

## **PRAYER OF ST. FRANCIS - RESPECTING LIFE BY LOVING**

***"Grant that I May not so much seek to be loved as to love."***

This month we see and hear many messages around the word "Love." It has been said to love and be loved is the greatest joy on earth. Wouldn't we want that for everyone? Mother Teresa of Calcutta was an expert authority on love and loving unconditionally. She asked to work in a place where she could be with the poorest of the poor. In her many letters to her co-workers, she spoke of loving without judging; she writes, "None of us has the right to condemn anyone, that leper, that drunkard, that sick person is our brother because he too has been created for a greater love." (One Heart Full of Love) That greater Love we know as God. He invites us to become closer to Him by loving each other. We may not be helping the poor in the slums of Calcutta, but we can start right here in our own community. In fact Mother Teresa wrote in a newsletter in 1988, "It is easy to love people far away, it is not always easy to love those who live right next to us." Could we love someone without totally understanding their situation? Could we accept someone without agreeing with them? Could we forgive without holding back? These are challenges we encounter daily.

We have opportunities both to love and forgive: listening to all sides of issues; putting ourselves in others "shoes"; practicing compassionate understanding; attending to the needy whether shoveling snow for a neighbor, serving a meal at a shelter, visiting the sick and homebound, or even a simple smile. Our ability to love, accept and forgive must go beyond our own perceived notions.

In 1979 when Mother Teresa accepted the Nobel Peace Prize, the first thing she requested from the audience was that everyone pray the Prayer of St. Francis with her. She explained this prayer is said everyday by the Sisters of the Missionaries of Charity. She wondered if 500 years ago when St. Francis composed the prayer they had the same struggles we do. The social justice issues of today remind us to become instruments of peace, wherever we find ourselves. As we begin this new year, may we commit ourselves to a more loving and compassionate mindset through prayer and action.

— The Social Justice Committee —