

## A Key to Peaceful Relationships

As I move into the 22nd year of engaging in the Counseling Ministry here at St. Paul's, our 21st century technology offers me a new avenue of service to our community. Through this parish web-site I will be able to offer to our whole parish some keys for living in healthier and more God-centered ways .

As I prayed for inspiration for the first column, I thought of the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi which has been my favorite prayer for over 30 years. Given our parish's rich Franciscan connections, this is likely a favorite prayer for many of us.

### Peace Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace,  
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
where there is sadness, joy;

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;  
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Within this prayer are many keys for peaceful relationships. My experience has led me to emphasize one in particular: "grant that I may not so much seek...to be understood as to understand." Stephen Covey offers a beautiful paraphrase: "Seek first to understand, and then to be understood."

Applying this principle helps to create peace in every kind of relationship we experience.

- For individuals, we regularly experience inner battles or tensions. One part of us pulls in one direction, another part in a different direction. We are tempted to try to get rid of one side, yet this never works and the battle goes on. As we begin to seek first to understand all sides of the conflict, we often experience a calming of the storm.
- For married couples, we engage in repetitive conflicts. Once we begin to apply this principle of seeking first to understand, usually we both begin to relax

and then are able to find a real resolution.

- For parents tending family life in an overly busy world, it is often challenging to find time to listen to all members of the family. Yet, when we do make time, the family is strengthened.
- For parishioners working together in ministries, often the task seems so urgent that we forget to listen to each other and to the Spirit in our midst. When we make time for listening in order to understand each other, we often receive clear and peace-filled guidance.
- For people of different religions, races, economic classes, and gender, sometimes our differences seem overwhelming. As we work for a more peaceful neighborhood and world, seeking first to understand "the other" can be a powerful step in peacemaking.

And where do we get the power we need for seeking first to understand? From our Divine Master who has first lovingly received, listened to, and understood us, as we bask in the Presence!

In coming columns I will explore in more depth each of these types of relationships. Watch the bulletin for notices.

God's peace,

Mary Ann

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