**Lessons from St. Francis**

*The prayer of St. Francis is a favorite of many. It speaks of core values very near to the heart of faith: peace-making, being an agent of transformation, offering love and compassion to others. The life story of Francis of Assisi (1181-1226) demonstrates similar values. Today’s session invites you to learn a bit about Francis’ life and reflect together on how your own lives embody similar values (or could do so even more!).*

**Please see the next page for a short Biography of St. Francis**

**Questions to prompt discussion**

1. What aspect of Francis’ life (in this summary of it) jumped out at you as either new or as particularly interesting? Why?
2. Have you had meaningful encounters with either extreme wealth or poverty (your own or someone else’s)? What challenged you about those encounters? Have there been any changes in your life that you would say are related to those experiences?
3. Francis gave up a lot in order follow through on his choice to live in poverty. He gave up material comfort, the support of his friends, even his own family. Can you think of a time when you have given up something significant in order to live out a value or commitment that you believed in deeply?
4. In the Prayer for St. Francis, we pray that God “will make us instruments of God’s peace.” Can you think of someone who has been an instrument of God’s peace to you? How are you (or have you been) an instrument of God’s peace to someone else?

**A Prayer:**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
To be understood, as to understand;
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life. Amen.

**A Short Biography of St. Francis (by Sharon Callahan)**

Saint Francis is called the little poor man of Assisi. He was born in the year 1182 in the town of Assisi in Italy. His father was a very wealthy merchant of Assisi. Francis was very joyful, soft-hearted and loving by nature, so he had many friends. All the noble men's sons were his companions. Brought up in great wealth and luxury, Francis spent a considerable portion of his wealth in extravagant pleasures. He used to drink and party with the young princes of the land.

     One day while joking and laughing with his friends Francis was approached by a beggar who came along crying for alms. Francis, who was very compassionate, gave whatever he had in his pocket to the beggar. His companions mocked him for his charitable act. Dispassion dawned in his heart. The sight of the beggar set him thinking about the poverty and misery of mundane life and he began to give much money to the poor. His father thought that Francis was crazy wasting his money and rebuked him.

     Sometime after this, Francis was sick in bed for many months on account of some serious disease. He was about to die. The nature of Francis was entirely changed during that time as he spent much time praying and asking for guidance as to his future. He made a strong determination to renounce his old way of living to tread a life of purity and to dedicate his life to the service of humanity and nature which he saw as a manifestation of God.

     As soon as Francis got well, he informed his parents of his determination. They were disappointed and became angry with Francis. Francis gave up his old ways, threw away his expensive cloths and began to serve the greater good of all beings. He distributed clothes, goods and money to the poor. His father was very much annoyed at his son. He said, "Is this the gratitude you show to me? I labored hard and amassed wealth which you are now lavishly wasting it on these miserable people".

     Francis' friends mocked at him and teased him. His father turned him out of the house. Francis lived like a beggar. His old friends even pelted him with stones and mud. He bore all of these things with patience and began a life of simplicity wearing simple clothing and eating simple food. Living in a cave in the mountains of Assisi Francis spent his time in prayer and meditation for two years. Some kind people gave him food, but very often he had nothing to eat at all.

     Francis was very humble and loved all of God's creatures. He loved birds animals, plants, trees and nature itself. He loved the depressed and the outcastes. He treated the birds, the beasts and all beings as brothers and sisters. Francis went from village to village preaching the love of God, even giving teachings to the animals. Francis once liberated two lambs tied to the shoulders of a farmer, who were bleating pitifully on their way to market where they would be slaughtered. He removed worms from a busy road so that they might not be crushed under the feet of the passersby.

     Francis invited people to join him in his life of service if they were willing. Bernard, a rich man of Assisi, was very much attracted by the saintliness of Francis and joined him. He was the first follower of Francis, placing all his wealth at the altar of God. Eleven others also joined Francis, including St. Clair who like Francis left a wealthy life of luxury to care for the sick and underprivileged. Together these eleven distributed all their wealth to the poor traveling all over Italy preaching, teaching, healing and blessing wherever they went. The gospel of kindness and love of Francis soon spread all over Europe and earned for him the name of St. Francis. People called him the little poor man of Assisi.