

## **The Practice of keeping a spiritual or prayer journal**

There is no one “correct” way of keeping a journal. The word journal comes from the root for day, so for most people the practice of journaling is a daily or at least, multi-time-per-week activity. But again there are no rules for journal keeping. Generally people have found the keeping a journal useful for sharpening their powers of observation, and for observing growth and development in oneself. Keeping a prayer journal is an ancient practice in the Christian Tradition, and some of the journals through the centuries have been found to be especially helpful for other people as well as for the author, but the author needs to decide early on for whom he or she is writing. If you are writing to keep track of your own growth, and you are the only reader as well as the author, then you may say what you like in any way you like. You may find it prudent and useful to destroy your journals at some point before you die (as Ignatius did) so that someone else doesn’t find them and publish them!

If you are the only reader then the journal will be most helpful to you if you feel really free to say whatever you need to say that will help you understand what you are experiencing. Some write prayer journals as conversation with God. If so, it will sound like that.

Even though there are no rules for journal keeping, there are some suggestions that have come down through the Christian tradition through various schools of spirituality including the Ignatian tradition. These might prove helpful even in the simple exercise of journaling for this program.

Journal keeping here is designed to help you reflect on the content of each week, to recall and reflect on your own experience, and to pay attention to various inner movements that might be “at play” during the day, that will give you an indication of the state of your own inner life at this time (note movements in mind, heart and even stomach, back, or head). These can be thoughts, feelings, sensations, responses like suddenly becoming sleepy or anxious for not apparent reason.

We suggest that you use the reflection pages or a small note book for this purpose. Indicate the date and approximate time ( i.e. midday on 2/17/24). Keep track of ideas, questions, interesting points, insights that you might have in any session or between sessions. We suggest that you specifically use the Journal pages to jot down the inner movements of your affectivity of sense of decisions.

These movements can be named in any number of ways. As a kind of “code” we have chosen to call them “graces and fears” – that is movements toward God’s life versus movements of self-centeredness away from God (usually grounded in fear, but sometimes manifesting as boredom, anger, annoyance, judgmentalness, gossip, pettiness, divisive conduct etc.) In the Spiritual Exercises St. Ignatius terms movements as consolations and desolations, but subsequent use in psychology of these terms (or similar ones) has confused the issues around discernment, so we have chosen less “loaded terms.” If we use the spiritual sense of these please note that any movement you experience that leads to God is a consolation – even one that doesn’t “feel good”- and any movement away from God is a desolation.

In any case, there is no requirement that you journal but it will help you see a fuller developmental picture that could be very useful to review occasionally such as when you are sharing with your group each week.

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Developing a deeper prayer life toward discernment