The season of winter, inner and outer reflections

Pat Flicker, FCV Director

Some people love winter! They can’t wait for that first snowfall. They may own snowmobiles or love skiing. They may love the cold, crisp air or have children that can’t wait to make snowmen and snow angels. Whatever it may be for them, it is not that way for me.

Snow, to me, means shoveling and slippery roads. Less sunlight and extreme cold. I do not like snowstorms and slippery roads, but this winter I am promising myself that I will look at winter differently!

As the days get shorter and darkness comes early, I am choosing to slow down and spend time with myself. Bears hibernate, snuggling in their homes, and I feel it is time for a bit of hibernation. To snuggle into my new home and stay warm. To reflect on all my blessings and see the wonder of what God has given me.

What I am learning is that the season of winter is vital to restore and renew ourselves. Sister Joyce Rupp wrote in her book, A Circle of Life, that “nature has been busy producing. It is time to slow down and rest. Without this rest, soil wears out and loses its nutrients.” As I grow in my Franciscan way of life, I am learning that I too, need to rest. Just like Francis went to the cave to pray, I need to take time to reflect on my life and the world around me. To see what is broken and where God is calling me.

Some people have “inner” winters in July, where a life event happens, like a death in the family, divorce, or children issues stop us in our tracks. It is important to honor the inner winters in our lives as they happen.

Because of the cold and snow, it is natural to want to hurry winter on. But how wonderful it would be if we could all stop for a moment and see the beauty of winter, both the outer and inner.

Look outside on a snowy day. Watch the snowflakes fall and realize that this is water for our earth. Look at the bare trees and think of how stark they look right now, yet they are resting, so that next spring they can bring green leaves and great beauty into our lives. Go outside on a crisp, cold night and look at the amazing midnight-blue sky, filled with the stars of night. The outside winter can be harsh and beautiful at the same time.

The same can be said for an inner winter. When winter comes to our inner selves, we can easily lose heart. Where is God in our pain, grief, feeling of emptiness or loneliness? We stop believing in God and in ourselves and forget about our blessings. I know I have had inner winters like this. I have learned that when I have these feelings I need to acknowledge that winter is here, and that means I am getting ready for an amazing period of spring growth.

It has taken a new meaning for me. When I feel winter coming, I begin to look at my life. What is it that is prompting me to stop and look around? Where is God calling me? It may seem at times that winter will never end, but we know better. We are growing, getting stronger, spending time in the quiet and trying to learn what we need to, because we know that spring is just around the corner.

To me, Joyce Rupp, in The Circle of Life puts it best when she wrote, “This gruff-voiced season has another voice less readily heard. It is the calm and wise voice of encouragement. Winter offers assurance that the seeds of life are being tended, that what is needed for future growth is simply waiting to burst forth with the wild joy of spring.” And so, my dear friends, HAPPY WINTER!
The gifts of an intentional community
By Ann Anosike, FCV

Living in an “intentional community” is not something I can say I had given much thought prior to joining the Franciscan Community Volunteers. It was not something I had words for. When I initially learned of what it was, I was confused about the difference between this type of living and my living arrangements senior year of college where I shared a four-bedroom apartment with three friends. As the weeks have gone by, the sweetness of this community of volunteers and Franciscan Sisters has been one which has been transformative in an unforeseen way.

These past few months, I have been surprised with joy even in the little things—things I never knew could bring me gladness. This current reality leaves me in awe as I consider the privilege of sharing in the generosity and the sacredness of each person in this community. Living with my girlfriends made me ready for this place in that it made me instantly able to look for the gifts of each person and to regard them all as conduits for God’s grace.

Each person’s natural gifts challenge me to always examine myself and to seek ways to improve and love in ways that are impactful. Sister Karen and Anna in their unapologetic ways of completely being themselves and staying true to that self both in speech and action force me to check my authenticity every day. Their lives make me question myself on how truly and earnestly I am being my most authentic self and shedding any layers that are not me. John-Caleb’s ability to accept criticism, his openness to those that are considered “other” as well as his ability to be vulnerable in front of us and with us makes me check myself and my willingness to go deep within myself and with those I share space with.

Sister Michelle’s tenderness toward Sister Rose Mae and her wisdom and joy make me check my gentleness and how fully I am using my gifts at my service site. Sister Rose Mae’s joy, deep gratitude, graciousness and humility in everything she does and in her interactions with people remind me to consider all things gift and to always forego shallow thankfulness. Isaac’s piety and his devotion to our Mother Mary challenge me daily to shed my slothful ways in order to grow more strongly in prayer.

Jenny’s natural ability to laugh easily and her willingness to share whatever she has reminds me to always be jovial and to be a cheerful giver. I can go on and on about these special people of God and how they’ve enriched my experience but for the sake of time and space, I will stop here. But I will be forever grateful to God for his mindfulness in picking each person to share in this community. With confidence I say, for all that has been, thank you. For all that is to come, yes! I cannot wait to see what the future holds for this community.

We were blessed to have Padre Nery, from San Rafael Mexico have supper with us one night. We met Padre Nery last January when FCV went and built a home for a woman and her two children! We are hoping to go back next January and possibly build a community room by the parish church. Say prayers that if it is meant to be it will happen! Front: Pat, Sister Rose Mae and Ann. Back: Anna, Padre Nery, Isaac, Sister Michelle and Majuli Bales.

Making eggrolls together from left: John-Caleb, Jenny, Ann, Anna, and Isaac. They tasted amazing!

Celebrating Sister Karen’s 60th Jubilee from left: Anna, Ann, Sister Rose Mae, Sister Karen, Isaac, Jenny and John-Caleb.
2009-2010 FCV Caitie Tobin (2nd from left): I've spent the past few years working as a lawyer. I especially enjoy undertaking pro bono work where I have the opportunity to assist, through programs run by the firm I'm at. The work is with recently arrived refugees and asylum seekers with their visa applications as well as people with mental illnesses on treatment orders. I think about my time in Minnesota, often including all the wonderful sisters of Little Falls!

I recently attended the Catholic Volunteer Network Conference where Sister Simone Campbell was one of the keynote speakers. It was the day after the election and she shared many ideas on how we can create unity, community and peace among all. She was amazing—and I wanted to share a few of her ideas:

May 2017 give you the strength and wisdom to:

- open ourselves to the differences of each person. Go back to “we the people” and not “I, the individual.”
- sit together in the dark with all people, trusting that we are all being heard and not abandoned.
- tell SACRED GOSSIP. When you hear a story of good news, pass it on! By telling people’s stories of injustice, we will break hearts, not heads! We are called to treat ALL people as people, no matter their color, faith, race, creed, sexuality, gender, etc.
- learn and befriend people unlike ourselves. This is hard. Stop and talk in the grocery line, parking lots, coffee shops, restaurants, etc. Find your common ground!
- confront behavior that is not okay! If you see someone discriminating, teasing, taunting or bullying, stand up and tell them to stop. It begins with one voice!
- radically accept that if you are at odds with God in someone else, then YOU are at odds with God within yourself.
- stop fighting against the people who don’t agree with your values, instead come together and fight for the ideals and common needs of this world: peace, unity and community!
Franciscan Community Volunteers is based on three pillars: service, community living and Franciscan spirituality. Volunteers make a year-long commitment to work full time in local nonprofit agencies that serve the needs of those who are poor and marginalized while accepting the challenge of living simply and in accordance with Gospel values.