



March 2012
Volume 85 Number 3

From the Clergy Assistant

Our Parish Prayer List

I often have family, neighbors, friends, as well as parishioners, who ask me to add someone to our parish prayer list. Often these requests are for people who are going through difficult situations such as health crises, family crises, terminal illnesses, or grieving the death of a loved one. I imagine most of us have asked—and been asked—for prayers for someone at one time or another.

Shortly after I started here at St. Elizabeth's, a dear long-time friend of mine called me to say that his father's cancer had returned and he had started chemotherapy again. We had a good conversation in which he filled me in on the details of his father's situation, and we also got caught up on our families. At the end of our conversation, I asked if he would like me to add his father to our parish prayer list. He said, "Sure." A few months later, his father died. Shortly after his father's death, he called me to say that his partner was going to have to undergo some major surgery. Again, at the end of our conversation, I asked him if he would like me to add his partner to our parish prayer list. He immediately replied, "Joan, you put my dad on that list and he died..."

We have been taught, and know in our minds, that we are not supposed to pray for *things*—such as to win the lottery or for our team to win the Super Bowl. And that prayer is not bargaining with God—"I promise to pray every day and be really good, if only you will cure my father." As a teacher of mine used to remind us: God is **not** a vending machine. We can't put our prayers in like coins and select what we want to come out... And yet in our hearts, I think it is easy to slip into this pattern of bargaining. I suspect that we all have had loved ones who have had cancer or other terminal illnesses, and we have formed informal support groups who have prayed for that person—and sometimes there are those who are disappointed—or even angry—when the person they have been praying for is not cured. And wouldn't it be a matter of justice to cure someone, especially a young child with leukemia?

It is a good thing to pray for healing or protection or guidance for ourselves and others. And God always does answer prayer, but it is important to remember that it might not be *how we expect* it to be

answered, or as quickly. There is so much beyond what we can see or comprehend. And the effects of prayer go beyond anything we can imagine. God never promised that life would be easy—let alone fair... God's promise has **always** been to be **present with us**.

For me, the beauty behind our parish prayer list especially shines forth during each Wednesday Noon Healing Service. One of my favorite parts of that service is when all those gathered take turns reading aloud the names of those on our parish prayer list. To hear those names read aloud by the saints gathered—especially our “more seasoned” saints who have seen and experienced a great deal over their many years—is an experience that always carries such genuine “heart” and “voice” for those prayers. It is a powerful experience of lifting others up in prayer—of lifting *each other* up in prayer. God is present with us.

O Lord our God, accept the fervent prayers of your people; in the multitude of your mercies, look with compassion upon us and all who turn to you for help; for you are gracious, O lover of souls, and to you we give glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen. (BCP, p. 395)

The Rev. Joan F. Conley