

Being Imperfect Together – 05-28-15

You're Part of A Community - Lucky You!

Art Maines, LCSW

I have to admit something: I have been very skeptical of religious communities for a long time. Maybe it was growing up in Texas and having to deal with an abundance of earnest but annoying people trying to "save me," or being an only child and thus being quite comfortable entertaining myself. Whatever the source, being a part of a religious community wasn't part of my life plan.

And then my beloved husband got back into the priesthood in the ECC, and religious community sprang to the forefront of our life. What I had kept at a comfortable distance was now a regular feature of our weekly routine.

I was less than thrilled.

As time went on, however, I came to appreciate the qualities and goodness that being a part of our religious community has brought to my (and our) life. I feel a part of a genuinely loving community striving, however imperfectly, for inclusion and making a difference in the world. I'm gratified to see the emphasis on action and deeper spiritual connection at work at Sts. Clare & Francis, especially the importance we place on an adult spirituality that includes a strong element of personal experience of the Divine.

All of which has led my curiosity to do a little research on the benefits of being a part of a religious community. Here's a brief summary of what I've found:

Benefits of Being a Part of A Religious Community

- Better longevity overall
- Fewer and less severe colds and flu
- Better survival rates for illnesses
- Less isolation. One cardiologist compares social isolation to smoking, calling loneliness "the new tobacco" in terms of its negative health effects.
- Being a part of a community may actually make our country stronger. Harvard researcher Robert Putnam wrote in his book, *Bowling Alone*, that social ties are not just personally beneficial, but evidence suggests they increase engagement in pro-democracy behaviors such as voting.
- Involvement in a religious community may also help make the world a better place. Authors and researchers such as George Lakoff and Bill McKibben assert that empathy, a major positive effect of being a part of a healthy community, contributes to both progressive social change and sustainability. I'm so proud of SCF for the importance we place on empathy as well as both of those broader efforts.

Personally, I've come a long way since the early days of SCF. I still enjoy my alone time and solitary pursuits, and probably always will. At the same time, I have come to love the sense of belonging to a community that, despite its sometime failings and imperfections, is committed to

a journey together rooted in love, solid principles, and backed by an ever-growing body of research. Lucky me!

You, too, are part of our community. Lucky you!

Want to read more about the benefits of community? Here are a couple of links for you:

<http://bewell.stanford.edu/features/social-ties-good-health>

<http://www.relevantmagazine.com/life/whole-life/10-unexpected-benefits-real-community>

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