

The focus of the meeting was a celebration of Emmanuel, God with us in the midst of the many challenges we are currently facing. His presence in this world brings light and joy into darkness, and the darkness will never overcome it. Joy is not the absence of pain but the presence of Jesus and when we have Him we can bring his presence, hope and witness into the world. We need to let it show on our faces so that those around us can see and know that God is here.

Questions: How has the Lord been present to me during this Advent/Christmas season?  
Is Jesus revealing something new to me at this time?

OUTLINE:

Welcome: Anne/ Janet

Introduction: Mary Ellen

Opening Prayer: As we come together today, we ask our Creator God..Father, Son and Holy Spirit to bless this time of prayer and reflection. Help us to experience more fully the knowledge that Emmanuel, God-with-Us is ever present, inviting us to live deeply in His love. We ask for God's grace and blessings and give thanks for all the gifts He has given us. May we grow closer to God and to one another as fellow companions on the journey. Amen.

Opening Song: Prince of Peace (lyrics pg 2)

Scripture Reading: Sr. Yvette Luke 2:1-14

Reflection: Mary Ellen

Individual private prayer time 10 minutes

Questions: How has the Lord been present to me during this Advent/Christmas season?  
Is Jesus revealing something new to me at this time?

Sharing: 2-3 minutes each Moderator: Anne

Closing Prayer (from Sr Muriel 2008 Advent booklet):

Emmanuel, as we take a long, loving look at you, and at those who surrounded you at your birth we pray...

Mary, you who welcomed Jesus with such awesome tenderness, teach us how to love your son more wholeheartedly

Joseph, you whose steadfast presence strengthened Mary, gift us with your listening heart and your strong faith to respond with great trust to the Word.

Shepherds of the flocks, you who were surprised with joy, share with us your openness to the wonder and blessing of this holy night.

Angels of God, sing in our hopeful lives the Christmas message of Peace on Earth.

And finally, Emmanuel, make us more and more aware of your wondrous love and comforting presence in our lives! We journey through this holiday season and into the New Year knowing that you are our faithful, compassionate companion, who gifts us with all we need to embody you in our world.

Amen.

Closing Song: When a Child is Born (lyrics pg 2)

LYRICS

Dan Shutte Prince of Peace

She watches him with a Mother's love, her tiny princely child; A tiny hand reaches out to feel, the wonders of her face. He plays game with her smiley eyes, her tiny princely child.

Do not be afraid, I bring you news of great joy; For to you is born a savior, who is Christ, who is Christ, the Lord.

And who would think, that this little child, could really be a king. The prince of peace, the promised one; the savior Christ, the Lord.

The blind shall see, and the deaf shall hear; the lame shall leap for joy. The hills will break into happy cries; the heavens clap their hands

When a Child is Born

A ray of hope flickers in the sky; A tiny star lights up way up high; All across the land, dawns a brand new morn. This comes to pass when a child is born.

A silent wish sails the seven seas; The winds of change whisper in the trees; And the walls of doubt crumble, tossed and torn. This comes to pass when a child is born.

A rosy hue settles all around; You've got to feel you're on solid ground; For a spell or two, no one seems forlorn. This comes to pass when a child is born.

And all of this happens because the world is waiting, waiting for one child. Black, white, yellow, no one knows But a child that will grow up and turn tears to laughter, Hate to love, war to peace and everyone to everyone's neighbor; And misery and suffering will be words to be forgotten, forever.

It's all a dream, an illusion now. It must come true, sometime soon somehow. All across the land dawns a brand new morn. This comes to pass when a child is born.

#### REFLECTION:

We have recently celebrated the birth of Jesus, when the compassion of God was so great that through the Holy Spirit and with the faith filled consent of Mary, He sent His son into the world to be one with us, with all that that means. In the midst of a suffering and sinful world, as was the case at the first Christmas as well as our contemporary time, our God has come to save us. Into a world filled with all kinds of darkness the Light has come, the Light of the World and the darkness will never overcome it. Today we celebrate Emmanuel, God with Us. This year our experience of Christmas is no doubt very different from all of our past celebrations. We are not able to gather closely with family and friends, to embrace and share a meal as before, to participate in all of our family customs and it has been a tremendous challenge. Yet even in these unprecedented times of struggle, our God is present with us. Emmanuel has come and we are not alone.

During the Advent season I took part in an on-line retreat entitled Unshakeable Joy with Chris Stefanick and the statement that sums up the theme is that joy is not the absence of pain but it is the presence of Jesus. He mentioned that early Christians used the image of an anchor when facing the life-threatening challenges as Christians were being persecuted and brutally murdered. "The choppy surface of the sea doesn't disturb an anchor. Hurricanes and tidal waves and persecutions and job loss and disease and (insert your waves here) can't rob your hope when it's anchored in the Love that is God. The tattered pages of your life can't rob your sense of story when they're bound by the Gospel. And that's why all the things life throws at us can make us sad on the natural level, but they can't rob the deeper, spiritual joy in a Christian soul. Jesus promised, "No one will take away your joy" (John 16:22). Because the world can't take what it didn't give you." He mentioned some people who experienced horrendous cruelty in one case or suffering from childhood neglect leading to addiction and imprisonment who encountered people with great faith and their lives turned around. They were transformed by the love of Christ and the joy of true believers in whom they saw something that was missing in their lives, something they desperately wanted. And it showed on the faces of the people whose lives were filled with the joy of living in relationship with Jesus, God with Us.

This is not to diminish the painful time in which we are living and the very real anguish so many people are going through in many different ways. Yet it calls us to respond with compassion and outreach to those we know who are undergoing sickness, financial distress and loneliness. We are each in our own ways encountering situations that need our assistance. Working with the elderly, I need to maintain a comforting presence to those who are dealing with any number of issues impacting them at this time. It is in the people around us that the presence of the Lord often breaks through but we often do not realize it at the time. That is why it is important to try to cultivate the qualities from the General Chapter of 2015: Presence. Hope and Witness. This comes by being in a relationship with the Lord, by spending quiet time in His presence and allowing our hearts to soak in His love. Starting the day with quiet prayer time makes such a difference in how we go about the rest of the day. Reading the word and allowing it to speak to our life allows God to guide and inspire us throughout the events we

face. Most important is the silence when the Lord can just be with us even in wordless expression of where we are.

In the chapter from *Walking the Sacred Path* entitled “God with Us” (Emmanuel) it states that “ the act of God taking on human flesh is an act of intimacy. It is a story of a God who is so in love with us that we can barely fathom it. We may feel uncomfortable with this kind of closeness to God because we feel unworthy. Furthermore, to speak of God in such human terms can seem inappropriate, if not blasphemous. And yet that is what we Christians do. The infinite, the all-perfect God, is presented to us as a human infant, born in a lowly cattle stall to poor parents of no great importance. Such is the foolishness of God’s wisdom! As the divine God takes on our humanity, so our humanity begins to take on more of God’s divinity. The work and power of God’s redemption of this world is set in place. To those who see with the eyes of faith, God continues to take on flesh for us in thousands of unexpected ways and faces.”

Sometimes it may mean taking a small leap of faith. I know that for me, stepping out of my comfort zone does not come easy. An example that comes to mind is that I had recently wanted to ask a co-worker who had brought some holly into work in the past if I could possibly go over and get some at her house. I summoned the courage to call to ask her and she agreed and called back later to set a time to come over. I baked some blueberry muffins that morning and brought some over to her. It was a nice visit and I think it has opened up a stronger relationship between us. If I hadn’t called it would never have taken place and I need to learn to listen more to the “nudge” of God when I sense it and to leave the rest to Him.

God is with us in our day-to-day encounters. He walks with us as Emmanuel even in our darkest days. He is our companion in our lonely times when we can’t be with family. He invites us to be open to the people around us and to offer a smile or a word of encouragement. I don’t know if you have noticed but a lot of people have smiling eyes above their masks and there is a sense of people caring for one another during these times. Let us be those smiling eyes for those around us. Help us to see the needs around us and to respond with compassion, with presence, hope and witness. Our God is with us and lights our path each day. Let us carry that light and joy and let it shine on our faces so that those around us will see and know that God is here.