

## **Marianist Mindfulness—A Gateway to Peace** by Diane H. Browne, Psy.D.

“Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate... whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.”<sup>1</sup>

God created a beautiful world for us to enjoy—clean water, fertile soil, and blue oceans to sail on a hot summer day. He embedded wonders and mysteries in faith and science to challenge our minds and imaginations. But almost from the beginning our actions deviated from God’s plan for us to live in harmony with him and with all other creatures. As this publication is being written, tremendous conflicts over immigration are occurring at our Mexican border and violence against racial minorities and people identified as LGBTQ make daily headlines. In addition, the United States is experiencing a number of public health crises. Deaths from the opioid epidemic and the latest mass shootings are topics of daily conversation. We live in an anxious age in which many people struggle to find safety, stability, and meaningful relationships.

Despite our high level of connectedness through social media, some researchers report that loneliness is on the rise.<sup>2</sup> The recent suicides of celebrities who seemed to “have it all” brought to our attention that fame and financial security do not guarantee happiness or longevity. In the last few years the number of suicides has risen such that in 2016 there were more than twice as many suicides (44,965) as homicides (19,362). That same year the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that the incidence of suicide has risen nearly 30 percent in the last 17 years. Suicide is now the second leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 10 and 34, and the fourth leading cause of death among individuals between the ages of 35 and 54. While the suicide rate increased 21 percent for men, it increased by 50 percent for women.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, many people feel their lives lack purpose, meaning, and loving connection.

We often feel helpless as we witness such suffering. Even though we may not be the ones experiencing the trauma of addiction, violence, or social isolation, humans are social beings designed to be responsive to the emotions they perceive in other people. Our ability to read the expressions of others and sense their emotions helps us relate to one another and experience the connectedness we need to feel whole. Yet studies show that we are becoming more isolated and therefore we often bear individual and societal stressors alone. Numerous studies have found that without meaningful social connections our ability to manage stress decreases, affecting our mental and physical health and even our longevity.<sup>4</sup>

As Marianists we value every human life and treasure the gift of life that we share. A key component of our Marianist mission is working as one mind for justice and peace. Our mission involves being attuned to the “signs of the times” and becoming sensitive to cultural shifts and to

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<sup>1</sup> Jn 10:7-10.

<sup>2</sup> Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B. Smith, and J. Bradley Layton, “Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review,” *PLOS Med* 7, no. 7 (July 27, 2010): <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.10000316>.

<sup>3</sup> “Vital Signs: Trends in State Suicide Rates – United States, 1999-2016 and Circumstances Contributing to Suicide—27 States, 2015.” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (June 8, 2018): 617-624. <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6722a1>.

<sup>4</sup> Holt-Lunstad, “Social Relationships.”

those in need.<sup>5</sup> Alongside other people of goodwill, Marianists actively engage in social justice movements to establish equality, freedom, restoration of the environment, and peace. Despite the difficulties of our present times, living the virtues that Jesus displayed during his time on earth offers us the gateway to peaceful living—the true and lasting peace that is needed to restore our own health and to repair the world in which we live.

The desire for peace is natural and healthy and comes from God. Father Chaminade taught that “the natural desire to strive for happiness finds its completion in God’s truth and love, leading us to love God who is the source of all that is good, and all that is true...to a love of our neighbor. In loving our neighbor and ourselves, we demonstrate our love for God and fulfill the Law given to Moses.”<sup>6</sup> In loving and receiving love we can manage stress, find “the meaning of life,” and know that our lives have purpose and value. Living peacefully ourselves is the best way to bring peace to others. But how do we really go about experiencing more love and peace in our daily lives? And how can we reach out to those who are hurting and not take their stress upon ourselves?

In recent years, mindfulness has become a “buzz word” as a method to manage chronic stress, improve our sense of well-being, and help us connect more deeply with ourselves and others. Numerous research studies have found that by choosing where we direct our focus we can alter the way the brain processes the experience.<sup>7</sup> By shifting our focus and changing the way we think about a situation, mindfulness and mindfulness meditation even have been found to decrease the sensation of pain.<sup>8</sup> What is mindfulness? How is a Marianist mindfulness approach different than other mindfulness practices? What can Marianist mindfulness offer a world searching for meaning, purpose, and connection? We will answer each of these questions, but first let us answer a broader question, what is peace?

### *What is Peace?*

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid... I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.”<sup>9</sup>

The desire for peace encompasses the deepest needs and wishes of human beings for love, happiness, safety, and justice. No English word exists to convey the fullness of the concept and presence of peace. To truly understand the profound and perfect nature of peace, we need to study the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*.

As we read through the Old Testament we see that the horrors of wars and the loss of a nation into captivity had sensitized the Hebrews to appreciate a state of peace. They longed for a

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<sup>5</sup> Phillip T. Aaron, SM, *Commentary on the Rule of Life of the Society of Mary* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 1994), 634-53.

<sup>6</sup> Antonio Gascón, SM, *Reason, Revelation, and Faith of the Heart* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2007), 87.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Garland et al, “Behavioral Mechanisms of Mindfulness as a Treatment for Chronic Stress: An RDoC Perspective.” *Sage Journals* (June 22, 2017). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2470547017711912>.

<sup>8</sup> Fadel Zeidan and David Vago. “Mindfulness Meditation-Based Pain Relief: A Mechanistic Account,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 1373(1), (June, 2016): 114-127. <http://doi.org/10.1111/nyas.13153>.

<sup>9</sup> Jn 14:27, 15:1.

day when a “nation shall not lift up sword against nation”<sup>10</sup> and peace would permanently reign. When the Hebrews spoke of shalom they were not referring to truces which granted only temporary relief from war, or to victories which lasted only a few years. They understood that real peace would only come through a close relationship to Yahweh.<sup>11</sup> Peace represented the total absence of suffering not only within the individual but also within the community and the nation. In his book *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, systematic theology professor Cornelius Plantinga described a peace few of us have ever experienced. He describes shalom as “the webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight.”<sup>12</sup> Shalom is completeness, a wholeness in which nothing is lacking. All needs are satisfied, and gifts fruitfully employed. Shalom, in other words, “is the way things ought to be.”<sup>13</sup> Hugh Whelchel, in his Theology 101 blog *What Perfect Shalom Looks Like*, stated that “shalom means a totality of salvation, wholeness, integrity, soundness, community, connectedness, righteousness, justice, and well-being. Where peace is present, so is love, justice, healing, and contentment.”<sup>14</sup>

You may have noticed that after “passing the peace” at Mass you feel happy and calm. There is a sense that order and safety have been restored. When we exchange the blessing “peace be with you,” we are actually saying “may you be full of well-being, health, and prosperity.”<sup>15</sup> “May you be successful.”<sup>16</sup> May you experience the active and life-giving force of God and experience both his presence and an overflow of His blessings.<sup>17</sup>

During the sign of peace, people shake hands, embrace, and make eye contact across the pews. Hopefully there is reconciliation with someone with whom there had been division. Peace is the relief that comes from the restoration of unity and communion. Sharing peace reminds us to turn away from behaviors that create division. The sign of peace calls us out of the disharmony and selfishness that isolates us into a oneness and communion with all people. The sign of peace is also a sign of hope in our troubled world.<sup>18</sup> In the presence of peace our minds are naturally benevolent, confident, and empathetic toward others. We are happy.

Now that we have a deeper understanding of the biblical concept of peace, let's examine the well-known verse in Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” Jesus is not referring to mediators or psychologists. He is stating that people who walk with God will be so full of peace that it will “spill out” onto others so that they too experience peace and wholeness.<sup>19</sup> In this way, we bring Jesus into the world.

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<sup>10</sup> Mic 4:3.

<sup>11</sup> Luke E. Ugwueye, “Shalom! A Study of the Concept of Peace in the Old Testament.” *International Journal of Theology and Reformed*, vol. 2, (2010): 69-85. [academicexcellencesociety.com/a\\_study\\_of\\_the\\_concept\\_of\\_peace\\_in\\_the\\_old\\_testament.pdf](http://academicexcellencesociety.com/a_study_of_the_concept_of_peace_in_the_old_testament.pdf). 75.

<sup>12</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

<sup>13</sup> Plantinga, *Not the Way*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> Hugh Whelchel, “What Perfect Shalom Looks Like.” Theology 101. February 24, 2014. <https://tifwe.org/what-perfect-shalom-looks-like/>.

<sup>15</sup> Doug Hershey, “The True Meaning of Shalom.” Fellowship of Israel Related Ministries (FIRM). Accessed June 10, 2018. [www.firm.org.il/learn/the-meaning-of-Shalom/](http://www.firm.org.il/learn/the-meaning-of-Shalom/).

<sup>16</sup> 1 Chr 12:18.

<sup>17</sup> Ugwueye, “Shalom,” 74-75.

<sup>18</sup> Kristopher W. Seaman, “Sign of Peace.” *Preparing Your Parish for the Revised Roman Missal: Homilies and Reproducibles for Faith Formation* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Hershey, “The True Meaning of Shalom.”

I hope you have caught a glimpse of what the full experience of peace could be like and why we truly want to be vessels of peace. The peace that God gives is more than an absence of conflict. God's peace is an assurance that we will never be abandoned and that all will be well. God remains with us wherever we are and in whatever we are facing. We are always in God's presence. We can enter into God's peace if we know how. With that confidence as our foundation, let us now explore the practice of mindfulness as a method to restore our own minds so that we can be a vessel to carry peace into the world.

### *What is Mindfulness?*

“The essential is the interior.”

Blessed Chaminade

Mindfulness based practices (MBPs) comprise a broad spectrum of interventions to improve our quality of life, enhance our sense of well-being, and manage daily stress.

A mindfulness practice can be as simple as attuning to the beauty of nature while walking to work, being fully present to the sensation of cool water during an ocean swim, or saying a prayer of gratitude felt deeply within our hearts. The goal of mindful living is to move with more awareness through our waking time, learning to take special note of what is pleasant and peaceful. Research has found that practicing mindfulness, especially meditation, can lead to positive changes in brain structures associated with memory, empathy, introspective awareness, and stress management.<sup>20</sup>

For purposes of our discussion, mindfulness is simply *being fully present in the moment* by bringing our awareness to what is happening outside and inside ourselves—our thoughts, sensations, and feelings—and then choosing where we want to direct our attention.<sup>21</sup> Positively connecting with ourselves and others in the present moment activates “the reset button,” which allows us to feel more relaxed and happy. Mindful living is thoughtful and reflective living, releasing negative thoughts and eventually changing negative thought patterns to embrace what is good in the present moment.<sup>22</sup> Through mindfulness we become aware of our own flow of experience, and we learn to notice, without harsh judgment, our own thinking processes and actions rather than being critical of others. Mindfulness practices teach us to notice how troubling emotions, such as anger and resentment, affect our bodily comfort and happiness. Observing and modifying our own actions rather than focusing on the trespasses and flaws of others is an act of peace.

Mindfulness embraces virtues shared by all major religions, including kindness, appreciation for our bodies, respect for the needs and rights of others, humility, enjoyment of beauty, and thoughtful use of time. Mindfulness can help us manage distractions and destructive

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<sup>20</sup> Sue McGreevey, “Eight Weeks to a Better Brain: Meditation Study Shows Changes Associated with Awareness, Stress.” *Harvard Gazette*, posted January 21, 2011.

<https://hms.harvard.edu/siles/default/files/assets/Harvard%20Now20and%20Zen%20Reading%20Materials.pdf>.

<sup>21</sup> Shian-Ling Keng, Moria J Smoski, and Clive J. Robins, “Effects of Mindfulness on Psychological Health: A Review of Empirical Studies.” *Clinical Psychology Review*, 31, no. 6 (August, 2011): 1041-56.  
doi: 10.1016/j.cpr.2011.04.006.

<sup>22</sup> Terry Fralich, *The Five Core Skills of Mindfulness: A Direct Path to More Confidence, Joy, and Love* (Eau Claire, WI: PESI, 2014), 3.

habits and acquire an appreciation for how suffering leads to gratefulness, wisdom, resilience, and empathy. Experiencing joy through developing a habit of gratefulness and attuning to positive thoughts is a core value of mindfulness. Mindfulness practices include forms of meditation, centering prayer, and conscious walking. Breathing slowly while taking in information from our senses, practicing the Five Silences, and spending time consciously listening to enjoyable music are all forms of mindfulness. Most mindfulness practices are free of charge, require little training, and can be practiced by most anyone. But the key to long-term health benefits and changing maladaptive habits is regular participation.<sup>23</sup>

A key component of mindfulness is learning how to quiet the mind and body by finding comfort in silence. Recent research has found that spending time in silence can have a restorative effect on our brains, possibly allowing us to process information at deeper levels.<sup>24</sup> Mindfulness practices improve not only our health but also our relationships. As we slow down and attune to what is positive, our heart rates decrease, blood pressure drops, and we are more likely to “take in” the needs of people around us. We begin to notice how we are contributing to conflictual patterns through our words, gestures, ways of thinking, and how we allocate our time. We may see how we “hold on” to the past, and how we try to manipulate others into adopting our notions about how things “should be” based on our own fears. When we can develop mindfulness practices to observe and “silence” destructive patterns, our truest passions have the opportunity to flourish.

When we “slow down” and release the tendency to judge ourselves and others, we give ourselves space to notice what “gets triggered” inside us throughout our day, both the positive and the negative. Then our “observer” can become better at attending to the positive and taking negative thoughts captive before we have a chance to dwell on them. Defusing stress through cultivating relaxation has been found to strengthen our immune systems by reducing inflammation, a key component in chronic ailments such as heart disease and diabetes.<sup>25</sup> The Bible also encourages us to focus on the positive as a key to good health. Proverbs 17:22 states, “A joyful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit dries up the bones.”

Mindfulness practices often begin by slowing down our breath and then directing our attention to what is happening right now around us and inside us. Being fully engaged in the present moment can make us more productive as well as help us connect more effectively with other people. The practice reminds us to make time to enjoy the goodness right in front of us. By focusing our energies on the task at hand we silence distractions and come into awareness on what it means to feel fully alive *right now*. From this fully awake and alive moment we are ready to engage with other people, offering them the quality of our presence and the best of ourselves.

Let me offer you a moment of reflection. How often were you fully present today? When did you converse with others, or were you also looking at your cell phone? Were you really listening or were you distracted by something else? Did you take in what each person was saying, as well as nonverbal gestures, or was your mind formulating a response before fully hearing what the person had to say? If we remain aware, we often find that we encounter people

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<sup>23</sup> David Siegal, *The Mindful Therapist: A Clinician's Guide to Mindsight and Neural Integration* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2010), 181.

<sup>24</sup> Imke Kirste, et al., “Is Silence Golden? Effects of Auditory Stimuli and Their Absence on Adult Hippocampal Neurogenesis.” *Brain Structure and Function*, 220, no. 2 (March 2015): 1221-1228. doi: 10.1007/s00429-013-0679-3.

<sup>25</sup> Harvard Health Publications, “Health Problems that Are Linked to Stress.” *Now and Zen: How Mindfulness Can Change Your Brain and Improve Your Health*, published for the Longwood Seminar (March 8, 2016).

throughout the day who carry heavy burdens. Sometimes all we can give a suffering person is our full presence. Yet the gift of our time and total attention (presence) is no small thing, especially when the person senses that our hearts are stirred in compassion, and we are moved to help in whatever way we are able.

Through establishing daily quiet and reflective time to objectively review our own actions we are better able to release resentments and stay attuned to our own truest needs. Mindfulness encourages forgiveness and learning to “let go” of the past to enable us to engage in and appreciate the blessings of today. Practicing compassion, embracing humility, and looking for humor throughout the day are essential ways mindfulness can work for our peace and peace in the world. Only through observing ourselves can we “catch on” to how our egos seek security through material wealth, status, and the assurance of others that we are “okay.” If we stay alert we often can notice how our egos contribute to division, wasting precious energy and time we need to work collaboratively with God to address the problems in the world. We may also begin to notice how much of our time is spent in managing material “stuff.” Through consciously choosing where we direct our time and focus we can embrace our unique calling, own our evitable mortality, and sense how God is operating in our best interests in our present circumstances. Only when peace is firmly established inside us can it flow out to others. By sharing God’s peace through our work and lives we share in the mission of Mary to bring Jesus into the world to build communities of peace.

Here is a simple mindfulness practice that can be done throughout the day:

- Pause to acknowledge that you are in the presence of God.
- Bring awareness to your breath, consciously slowing down the tempo of inhaled and exhaled. Notice when relaxation begins. Try breathing in for five seconds, hold your breath for a few seconds, then exhaling for eight. If this is too long, find a combination that works for you. Just make the exhaled breath longer than the inhaled.
- As you continue to breathe slowly, release your mind of distractions. You might imagine yourself erasing a white board, imagine looking at a blue sky with no clouds (thoughts), or just let the thoughts fade as you focus on your breath.
- Release the muscles in your shoulders, jaw, and hands as you continue to breathe slowly. Take note of what you are finding pleasing in your mind and body; as you relax more deeply, enjoy that experience.
- Savor the simplicity of the moment. Stay with that, or focus on a pleasing sound, your breath, a happy memory or thought, recalling a relaxing smell, or embracing silence. Experiment until you find the combination that works for you.
- Enjoy staying in the moment as long as you are able or until you feel ready to move on.

### *Concerns About Adopting Non-Catholic Mindfulness Practices*

Though mindfulness practices can offer significant health benefits, some Catholic writers have expressed concerns that deviating from a Catholic spiritual base can work against our ongoing Catholic spiritual formation.<sup>26</sup> Mindfulness has its roots in contemplative teachings and practices

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<sup>26</sup> Susan Brinkmann, “Catholicism and Mindfulness: Compatible Practices or Contrary Spiritualities?” Interview by Carl E. Olson. *The Catholic World Report*. January 7, 2018.

from Judaism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, but as it is advertised and taught today, the practice is almost always based in Buddhist philosophies and in the evidence-based practices of positive and cognitive-behavioral psychology. Mindfulness often incorporates spirituality, but most mindfulness writers and teachers are not trained in Catholic doctrine. Why is it important as Catholics to understand differences among the religions as well as secular practices when it comes to mindfulness?

Philosophies, religions, and psychological approaches offer specific ways of viewing, understanding, and responding to life. Though they may share many core values, each school of thought has developed principles and methods of practice that distinguish it from all others. Nothing should prevent a Christian from studying science, psychology, or Buddhism, but it is important for our spiritual formation to remain cognizant of philosophical differences. Father Chaminade understood that what we embrace and practice “forms” us, shaping who we become. He wanted all Marianists to be formed by a common spirituality. In his vision, Marianists were to be recognized by their “similar dispositions, attitudes, and virtues that result from being formed in the same spirituality.”<sup>27</sup> Though non-Catholic practices can help us manage stress and increase our enjoyment of life, the *shalom* that God offers is not found in Buddhism or secular psychology because both direct our focus away from a relationship with God and toward a reliance on self.

While Buddhists, Catholics, and practitioners of psychology share a desire for truth, have compassion for others, and often work side-by-side on behalf of justice and peace, there are key differences in beliefs. Buddhists do not recognize a single creator nor a beginning or end of time. According to the Dalai Lama, “morality is the foundation of the Buddhist path.” Self-reliance is emphasized, including finding one’s own path to happiness. They do not pray to a divine being.<sup>28</sup> Secular psychology attempts to avoid theological questions altogether in favor of scientific study. Psychologists teach mostly non-spiritual mindfulness practices to help clients improve mental and physical health. They may offer a spiritual practice if a client is interested and believes the technique might be beneficial, however.

Buddhists use spiritual meditation and mindfulness practices to purify the mind and body from impediments such as materialism and ego, with enlightenment as their goal. While Catholics also seek purification and release from materialism and ego, they engage in spiritual mindfulness practices to become closer to Christ. All three approaches can help individuals discover and minimize the power of the “false self,” sculpted by socialization, thus enabling us to become who we truly wish to be. But in our Catholic faith, true authenticity is knowing that we are unique, loved by God, and that we have been given gifts to serve others. The aim of Catholic mindfulness is to move away from pleasing the world and satisfying ego, toward an authentic self that experiences wholeness by imitating Christ.

While both religions and psychology deeply value the beauty and healing power of nature, Catholics acknowledge nature as a gift from the Creator. Buddhism, Catholicism, and psychology all embrace the power of being fully present in the moment, but Catholic teaching goes beyond the moment to a distinct awareness of the movement of the Spirit. Both religions follow the teachings of a great master and seek to emulate his example. Buddhists seek to

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<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2018/01/07/catholicism-and-mindfulness-compatible-practices-or-contrary-spiritualities>.

<sup>27</sup> Quentin Hakenewerth, *A Manual of Marianist Spirituality* (Dayton, Ohio: NACMS, 2000), viii.

<sup>28</sup> Travis Hellstrom, ed., *The Dalai Lama Book of Quotes: A collection of Speeches, Quotations, Essays, and Advice from His Holiness* (New York: Hatherleigh Press, 2016).

embody the qualities of the Buddha, but Catholics believe that, while the Buddha was a remarkably good and wise man who helped millions renounce the trappings of this world, Jesus alone is fully God while also being a fully actualized man. Through him alone we have blessings on this earth and in eternal life.

Neither Buddhism nor psychology acknowledge the role of Mary in changing hearts and bringing Peace Himself into the world. Chosen by God as the purest of vessels, Mary is the most exalted and mindful human who God ever made. Her ultimate beauty is in her fidelity, humility, presence, and grace. Having nurtured God in her own body, Mary embodies peace and shows us the path to peace by imitating her son.

Finally, there are many Catholics among us who have not had the benefit of solid catechesis. Practicing non-Catholic spiritually-based mindfulness meditation without a grounding in Catholic tradition can lead some away from the fullness of faith that is theirs through the sacrament of Baptism. Unless we are working with a Catholic teacher, secular and Buddhist practices leave eternal concerns unaddressed, the power of the sacraments is not acknowledged, and the guidance and intercession of the saints are not enjoyed. To achieve maximum benefit from the life-giving practices of mindful living, it is only when we recognize that God exists and is active in our lives that we can embrace mindfulness methods within our Catholic faith. When we do, we truly will find the wholeness we seek. Engaging our Catholic practices with deeper reverence and our undivided presence can offer us a renewed sense of connection and purpose. As with any meaningful endeavor, regularly setting aside time to make a practice ours leads to our ultimate well-being and happiness.

Let's look at how mindfulness can be practiced within Marianist spirituality.

### *What is Marianist Mindfulness?*

The Christian spiritual journey is one of transformation and mission. Spiritual practices that enable us to focus our minds and experience the true peace in Christ always have been an integral part of our Catholic faith and Marianist spirituality. Centuries before the term mindfulness was developed, Catholic monks practiced meditation, centering prayer, and chanting. The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, praying the Rosary, singing Gregorian chants, participating in *Lectio Divina*, the Liturgy of the Hours, pilgrimages, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, and receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation are just a few of the ways Catholics over the centuries have stepped away from their busy days to consciously embrace the precious moments of life and reflect on the Incarnation of Christ into their own lives.

Father Chaminade understood the connection between daily meditation, experiencing true peace, and repairing the world. He recommended that his followers meditate an hour each day in the silence of prayer as an act of faith in the presence of God.<sup>29</sup> He realized that through meditation we “attain purity of heart” and oneness with God. Faith comes to live in our minds *and* our hearts. Only faith of the heart can stabilize our minds and wills and animate our whole being to a deep love for truth and justice. Only through faith of the heart can we consistently look upon our fellow humans, and upon our own weaknesses, with love.<sup>30</sup> Father Chaminade understood our need for instruction. He left us with a System of Virtues so that we might become the best version of ourselves, leaving behind us a wake of peace and healing.

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<sup>29</sup> Roger Bichelberger, *Walking with William Joseph Chaminade* (Dayton, Ohio: NACMS, 2003), 19-22.

<sup>30</sup> Bichelberger, *Walking with William Joseph Chaminade*, 31-34.



Recently Marianists have been exploring how living the Virtues developed by Father Chaminade, beginning with the Five Silences, can help us in our quest for peace. In 2017 the North American Center for Marianist Studies (NACMS) developed a community of scholars, the Marianist Scholars Program 2.0, to do independent research on the subject “The Five Silences: Marianist Mindfulness for the Twenty-First Century.” Marianist mindfulness was defined as “the practice of being aware of one’s body, mind, and feelings and being in the presence of God, at any moment.”<sup>31</sup> With assistance from NACMS staff, thirteen lay and religious Marianist writers (twelve from the United States and one from Canada) designed independent projects that articulated the use of the Five Silences in family life, as a focus for retreats, and as a tool in nonviolent communication, just to name a few. Participants concluded that the Five Silences are an essential skill for living our daily lives harmoniously and in fulfilling our Marianist mission. This document is one of the projects that resulted from the year of study.

Marianist spiritual formation is a continuous call to conversion in which self-defeating habits, vices, addictions, negative emotional patterns and attitudes that characterized our “old self” slowly give way to a new way of being in the world. Under Mary’s life-giving influence, we become a “new person” who brings Jesus into whatever we are involved. The more consciously we invite the presence of Mary in our lives, the more she is able to form us through her love and the power of the Holy Spirit into the image of Jesus.<sup>32</sup> But work is also required on our part. If we are to truly change from the deepest parts of ourselves, we need discipline, awareness, and stamina for the journey. Father Chaminade developed the System of Virtues as a method to help us change. The Five Silences are exercises (tools) within the System of Virtues. Making a habit of using the Five Silences helps us develop the awareness and self-control (discipline) necessary to acquire the virtues of Jesus that are the gateway to peace. Utilizing the Five Silences is an essential tool of transformation for our own well-being and as a gateway to living in peace.

In addition to the health benefits of mindfulness practices in general, Marianist mindfulness, grounded in Marianist spirituality, has additional life-giving benefits that work for peace in our lives and in the world. These include the following:

- Strengthening us to remain present in the suffering of others and to respond with love and hope.
- Building conscious respect for the needs of all people and their cultures.
- Utilizing the Five Silences to engage in nonviolent actions and communication by adopting good habits of listening and reflecting. By understanding that unmet needs are often communicated through negative emotions, we are able to be more patient and effective at resolving conflict.
- Learning to cultivate an aware-but-peaceful presence that helps us bring about reconciliation, forgiveness, peace, and justice in the world.
- Developing the desire and courage to forgive and make efforts to reestablish peace between ourselves and those estranged from us whenever possible.
- Offering us a rich enjoyment and appreciation for the value of the moment while also acknowledging and joyfully anticipating our eternal destiny.

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<sup>31</sup> Marianist Scholars 2.0 online group meeting, October 17, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Hakenewerth, *A Manual of Marianist Spirituality*, 27-31.

- Deepening daily meditation to bring us closer to God so that we are better able to listen and respond to him.
- Offering us a daily awareness that God is at work in our lives and in the lives of others. We can see that Christ is being born in us.
- Teaching us to view suffering as an opportunity for growth and an invitation to bring God into our lives.
- Developing in us a deep and abiding love for Jesus and Mary, a strong connection with our Marianist Family and mission, and a passionate desire to share with others the goodness we have received.
- Helping us grow within communities. Marianists are a “community of communities” in which individuals find and develop their unique spiritual gifts within the “give and take” of community life. We use our gifts, indeed our entire selves, to “do whatever he tells us” while we receive from others.
- Forming us to engage in mission. Mission is central to our Marianist identity and purpose. By engaging in mission together, we combat feelings of isolation and discouragement and build collaborative skills. The work of repairing the world is challenging but exciting. We participate in creation itself and the unfolding of the story of humankind.
- Leading us to a deep understanding of the Hebrew expression for peace—*shalom*—which means happiness, wholeness, completeness, oneness, love, mercy, justice, and oneness with God and his creation.

### *Five Silences—Tools for Peaceful Living*

“For who has known the mind of the Lord to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.”<sup>33</sup>

Father Chaminade was well versed in scripture. Through study and reflection on the Gospel we learn about “the mind of Christ. But only through practicing His virtues can we “take on” His mind and consistently respond with love, especially when people are acting in ways which are displeasing to us. Father Chaminade recognized the need for a system to advance us in this undertaking. He developed the System of Virtues to aid us in the transformation to become more like Jesus. Through the exercises of instruction, mental prayer, and the examen (reflection) we can make progress toward bringing Christ into our everyday lives.<sup>34</sup>

The Five Silences are a form of instruction that helps us build awareness and skill in exercising self-discipline. The practice of the Five Silences helps us focus our energies so that every moment we can live fully, learning to let go of distractions and ego-based ways of thinking such as perfectionism and excessive worry, which are exhausting and keep us from realizing our potential.<sup>35</sup>

When we have a “listening heart” and we are led by the Spirit to pray to receive instruction (mental prayer), we are moved to change. The Five Silences are not just about being

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<sup>33</sup> 1 Cor 2:16.

<sup>34</sup> Hakenewerth, *A Manual of Marianist Spirituality*, 48.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Lackner, SM, *Virtues for Mission* (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2003), 35.

silent, though becoming friends with silence creates space to enjoy all the benefits of mindfulness we previously discussed. The Five Silences are about creating a positive presence in the world. Participating in the Five Silences “slows things down” and offers us time to hear from God and our own hearts. A helpful way to understand the Silences is to think about a traffic light. Traffic moves most safely and efficiently when everyone is watching the light (remaining respectfully and actively present) and moving only when the light signals them to do so. Just like yielding our freedom to move until we receive a green light or arrow, there are times when we need to choose to stay still, obey a “red light,” and not speak, gesture, get distracted, imagine what someone is thinking, or dwell on a previous hurt. Other times we are “signaled” to move forward by providing a good word and a smile by applying a passionate focus through remembering a kindness done or by imagining what a positive outcome could look like.

A green light reminds us not to dwell on negative feelings and get stuck there. Through regulating our energies so that we neither create conflict and chaos, nor waste our precious time, we have the energy and resources we need to move forward with “missionary zeal” to first manage ourselves and then comfort those who are hurting. We become the change the world needs. To manage our presence in the world, we need to develop our abilities to regulate our emotions, to be mindful of how we use our words and employ our actions, and to be aware of how we are engaging our minds. The Five Silences address this process of self-awareness and self-regulation through: *silence of words*, *silence of signs*, *silence of the mind*, *silence of imagination*, and *silence of passions*.

### *Silence of Words*

Silence of words is perhaps the easiest to observe and employ. Luke states that “out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Lk 6:45). Did your words make the world a more peaceful, safer place today? Is there bitterness and anger, driven by unexpressed pain, unforgiveness, or an old pattern you have not examined? Death and life are in the power of the tongue.<sup>36</sup> Often, we use too many words, blanketing our listeners with too much to process as we struggle to express what we mean. Maya Angelou, the famous American novelist and poet once said, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”<sup>37</sup> We forget that conversation is like a tennis game—meant to be relayed back and forth in rhythmic balance. Great tennis players and great communicators take a moment to think about how they want to aim their next serve. Too often in conversation, rather than fully listening we are preparing our response. We talk *at* each other, rather than *with* each other. Yet, one of the most valuable gifts we can offer another is to listen with our hearts to what others are choosing to share with us, without judgment or a critical response. Mary modeled effective use of words in the scriptures. Her words are not plentiful but are carefully chosen, direct, and uplifting. Her words to every Marianist and Marianist community are “do whatever he tells you.”<sup>38</sup>

By taking time to fully listen, we “inform” the speaker that the conversation and the speaker matter to us. Before being quick to respond, take a breath and then check out your understanding of what the speaker just said to you. You might begin with, “If I am hearing you

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<sup>36</sup> Prv 18:21.

<sup>37</sup> Goodreads. Accessed August 14, 2018. [www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3503.Maya\\_Angelou](http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3503.Maya_Angelou).

<sup>38</sup> Bernard J. Lee, SM, *Habits for the Journey: A Mystical and Political Spirituality for Small Christian Communities, A Marianist Conversation*. (Dayton, Ohio: NACMS, 2000), 49-55.

correctly you said...” repeating back what you think you just heard. If the speaker confirms that you are correct, then ponder the words and the meaning, gathering information from your heart and mind before crafting a careful response. If you were only partially correct, ask them to share with you again and listen more carefully this time. In any conversation, it’s okay to say, “give me just a moment to think about what you just said.” Or, “I need a moment to collect my thoughts before I speak.”

### *Silence of Signs*

Mother Teresa is quoted as saying “peace begins with a smile.” How does your body respond when you find yourself facing a person with a frowning face and arms crossed? Now, take a deep breath and release that thought. Next, think of a smiling face and open arms. How does that feel different? Gestures (signs) and the tone we use, like words, are felt in our bodies. Words said in sarcasm and communicated with an angry face and tone send a confusing and wounding message. Turning our back on someone who is speaking communicates indifference or contempt. If we truly are listening and of goodwill, our eyes are on the speaker and our faces relaxed. We may even be leaning forward, with our bodies open and relaxed. This sends a message that we are present and interested in what the other person has to say. Our attentive listening is a sign of peace. Another “sign of peace” is being present. Mary supported Jesus’ mission by being present in key places at the right time, including at the foot of the cross. Veronica wiped the blood off Jesus’ face when he fell. Simon helped carry the cross. Your presence makes a difference. Are you spending your time where your heart says you need to be? And when you are there, are you *really* there?

### *Silence of the Mind*

Many people believe that they must accept whatever comes into their minds, but is that really so? We have locks on our doors and passwords on our devices. Should we not also protect our minds? St. Paul urges us “do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). Humans are designed to be constantly learning, not holding on to the hurts and injustices of the past. By watching movies and TV shows that reflect the values of this world, we take sinful actions into our minds, where they influence how we think and act. Imagine how different our presence in the world is if we are making time to listen to the Divine Office, which offers scripture and hymns of praise throughout the day, rather than using the same time to listen to our favorite news channel. What do you “feed” your mind? Is your heart tugging at you to use your gifts to build a peaceful world in your home and community? What thoughts do you need to silence in your mind in order to experience peace?

Proverbs 4:23 says that we are to “watch over our hearts with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.” Our mind and heart shape one another. We must watch over both and limit time spent with people, ideologies, written materials, and social media that direct us away from the concerns of Mary and Jesus. Nothing kills our forward movement like shame and regret for actions we committed in the past, so it can be useful to make a list of regrets and take them to prayer and find a way to resolve them. Trusting in the grace of our all-knowing, yet tender God of Mercy allows us to accept St. Paul’s advice to “forget what lies behind and strain forward to

what lies ahead.”<sup>39</sup> Embracing forgiveness of others and ourselves releases our minds to learn from past mistakes while remaining receptive to newness of life.

### *Silence of Imagination*

How do you use your imagination? Is your imagination an instrument of anxiety, or creativity? Constructively using imagination is a challenge throughout our lives, for we must imagine our course before we can walk it, and the course we imagine impacts the lives of others. When we first meet St. Paul he is Saul, using his imagination to search out and persecute Christians, a destructive action based in fear. Through a personal encounter with Christ, Saul becomes Paul. Paul’s mind was transformed. He changed his actions and established the first Christian community in Europe in Philippi, Greece. In Philippians he gave the community instructions on how to direct their thoughts so that the “peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, would guard their hearts and their minds in Christ Jesus.”<sup>40</sup> St. Paul understood that the content of our thoughts directs our imaginations, and our imaginations are powerful in creating the emotional space in which we live. St. Paul’s advice is as wise today as it was then. He advises us that “whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”<sup>41</sup> He knew that hearts focused on beauty, peace, and virtue will bear good fruits and attract others to the mission of kingdom building.

Earlier in Philippians, St. Paul readily admits that he has not attained perfect maturity but states that “I press on to make (the goal) my own because Christ Jesus has made me his own.”<sup>42</sup> By admitting his struggles, he gives us an example of how humility combined with constructive imagination deserves the “green light.” In our world today, we are confronted with many fearful situations that can feed our imagination and cause us much anxiety. It can be tempting to imagine many horrific outcomes from what we hear on the news. Sometimes prayer is the only way we can affect the outcome of a situation. In those cases, let us take St. Paul’s advice and direct our imaginations to improving ourselves and our communities to reflect the goodness of peace while we pray for God’s merciful intercession in situations we cannot change.

While we want to focus our imaginations on how to improve ourselves and the world, we must be mindful of ego. All too often people imagine how more power, greater glory, and excessive wealth will bring happiness; in actuality, the ego’s pursuits create many of the world’s problems. The outcome of vanity and temporary stardom is usually suffering and disillusionment, but these experiences can teach us humility.

Humility is very necessary if we are to carry peace. But humility is not timidity or weakness. Humility is a confidence that comes from emotional maturity. A humble person is free from an ego that seeks to be “one up.” Without humility it is difficult to genuinely have compassion for others. Humility allows us to see that the needs of others are as important as our own. Alongside Jesus, the person who most characterizes humility is his mother, Mary. Though she could not imagine the sufferings she would endure as mother of the Messiah, she trusted she was part of God’s plan for humanity and with her “Yes,” she gave her entire self over to his will. By being aware and taking initiative at the wedding of Cana, Mary repairs the world by restoring

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<sup>39</sup> Phil 3:13.

<sup>40</sup> Phil 4:7.

<sup>41</sup> Phil 4:8.

<sup>42</sup> Phil 3:12.

the wine without calling attention to herself. Let us use our imaginations on how to be part of God's plan so that, like Mary, we are a vessel of peace and healing in our world.

### *Silence of Passions*

Opportunities come up throughout our day that engage our interest and imagination. Passion is an animation of our entire being—an experience of being fully engaged and motivated. But which passion do we choose? The temptations of the world are intriguing and relentless, often brutally testing us to stay true to what we claim we really care about. When our passions are at war, we have no peace. Throughout the day we must give a “red light” to some pursuits so that we can give a “green light” to those we really feel passionate about. Father Chaminade wrote that in order to have peace within ourselves we would need “absolute domination over our passions; triumph of the new self over the old self.”<sup>43</sup> Only then, when our soul is united with God and we can recognize his will being done in our lives, will true peace be ours. When we consciously manage our passions, all that we are, and all that we have, is available for the Spirit to use.

The world encourages us to become *something* instead of *someone*. Our ever-present egos are often easily absorbed in imaginations about receiving accolades and praise. Yet true freedom and fulfillment are found when we focus our energies and passions on our calling, rather than on “fitting in” with others who may not share our values or beliefs. In silencing the ego and focusing on godly pursuits we have less desire to operate as a “false self”—an aspect of us that seeks “social security” over “heavenly security.” When we are successful in silencing passions that once drove us into debt, sin, and shame we enjoy a new freedom to direct our imaginations in altruistic and creative pursuits. We can follow the urge to work collaboratively with God and in community to repair the world.

Making an honest inventory of our passions is the first step in silencing the passions of lust, greed for power or material things, and other vanities that feed the ego but starve the soul. Once destructive passions are “under new management,” we can use our words, gestures, and mind to discover the truest desires of our hearts, desires that God put there to build his kingdom on earth and that will bring us fulfillment. When we answer God's calling we are in alliance with Mary and experience the joy and even the mystification of what it means to give our yes to her, as we join others called to work for peace. Though the future always comes with loss and uncertainty, finding ourselves in Christ brings wholeness and happiness. As part of a “spectacle of saints” we join the Carpenter at his bench, repairing this world which is passing away, while building a Kingdom with him that will reign eternally.

### *Building a Daily Marianist Mindfulness Practice*

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”<sup>44</sup>

Our minds will always be our first and most enduring mission field. Just as the Five Silences help us develop our presence as a tool of peace, mindfully receiving the Eucharist and other sacraments with appreciation and faith can fill us with God's presence and grace. For peaceful living to “take root” in our lives so that we reap the social and health benefits, we need to “go

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<sup>43</sup> *The Chaminade Legacy*, vol. 4 (Dayton, OH: NACMS, 2010), 54.

<sup>44</sup> Rom 12:2.

green.” Give a green light to health promoting practices such as meditation, prayer, watching sunsets, and participating in spiritual retreats. If you can’t take more days off, take more “moments off” and reflect on pleasing experiences until positive reflection becomes a habit. We practice Marianist mindfulness when we:

- Develop a meaningful and nurturing daily prayer life.
- Recognize Mary and Jesus as the ultimate models of mindful living. In contemplating how they lived, we can appreciate and imitate their virtues.
- Welcome Mary into our lives as Mother and Formator. Through daily participation in the Marianist Doxology and the Three O’clock Prayer we demonstrate a devotion to Mary and place ourselves under her direction.
- Accept our mission is to bring Jesus into the world as Mary did, being alert to opportunities to share Jesus with others.
- Read books on Marianist spirituality.
- Invite the Gospel to become a living force within you. Pray the Liturgy of the Hours (DivineOffice.org) or another source for daily scriptural readings.
- Live in community. If there is not a Marianist community near-by, consider starting one or joining an online community. Look for other opportunities to develop support networks through your parish, local meet-up, or where you work. Invite those who are alone and reach out to those who need support.
- Become aware of how you use resources. Do your part to live simply so that all people might have the material and ecological resources they need.
- Listen to your heart. What is God asking you to do? We can embrace our callings with our minds and our hearts and act confidently on behalf of others.
- Remain open to new learning and new experiences. Practice being mindful of what is happening in your family and community. *Be there for people.*
- Express gratitude for your food, home, friends and family, and take time to reflect on all that is good in your life. Even acknowledging the smallest moments of appreciation can lead to joy. When you find yourself anxious or sad, think of at least five things that give you joy *in that moment* and enjoy the thoughts.
- Consider developing a God-inclusive meditative practice.<sup>45</sup> Focus on an icon, say the name of Jesus, or simply acknowledge something that God has created that brings you joy while you sit in stillness, go on a walk, or dance. You can start with just spending a minute in awareness and gradually extend your time as your focus improves.
- Practice gratitude. Begin and end each day by thanking God for the gift of life, *for being alive today.*
- Send blessings upon those you were grateful for today and those who need help.

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<sup>45</sup> *Note:* A key principle of mindfulness is that our focus is always on changing ourselves, not other people. Mindfulness practices, especially those that involve meditation, must be chosen carefully by those who suffer mental health issues. Mindfulness practices are not helpful to everyone nor are they intended as a substitute for professional mental health services or spiritual direction. People suffering from mental and physical illnesses, and those in life emergencies, need and deserve professional, skilled, compassionate, and affordable care.

- Make time during the day to slow down your breathing pattern. Take in slow breaths and let exhales be even slower and longer (e.g., 5 seconds in, pause, then 8 seconds out).
- Make time to enjoy what you eat. Eat slowly, taking time to see, taste, and enjoy your food. Bless your food. Pray for farmers, laborers, and truckers, and that all might care for the earth. Pray especially for the bees that pollinate our crops.
- “Stop and smell the roses.” Look for opportunities to appreciate what is good in the world, including in people.
- Notice people’s needs, including your own. Develop a “listening heart” by staying present with others. Use silence to get to know yourself.
- Work for peace. Seek out organizations like Marianist Social Justice Collaborative ([www.msjc.net](http://www.msjc.net)) that are concerned with justice and the sharing of resources, and offer them your gifts.

### *Conclusion*

In our modern world many suffer from loneliness and despair. Our Marianist charism calls us to put our values into action as Mary’s family and work for true peace in our homes, communities, and in the world. Father Bertrand Buby, SM, a Marianist author and biblical scholar sums up how we are to go about this.

Our mission is to proclaim the Good News of the Gospel, to heal, to preach, to teach, and to comfort those who need solace and help. Our call is now universal because it extends to all peoples and nations. Like the apostles we are named one by one to be followers of Jesus and even to go forth and baptize in his name. We are not alone in this calling, for Jesus is always there within us and at our side. As brothers and sisters in this mission we are to be living examples of hope and joy.<sup>46</sup>

Through practicing Marianist mindfulness, especially the Five Silences, we can live lives of peace and be fully present to those in need. Though suffering is a part of being in this world, aligning our will with Jesus and Mary and following their benevolent examples brings true inner peace. As Jesus prepared for his crucifixion, he explained once again to his disciples that his time on earth was ending, but to remember that God loved them. Jesus reminded them that the Father is with him and that he would continue to intercede for them. “I have said this to you, so that you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”<sup>47</sup>

### *Closing Prayer*

“May the God of peace himself sanctify us entirely; may our spirits and souls and bodies be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>48</sup> May we become the messengers of *peace* needed in the world today. And may the Father, and the son, and the Holy Spirit be glorified in all places through the Immaculate Virgin Mary.

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<sup>46</sup> Bertrand Buby, SM, “Out of Egypt.” Private email to undisclosed recipients based on the daily readings for Mass, July. 10, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> Jn 16:33.

<sup>48</sup> 1 Thes 5:23-24.



### *Dedication*

This publication is dedicated to the memory of Father Richard Kuhn, SM, who was born to eternal life on July 5, 2018. Father Kuhn embodied the Five Silences and carried the light of Christ to many. May we follow his example.

Thanks to Father Bertrand Buby, SM, for his input on shalom and to NACMS for making this document possible.

### Suggested Songs:

- “Unfinished.” Mandisa. From the album “*Out of the Dark*” (Deluxe Edition). UMG (on behalf of Sparrow (SPR), 2017.
- “This Is My Song, O God of All the Nations.” (Finlandia) performed by Joan Baez. From the album *Mita vapaus*. Amnesty International 50-vuotisjuhla-albumi. Fullsteam Records, by Lloyd Stone and Georgia Harkness. 2011.
- “Go Make A Difference.” From the album *Never Too Young by Request*. Steve Angrisano & Tom Tomaszek. January 1, 2008.
- “O Lord, Heal Us.” Christopher Walker. From the Album *At the Name of Jesus* (Palm Sunday and Easter), OCP, 1999.
- “A Living Prayer.” Alison Krauss & Union Station. From the album *Lonely Runs Both Ways*. Rounder Records, 2004.

### *Resources for Suicide Prevention*

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline—telephone (800) 273-8255—available 24/7. The service is available to everyone and all calls are confidential. Chat: [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)  
#BeTheOnetocampaign (resource network to help prevent suicides)

Mental Health America Live Your Life Well, [www.mentalhealthamerican.net/live-your-life-well](http://www.mentalhealthamerican.net/live-your-life-well)