make. While observing abundant life on the shore, I could see that my living, my participating at any moment wherever I am, fulfills my purpose for being.

A tiny organism living in a tiny seashell and a microscopic grain of sand contribute to the vitality and beauty of the shore. I can surely never be too small to contribute.

LOVING LARGE: THE STORY OF MRS. M

Lillian Mastrangelo, my chosen second mother, appeared to me larger than life, certainly larger than her 4-foot-8 physical presence. Mrs. M was born during the Roaring Twenties when



most roads were unpaved, home entertainment centered around the radio, and air-conditioning meant opening windows and doors. Wonder Bread, Hostess Twinkies, and bubblegum were introduced when Mrs. M was a girl. The American dream was on the rise, and hard work would ensure it.

The stock market crashed in 1929 when Mrs. M was 6 years old. The Great Depression that followed would shape her, along with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal and World War II. Mass production of television, the civil rights movement, the war in Vietnam, and the drug culture it spawned would impact Lillian and her family immensely.

No matter the heartaches and challenges, Lillian stayed faithful to her core value of devotion to her family. She unselfishly cared for the daily needs of her large family, while always making room for others around her kitchen table.

Everyone who entered her home was welcome to her macaroni and gravy, escarole soup, and plenty of family favorites—all



with her special secret ingredient—Mrs. M’s love. Love was enough for Mrs. M.

“YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON”

A peanut-size woman with a super-size spirit, Mrs. M loved large. When you entered the room, to Mrs. M you were the only person. For every problem you might speak of, with a twinkle in her eye Mrs. M would calm you and encourage you with the message: “Don’t be afraid. Life is beautiful. Go live your life. Be happy. Come back and tell me all about it.”

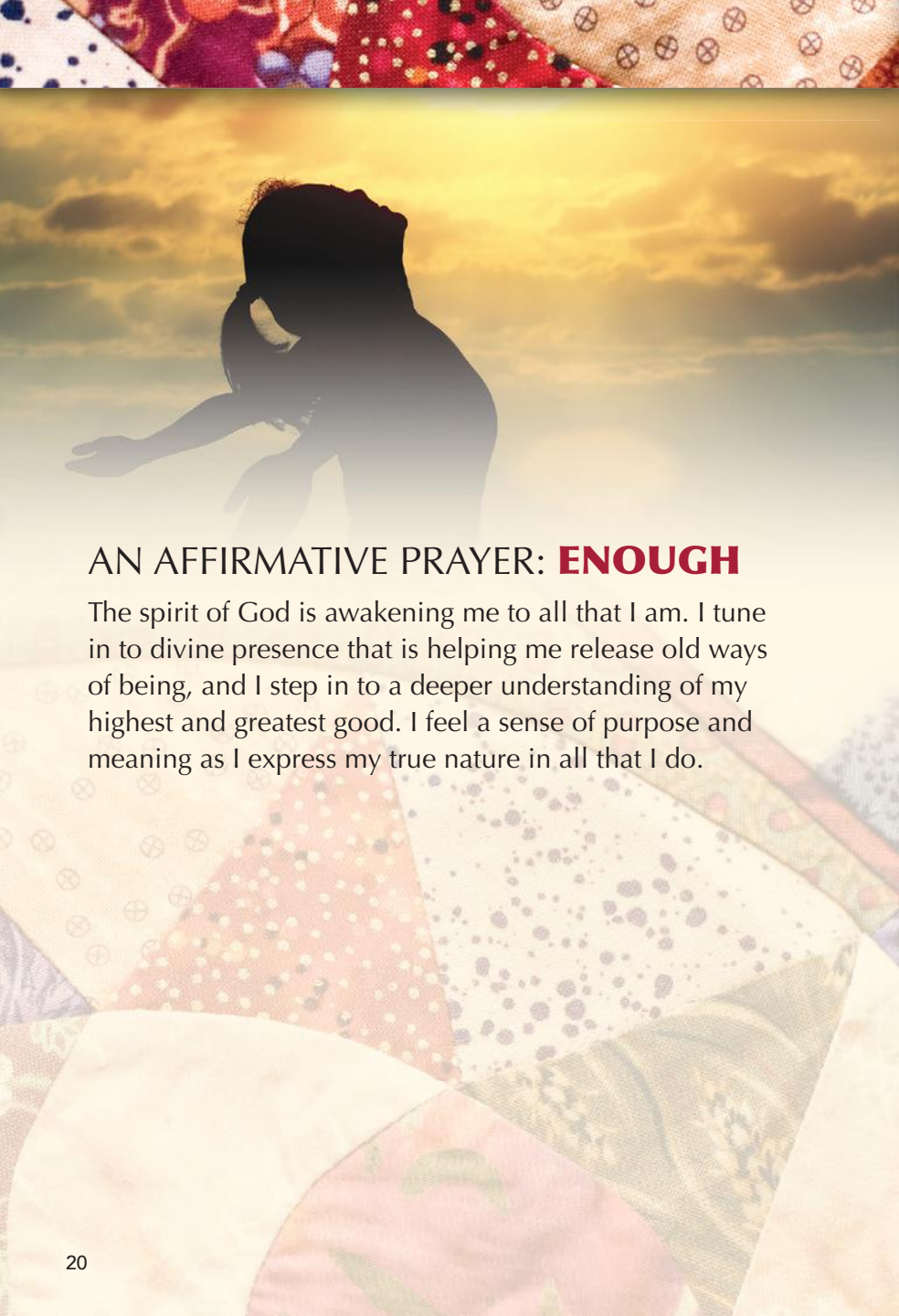
In her own arena, in her own home, Mrs. M demonstrated “enoughness” each day, giving where and how she could to everyone around her. May we do the same. Let us affirm:

Centered in my awareness of God, the Source and universal mind, I breathe and know I am enough. Although I am not all of God, I am enough of God expressing.

Whenever my personal memories give me the false impression of “not-enoughness,” I deliberately turn from my past and claim my divine identity. Whenever I interpret the words or actions of another as a judgment of my inferiority, I disclaim my errant thoughts for the truth that I am enough.

Every experience appears for love. Love is the great magnet of the universe, my calling to be unified and whole in every circumstance whether labeled “good” or “bad.” I am enough of divine love for everything and everyone I encounter every day.

And so I AM. And so it is!



AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **ENOUGH**

The spirit of God is awakening me to all that I am. I tune in to divine presence that is helping me release old ways of being, and I step in to a deeper understanding of my highest and greatest good. I feel a sense of purpose and meaning as I express my true nature in all that I do.



HONORING MEMORIES

By Rev. Toni Stephens Coleman

*We are now and
forevermore one in
the love of God.*





Memories are as unique as we are. They are the cumulative echo of our life experiences. However, it is important to recognize that as an echo, our memories are not the actuality of our lives.

Memory helps make us who we are. If we couldn't recall the who, what, where, when, and why of our everyday lives, we would not be able to learn new information, form lasting relationships, or even function in most daily situations.

People who have forgotten or don't have functioning memories have an extremely difficult time taking care of themselves. Memory has permitted our species to survive and advance to the point of becoming technological beings.

Memory allows our brains to encode, store, and retrieve the information our senses provide from each experience. Then it allows us to think about what we have experienced, recalling it for reference and reuse.

THE GOOD (AND BAD) NEWS OF MEMORY

One of the amazing things about memory is that we can re-experience what we have previously experienced. A memory can stir up the same feelings and thoughts we had the first time around—even physical reactions.

That's good news and not so good. Painful, frightening, difficult memories may often be experienced anew. When we have troubling memories, it is important to make peace with them and find ways to honor the teaching that can be found in them.

Memories can be adjusted to serve us—to help us understand or forgive. Once an experience has become a memory, it's only a story we tell ourselves and may tell others.



USING MEMORIES TO REWRITE OUR STORIES

That makes it possible to rewrite the story with a positive and useful outcome. Look for the key learning in the experience and rephrase it for yourself as: “The moral of this story is ...” “The gift from this experience is ...” or “What I learned is ...” This will change the energy and feelings attached to the memory.

Another way to change a memory for the better is to play it out differently. This can be done through imagination—mentally recreating an experience then looking for details to support a different outcome or playing it through to a peaceful resolution.

You may also be able to use props or stand-ins (maybe a chair or pillow) to visualize the situation and interact with it. Share your thoughts and feelings intensely. This is especially helpful when a participant in your memory has died and you need resolution and completion.

Ask a trusted friend to interact with you. Retell the story in detail, then ask your friend to provide a believable, loving, and peaceful resolution.

You know these techniques are working when you feel the full level of passionate emotion you felt with the original experience, and it then evolves into a more peaceful emotion. Your feelings are the key.

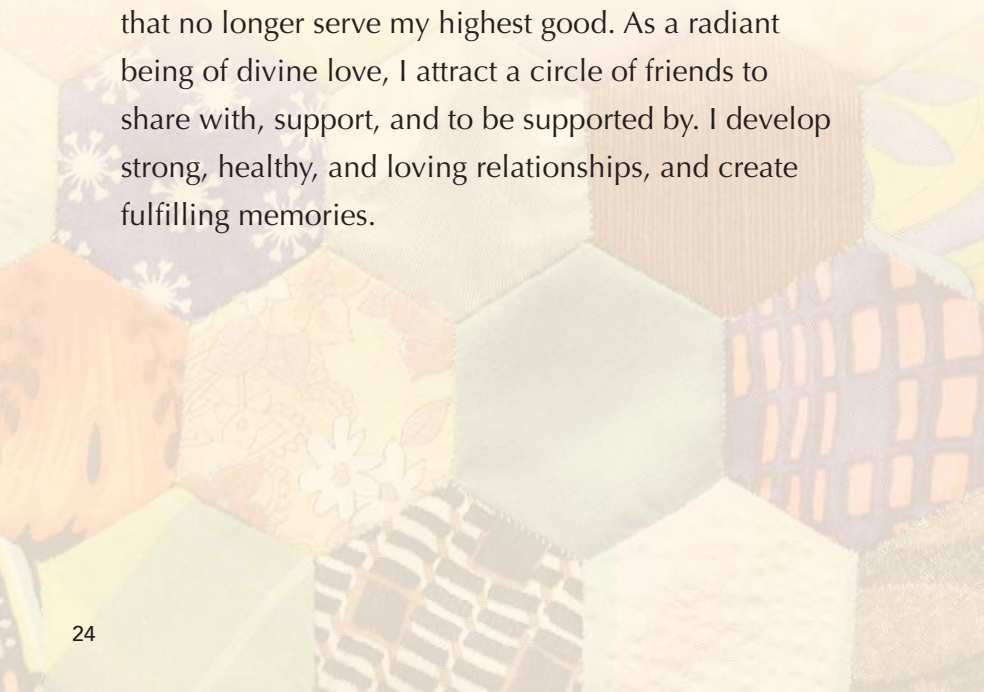
Remember, memories are echoes of what was or what happened. They represent our perspectives, not the ultimate truth or what is right. The best way to honor a memory is to find value in it and make it useful for yourself and others.

Honoring memories is to find the divine light in them, dissipating darkness and sadness, and showing the way for yourself and others.



AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **MEMORIES**

I gently release any thoughts, feelings, or relationships that no longer serve my highest good. As a radiant being of divine love, I attract a circle of friends to share with, support, and to be supported by. I develop strong, healthy, and loving relationships, and create fulfilling memories.





LETTING GO

Rev. Bill Englehart

*I let go of any concern
and allow good to unfold
in my life.*





This article is not a recitation about a new door that opened in my life or what a joy it is to recount the tremendous success I found on the other side. This article is being written about the time in between, which is exactly where I am as I write.

This past year, I realized after 12-plus years that it was time for me to move on from my active role as senior minister of my Unity church.

I loved the role, the people, and the community, but I knew it was time to step into the unknown—the field of all possibilities.

WHEN IT IS TIME TO CHANGE

One consistency throughout my professional life has been knowing when I am complete. I don't fight it. (Okay, sometimes I ask for more than one sign!) I should also note, I've found that Spirit-driven guidance never seems to make logical sense to my ego.

I knew immediately when my previous work had come to its end. I was 39 and at the apex of my corporate career. That guidance eventually led me quite unexpectedly to ministry.

Now more than 13 years since ordination and after leading a wonderful spiritual community, the guidance came once again saying it was time to depart.

I had some family obligations to tend to and a desire to move in with my beloved after many years of long-distance relationship, but that inner voice was the predominant motivator urging change. It pressed me to discover the "something else" I was to be doing. I would not discover it unless I let go first.

TAKING A STEP INTO THE UNKNOWN

Of course, I would have liked to know what that "something else" was prior to stepping out into the unknown. Despite any wish to



the contrary, I never receive the kind of guidance that spells out the entire map of my life's journey. At best, I'm shown the next exit to take, not knowing where it will lead.

So here I am, awaiting the unfoldment of Spirit's direction. One door closed. I am waiting for the next one to open.

During this transition time, it is easy to run up and down the hallway filled with anxiety, trying every doorknob or jumping out a window! Admittedly, there have been times the anxiety is so intense I have wanted to go back in the direction from whence I came.

Uncertainty about what's next seems to be where anxiety, fear, and concern live. However, the uncertainty of life can either be filled with dread or it can be an adventure filled with new developments!

THE ADVENTURE OF THE IN-BETWEEN

During this in-between space, I am actively pursuing what I feel called to do without attachment to where it will lead me. I am taking yoga for the first time, learning to swim, speak Spanish, and write articles. I cofacilitate a men's group at the San Quentin State Prison. I am a support for my family and girlfriend.

I am doing all this because I want to grow in these areas, and it brings me joy. They are the unmet desires of years, so there must be a reason they're coming to fruition now.

This is fulfilling in and of itself. I am cultivating happiness by pursuing long-held desires. I choose happiness each day. I choose to let go of any fear or worry and allow good to unfold in my life. I follow my good and, in doing so, it's easy to let go of concern as a lifestyle.

I know Spirit will work out the details.



AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **LET GO**

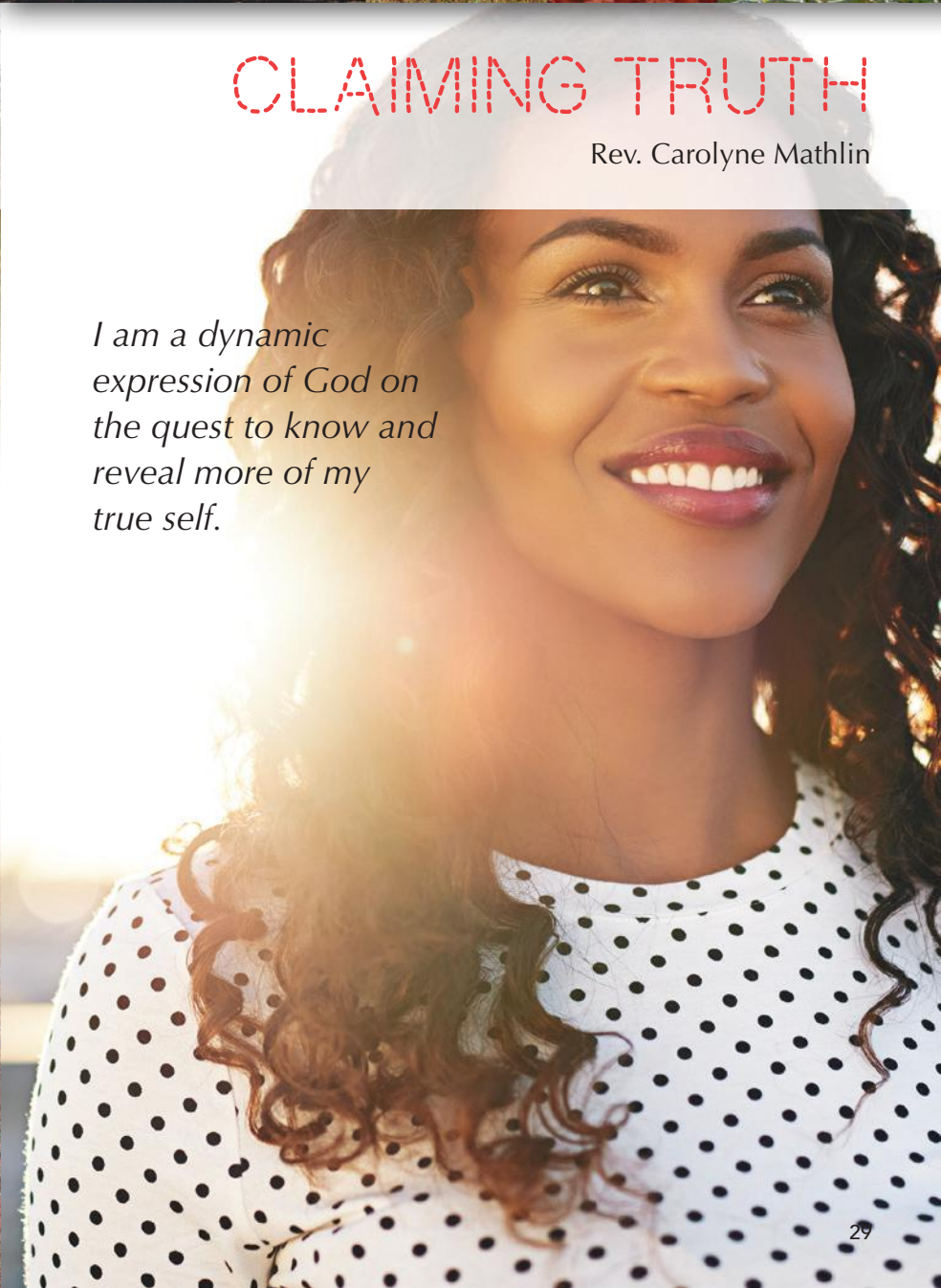
Right where I am, my freedom exists. The spirit of God within me is not bound by unwanted habits, thoughts, or feelings—I let them go. I release old ways of thinking and being and take the next step with renewed strength and faith. I am blessed with peace, strength, wisdom, and health. Through the Christ within, I am free.






CLAIMING TRUTH

Rev. Carolyn Mathlin



*I am a dynamic
expression of God on
the quest to know and
reveal more of my
true self.*



Growing up in Unity, I was blessed with a foundation of positive thinking and self-empowerment consciousness. Early on, I took to heart the teaching that I am a child of God, claiming my divine identity as the Truth of my being.

My world has been completely transformed by my ongoing quest to grow so that I can live more authentically from my true, or Christ, self through spiritual study and practice.

I used to think of spiritual growth as a process of learning new teachings and systems then demonstrating proficiency in them.

But adding more spiritual skills started to feel like adding more stuffing to a pillow. At some point, more isn't better—it's just more. Continue to stuff the pillow, and the seams eventually stretch and rip.

My pillow of spiritual knowledge was pretty stuffed. Adding more did not seem to create the same transformational experience it once did.

Unity practitioners are well aware of the power of letting go, and they know our teachings about denials and renunciation. Charles Fillmore, Unity cofounder, described denials as the mental process of erasing false beliefs and making room for the establishment of Truth.

Similarly, he described renunciation as letting go of old thoughts so that new thoughts might find a place in consciousness. Both are important building blocks to spiritual transformation.



KENOSIS: TO EMPTY ONESELF

I first learned the term *kenosis* from author Cynthia Bourgeault. The word comes from the Greek verb *kenosein* and means to empty oneself.

In denials and renunciation, there is a subtle, yet distinct, pushing away from something toward something else. Kenosis, by contrast, is a self-emptying through willingness to let things come and go without grabbing on.

Jesus described chaff burning away in a divine fire. And while we've all probably experienced a form of this, what makes kenosis distinct is that the fire takes what we have labeled positive as well as negative. Therefore, spiritual identities that have felt integral to the expression of our higher selves start to be burned away too.

I experienced this recently as I began to feel divine discontent in serving as minister of the church where I grew up. Meditator, minister, spiritual guide, mystic, teacher, spiritual leader—one by one all these spiritual identities lost their structure as expressions of my true self.

At first it was painful, like a loss of my spiritual identity. Then I started to experience a new type of freedom.

What is most remarkable is that I let them.

At first it was painful, like a loss of my spiritual identity. Then I started to experience a new type of freedom. There was a sense of the choiceless choice, where everything I came to count on as my sense of spiritual self was less real.

At that point, it felt as if this dissolution was an essential part of revealing a new expression of my true self.



THE EXPERIENCE OF EMPTINESS

The expression of your true self and how you identify with the divinity that you are will take many forms throughout your lifetime. It certainly has in mine so far, and I expect it will continue to evolve.

If you are in a period of acquiring new skills and growing in consciousness by learning and demonstrating New Thought principles, beautiful. Let your true self shine as the light of God and delight in the new positive sense of self you are inhabiting more and more.

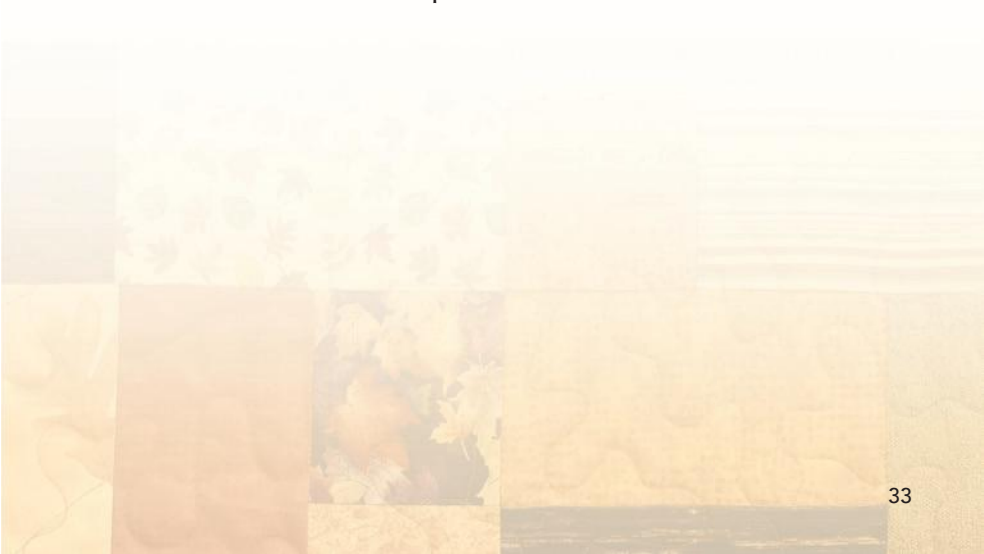
For others, the sense of growth might have taken on another flavor, the flavor of letting go in a way you never associated with spiritual growth. If this is your experience, know that this is a process many have experienced before you. It doesn't mean anything is wrong. It is a turning toward another dimension of your true self, a dimension that is more nothingness than somethingness. Continue to let the kenosis undo you.

No matter the essence of your quest to know and reveal more of your true self, you are ever-evolving, ever-changing, and always a dynamic expression of God. Go forth and live it.



AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **TRUTH**

I am wholly divine, unlimited in my potential to be whole and complete. I am open and receptive to divine ideas that expand my sense of identity and express more love and light in my life and world. Born in me by design are the enduring strength, courage, and wisdom to meet all that is before me in the present moment.





BEING PRESENT

Rev. Paul John Roach

*I live in the now, and
divine understanding
is active in me.*





The terms “being present” and “living in the now” have become clichés on the New Thought spiritual path and in the nondual tradition in general. We speak of the power of now, the timeless moment, and that there is only now.

In New Thought, we released sin as a stumbling block then replaced it with the charge of negative thinking. Now our greatest put-down is the accusation of being distracted and therefore not present to what is!

I am being slightly facetious, but the essential point remains: The key to awakening is in the awareness of what is. This is true in all traditions.

AN IDEA THAT CROSSES ALL TRADITIONS

The Sufis say one clear moment is all it takes. The Zen tradition asks the challenging question, “What in this moment is missing?” Jesus continually spoke of the kingdom of wholeness and perfection as an ever-present reality.

Modern Hindu teachers like Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj and Papaji invite us to simply be quiet and rest naturally in the I AM consciousness. “Sailor” Bob Adamson, an Australian student of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj, asks us, “What’s wrong with right now—unless you think about it?”

Ah, yes. Thinking can get in the way. Thinking involves memories from the past and projected ideas about the future. As we learned from babyhood on, discursive reasoning formulates and then reinforces a linear view of reality based on an idea that a “self” is moving through time. This sense of self, often called ego, only conditionally exists—it is not our reality.



Yet so often we try to use it to find that reality. There is the sense that if I can work hard enough, or let go long enough, I will find the timeless moment and be free. We can't. It is as impossible to think ourselves into enlightenment as it is to find enough time to be present.

THE GOOD NEWS AND THE BAD NEWS

If there is one bit of crucial understanding we can take into our hearts, it is that intellectual knowledge, however subtle or profound, is incapable of awakening us to what is. There is no substitute for direct experience.

The good news is that the present is right here, right now. We are as immersed in the ocean of infinite, timeless consciousness as fish are in water.

The bad news is that the habit of linear thinking is hard to release. The long years that monks spend meditating in a Zen monastery searching for satori attest to that, as do the seekers testing the patience of the guru with the same old questions arising from a yearning to satisfy the discursive mind and its neediness.

Every day in every way it's getting better and better, says the positive-thinking spiritualized ego. *How could that be, if every moment is perfect?* replies the inner guru.

HOW NOT TO GIVE UP ON THE SEARCH FOR INNER FREEDOM

It is at this point that many of us fall away from the path. After our initial enthusiasm, we complain that this stuff doesn't work and become disenchanted. Hold on. It is salutary to ask ourselves: *Do we want radical freedom or a more comfortable and self-satisfied imprisonment?*



Assuming we want freedom, how can it be achieved? I offer five approaches that I invite you to look at without much thinking:

1. You are already here. You are already free.
2. Consider letting go of the story, whatever the story is.
3. Laugh, with compassion.
4. Investigate buoyancy.
5. Be quiet.

Each of these approaches is like a mantra with an action component. We chant, we contemplate, then act. It is the practical application that prevents us from getting lost in thought.

Once we have experienced a moment of being present in this way, the affirmation for this month is no longer just a nice, positive statement. Now it becomes a living reality.

I live in the now—there is no other place to live. When I do, divine understanding is active in me because I release the extraneous for the essential. Being present sets me free.






AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **PRESENT**

I acknowledge the sacred presence of God within me.
I have peace to keep me patient and positive; guidance
to show me the way through every challenge in my life;
healing to restore me to wholeness in body, mind, and
spirit; and abundance to meet my every need. All I could
want or imagine is available in this moment.





EMBRACING CHANGE

Elaine Meyer



*My life is enlivened
and enriched by
a new perspective.*



After resigning recently from the organization where I had spent more than 30 years, the hours seemed to zip by with my last day looming large on the horizon.

The trepidation of releasing a steady paycheck nagged at me to the point that I wasn't able to relax or even reflect on the cherished memories I would forever hold close.

Then I had an epiphany. Rather than viewing the last day as the horizon, I should change my vantage point to look beyond this life change.

As Eric Butterworth stated (I'm paraphrasing here), *Change your thinking, change your life.*

My view of the horizon now includes visions of spending more time with my newborn granddaughter, creating numerous quilts, knitting gifts for loved ones, and practicing my culinary skills. As Marianne Williamson once said, "Let go of your story so the Universe can write a new one for you."


HOW TO NAVIGATE THE GREAT UNKNOWN

Rarely does complaining about change make it stop or make it happen. Change is simply part of life.

If the event is positive, then embracing it with open arms is easy enough to do. Should the change be a significant and unexpected life event—the death of a loved one, being released from a job, a health challenge—finding peace with the change may take time.

So how do you embrace change rather than be fearful of the unknown? Try the following suggestions to help you navigate the major changes in life:

- Have faith. Rest into your faith and remain there—centered in the presence of God.

- 
- Look toward tomorrow. Know and affirm with conviction that better days are ahead. If worry or sorrow persist, acknowledge that this is the human side of your current journey.
 - Remember that you are not alone. If feelings of restlessness steal your peace of mind, turn within for comfort and reassurance by connecting with the one presence and power.
 - Think differently. Consider the situation from a higher, spiritual viewpoint and look for any hope or positivity from this new perspective.
 - Get by with a little help from a friend. Seek the company of others if you find yourself depressed or despondent. Friends help each other—whether it's through church, community groups, or your prayer partners in Silent Unity.





WHAT IT MEANS TO “LET GO, LET GOD”

As difficult as it may feel to let go of the familiar and to embrace change, remind yourself that you are a spiritual being, living a human existence, capable of resiliency. Learn to embrace change while resisting the fear.

I leave you with these inspirational words from a *Daily Word* article by life coach and Unity minister Carla McClellan:

Be willing to say “yes” to what is—even those situations that are causing you discomfort.

When you say “yes,” you are accepting the facts of the situation, but not its power over you. Acceptance opens us up to the field of possibilities, and we see there are many choices before us.

Dag Hammarskjöld, former head of the United Nations, once said, “To everything that has been, I say, ‘Thank you.’ To everything before me, I say, ‘Yes!’” Yes changes the energy in our bodies, and our courageous hearts open up to express something creative and different.

Through willingness, self-reflection, observation, and acceptance, we are able to take authentic action and live lives filled with meaning, courage, and possibilities.

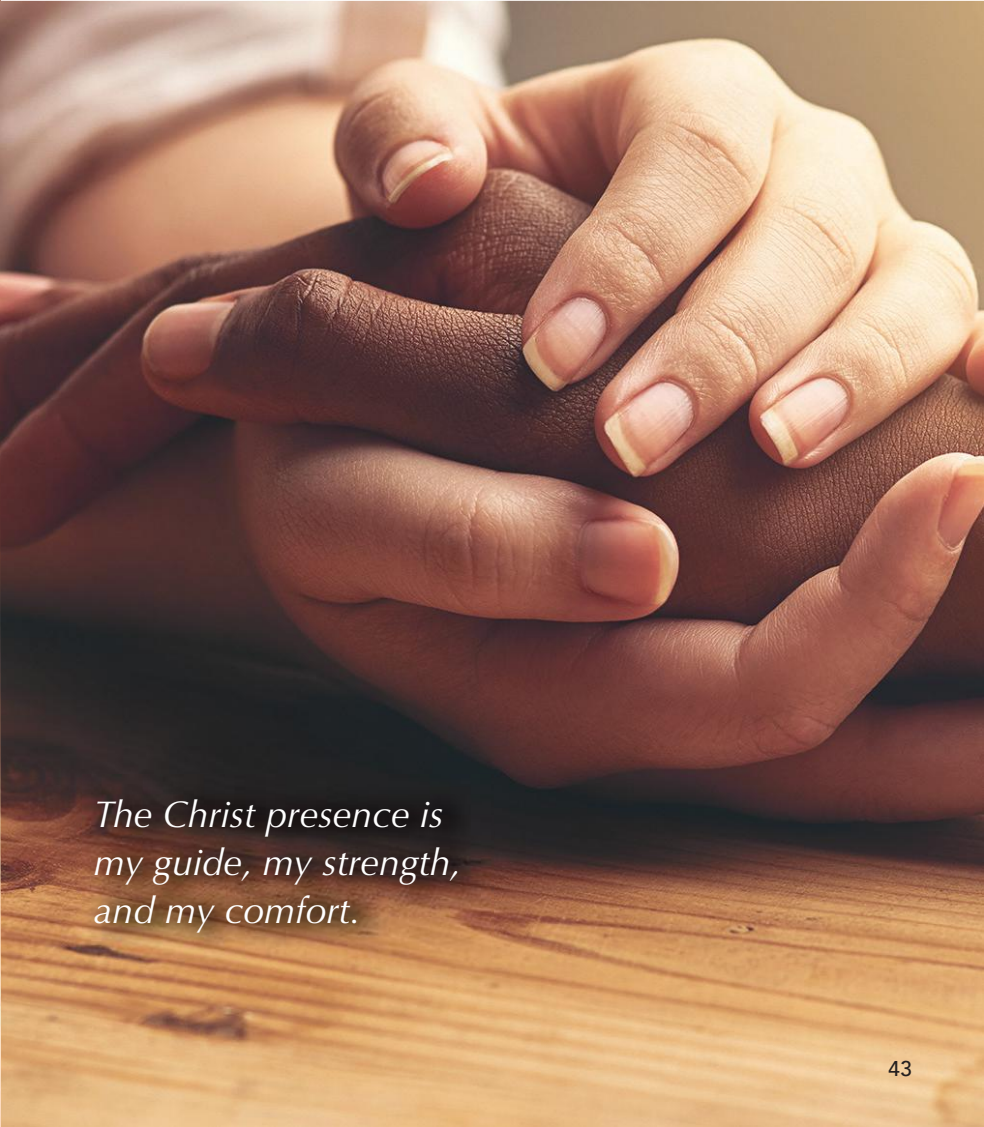
AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **CHANGE**

I have faith that all things are working together for good. In the stillness, I turn to the light within and am open and receptive to inspiring ideas for my life. I am ready to experience the great and wonderful possibilities open to me now.



FINDING COMFORT

Rev. Elizabeth Longo



*The Christ presence is
my guide, my strength,
and my comfort.*



I was born in Cuba during tumultuous times. A revolution was going on, and all the grown-ups around me were stressed. Being an only child, I spent a lot of time on my own, hugging my teddy bear to feel safe and comforted.

When I was 5 years old, my mother and I left Cuba as refugees on a Pan Am flight to the United States. Missing was my faithful companion, my teddy. It was taken away from me or disappeared—I don't know what happened to my dear friend amid so much confusion.

I was devastated. I cried and cried as I said goodbye to my father, my grandparents, my home, and everything familiar. The memories are faint, but what I do recall is that, after my meltdown, I started to feel a profound peace. There was a deep knowing from within that everything was going to be all right and that I was being cared for and protected.

Looking back, it is clear to me that what I relied on as a child for comfort and reassurance was none other than the Christ presence, my invisible friend in uncertain times. All along, I was being held in the arms of God.

TURNING TO PRAYER

While I was praying and contemplating what comfort means for me, I received a call from a dear friend and spiritual leader, so I spontaneously asked him his thoughts about comfort.

First, he giggled and said that he found comfort in chocolate, a massage, or a day at the spa. Then he paused and said my question was very timely, for he had been in deep despair the past few days.

In the midst of his darkness, he turned to prayer, opened his “spiritual tool box,” and called on God with every breath of his being. What kept coming to him were the words: “Be still, and



know that I am God,” which are framed in his living room in front of his meditation chair.


He found comfort in the power of prayer and in knowing that, even though he was feeling utterly alone, he had sacred people in his life who truly loved him and were praying for him.

He also found comfort by turning his attention to gratitude, despite his feelings of desperation. Underneath it all, he knew he already had all he needed.

Then he said, “And I am still here. And the power that carries me through the dark times is still here, always has been, and always will be, for there is no place where the love of God is not. And all things work out for good.”

BEING THE PRESENCE

As a Unity minister, I’ve heard many times that the role of a minister is to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the



comfortable.” There is great wisdom in these words. When we get too comfortable in our habits and our safe little world, not much spiritual growth seems to happen. Yet when our world is shaken by life’s circumstances, we have a tremendous opportunity for growth.

It gives me great comfort to know that, regardless of where we are in life’s journey, we are held in the love of God. By being available to each other, we express the living Christ presence. Knowing this brings peace to my soul and empathy for the experiences of others.

I have found that the greatest gift I can give someone going through a time of loss or despair is simply to be a listening presence. Our human tendency is to want to alleviate the pain or find a solution. What is needed is to make space for Spirit to do its healing work. Just being present and available creates an opening and a safe space that is comforting.

The greatest source of comfort lies within us, where we can turn for solace, strength, renewal, and guidance. Knowing the Christ in me is knowing unconditional love and acceptance—closer than my very breath, always guiding and leading me toward my highest good.

AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **COMFORT**

As I center myself in the awareness of the presence of God, I allow peace to enfold and surround me. I know the light and love of God are flowing and expressing in, as, and through every part of me right now. All circumstances unfold perfectly for my highest good, and I go forward expecting only the best.




EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

Rev. Charline Manuel



*I am gratefully and
wonderfully blessed!*



There is an art to gratitude. There is a form, structure, a knack for growing it, developing it, and subsequently owning it as a way of life.

But why does it matter? Why grow gratitude? Why spend the time developing it? Aren't there other fun, uplifting, exciting things to do with one's time?

The art of gratitude means there is a way to live in which feeling thankful is a general state of awareness—on good days and not so good days. How? Grow your gratitude and strive to keep it thriving.

CONSIDER PERSPECTIVE AND ATTITUDE

Approach gratitude from a perspective that it is a gift you give yourself and others. Shift away from the mindset that you are “spending” time developing gratefulness. Rather, practice gratitude as an investment.

Building a grateful mind and heart is an investment in your own health, success, joy, and prosperity. As we invest in ourselves, we are shaping the life we desire and consciously choosing the path ahead.

The second method is to adopt an attitude for growing your gratitude, especially in ways that can be uplifting, fun, and inspiring. Try finishing this sentence with words that are inspiring for you: “I am gratefully and wonderfully blessed when ____”

Here are some that apply for me:

“... when I hold my grandson in my arms.”

“... when I watch the sunrise on a clear day.”

“... when I'm dancing and singing like nobody is watching.”



With each expression, I'm investing in me. I'm investing in my life. I'm investing in how I plan to think and feel in my future. I'm growing my gratitude.

THE A-R-T OF GRATITUDE

The practical side of growing your gratitude can be remembered as the A-R-T of Gratitude in this way:

A is Act. Act as if you expect to discover something to be grateful for in everything that comes your way, as well as everything that seems to be complete. Why act as if? Because as you consciously practice this state of awareness, in time it will become a natural action and response toward the small stuff.

Then when the big stuff comes your way—that which is not so easily seen as something to be grateful for—your fallback position, your default response, will be to act as if there is something, some part of what is happening, to be grateful for.

So, start small. Find something in every set of circumstances that you can genuinely be grateful for. The key idea here is “genuinely.” This will take work in some predicaments. That’s okay—it gives us something positive to focus on as we are searching a situation, looking for good. But look with an intentional eye, a purposeful view.



R is for Release. Release the regrets and resentments that can easily build up inside and block your ability to see the good in your life. Regret and resentment are like viruses that can spread and thereby affect those aspects of our lives that are otherwise going well.

To let go of nagging regret and resentment, of course pray, of course meditate, and engage in all the spiritual practices you know. Then if the feelings persist, find a counselor, coach, or trusted friend and unload the issue and all its remnants—once. Once and for all, let this be the opportunity to let it go. Set the intention that after this pouring out from within, it is finished. Declare: “*It is finished.*” And let it be so.

T is for Trust. Trust in divine life, divine order, and a well-orchestrated divine plan for your life. Trust the highest part of your being to guide you to the blessings that make for a life you desire. Trust that the challenges you face can and will be overcome in ways that are for your highest good.

Trust that life is good, even as you are searching your circumstances to realize it. Trust that you are and have the awareness of grace, as Spirit is always with you, no matter where you go or what you do.

The more you live in the A-R-T of Gratitude, the more you can expect your heart to someday sing, even when you least expect it, “How great Thou ART!”

A woman with dark, curly hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a bright yellow long-sleeved shirt. Her eyes are closed, and her hands are clasped over her heart, suggesting a moment of prayer or reflection. The background is a soft-focus indoor setting with a window and some potted plants. The image is framed by a quilted border with various patterns, including floral and geometric designs, in warm tones.

AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **GRATITUDE**

With the joy of God in my heart, I give thanks for the fullness of life. My thoughts are uplifted and in tune with Spirit. God's goodness moves through me as a nourishing river of gladness and thanksgiving. I am grateful that blessings are a constant reality. My gratitude comes from an overflowing heart.

A young girl stands in a field, her arms raised high in a gesture of prayer or praise. She is wearing a white dress with a red bow at the waist and a floral pattern. The background is a bright, golden sunset with silhouettes of trees and foliage. The overall mood is peaceful and joyful.

AWAKENING JOY

Rev. Margaret Flick

*I am a perfect child of
God, filled with wisdom,
peace, joy, and light.*



When we moved from the city to the country, we were delighted by two mother deer and their fawns ambling through our property. During a drought, we provided water and a few carrots.

Word spread through the deer community, and we eventually kept a big bowl of sliced carrots to toss out to an ever-increasing herd.

One deer kept coming closer until she looked into my eyes and took a carrot from my hand. Wow! Sheer joy in that moment of connection and trust.

We no longer feed them, but my joy of connecting with a wild deer stays with me. Happiness can fade, but joy does not. Joy comes from a deeper, more profound place of connection with the Divine in all its expressions.


Coming home to God is our deepest joy. When we open our hearts, minds, and eyes to see God everywhere and in all creation, we find joy.

HOW TO BRING FORTH THE JOY WITHIN

Gratitude brings us joy, because we are choosing to see and appreciate what has been given to us and the beauty that surrounds us. The gift we all share is life.

More than 30 years ago I was faced with dying or making a drastic change in my life. I had renounced God and had no spiritual life but finding myself near death brought about a shift in my being.

I prayed for help and I got it. To stay alive, I needed to continue making changes in my life. I needed guidance and a new relationship to the Divine. Ideas of God from my family religion no longer worked. That god was angry, untrustworthy, and fickle.



I opened my heart and mind to different ways of understanding God. Divine guidance led me to Unity and eternal gratitude. I found joy in discovering I am loved beyond measure. I began to remember that God is love, wisdom, understanding, and power, residing within and all around me.

“Joy comes from our inner awareness of divine love’s presence and connection to God and each other. Joy embodies great-fulness,” says Brother David Steindl-Rast, the Benedictine monk who has made a life study of gratitude.

HOW TO CULTIVATE MORE JOY

In *The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World* by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the Dalai Lama explains how to cultivate joy.

“Joy is the reward, really, of seeking to give joy to others. When you show compassion, when you show caring, when you show love to others, do things for others, in a wonderful way you have a deep joy that you can get in no other way. You can’t buy it with money. You can be the richest person on Earth, but if you care only about yourself, I can bet my bottom dollar you will not be happy and joyful. But when you are caring, compassionate, more concerned about the welfare of others than about your own, wonderfully, wonderfully, you suddenly feel a warm glow in your heart, because you have, in fact, wiped the tears from the eyes of another.”

Joy can be a connection with other people, with nature, and with other beings. It is the wonder, the delight, the welling up of loving energy—so that we feel our connection to God in all its forms—that brings forth the light of the soul as joy. It can be the joy of the first snowfall, the first signs of spring, the birth of a child, the stars at night. It is seeing the miracle of life and celebrating it.



IDEAS FOR CREATING JOY

- Focus on qualities of God and emulate them. God is love, be loving; God is wisdom, be wise; God is mercy, be merciful and forgiving.
- Monitor troubling thoughts and feelings and ask whether these things are really true. Forgive yourself for thinking those thoughts.
- Keep a gratitude journal.
- Mindfully walk in nature.
- Pray and meditate on one aspect of creation.
- Be generous with time, talent, and treasure.
- Remember joy is connection with the Divine and all creation, and it is eternal. We cannot be separate from God in all its manifestations. Anything that heightens our awareness of the One will stir up the joy that is our divine nature.





AN AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER: **JOY**

I still my thoughts and allow God's unwavering, ever-present joy to uplift and inspire me. God and I are one, and I am filled with happiness. I take time to stop and enjoy all that life has to offer. I give thanks for simple, everyday happenings that bring joyous feelings and responses. For all of life's joy, I am grateful.





HOW MAY WE SERVE YOU?

Through prayer, publishing, and events, Unity is always here to support you in expressing your divine potential for a healthy, prosperous, and meaningful life:

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Call Silent Unity® at 816-969-2000 for personal prayer anytime, day or night, or visit silentunity.org to submit your prayer request online.

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1901 NW Blue Parkway
Unity Village, MO 64065-0001
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G1275
Canada BN 13252 9033 RT
Printed U.S.A.

