

Editorial

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As I write this editorial on the anniversary of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City, I am reminded of the early days of this journal's existence. In the first very uneasy days after 9/11, I was also writing an editorial for *Vision*. *Newsweek* and *Time* had both been caught off guard. Their issues for that week had been written, edited, and formatted before the event and were all but irrelevant when they appeared on the newsstands. By contrast, the contents of *Vision*, also produced prior to that day, seemed all the more pertinent. I read

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through the articles gratefully, taking respite from those terrible events and also gaining perspective on them. Our hope for the journal is that it will be for you, too, a place of retreat from the demands of work and world—one that sends you back to those demands with renewed vision.

The life of the church, routine as it often is, takes on urgency in times of crisis. But without the everyday practices of our faith, we would have nothing to turn to when we are in great need. Prayer is at the heart of Christian practice, public and private. We pray on momentous occasions, those times marking the milestones and the disruptions of our lives, as well as in the seasons of the turning year. We pray in services of worship, in small groups, and before meals. We also pray in the course of the day. I was moved to hear a parent in our congregation talk about seeing her son stop and stand still on the playground one day. When she asked him what had happened, he told her matter-of-factly, "Oh, I was just getting quiet on the inside so I could hear God." Consciously and unconsciously, we—children and adults—are privileged to take everything to God in prayer: fears profound and silly, love and laughter, pain and grief, confession and celebration.

Many of us often pray but rarely talk about it; the purpose of this issue of *Vision* is to open up a conversation about our praying. Some articles in this issue will seem more personal than what we often publish: prayer is probably the most personal of our religious practices. As one of my colleagues puts it, prayer is talking to the one before whom we need not explain ourselves, the one who not only knows us better than any other but who knows us better than we know ourselves. The overall slant of this issue may also strike you as a bit more ecumenical than usual: prayer both transcends denominationalism and is also something about which Christian traditions have much to teach one another.

You may be surprised to find attention given to contemplative prayer practices: many contemporary heirs of Anabaptism are finding, as Arnold Snyder has suggested, that Anabaptism's early roots in medieval monasticism are resonating with twenty-first-century impulses and needs. I regret that evangelical prayer patterns did not find a greater voice in the issue, especially since that is my background. The prayer life that was a large part of my early formation may have embodied rhythms like those of the daily office, but the content was the immediacy of a personal relationship with Jesus, a dependence on God the Father, a hope for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The issue is rich. We begin with several articles that provide an overview. Roy Hange describes with passion and insight the range of prayer ministries, public and personal, in which he as a pastor engages. Willard Swartley, from the wellspring of a lifetime of teaching and practicing biblical spirituality, helps us get inside New Testament thinking about prayer. Barry Murr, a Presbyterian friend, writes about his pastoral journey in prayer. He shows us how John Calvin can help us clear away some of our misconceptions about prayer in order to construct a more sound theology of prayer, to serve an impassioned practice.

The next several articles look at some particular kinds of prayer. Juanita Weaver aids in thinking through the double audience of public prayer, which addresses God before the listening congregation. Jay Landry talks about how learning and teaching centering prayer has brought him into a deeper and wider relationship with God. Paula Snyder Belousek movingly describes the prayer life of people with developmental disabilities and

suggests ways we may all benefit from including nonverbal prayer in congregational worship. Ron Guengerich regrets that we have not used the lament Psalms in our public prayer life. He makes a case for the necessity of drawing more freely and fully from the range of the Psalter's resources if we are to mature in faith.

Next we turn to what I would have called "testimonies" at one point in my life, stories of how people pray. Duane Shank speaks from his experience about the need for prayer in a life of activism and gives us a glimpse of how he prays. We are privy to Lois Schertz and Don Yost's delightful intergenerational exchange on daily prayer. Dan Schrock opens tenderly and graciously one of the most difficult issues of prayer—praying when we do not perceive that God is listening. We then close the issue with a sermon about prayer and, fittingly, some of Lois Siemens's eloquent prayers.

My own prayer today is one of gratitude. I am thankful for writers who struggle with difficult questions and find words that open their minds and lives to us. I am thankful for readers who hear, test, and use the gifts the writers offer. I am thankful for editors who maintain and improve the trail that leads from the writer's heart to the reader's heart. I am thankful for the love of God, whose mission in the world this journal strives, above all, to serve.