

CONGREGATION  
*InFormation*

Week 1  
**Awareness**

Where do we find God? Where does God find us?

The first step of Christian formation is spiritual awareness. Openness to the presence and activity of God in our lives and the world is a place to begin. Remember, God wants to be in relationship with us. Sometimes we act as if it is our task to find God; perhaps we need is to be still for long enough for God to find us.

The consciousness examen was developed by Ignatius of Loyola in the sixteenth century. He saw it as the cornerstone of the spiritual life. When Jesuits at the Council of Trent asked if they could skip their prayer exercises because they were so busy, Ignatius told them to skip anything but the examen.

This week, at the end of each day, light a candle or go someplace in your home where you can relax and be aware of God's loving presence. Take about five minutes and ask yourself these two questions:

For what moment today am I most grateful?

For what moment today am I least grateful?

Give God thanks for the day.

You may do this silently by yourself, but it is also works to share with others around the supper table or at bedtime. Being conscious of God's activity during our waking hours can help us release the day into God's care and sleep in peace. Examining what gives us energy or life and what makes us feel drained or lifeless may help us to see directions where God is encouraging and calling us. What makes us feel good (overwork, alcohol, other addictions) in the short term may not be what is truly life-giving in the long run. God wants the best for each of us, and has given us the capacity to choose life.

You may continue this practice throughout the season of Lent.

FURTHER  
*Information*

Before he founded the Jesuit order of the Catholic Church, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) was a soldier. He was confined to bed recovering from injuries to both legs, and one of the books he had to read was The Life of the Saints. He found himself alternating between imagining returning to his life of wine, women, and soldiering, and imagining walking barefoot to Jerusalem, like one of the saints. He realized that while he was thinking of the things of the world he was filled with delight, but afterwards he was dry and dissatisfied. When he entertained thoughts of walking to Jerusalem, and even after he dismissed them, he was cheerful and satisfied. Ignatius called the first way “desolation,” and the second “consolation.”

Thinking about our lives in terms of desolation or consolation helps us to discover God’s purpose for our lives, and enables us to redefine that purpose as we learn to know God better and our lives change in unexpected ways. The consciousness examen can be a practice for reviewing a day, a week, a year, or a lifetime. What things have brought you joy (consolation)? What things have brought you sorrow (desolation)? For what are you most or least grateful? To what purpose may God be calling you, even now? Give God thanks for the guidance of the past day, week, year, or span of years.

Consider how you could share your experiences of God’s presence with someone who is beginning the spiritual journey. This could be someone outside of our congregation or someone at Creekside. Many people are unsure if God has a purpose for their life, or how to discover it. What have you learned about listening to God at work in your life and in the world? How could you share that gift with the community of faith?

There will be opportunity for individuals to share about their experiences of prayer or other spiritual practices during our worship services in Lent. If you feel God calling you to share in this way, please call Pastor David.