

## Session 1 Handout: Together: One Community of Faith

### Opening Prayer

- Putting out into the deep (Luke 5:1-11—Call of Peter)

### Quote for contemplation:

"We're all just walking one another home." -- Ram Dass

### Summary:

In his book "Together", Vivek H. Murthy, M.D explains the greatest health risk for US citizens today is "loneliness." While the book goes into great detail about the data supporting the connection between these diseases, it really focuses on the call to action to address **loneliness**. The feeling of loneliness is an alert system of the human body in much the same way that hunger and thirst are alert systems. When we feel hunger or thirst, we reach out and eat or drink something. If we feel lonely, we need to connect with someone.

We know this to be very true with our experience during the COVID pandemic days. We need to connect with friends and family to feel fully alive and fully human. We realize we are better together in community. At St. Simon, we can do this - we can gather together, celebrate the Eucharist together, sing together, serve together and pray together - it feels more real and energizing in person to do this in community TOGETHER!

Some strategies to connect:

1. Spend some time with those you love. Spend 15 minutes **each day** connecting with somebody who is meaningful and important to you.
2. Be really present to them without distractions. Put away the phones. Genuinely listen.
3. Embrace solitude. It is important that we become in touch with ourselves, pray, meditate, go for a walk, view some artwork or listen to music.
4. Help and be helped. Service is critical to the human connection. Caring for others is an important aspect to who we are as humans.

### Dialogue Exercise:

- What would it take to create that type of community at St. Simon?
  - Brainstorm about a specific culture you want to create in the parish.
  - Turn to your elbow partner and spend a few minutes chatting about this concept of loneliness, community, and a culture of kindness.
  - We will report back in summary.
- What are the one or two things we can do to make a culture of kindness a reality here at St. Simon?
  - Could a smile make a difference in our parish?
  - We'll report back in a few minutes.

**Reflection time:**

- What step could we take in our personal life to connect with friends or family?
- What steps could we take in the office or home or parish to bring about a culture of kindness and welcome?
- Could we smile more at people wherever we go and are?
- How does creating community and addressing loneliness align with the teachings of Jesus / our Christian faith? (we are one body, one spirit: Ephesians 4:4)

**Prayer:****Vulnerability**

Edwina Gately  
(Psalms of a Laywoman)

Oh, let us dare to be vulnerable!  
Let us dare to believe that we are as capable  
As Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Martin Luther King,  
And even Jesus,  
Of acts of compassion and love!  
But first we must be vulnerable.  
We must acknowledge and accept  
our own fear and insecurity  
Before the enormous task of transformation.  
Yet still, in the face of God's grace,  
We must cherish our possibilities.  
It is then, from within our grace-filled trembling,  
That we dare to step forward in trust and tenderness  
To the brokenness of others.  
God will transform our small hearts  
Into vessels of great grace.  
We are capable of healing the world.

## Session 2 Handout: Behavior & Tiny Habits

### Opening Prayer:

- 1 Cor 1:10—Be united in community

### Quote for contemplation:

"If you plant the right seed in the right spot, it will grow without further coaxing." -- BJ Fogg

### Summary:

- If we want to change human behavior then we need to examine it from a scientific data point of view.
- Behavior = motivation + ability + prompt. (B=MAP)
  - What behavior do we want to change or start?
  - What is our ability to do it?
  - What prompt can we use to make it easier for us to do it?
- Start Tiny. Anatomy of a Tiny Habit—**ABC**
  - A - Action (anchor moment)
    - An existing routine (like brushing your teeth) or an event that happens (like a phone ringing).
    - The Anchor Moment reminds you to do the new Tiny Behavior.
  - B - Behavior (New tiny)
    - A simple version of the new habit you want, such as flossing one tooth or doing two push-ups.
    - You do the Tiny Behavior immediately after the Anchor Moment.
  - C - Celebration (Immediate)
    - Something you do to create positive emotions, such as saying, "I did a good job!"
    - You celebrate immediately after doing the new Tiny Behavior—SHINE!

### Dialogue Exercise:

- What did we learn about the behavior model?
  - B=MAP
  - ABC
  - Celebration
- How do we celebrate the tiny habits of success with each other?
- What would we do as a community to celebrate these little moments of success?
- We'll report back in a few minutes.

### Reflection Questions:

- What new insight did I learn from this session?
- What behaviors do we need to work on in our own lives?
- How can tiny habits in your life, become a "recipe" for living in unity with God?
- How do we celebrate the tiny successes?

**Prayer:**

**Prayer for Detachment: Asking For Light**

Blessed Peter Faber SJ

I beg of you, my Lord,  
To remove anything which separates  
Me from you, and you from me.

Remove anything that makes me on unworthy  
Of your sight, your control, your reprehension;  
Of your speech and conversation,  
Of your benevolence and love.

Cast from me every evil  
That stands in the way of my seeing you,  
hearing, tasting, savoring, and touching you;  
Fearing and being mindful of you;  
Knowing, trusting, loving, and possessing you;  
Being conscious of your presence  
And as far as may be, enjoying you.

This is what I ask for myself.

## Session 3 Handout: Connecting to God: Levels of Prayer

### Opening Prayer

- Matthew 6:5-8 (Teaching on prayer)

### Quote for contemplation:

"We think of prayer as something we do for God whereas prayer is essentially a gift. Prayer is intimacy with God and it is God who offers this intimacy. We respond." -- Sr. Ruth Burrows

### Summary:

Sometimes, we need to be taught or reminded how to pray and we need a space to practice it. Like a fire that needs kindling ... we need to kindle our fire that seems to have gone out. It needs stoking up ... we don't mean for it to go out or burn low, we just forget to feed the fuel of the fire because we assume it is always there. Like a fire needs to be stoked, our body needs to be fed nourishment and our soul needs prayer.

How do we connect with God?

- Prayer is fundamentally us spending time connecting with God.
- We can do it anywhere at any time:
  - We can connect with God in nature.
  - We can connect with God with friends in shared experiences.
  - We can connect with God with family in shared events.
- We just need to decide to do it and be conscious of it to receive the full benefits.
- However, like any behavior unless we design it, it will not happen.

Four Levels of Prayer (see separate handout for examples)

1. Simplicity: Praying at God
2. Complexity: Praying to God
3. Perplexity: Listening to God
4. Harmony: Being with God

Prayer is a practice.

- We develop our skills at different times in our lives based on our experiences, so let the Lord give us what we need for this moment.
- We can learn to recognize the presence of God at every moment.
- God invites us to a deeper connection with God through Christ.
- Take Jesus' hand and go wherever he leads you ... Don't be afraid, go with him.
- Open your clenched fists and open your hands and hearts to him.

### Dialogue Exercise

- What level of prayer do I feel most comfortable? Why?
- What one tiny step could I take to make prayer a habit?

**Reflection Questions:**

- What new insight did I learn from this session?
- What one tiny step could I take to make prayer a habit?
- What current routine (anchor) can I attach it to?
- Is there some other thing in my life I want to change?
- What tiny step can I take to make it real?
- How do these levels of prayer address loneliness and create community? (Infinite unity with God is our destiny, and prayer can bring us to this unity during our lifetime. Your longing to be one with God, echoes his longing to be one with you.)

**Prayer:****God of Watching**

Padraig O'Tuama

God of watching,  
whose gaze I doubt and rally against both,  
but in which I take refuge, despite my limited vision.  
Shelter me today,  
against the flipping nature of my own focus,  
and help me find a calm kind of standing.  
And when I falter, which is likely,  
give me the courage and the kindness to begin again  
with hope and coping.  
For you are the one whose watchfulness is steady.  
Amen.

## Session 4 Handout: The Kindling

### Opening Prayer:

- Luke 22: 39-46 – Agony in the Garden

### Quote for contemplation:

"Yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world." -- Teresa of Avila

### Summary:

At our retreat, we gathered together in community and talked about how important connection is and what type of connection we want. We brainstormed ideas about the community we want St. Simon to be. We explored small steps we can personally take to create new "tiny habits" of prayer, we've talked about ways to understand how God can be present in our lives every day, we've celebrated the gift of God's presence in our daily lives through conversation, nourishment, artwork, music, nature, prayer and reflection.

We have learnt about several ways to pray at different levels with beautiful music, scripture and poetry to inspire us. We have shared stories of success and failure and demonstrated how God works through it all no matter what happens. This time has given us the opportunity to rekindle our spirits and to recognize the awe and wonder of God's creation. Together, we have committed to helping each other grow in our relationship with Jesus and to deepen our faith journey in one community of faith.

### Closing Exercise: Letter to themselves

- Write a note about what you learnt this weekend and want yourself to remember and continue to develop.
- When you are finished with your letter, please place it in the envelope provided. Address the envelope with your name and address on the front and then seal the envelope.
- We have placed baskets around the church for your convenience. Please feel free to drop your sealed letter into one of the baskets before you leave and we will mail it to you during the first week of Lent, 2024.

What shall you write about? Here are a few ideas/prompts to assist you....

- What are the top 3-5 things I want to remember from this retreat?
- What step did I promise to take to connect with friends or family? Recommit to it now.
- What step did I promise to take in the office, home, or parish to bring about a culture of kindness and welcome? Recommit to it now.
- What will encourage me to take another tiny step to make prayer a habit?
- What current routine (anchor) can I attach it to?
- Is there some other thing in my life I want to change?
- What tiny step can I take to make it real?
- How will I share my prayer life with those close to me? What will this look like?

We are both humbled and grateful for your presence this weekend, you are the church! We will continue to hold you in deep prayer well after our retreat has ended, and may you find the courage to continue to build God's Kingdom with your Rekindled Spirit.

**Prayer:**

**Blessing for longing**

(John O'Donohue)

Blessed be the longing that brought you here  
And quickens your soul with wonder.

May you have the courage to listen to the voice of desire  
That disturbs you when you have settled for something safe.

May you have the wisdom to enter generously into your own unease  
To discover the new direction your longing wants you to take.

May the forms of your belonging  
—in love, creativity, and friendship  
—Be equal to the grandeur and the call of your soul.

May the one you long for long for you.  
May your dreams gradually reveal the destination of your desire.  
May a secret Providence guide your thoughts and nurture your feelings.

May your mind inhabit your life with the sureness with which your body inhabits the world.  
May your heart never be haunted by ghost structures of old damage.

May you come to accept your longing as divine urgency.  
May you know the urgency with which God longs for you.