

Writing fosters spirituality, faith

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

What comes to mind when you think about journaling? It might be an image of a young girl in her bedroom unlocking her diary, or it might be an image of an elderly gentleman penning his memoirs and words of wisdom to a younger generation.

Or, it might be an image of a 24-year-old single mom, balancing the demands of college and motherhood, stealing minutes to write about her frustrations.

This last image might seem a little unfamiliar. Journaling or diary writing is often seen as an activity reserved only for writers or for the very young or very old, an indulgence that those in between either don't have the time or the use for.

Journaling is actually a good spiritual practice and a way to grow closer to God, according to Patricia Scouten, administrator of Borromeo Prayer Center in Greece.

In February, Scouten led an introductory workshop at the prayer center on keeping a spiritual journal, and, because of demand, is considering leading another one in the future. Keeping a journal can help de-

Young Adult

velop a stronger, more appreciative relationship with God, she said.

"At the end of the day, what usually comes to the front in your life are all the little annoyances. It's really a sense of little wonderful moments, little gifts from God (that) kind of get buried. We focus on the person who cut us off at the corner, all the red lights," Scouten said.

Before going to bed each night, take five minutes to reflect on and write about the simple gifts you've been given each day, and to thank God for them, she suggested.

Scouten said she often hears from people who say they would like to journal, but just can't find the time. Keeping a journal does take a commitment and a conscious effort, but she advises new journal-keepers to set a realistic goal. Writing for half an hour each night may not be realistic for many, but most people can squeeze in five minutes of "gratitude" journaling, she said. If the goal is attainable, people are more likely to stick to it.



the act of writing that will grow into a habit," writes Koch, an adjunct professor at the graduate school of St. Mary's University in Minnesota.

Deacy Dee, 24, is the mother of a 3-year-old and a recent graduate of SUNY Brockport, where she attended the campus' Newman Center. She first began keeping a journal when she was in elementary school, filling it with stories and short poems. As she grew older, she began to use the journal as a way of dealing with her inner life.

"When I learned how helpful it is to process my thoughts and feelings into written words I began to journal for healing and coping purposes," Dee said.

Because of time constraints, Dee is only able to journal about once a month. She finds that she often turns to her journal at times of great stress or when she wants to explore new ideas. She writes about her goals for the future, things she

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"Begin with five minutes, kind of find a time that you recognize to write in and try to find a place where you're not distracted," Scouten said.

In his book *Journal Keeping: Exploring a Great Spiritual Practice*, Carl Koch agrees. He offers readers "10 Commandments for Journal Keeping," and first among them is to write every day, or at least regularly.

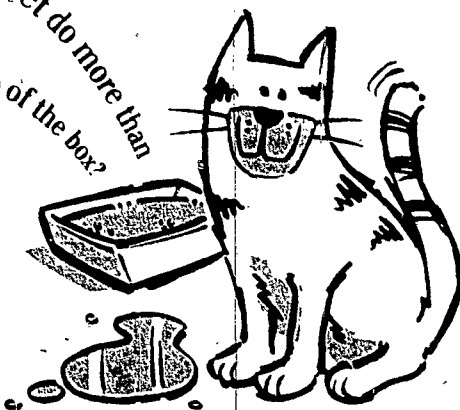
"They can describe one event, remind themselves of one blessing of the day. Writing consistently 'plants

wants to do to be a better parent and things in the world that bother her, such as the war in Iraq.

"The process of putting my feelings into words is extremely therapeutic. In the journal I am my complete self; the good, the bad and the ugly," Dee said.

Dee said that her journal sometimes provides a safe place for her to vent her frustrations without hurting anyone and a place where she can gain a new perspective on her life.

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