

Care for the Soul Series

Five Monday Mornings, January through May, 2014

10:00 - 11:15 am

St. Mark Catholic Church

9970 Vale Road, Vienna, VA 22181



“...put away the old self of your former way of life...and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created in God’s way in righteousness and holiness of truth.” Ephesians 4: 22-23

Program Description: When we understand and integrate our motivations, emotions, desires and behaviors under God’s direction we can better put off our old self and put on our True Self, which is God in us. Improving self-awareness, God-awareness and other-awareness heightens our understanding allowing us to simultaneously deepen personal relationship with Christ and others. This series for adult men and women includes monthly educational and interactive discussion group meetings each focusing on a different topic connecting relational and spiritual growth. Participants are encouraged to think about the topic in advance and come prepared to discuss experiences in which they practice or struggle with the topic in their lives. In sharing experiences we deepen our faith life, our relationships with others and with God. We also have due opportunity to speak God's encouragement into one another's lives.

Group Information: Pre-register before each session by calling or emailing Ellen Murphy [emurphy@stmark.org or (703) 281-9671]. Because space is limited pre-registration is necessary. While there is no fee for participation in the program donations to St. Mark Catholic Church are welcome. All donations will go toward St. Mark outreach programs that provide financial assistance to those in need of basic services.

About the Facilitator: *Ellen Murphy, LCSW, of St. Mark Counseling Center*, has served as parish counselor here in her private practice since 2007. She assists individuals, adolescents, adults, couples and families with a holistic mind-body-spirit approach as they grow and persevere through struggles in their lives. One area of particular interest is in helping clients experience their faith and spirituality as a healing resource in relationships. A graduate of Catholic University in clinical social work, Ellen holds a post-graduate certificate in *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* from The Catholic University’s Center for Spirituality and Social Work. She facilitates a women's spirituality group, develops workshops and leads retreats. She also holds a post-graduate certificate in *Gestalt Psychotherapy* from The Washington Center for Consciousness Studies and currently participates in a Christian *Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB)* study group. Ellen is an *EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)* practitioner in the treatment of trauma and stress.

I. Contemplative Prayer/Scriptural Meditation –*Mon. Jan.27, 2014; 10:00-11:15am*

“I commune with my heart in the night; I meditate and search my spirit.” Psalm 77: 6
“But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.” Luke 2:19

Contemplative prayer can include scriptural meditation. Most all faith traditions have a form of this practice. It may incorporate repetitive reading of a Gospel scene or repeating a sacred word to encourage a frame of mind and heart conducive to prayer and deepening relationship with God. Christ often retreated for periods of time alone practicing contemplative prayer. In this session we will practice several forms of contemplative prayer.

II. Cultivating Compassion —*Monday, February10, 2014: 10:00-11:15 am*

“When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” Mark 6:34

To have compassion for others we must first receive genuine compassion into ourselves. We will explore methods for cultivating awareness of God's compassion for us to be strong in suffering and increase contentment, happiness, freedom and extend compassion for others.

III. Is There A Purpose for Suffering? – *Monday, March 10, 2014; 10:00-11:15 am*

“Not only that but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance and endurance proven character, and proven character, hope.” Romans 5: 3-4

Many of us struggle to understand the paradox of why bad things happen to good people—or why does God allow suffering? Familiar examples are cited, like the Holocaust and the more current crisis in Syria. The answers are complex and deep-rooted, never simple. We will explore ways of understanding our struggles and how we approach or interact with others in their suffering.

IV. Healing Power of Forgiveness –*Monday, April 7, 2014; 10:00-11:15 am*

“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” Matt. 6: 14-15

Forgiveness, particularly self-forgiveness can be one of the most powerful grace-filled experiences of our lives. There are countless physical, spiritual, emotional and relational benefits to forgiveness, yet it can be so difficult to achieve. Why is it so hard to receive this gift ourselves or to forgive others? We will discuss what prevents forgiveness, the components of this sometimes difficult process, and what can result if we fail to forgive or if we choose to forgive.

V. Letting Go: The Illusion of Control –*Monday, May 5, 2014; 10:00-11:15 am*

“...that you should put away the old self of your former way of life, corrupted through deceitful desires and be renewed in the spirit of your minds.” Ephesians 4:22

Part of our human conditioning is to want to manage or control that which we have difficulty understanding or accepting. The illusion has us believe that by working harder or faster we can control the circumstances and avoid pain. This compels us to try harder, often growing more frustrated when times are difficult. If we are habituated toward control we may have difficulty releasing or letting go. Our true refuge is in connection, awareness and openness to God. What illusions about control have a grip on your life, distract and obscure your focus on and access to God?