

Prayer: Attending with openness to God and the world

In prayer, we draw close to the heart of God. Through words or silence, movement or stillness, individual or corporate prayer, we notice and listen to the Holy Spirit and we respond. Prayer can be an intimate conversation with God, a cry for help, a joyful response, a lament, a deep question. Parishioners of all ages engage in a variety of prayer practices; when our Sunday school children were recently asked what they would like St. Matthew's to keep doing in the future, the first response was, "Keep praying for our friends."



Blessing the family betta fish, God's beloved creation

Prayer grounds our life together. Every ministry meeting, no matter the group, begins with a time of Dwelling in the Word. This practice, a variation on *lectio divina*, opens us to what God might be saying through scripture as we wonder how those stories interact with our own lives. Indeed, "wondering" is one of the key words we use to introduce our observations and reflections on the scripture. We stop and listen in silence to see what catches our attention. We hear what God may be saying to each person in the room, a rich practice of pausing before church business occupies our minds.



Walking the labyrinth at a women's retreat

As well as the traditional prayers found in our rich liturgies, many other forms of prayer have become woven into our community life:

- A Centering Prayer group meets on Saturday mornings. This practice of silence in a communal setting provides an extended time of stillness and calm, which are too often missing in our busy lives.
- During our worship services, many parishioners treasure the monthly spiritual practice we engage in after each sermon and the silence that follows, as a moment to pray and absorb the words of the sermon we have heard.
- Lay ministers offer healing prayer during communion, when individuals are welcomed in the side chapel to ask for prayer for themselves or a loved one. We listen and then offer prayers for healing in mind, body and spirit. The prayers are gentle, filled with compassion and love. For many, these prayers have become a moment of comfort and hope in the midst of crisis, an assurance that we are not alone and our community shares our troubles as well as our joys.