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What Canst Thou Say?

Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this: but what canst thou say?
Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest,
is it inwardly from God? —George Fox*

Gratefulness

My Spiritual Practice of Gratitude

Lee Junker

The spiritual practice of gratitude has become the golden thread that weaves through my days, holding them together, present and visible in all the varied patterns of my life. It is an integral part of everyday, ordinary events and experiences, no longer relegated to special, extraordinary happenings.

My spiritual practice of gratitude starts early in the morning, when I sit down by my window to pray and try to be open to God's presence. No matter how I am feeling—whether cheerful, angry, or grieving—I always begin with thanks for the blessings in my life. I have learned that practicing gratefulness requires intention, discipline, and being very mindful. For me it has become an expression of my confidence and trust in the Spirit.

More and more each day, I find myself saying "thank you" all through the day. God is present here and now, in all of life. I feel gratitude that I can still walk downstairs, pull out the canister of coffee and enjoy its aroma, that I can hug my husband, hear a Carolina wren outside the window in my Philadelphia home, take a long walk, and at this time of year see once again the changing foliage of the fall season. My moments of deepest gratitude, however, come when I am in the beauty of the outside, especially

in Maine. Just observing the dew on the early morning grass, the fog on the river, the infinite variety of birds and flowers and creatures—all, all humble me and overwhelm me with gratitude. So, now in the later stages of my life, I have finally learned the inestimable blessings of just stopping and watching and paying attention. How can I not be grateful?

I am finding that the intentional practice of expressing gratitude is gradually imprinting itself on my spirit. It is expanding my horizon and creating an internal spaciousness. My attitude is changing from one of being miserly, narrow, focused on life's deficiencies, to one more expansive and generous.

I am also learning that when unbidden suffering comes, the practice of gratitude helps us to look beyond it. I have a good friend, who says often, with heartfelt conviction, "Thanks be to God!" Last year this friend learned that she had aggressive brain cancer. In spite of months of surgery, chemotherapy and radiation treatments, she continues to see God's love and feel God's presence beyond this unbidden life experience. I never speak with her without hearing her comment, "Thanks be to God."

And I echo those sentiments, "Thanks be to God."

Lee Junker is a member of Central Philadelphia Friends Meeting and a convinced Friend of 45 years.

From the Editor:

Appropriately, I guess, for this issue, I am feeling deeply thankful to each of the writers who have shared their stories. They tell us of gratefulness that has come as a surprise, as a chosen discipline, as a response to trauma and illness, or just a part of the dailyness of life. However it comes, gratefulness adds light and grace in all circumstances. Thank you, friends, for this window into gratefulness and grace.

Patricia McBee
Editor for this Issue

Discovery

Alfred LaMotte

I haven't really learned anything new since that radiant spring afternoon when I was eight years old. After a beastly morning in Sunday school, I ripped off my necktie and suit, and put on musty jeans with a ragged tee-shirt to run barefoot into May weather. The sky was blue as a robin's egg. Giant puffs of cloud tumbled slowly in the sunbeams, shimmering green on the grass, then gold in the wheat field, all the way to the woods dotted white and pink with dogwood blossoms.

I gazed up into endless blue and, in the same instant, felt my feet rooted on the cool earth. I saw the essence of every religion from the dawn of history in that epiphany of earth and sky. And I knew it. I've studied them all for half a century since that moment, yet I've never found anything but a variation on that vision of ineluctable suchness in a schoolboy's heart.

"So this is what they were trying to teach me in Sunday school!" I thought. "The sky is the Father. The Earth is the Mother. Standing between them, joining them like a lightning rod, I am

their Son. *This* must be the Holy Trinity! But it only works when you run outside in your bare feet and put your body into it."

Alfred LaMotte is a member of Olympia, Washington, Friends Meeting, where he is an interfaith Quaker chaplain at The Evergreen State College. He teaches courses in World Religions and Biblical Studies.



Photography as Gratitude

Allison Randall

I was brought up to be grateful. My parents didn't set out to teach me gratefulness, but they modeled it almost every day of my life. At home, when there was a snowstorm or it was autumn or there were birds at the feeder or a cardinal in a tree, they would bring our attention to it, commenting on its beauty with awe in their voices.

For most of my life, gratitude has sprung freely from my heart. When I see a sunset, I feel grateful. When I look at one of my children or grand-

children, I feel great gratitude. When I see a birch tree, a beautiful rock, a kind face in the grocery store, the light through green leaves, when my car starts up easily on a cold morning, or I hear the voice of a friend on the phone, when I eat blueberries or strawberries or even just my morning cereal, when I hear Beethoven, or hold the hand of my husband or my granddaughter my heart fills immediately with gratitude. So many moments in every day are short and heart-sprung wordless prayers of gratitude.

For a particular section of time in my life, however, gratitude was more difficult. After an incident of sexual abuse 11 1/2 years ago, my

A heart that is not full of gratitude shrinks like a deflated balloon, and feels just as flat.

heart quickly threw up a protective shell around it which was very useful for keeping men out, very effective in making me feel safe, but that shell also kept out gratitude. My world became much smaller, and my heart did too. A heart that is not full of gratitude shrinks like a deflated balloon, and feels just as flat.

The world seemed too dangerous a place to be open to in the way I had been accustomed to. Those days of heavy Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were overwhelming. I could clear only one dish at a time off my table, I could cut out and sew up only one cloth toy at a time, could read only one and a half pages of a book at a sitting, could face only one task of any sort at a time, and even that was frequently too much. I avoided the grocery store or anywhere there were a lot of people, I moved into a basement apartment so there wasn't too much to see out the windows. The world was too big a place to take in all at once. I had to keep my world small.

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Please write for WCTS! Instructions to authors are on page 8. Send editorial correspondence to <mariellen.gilpin@gmail.com> or WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820. See the WCTS website for a history of WCTS and updated queries for future issues: <whatcanstthousay.org>

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Please write for permission before reprinting excerpts.

About six months after the abuse, one of my brothers gave me a camera that was remarkably easy to use. A camera that thought for me, because I couldn't think much for myself during those dark days. The camera had a zoom feature so I could see things close up. Instead of looking at a whole forest or even one tree, I could put the camera protectively up to my face, zoom in and concentrate on one burl on one tree. Instead of seeing the whole sky I could see one cloud formation. Looking through the lens was safe: it kept the world small enough for me not to be afraid of, and I discovered that these small frames of the world were beautiful. And in seeing the beauty I felt grateful. Each time I put the camera to my eye and framed a small piece of nature I felt gratitude. Each time I held one of my

Each photograph I took became a prayer of gratefulness.

photographs, a rectangle of paper that was a small piece of the world, a close up manageable and beautiful piece, I felt gratitude. Each photograph I took became a prayer of gratefulness.

Since my gratitude has always been to God, whom I consider to be responsible for all the beauty and goodness and deliciousness in the world, when my heart had been full of gratitude and full of prayers it was full of God. And when my heart had shrunk and was protected by a shell, it could only let in a little gratitude at a time, a little God at a time. But that camera helped me extend my vision. Through the eye of that camera I could peek out at the world as if through a small hole in my shell, and I came to learn that God was indeed still out there in the larger world, as well as hidden away in my heart. And I was hugely grateful.

Mystery and Wonder Fill My World For These I Am Grateful

Janet Means Underhill

*Have you seen dawn rising to greet the sun?
Have you gazed at the stars filling the dome of sky on a dark night?
Have you watched a spider drop into unknown space
and weave his web?*

Mystery and Wonder fill my world

*Do you greet the smiles of strangers passing on the streets?
Do you feel the touch of another's hand?
Do you sink into Silence and let yourself be held by The Other?*

Mystery and Wonder fill my world

*When the world turns dark and fearful,
When you are consumed by despair and grief,
When there seems no hope or reason,
When you have tripped over your frailties—again,*

*Have you expanded into the hammock of love and safety
that undergirds you?
Have you known it is not you who makes the rules and leads the way?*

*In the absence of all comes The All,
Your world turns,
You are breathed into life
To move forward.*

*Mystery and Wonder fill my world
For these I am grateful.*

Janet Means Underhill is a member of Lake Forest Meeting, Illinois. She is a member of Illinois Yearly Meeting's Ministry and Advancement committee.

Through much photography, prayer, counseling, prayer, journaling, prayer, sewing, and Grace, the larger world is no longer unreasonably frightening to me. I still struggle with PTSD on and off, but am no longer overwhelmed by it. I continue to take photographs, and most of them are close-ups rather than large scenes; I became very partial to that scope

and consider those photographs to be closely focused prayers. Gratefulness-prayer photography has become part of my day-to-day life, one of my spiritual practices, a way of translating the mystical experience of heart-striking awed gratitude into picture form.

Allison Randall is a member of Keene, New Hampshire, Friends Meeting, and attempts to stay open to The Divine.

Gratitude: Unexplained

Betty Engle Stoddard

The call came. An unfamiliar voice. The message was astounding. Astonishing. Mind-boggling.

My older son was arrested in Michigan. He'd fallen in love over the internet and the young woman had neglected to tell him her age—accurately. He first knew of her age as her father was pummeling him, over farm equipment, awaiting the arrival of the sheriff. She was a minor.

Gratitude has bubbled over & within me since the first time I got the call.

I spoke with Jim, the unfamiliar voice. His calmness, in retrospect, brought calm. Gratitude.

I called my neighbor, who was waiting to attend Meeting with me, and asked her to share the news with a Friend. Then I called my colleague, Carol—I needed her presence. Carol came with a passenger: her white, brilliantly blue-eyed, deaf angora cat, Dakota, on his leash. Purring constantly, he climbed happily all over me. Such a pleasure for me. Gratitude.

At the close of Meeting two dear Friends arrived on my doorstep. “Will you sit close by me on the floor, please? I want to be on the floor.” Quietly they sat. Supportive. Loving. Generous. One Friend would leave; the next arrive. A gift. Unarranged...at least in any way we knew. Gratitude.

I spoke with the Presbyterian minister in the community where Robert was first jailed. That very Sunday evening the minister visited Robert in jail. Son David offered to overnight thousands of dollars to the chosen attorney. Friends at Pine River Friends Meeting became friends.

Concerts, picnics, racquetball and more: a couple in that town ‘adopted’ Robert during the five months he awaited his sentencing. The innkeeper made chicken soup with homemade noodles for gathered family and friends. Prayers in abundance. On & on the list goes. It grows.

Six years later Robert is still incarcerated; denied parole twice, for inexplicable reasons. The persons who have stood by him, with him, and visited him have been incredible, both in number and dedication.

Gratitude washes over me. Then. Today. Amazing. Its source: unexplained. The source: Known.

Betty Engle Stoddard is a member of Raleigh, North Carolina, Friends Meeting, where she currently serves as co-convenor of the Hospitality Committee and Quiet Garden. She is active in prison ministry in response to an unexpected calling. Betty encourages herself to meet “that of the divine” within the other.

WCTS Editor Mariellen Gilpin was interviewed about the book listed below on “Keepin’ the Faith” November 25, 2007. You can listen to it at: <will.uiuc.edu/am/ktf>

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Gratitude Rediscovered

Willing Madeira

As a little boy at a church school, I loved the doxology and bel-lowed it out happily. In my childish understanding, I loved prayers of thanksgiving and thought that prayers of contrition and supplication were whiny, like my little brothers. When I grew up I became resistant to chances for spiritual growth, like a dog pulling against a leash because he doesn’t want to go for a walk, even though he will have a wonderful time when he does.

Last spring, however, I was diagnosed with a rare and lethal form of eye cancer. I had gone in for cataract surgery some months earlier than I had planned. It was then that the malignancy was discovered, quickly treated, and cured. Had it been diagnosed a few months later, I would surely have lost the vision in that eye and may have lost my life.

While I certainly understand that the doctor’s skill was the vehicle, I experienced a miracle. I sensed a miracle as the light slowly returned through the thicket of the damaged eye. The miracle grew from recovered sight to the whole visual and sensual world: the doxology returned.

When I finally woke one morning and could see the whole world, I laughed with a delight that surprised me. As the months pass, I take more and more pleasure in the ability to make others laugh and know that, too, as a form of grace.

Willing Madeira works for Public Citizens for Children and Youth In Philadelphia, where he advocates for youngsters in the juvenile justice system. He is a member of Central Philadelphia Friends Meeting.



Gratitude in the Face of

Lynn Kirby

Even life's darkest situations bring blessings. Gratitude is possible in the midst of our grief and fears.

Schizophrenia struck our daughter when she was twenty-five, and she has been hospitalized at least a dozen times in the twenty intervening years. Serious psychotic episodes have been interspersed with periods of relative sanity, but she has never fully escaped from delusions and hallucinations. Unable to work, she has lived below the poverty line and has sometimes believed her family and friends were The Enemy. Her life has been hard, and yet she has deep love for God and a sense of being His.

It took years of despair for me to accept that my golden child had this cruel and undeserved illness, permanently. Along the way, I had a vision in which God reassured me that I would be shown how to live in peace and trust instead of anger and fear. I began to see that no matter what happens, even when scary and dangerous, the results will not be all bad. God will take care of us and give us what we need, always, even against our wishes.

I am deeply grateful for the gift of trust. What is best doesn't depend on my decisions, desires, and actions; a far wiser One will take care of it all. I have come to understand that solutions beyond my imagination will come in time. I don't even have to understand what comes—I only need to be open to receive guidance. What a relief to know that I am not in charge!

I am also grateful for another lesson I have learned, a surprising one. Society marginalizes, ignores, or persecutes people with mental illness. Underneath her personal reality, my daughter has a kind, tender, generous heart. She has taught me that one's personality and surface appearance can hide depths of love; that inside each of

us is one of God's cherished children. From this, I am learning to let go of judgment of others.

She has no husband or children, and I have sometimes worried about her dying alone and uncared for. But she is dying now. Amidst the sadness I feel, I can still be very grateful that she is not alone, and that her father and I can give her support and love now. I thank God for giving us the health and strength she needs. Above all, I am grateful for the gift of this person who has so profoundly touched my life in more ways than I can possibly count.

Lynn Kirby is a member of the Stevens Point, Wisconsin, Friends Meeting.

Meditation

Bob Denison

*i closed
my eyes
in darkness
near dawn.*

*the meditation
slowly erased
a chalk board
full and overflowing.*

*in the cloud
of white dust
the teacher spoke*

Bob Denison is a member of Chester River Meeting in Chestertown, MD. His morning writing practice begins with noticing something in the natural world, and then listening for words to complete a three-stanza piece. He leaves the creation in his wife's cereal bowl each day.

Living in Gratitude

Dotty Holcomb Doherty

When I open my eyes each morning and can see, I am grateful. When I wiggle my feet and hands and can feel them, I am grateful. Each step has become a blessing, each stair climb, a miracle.

Seven years ago I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Impaired vision was soon followed by a painful buzzing and numbness in my left arm, both legs and feet, making walking difficult. Debilitating fatigue blanketed my days. A year later, I had to give up my beloved science teaching job at Sandy Spring Friends School.

Each slow day had its joys, despite my frustration. Short walks focused my attention on the flowers blooming at my feet, and on the birds I so dearly love. I gave thanks for each blossom discovered, for each warbler song lifting my spirit.

I turned to writing, a practice I had previously kept to myself with no intention of sharing my thoughts with others. Today I am a freelance writer, with regular features and essays in local publications. With each painful loss in life, I have found an unexpected path.

I know what the future with MS can hold. I have seen how it can ravage lives—stealing one's ability to walk, see, swallow and even think. The disease has no cure, and can become progressively debilitating.

And so, I am grateful—for each day, each moment. My visual and sensory symptoms have faded, and I am learning to balance my energy. Exercise helps temper fatigue, so I row and kayak on the Chesapeake Bay, delighting in migrating waterfowl. I recently hiked Yosemite mountain trails with my husband, Jonathan. As I struggled up the steep high-elevation slopes, I kept a mantra going in my

head: "I have MS and I am doing this." Each step was a prayer, each moment of pure woodland silence, a gift. When we reached Cathedral Lake, my tears told me why I had persevered. The beauty and serenity confirmed the deep feeling in my gut that had told me not to give up. And my mantra all the way back, despite enveloping fatigue, was "It was worth it."

I find gratitude even on my worst days. When exhaustion descends like a cloak and spasticity creeps into my thighs, I am grateful for what I can do, and for family and friends that support me. I keep a quote by Charles Dickens on the wall above my desk as a reminder, in case I forget: "There is always something for which to be thankful."

Dotty Holcomb Doherty is a member of Annapolis, Maryland, Friends Meeting, and of the Friends Poetry Group there.

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A Moment of Light

Heidi Blocher

An experience following the recent death of one of my sisters cast a light into my soul I felt urged to share with others.

Theres had held out with pancreatic cancer for almost three years, a blessed time for her, of inward liberation, and without overwhelming physical suffering at any time. To everyone's surprise, she reached her 70th birthday.

After receiving the news by phone, I walked downhill in the night to get the day's mail. Suddenly the woods around me turned blue: a full moon had appeared from behind the clouds, blindingly silver. "She died at full moon!" it hit me. "She wouldn't do any less. She wouldn't go before fullness was achieved!"

That fullness of light was in my soul the next morning when I woke up. The normally somber view of hemlocks beyond my window seemed pierced with bright sun and patches of strong blue. There was no heavy feeling in me at all.

Instead, a great desire to dance!! I felt we should, all of us including Quakers, indeed we must, dance at

funerals! Celebrate life, the life that has been, the life we still have, and the ongoingness of life beyond us and those we love.

But there was something new for me in this feeling of celebration. For the first time, this fullness of joy included, quite specially, the shortness of our lives, their limitation in time. Not because life is painful (which it is; release from the valley of tears is part of this celebration) but the shortness makes it so perfect, so valuable, precious—intense. My old fondness of jewels as a child came back to me: tiny; perfectly condensed beauty and brilliance; the full intensity. I had committed myself as a child to the jewel. Like my sister with her full, brilliant moon, I would take no less.

I had been much burdened in the time of my sister's illness by a new awareness of my own mortality, the limitation of my life, and the fear that it won't be fulfilled. Now jubilation was in me for the perfection of the short, limited span given us. I saw the dance, cosmic, whirling around the globe incessantly: lives coming and going,

figure yielding to figure in a continuous movement; I thought I heard the music, the cosmic joy—the joy of being just one figure in this dance, passing through, appearing briefly and disappearing in the ongoing whirl. How

terrible it would be, it seemed to me, not to disappear, to deny the preciousness of both the short appearance and the ongoingness of the

whole that does not need to hold on to the temporary manifestation.

I blessed my sister for her participation in the dance and for being willing to leave it, to disappear, as a figure, in its movement. How great and full my appreciation of her and her life was at this moment!

For the first time, this fullness of joy included the shortness of our lives, their limitation in time.

What I Love

Janet Sawyer

*Is to use anything
for what it wasn't meant for.
One warm day a year ago
my knees hurt as I knelt
on the pebbles and broken walk
where I wanted to transplant
my impatiens and violas.
My knees were hurting too bad.
Back into the house I went
to rummage around and find
a square printed pillowcase
made from the skirt of a cast-off dress.
Now, what stuffing could I find?
Looking out the back window
I saw freshly mowed grass.
Delighted, I stuffed my pillow
with the sweet-smelling filling,
went back to pebbles and plants,
knelt on my soft fragrant pad,
happy with my good fortune.*

Janet Sawyer was a member of First Methodist Church, Champaign, Illinois. Charlotte Sawyer Green gave permission to reprint her mother's poem.

“Theres,” my soul said, “I thank you. Now there is nothing but this fullness and brilliance—now your terrible sufferings of soul, and mine, including those we caused one another, are only gestures and figures of this great dance that has carried us. Now you are transfigured, your life revealed in its truth.”

“Will this sense last in me?” I later asked. “Probably not. My legs, my heart, will grow heavy again. But I accept what is given me this morning, in fullness, as I accept the full moon, its fact, its moment, knowing it will wane, look awkward, disappear, reappear, wax again. I accept it entirely; today I am in the dance.”

Looking at the window, the perfect stillness out there, I had, for a moment, a sense of pure existence. Existence not made up of this and that, but only of itself. In my mind I saw myself walking out on a frozen pond without knowing whether the thin ice would carry me or not: there was nothing out there, but I was fully, entirely engaged. There is not a part of one’s being that does not participate in this act. And I longed for this pure existence, and for my life to be exactly like this. And I seemed to know that my life is like this, and the gratefulness I felt, pure gift, cannot be described.

As I lay there, savoring the quiet hour between warm flannel sheets, I came to feel myself resting in this pure existence as I had seen John resting on the breast of Jesus in a little icon I have. One can see it in the disciple’s open

*For all that has been, thanks.
For all that will be, yes.*

—Dag Hammarskjöld
UN Secretary General 1953-61

*In every thing give thanks:
for this is the will of God.*

—I Thessalonians 5:18

A Question of Respect

Lillian Heldreth

*I want to know how many women this morning
are cooking frijoles pintos,
soaking, parboiling, simmering over low heat for a long time
these painted seeds
my mother called
pinto beans.*

*And I want to know their real name.
not “beans, painted,” as the Spaniards named them, but
what the Maya call them,
the ones who bred them from the wild,
who cooked them first,
served them re-cooked in oil,
with what the Hopi call piki bread,
and the Spaniards called “little turtles.”*

*Quechua people, tell me, what do you call these beans
that I have loved for nearly seventy years?
I want to know their true name, so I can give thanks for them
with the respect they deserve.*

*So I can give thanks to your ancestors
for their great gift.*

Lillian Heldreth formerly attended Urbana-Champaign Meeting and is now a member of a Native American spirituality group in Marquette, Michigan, where she is writer/editor for the Marquette Magazine, a local tourist publication.

eyes that he is listening to and feeling the heartbeat of the Master. Resting on the breast of Existence, feeling and listening to its heartbeat. “Now,” I said to my sister, “I know this you had in your sorrowful and exalted life, and this you sought, like me: That daring, ecstatic walk on the ice, and that resting on and for the Heartbeat. At last, darling, we are sisters. It is finished.”

“I feel unusually unburdened, as if nothing remained between Theres and me to clear up,” I later wrote to a friend. I asked if this may owe something also to the undramatic but steady and devoted reconciliation process that

had quietly evolved between us during the time of her illness, mostly by correspondence and the exchange of poetry we had held in common during our school years, which I now recognized, with deep gratefulness, had been a way for us to bond in that which is eternal. Two years before her death I went to Europe where my sister lived, to say good-bye to her, upon news that she was about to go. Mercifully, more time was given us.

Heidi Blocher is a member of Sandwich, Massachusetts, Friends Meeting. Widely connected among Friends in both the U.S. and Europe, and long in the habit of documenting her inward experience in writing, she often shares intimately with Friends.

More Than a Feeling

Jennifer Frick

In my experience, the two most helpful spiritual disciplines have been to pray for those I have a resentment against, and to make a gratitude list. It is impossible for me to feel any serenity if I am resentful and ungrateful, so even if self-interest is my only motivation, it is enough! I had heard that the apostle Paul admonished people to be grateful *for* all circumstances and just wrote him off (a bit resentfully) as unrealistic. Then I discovered that what he actually said was that we should be grateful *in* all circumstances. Now that made sense! There is always something for which I can be grateful.

Over the years, I have noticed that if I make both a resentment list and a gratitude list, often the same people and things show up on both lists. People, places and things can elicit joy in me, and then gratitude is easy, but they can also trigger fear, frustration and anger, and then the temptation is to think that they are the problem, and if they would only change, if things were only different, then I wouldn't feel afraid or angry. Family and those closest to me commonly show up on both lists. Oh, how easy it is to drive our loved ones crazy!

For me, gratitude is much more than a feeling. It is an attitude that

Tell Us Your Stories!

What Canst Thou Say is a worship-sharing group in print. We welcome submissions of articles of 350-1500 words and artwork—line drawings or artwork suitable for black and white reproduction—that illustrate the theme of an issue, or that we might retain for use in future issues. Please send your text submissions in Word or generic text format and artwork in high resolution jpeg files. Photocopied art and typed submissions are also accepted. Send via email to <mariellen.gilpin@gmail.com> or diskette, or hard copy to **WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820.**

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leads to action. It is also a spiritual discipline. Pleasant feelings may accompany gratitude, but they do not define it for me. If I view gratitude as an attitude rather than limiting it to an emotional response, then I can decide to be grateful. Not once in my life have I felt happy when I was resentful or ungrateful. Superior, self-righteous or vindicated, sure, but never happy, joyful or serene.

Over the last couple of years, I discovered, through a particular situation in my life, that it is also possible for gratitude to prevent resentment from even beginning. I knew myself well enough to see that I was in the kind of situation that always caused me to feel hurt, afraid and resentful. I could see myself reacting to the situation but couldn't stop it. I did what I always

do, began praying for the person and it helped, as it always does. Then it occurred to me that if I started praying for this person before the next time he did something that upset me, then maybe I could just spare myself the resentment in the first place. It worked quite well.

I've begun to think of it as preventive prayer. It acts as a sort of inoculation against resentment and despair. I express gratitude to God for having that person or situation in my life, and pray also that they have all they want out of life, that all their dreams come true. I make no judgment whether I think their dreams are good for them, or reasonable. I don't even have to know what their hopes and dreams are. I just have to pray they come true. I do this even if I don't feel grateful at the moment. I don't deny how I am feeling, but simply pray for these things anyway, thereby taking the first step down the path from the prison of resentment and fear toward gratitude and serenity.

Jennifer Frick is the leader of Young Friends Youth Group and the Welcoming Ministries Coordinator at West Richmond, Indiana, Friends Meeting. She writes a monthly religion column in the local paper.

If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.

—Meister Eckhart

In gratitude we give to others. But in giving we express our gratefulness to the God who gave and keeps on giving.

—Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano, Filipina Writer

Books

Thanking & Blessing—The Sacred Art: Spiritual Vitality through Gratefulness, Jay Marshall, Skylight Paths Publishing, 2007.

Jay Marshall, Dean of the Earlham School of Religion, has given us an easy guide to the spiritual practices of thanking and blessing. It is written from a Christian-Quaker perspective, with rich use not only of biblical references but also of other world religious traditions.

Gratefulness, The Heart of Prayer: An Approach to Life in Fullness, David Steindl-Rast, Paulist Press, 1984.

This book is not new, but it is a treasure. Steindl-Rast invites us to be surprised by the gratuitous blessings that are poured out on us every day, like the surprise and delight when we see a rainbow. "Gratuitousness burst(s) in on us...Our spontaneous response is surprise... It is also the beginning of gratefulness."

Announcement

The Elizabeth Ann Bogert Fund for the Study and Practice of Christian Mysticism makes annual grants of up to \$1000. Proposals are due by March 1, 2009. Inquiries may be sent by e-mail to the secretaries of the Fund, Vinton and Michelina Deming at muccidem@comcast.net.



Welcome!

New WCTS Team Members

What Canst Thou Say? is produced by a team of devoted volunteers whose reward is to receive the stories of so many people's encounters with God. We are pleased to announce two new team members.

Michael Resman has joined the editorial team. Mike's writings have appeared in WCTS since its inception. He recently was a guest editor for the November 2008 issue on Angels. Mike is a member of Rochester, MN, Meeting. We are grateful to have his sensitivity and commitment to matters of the Spirit.

Debra Schwartz joins the layout and design team. She is a member of Lake Forest Meeting, IL, and attends Beloit, WI, Meeting where she has done the beautiful layout of their meeting newsletter. We welcome Debra and her talents to the WCTS team.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Please send this form to: WCTS c/o Richard Himmer,
1035 Hereford Drive, Blue Bell PA 19422-1925

Enclosed is my check to What Canst Thou Say?

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May 2009

Strangers

Guest Editors: Agnes Miyo Moriuchi and Lois Pomeroy with Mariellen Gilpin

I am a stranger and afraid in a world I never made (A.E. Housman). What stranger did you fear? What kept you from a hospitable spirit? Was Jesus' promise, *I will be with you always*, inaccessible? How have you practiced Jesus' radical hospitality across lines drawn in the sand, so that no one is a stranger? What opened your heart to transform *them to us*? How have you changed? Was the change laborious, or pure grace? Has the strange become familiar, or the familiar strange?

Deadline: February 15, 2009

August 2009

Body Prayer

Guest Editor: Amy Perry with Mariellen Gilpin

David danced before the Lord (2 Samuel, 6:14). All of our being belongs to God—our body as well as our soul. How do you use your body to come closer to God? What is your experience of God using your body as an instrument or vessel during prayer? How has a movement or a movement practice helped you spiritually? When have you felt that moving your body was prayer? Tell us about your body prayer.

Deadline: May 15, 2009

November 2009

Bread and Roses

Editors: Michael Resman and Judy Lumb

Man does not live by bread alone; he lives on every word that God utters. (Matthew 4:4) To those who came to help, it appeared the people in this very poor village needed bread to eat, but one villager planted roses. Soon everyone else planted flowers. They may have been poor, but what their souls craved was beauty. What do people really need? How have you been led to service, to meet needs? How have those experiences changed your life?

Deadline: August 15, 2009

What Canst Thou Say?

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Gratefulness