

My prayer for you this season is that you will **attune more closely to the “rhythms of the Holy One” through experiencing, in some unique and special way, the Nurture of Nature.**

“Your way, Oh God, is Holy.”
(Psalm 77: 13)

Have a safe and healthy summer.

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Healthy Reflections

Body, Mind and Spirit – Summer 2016

The Nurture of Nature



One of our lectionary readings for last Sunday was from Psalm 77:

*“I will call to mind the deeds of the Lord;
I will remember your wonders of old.
I will meditate on all your works
and muse on your mighty deeds.
Your way, Oh God is Holy.”*

(verses 11-13 NRSV)

What a wonderful season to meditate and muse on the wonders of God’s good creation – those

wonders and deeds of old, so evident in the natural world around us. In nature we can experience everything from gentle breezes to wild lightning storms, from harmonious bird songs to the boisterous scolding of red squirrels, from flowing rivers with gently lapping waves to crashing ocean tides, flowers from pastel blue and pink to vibrant gold and orange. God created ... and we are intended to be one integral part of that creation – to experience the world around us and to participate with it.

What does the natural world have to do with our well-being? Are green spaces in cities and towns important for our health? Are these topics relevant to our daily lives? These are some of the questions we explored at our last Wellness Circle.

A 2015 report completed by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association states that

- 98% of Canadians say parks and natural areas are essential services and benefit the community
- 75% say they help children and youth lead healthy lifestyles
- 77% say they are a major factor in crime reduction
- 93% say they improve health
- 89% say they boost social cohesion

The report goes on to discuss how, as a result of urbanization, we experience decreased contact and a gradual disconnection with nature. These trends may be partially responsible for some of the rising health concerns we are seeing in our culture today – sedentary lifestyles, childhood obesity and diabetes, depression, social isolation and loss of community connections, and environmental threats to health and well-being.

“People have an inherent need to connect with nature... connecting with nature is associated with improved cognitive, mental and physical health, enhanced creativity and positive social behaviours.” (*Pathways to Wellbeing, a Framework for Recreation in Canada, 2015*)

Our first reaction might be to think that is a bit of an overstatement. Maybe it would help to think back to a time when children or grandchildren returned home after a day in the park, or a weekend camping, or a week at summer camp. Were they energized and full of life, excited and engaged with friends they met or experiences they had? Did they display an overall sense of well-being and joy in life, Body, Mind and Spirit? Even though they might be physically exhausted, we observe that there is often an unusual aliveness present after some time spent in nature.

Do we experience some of these same responses to nature as we age? Back to our Wellness Circle discussion – following are some of the reflections from the participants:

- Being outside and in a natural area eases stress
- It is cooler, even my mood is cooler; if I was upset or angry I am now calmer and more peaceful
- Emotionally there is time to reflect and think
- A better experience of gratitude, peace and tranquility
- The shady streets and green areas help me to cool down
- I experience peace and a sense of God's presence, especially by the water. I love that, camping, out of the city, and being by the water
- You meet other people and say hello, rather than just walk by them
- The trees and plants literally breathe for us – they ‘breathe out’ the oxygen we need and use the carbon dioxide that we breathe out
- Nature has healing power
- I sleep better if I have taken a walk around the neighbourhood in the evening
- Experiencing nature and recreation is necessary at all ages and stages of life

