**An Advent Prayer**

Lord Jesus, Master of both the light and the darkness, send your Holy Spirit upon our preparations for Christmas.

We who have so much to do and seek quiet spaces to hear your voice each day.

We who are anxious over many things look forward to your coming among us.

We who are blessed in so many ways long for the complete joy of your kingdom.

We whose hearts are heavy see the joy of your presence.

We are your people, walking in darkness, yet seeking the light.

To you we say, “Come Lord Jesus”  
*Amen*

*By Henri J. M. Nouwen*

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**Upcoming Observances**

December 18–26: **Hanukkah** or the Festival of Lights. This 8 day and 8 night period celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem in 164 B.C. after 3 years of war.

December 21: **Winter Solstice** and the **Longest Night**. Blue Christmas Services are often held on this day to recognize the loss and loneliness that can be felt during the holidays.

December 25: **Christmas** celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ.

December 26–January 1: **Kwanzaa**. A secular holiday affirming African family and social values.

January 6: **Feast of the Epiphany** celebrates the star that led the Three Wise Men to baby Jesus.
Read of the Month

Three Wise Women — 40 Devotions Celebrating Advent with Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna
By Dandi Daley MacKall
ISBN 978-1-64060-805-4

Over recent years, we’ve frequently seen the saying “3 Wise Women would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped to deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, baked a casserole, brought practical gifts, and there would be Peace on Earth!” on a wide range of towels, ornaments, cups, plaques and clothing. These are not the Three Wise Women included in Dandi Daley MacKall’s devotional.

Many of us can remember being taught about Christmas and looking at nativity scenes that includes Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, the shepherds and their sheep, angels, and the Three Wise Men. Growing up we heard Biblical readings that included Mary (Jesus’ mother), Elizabeth (mother of John the Baptist), and Anna (the Prophetess at the temple awaiting the Messiah) but we didn’t necessarily put them together in our mind or consider what their everyday lives and faith were like.

MacKall’s recently released devotional relies on the Bible as the trusted source about these women. She has leaned on her knowledge of Middle Eastern history, language, and culture. Biblical quotes are provided throughout the book along with brief reflections in which she tried to “get into the heads” of these women to imagine what their lives, activities, thoughts, and feelings may have been in that time and place. The Pondering texts help us to consider not only what the experiences of these women were like and provides us with questions to consider regarding our relationship with God.
A Fond Farewell and Blessings to Amy Armanious

Amy Armanious, DNP, MSOL, RN served as a Health Ministry Specialist and Faith Community (Parish) Nurse in the Pittsburgh Mercy Parish Nurse & Health Ministry Program for nine years.

Soon after completing the 2007 Pittsburgh Mercy Parish Nurse Course, Amy became a salaried parish nurse for one year at a large Presbyterian Church in the Pittsburgh area. That parish nurse position laid the foundation for future roles as a Health Ministry Specialist and consultant to churches for the Pittsburgh Mercy Parish Nurse & Health Ministry Program.

In 2015, Amy started a visitation ministry at her local family church, Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church in the North Hills area. She and her team work closely with the clergy as they serve parishioners who are sick, homebound, and/or grieving the loss of a loved one. As a lifelong learner, Amy completed her two-year study at the Pneuma Institute (part of the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary) in 2016, and is a qualified spiritual director for individuals and groups.

A member of the Health Ministry Association, Amy is a work group member for the HMA Faith Community Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice Revision, 2023. While discerning God’s plan for her future, Amy is spending more time with her husband Mark and family.

Thank you Amy for the educational programming, guidance, encouragement and mentoring that you provided to so many Faith Community Nurses, Health Ministers, and Faith Communities. You have been a blessing to many people!

Holiday Prayers and Blessings

Best wishes to everyone observing Hanukkah, Christmas, and/or Kwanzaa celebration. May you, your loved ones, and friends experience the true meaning of your holiday and make wonderful memories. May you find the beauty of winter wherever you are.

From the staff of the Pittsburgh Mercy Parish Nurse and Health Ministry Program.
Celebrate Safely This Holiday Season

The holiday season is quickly approaching! It’s exciting to start planning gatherings with friends and family. As we begin to make our plans, it’s important to remember that staying safe from respiratory illnesses, including COVID-19, flu, RSV, and other seasonal viruses is still our top priority. While COVID case numbers are currently lower than earlier waves, many community levels are increasing. Hospitalization rates for COVID are on the increase and a surge is expected after the upcoming holidays. RSV and influenza cases and hospitalizations are also increasing.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers helpful holiday guidance to help you lower the risk of contracting and spreading the virus to others. Safety takes all of us continuing to work together.

Top 5 Tips
- Stay home if you’re sick (except to get care) and get tested if you have COVID-19 or flu symptoms [https://bit.ly/3j4ZenE]
- Wash your hands often.
- Wear a mask in areas of high community transmission of seasonal viruses.
- Know and take precautions recommended by your county. [https://bit.ly/3V79IWe]

Tips for Gatherings
Use precautions in indoor celebrations and at crowded events. The CDC provides suggestions for ways you can improve ventilation in your home.
- Consider celebrating virtually or only with members of your own household if community transmission rates are high, or if you will be spending time with elderly and/or immunocompromised people.

If you are organizing or attending larger indoor gatherings:
- Consider outdoor events or gatherings if possible.
- Keep events on the shorter side to minimize risk and keep attendance low.
- Urge anyone who is ill to stay home.
- Wash your hands frequently.

Tips for Traveling
- Stay up to date with your COVID-19 and flu vaccines before you travel. [https://bit.ly/3Ys0]
- Consider getting tested before travel.
- Follow CDC’s recommendations for wearing masks in travel and public transportation settings if community levels are high or for added personal protection based on your individual risk factors. [https://bit.ly/3WmxYPN]
- Get tested after travel if your travel involved situations with greater risk of exposure. [https://bit.ly/3WkwYyy] If traveling by air, check if your airline requires any testing, vaccination, or other documents.
- Prepare to be flexible during your trip as restrictions and policies may change during your travel.
The Longest Night or Blue Christmas Service

The holidays can be a difficult time for many people who are lonely, depressed or have experienced a loss of a loved one, their own health, job and/or home.

These quiet, contemplative services are usually open to members and non-members of a faith community. The service reflects God’s presence and love while also providing time, space, fellowship and hope.

A Different Type of Snow Angels

We all know that snow-covered sidewalks can be a hazard to everyone. The City of Pittsburgh’s Snow Angels Program was designed to pair older residents and residents with disabilities with nearby neighbors who volunteer to assist with snow removal on their sidewalks & walkways.

While this program is not available in every city or town, faith-based communities may be able to implement elements of this program for their members and immediate neighbors. Other potential services could include picking up prescriptions or groceries for the homebound or collecting blankets that could be distributed during a power outage.

The winter solstice will fall on December 21st this year. We will experience the shortest number of daylight hours and the longest night of the year. The observances described below are usually scheduled on the longest night.

National Homeless Persons Memorial Day

This remembrance day was established in 1990 to honor those who died while being homeless and raise awareness about homelessness. This may be done through advocacy events, candle light vigils and prayer services.

Take time to consider how you and/or your faith community can make a difference through donations, volunteering at homeless shelters or organizations that provide other services to this population.
Pittsburgh Mercy Parish Nurse & Health Ministry Program offers

Health Ministry Virtual Meetings . . . Learning, Peer Support & Networking
(Fourth Tuesday evening of every month, 7:00-8:00 pm ET)

**Goal:** To emphasize the importance of networking, fellowship, learning and peer support for faith community nurses and health ministers as they assist their congregations and local community to better health and well-being.

**Target Audience:** Faith Community Nurses, Health Ministers, Registered Nurses, Licensed Practical Nurses, Clergy/Laity, and anyone interested in learning about wholistic care approach (whole-person health) as we commit to health advocacy and education of others.

Our 2023 Meeting Dates (Second Tuesdays) unless otherwise indicated.

1) January 10, 2023
2) Wednesday, February 15, 2023
3) March 14, 2023
4) April 11, 2023
5) May 9, 2023
6) June 13, 2023

There is no cost and no preparation for participants. We focus on current topics that the Faith Community Nurse and Health Minister may encounter within their faith community and/or practice setting. Self-care, the intentional care of the spirit, the promotion of whole-person health, creative ministry programming, and current challenges in ministry are other areas of focus. Our Pittsburgh Mercy Faith Community Nurses and other content experts will present a brief learning activity such as a PowerPoint presentation, case study, or brief video segment. There will be time for Q & A, peer discussion, and brainstorming. Participants are encouraged to suggest topics of interest for future virtual sessions. Volunteer presenters are welcome. Private follow-up is available by phone or Zoom upon request.

**Registration is required** in order for each participant to receive the Zoom link, meeting ID, passcode, and agenda. Dial-in option is available. Registration deadline is by 1:00 p.m. ET on the Day of the Meeting. To register, please send registration information to ParishNurse@pittsburghmercy.org or call 412-442-1953 if you have questions.

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**January 2023 Secular Observances**

Monday, January 2, 2023 New Year’s Day (Federal Holiday Observed)

Monday, January 16, 2023 Martin Luther King Day (Federal Holiday)

Tuesday, January 17, 2023 National Day of Racial Healing

For more information & toolkit visit [https://everychildthrives.com/topics/racial-equity/](https://everychildthrives.com/topics/racial-equity/)
Do you need a sacred space and time set-aside for peace and quiet reflection? Do you desire to give to your family and others, but could use some extra encouragement and support? Do you want to learn more about self-compassion? Do you have a need to connect with others in prayer and contemplation? Do you want to experience spiritual awareness and spiritual care in a virtual setting?

Please attend our 2023 Virtual Candle Meditations which are brief prayer gatherings. It is a wonderful opportunity to experience spiritual awareness and group faith sharing through a virtual learning setting. We invite all to this quiet place and time as we allow ourselves prayerful reflection regarding our own whole-person health . . . balancing body, mind, and spirit. The emphasis is on the importance of self-care and connection with our Creator. In our busy lives, we sometimes feel overwhelmed to the point of neglecting our spiritual needs. We invite all to safe, better health and well-being. In addition, participants can also lift up other people or concerns to our Creator.

There are no fees for these virtual offerings. These times are intended for faith community nurses, health ministers, faith community volunteers, clergy, registered nurses, health care professionals, licensed professional counselors, social workers, Pittsburgh Mercy employees, and anyone interested as we continue our commitment to advocating for and serving others in need.

Our offerings are designed to reflect the changes in the seasons and in our lives. 1) Spring Solstice – Tuesday, March 21 at 7:00 p.m. ET 2) Summer Solstice – Tuesday, June 20 at 7:00 pm ET 3) Autumn Equinox – Tuesday, September 8 at 7:00 pm ET 4) Winter Solstice – Tuesday, December 19 at 7:00 pm ET

Registration is required in order for each participant to receive the Zoom link, meeting ID, passcode, and agenda. Dial-in option is available. Registration deadline is by 1:00 p.m. ET. on the date of session. To register send email to ParishNurse@pittsburghmercy.org or call 412.442.1951 and leave a clear and detailed message with the following information: First and last name 2) Date of desired session 3) Email address 4) Your phone number and 5) Your role or title and the name of your faith community/organization with city/state.

AGENDA
⇒ Welcome
⇒ Opening Prayer
⇒ Candle Meditation
⇒ Group Faith Sharing
⇒ Closing Prayer

Our Email Address: ParishNurse@pittsburghmercy.org
We enjoy hearing from our E-Newsletter readers about your faith community ministries. Send an email with a short description of your recent ministry activity, your email and phone number. We will reach out to you about including it in The Faith Connection.

If you should no longer wish to receive communications from the Pittsburgh Mercy Parish Nurse & Health Ministry Program, please unsubscribe by contacting us at 412.442.1951 or email ParishNurse@pittsburghmercy.org Thank you.

Find us on: facebook®
Pittsburgh Mercy invites you to “like” us!
A Christmas Blessing

— May there be harmony in all your relationships. May sharp words, envious thoughts, and hostile feelings be dissolved.

— May you give and receive love generously. May this love echo in your heart like the joy of church bells on a clear December day.

— May each person who comes into your life be greeted as another Christ. May the honor given the Babe of Bethlehem be that which you extend to every guest who enters your presence.

— May the hope of this sacred season settle in your soul. May it be a foundation of courage for you when times of distress for you occupy your inner land.

— May the wonder and awe that fills the eyes of children be awakened within you. May it lead you to renewed awareness and appreciation of whatever you too easily take for granted.

— May the bonds of love for one another be strengthened as you gather with your family and friends around the table of festivity and nourishment.

— May you daily open the gift of your life and be grateful for the hidden treasures it contains.

— May the coming year be one of good health for you. May you have energy and vitality. May you care well for your body, mind and spirit.

— May you keep your eye on the Star within you and trust this Luminescent Presence to guide and direct you each day.

— May you go often to the Bethlehem of your heart and visit the One who offers you peace. May you bring this peace into our world.

— By Joyce Rupp in her book, Out of the Ordinary
Faith Community Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice
3rd Edition

Co-published by the American Nurses Association (ANA) and the Health Ministries Association (HMA)

The Scope and Standards of Practice for Faith Community Nursing provides a definitive resource for the Faith Community Nurse (FCN) to use in decision-making when validating, or analyzing professional practice. It guides the FCN in practice within:

* Preparation and educational programs
* Role description and performance evaluations
* Policies and procedures
* Quality improvement endeavors
* Competencies and compliances

With the nursing process to assess wholistic care – balance of body, mind, and spirit – the FCN uses evidence-based practice for the intentional focus on spiritual well-being through education, counseling, prayer, presence, active listening, and advocacy. As health care delivery expands more into the community setting, multiple venues are available for FCNs to provide hope, healing, peace, purpose, trust and contentment – even when apart from cure.

With informed attention to ethics, cultural competence, care within life transitions, behavioral health, and addiction, the 3rd Edition of the Scope and Standards speaks to the demanding challenges of current practice. The six standards of practice and ten standards of professional performance are the criteria by which all FCNs are held accountable.

To learn more, click on this HMA link: [https://bit.ly/2BaiGXc](https://bit.ly/2BaiGXc)

Electronic Documentation System for Faith Community Nurses

This user-friendly electronic program was designed by FCNs, rigorously tested by FCNs, and is currently used by FCNs nationally. This documentation system offers the following:

* Documents client problems easily by using a concise list built-in to the system with drop-down boxes (physical, mental, spiritual, social, financial and relational areas)
* Rates the problem initially and at follow-up assessments using a 1-5 scale
* Demonstrates the outcomes of your FCN interventions

⇒ See YouTube Videos of the Pittsburgh Mercy Parish Nurse Documentation System at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNKGJx1Fex8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XNKGJx1Fex8)

⇒ See this brief YouTube link at on our website at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1u5WzlXWmM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e1u5WzlXWmM)

Contact us! ParishNurse@pittsburghmercy.org 412-442-1951

Health Observances
To encourage others in whole-person health... balancing body, mind, and spirit.
Note: This is not an inclusive list of all health observances.

♦ National Influenza Vaccination Week Dec. 6-12  https://bit.ly/3dgDNO1

New Year's Prayer
As the dawn breaks on a new year, let us give thanks for all we hold dear: our health, our family and our friends.

Let us release our grudges, our anger and our pains, for these are nothing but binding chains. Let us live each day in the most loving ways, the Godconscious way. Let us serve all who are in need, regardless of race, color or creed.

Let us keep God of our own understanding in our hearts and to chant God’s name each day. Let us lead the world from darkness to light, from falsehood to truth and from wrong to right.

Let us remember that we are all one, embracing all, discriminating against none.

May your year be filled with peace, prosperity and love. May God's blessings shower upon you and bestow upon each of you a bright, healthy and peaceful new year.

- Rev. Marcy Sheremetta

The next edition of “The Faith Connection” will be for January/February. If you have news to share, please email it by December 27th to ParishNurse@pittsburghmercy.org