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# Being There

*Hearts full of grace*

A Newsletter for & about  
Sonoma County Law Enforcement Chaplains

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the E.D.

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## Message from Rita Constantini, Executive Director

There is incredible value in being of service to others. Some may say it's what brings true happiness. Our role as law enforcement chaplains places us in the unique position of being with people in their darkest hours. Because we are an interfaith organization, we believe people deserve compassion and kindness no matter their religious or spiritual beliefs. We understand prayer is deeply personal and for many it is something they hold as private or even sacred. Prayer comes in many different forms, with no right or wrong—it can simply be whatever you want it to be. The most important thing is showing up, being there. Gandhi once said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." So, remind yourself you are here to serve and every small act of kindness is leading you to your joy.



## Update from Shaun Ralston, President, LECS Board of Directors: Welcome to our new Board members



**Terry Sanders** | Firefighter, EMT/Paramedic, Fire Survivor, Small Business Owner

- City of Santa Rosa, Current Planning Commissioner
- Wednesday Night Market Executive Board
- 2022 City Council Candidate, 4<sup>th</sup> District
- Firefighter for 23 years, Oakland (SR Resident)
- Lost his house in Tubbs Fire, 2017



**Kevin Kilgore** | Law Enforcement Career Professional

- Rohnert Park, Deputy Chief of Police
- Former Chief of Police, City of Sebastopol
- Masters Public Administration, Criminal Justice
- Committee on LGBTQ LEO Advisory Board
- California AG Valor Award for Lifesaving
- Sonoma County Juvenile Justice Council





## Prayer in Service to Others: The Practice of Compassion

*Dear Chaplains —*

*The theme of the Spring newsletter is: Prayer in Service to Others, a topic that is central to our role. We invited you to share your thoughts about what "prayer" means to you in your work as a chaplain and to contribute a prayer, a poem, quotation, mantra or affirmation that you use before/during/or after a call-out. Thank you for your eloquent contributions.*

What is prayer? Loaded with so many interpretations, beliefs and experiences, the word is sure to evoke an emotional response. In my research for this issue, the definition that really resonated with me is this: **Prayer is a conversation.** Be it with God, with a god or gods, the universe, or with one's own soul, it is a heartfelt intimate appeal for insight, guidance, and courage—for ourselves as individuals and as chaplains in service to the people in our care.

Prayer...or Meditation?

People often turn to prayer or meditation in situations where they experience intense negative feelings, such as anger, grief or fear, and when they feel like something is out of their control and they ask for help from a 'higher power.' Both are used as ways to focusing the mind to achieve a higher sense of awareness when seeking support and guidance. "Rituals such as prayer and meditation in general serve a calming function," says Ryan Bremner, associate professor of psychology at the University of St. Thomas in Minnesota. "They distract the mind which might otherwise go down one of those rabbit holes of useless worry, and they give us a sense of influence or control over something that may not be ultimately controllable." Both are often amplified by **mantra** (a word, chant or prayer repeated aloud to enhance concentration, for instance, "Om," or "Hail Mary") or **affirmation** (a phrase repeated silently or aloud to enhance personal empowerment, such as "I choose peace").

However, although they are complimentary, prayer and meditation differ in a crucial way, and that is whom you connect with during your practice. Prayer is the practice of communicating with the divine, and meditation is the practice of communicating with the self.

Meditation has been proven to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression and promote emotional health and well-being. While prayer also reduces stress and anxiety, it may even help you live longer, according to a number of studies. Amen.

—Inese Heinzel

"Pain and suffering may often seem to be calling us to jump in and fix things, but perhaps they are asking us first to be still enough to hear what can really help...  
So before we act, we need to listen."

—Mirabai Bush





## Chaplain Insights: Prayer & Service

Insights from fellow Chaplains in different callings from around town & around the world

### Prayer Journals:

A reflection from Rabbi Chaya Gusfield, palliative care hospital interfaith chaplain, Oakland, CA (excerpted from [chayasgarden.wordpress.com](http://chayasgarden.wordpress.com))

Prayer is a constant in my life both personally and professionally. I pray alone, in various groups with others, leading prayer for various groups, spontaneously and well planned. I use music, liturgy, text, imagination, and heart. The unexpected comes forth with the simple opening of the mouth for prayer. It is simple, and yet often mysterious.

For many, prayer is a challenge and seems out of their reality or even possibility. I hear:

*"I don't know how to pray" or "I'm not good at prayer."*

*"Please pray for me because it will be better than whatever I could do."*

*"I don't believe in God, so why would I believe in prayer?"*

*"I just want this pain to go away. I just want this anger to be released. I want to feel better and stronger."*

I believe that prayer is the act of speaking out loud the truth of what is on our hearts—our burdens and celebrations, our fears and hopes, our gratitude and yearnings. So when you think you can't "pray" but can share the truth of what's on your heart, that is prayer. (*"I just want this pain to go away"* is prayer.)

\*

Prayer #1—written in the hospital prayer/meditation room journal:

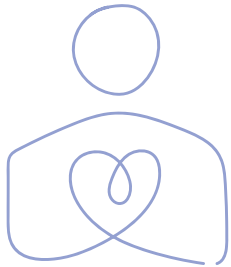
*"Please take away my anxiety."* This simple act of expressing what was on my heart publicly and anonymously, lessened my anxiety about 50%. Throughout the day I remembered picking up the pen and writing that and even went by and looked at it and took a breath. Joy began to arise.

\*

Prayer #2—Joining with an elderly woman who finds great comfort in prayer and is a devout Catholic (after a discussion learning what was on her heart):

*"We notice that we are here together in this hospital room. It is noisy and chaotic and filled with care. The care of the doctors, nurses, dietitians and EVS workers. The care of social workers and chaplains. We notice that the care of God is with us here, always, amidst the bustle of the work. We thank God for your family, your life, the care you have been receiving. We thank God for your faith. We ask God to hear your prayers of hope that you will be able to be well enough and strong enough to have a good visit with your grandchildren who are coming to see you next week... May the blessings of God rest upon you. May God's peace and healing be planted on your heart. And may the blessings of God walk with you on your healing journey now and forever more."*

**A few simple words exchanged with kindness. Noticing...offering gratitude...  
asking for our prayers to be heard...and blessing.**





## Chaplain Insights: Prayer & Service



"Policies and procedures aside, when you lead with love, when you live your values, you have everything you need. Strong back. Soft front. Wild heart."

—Brene Brown

## Insights about prayer and service from our own LECS Chaplains:

**Thomas**— Nearly every moral or religious code contains encouragement to serve others. Serving is the heartbeat of why we serve as chaplains. We are reminded often of the cost of this work we do within LECS. The time invested, emotional drain, and sleep lost only begin to describe the cost of serving in this way. I have also found incredible benefits of serving as a chaplain. Beyond the satisfaction of knowing we helped lighten the load of someone during the initial impact of grief and greater than the amazing friendships built within the chaplaincy, there lies a benefit to the soul.

Sharing from my own religious background, there is an account of Jesus' disciples urging him to stop and eat. Jesus had just been speaking with someone and knew he would soon be met with more people needing his service. His reply to his disciples (loosely translated) was, "What fills me and sustains me is to do what I'm called to do." I share the sentiment that I have heard many chaplains express: we joined the chaplaincy because we felt like we were called, or supposed to do this. Sure, there was a cost for Jesus traveling around Palestine and there is a cost for us serving throughout Sonoma County, but the very thing we are called to do is the same thing that will fill us from the inside out. Let us continue serving and experience the sustaining joys and benefits of this chaplaincy that far outweigh the cost of service.

**Kara**— My prayer, which I repeat to myself while driving to the call-out, is always the same: *"Please let me be whatever is needed in this situation."* It's an all-purpose, one-size-fits-all prayer, and it allows me to enter into even the most messy of scenarios with serenity and quiet confidence.

**Danelle**— As I walk up to my barn each morning to feed the herd, I repeat *"This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it"* to myself a couple of times. It reminds me to embrace whatever the day may bring to me and that God has given me the strength I need to face what the day holds. It's simple but it seems to ground and center me. Starting my day in the barn is also very centering. Horses tend to help with that.

**Elizabeth**— *"Dear God, please allow me to be what is needed in this moment. Allow me to show others your grace through my work. Protect those who need protecting and grant peace to us all when this moment is through."* Rereading it, it sounds a little self-serving...but it is said in the spirit of bringing to the scene some little bit of what officers or families may need, not specifically that "I" be what is needed.

**Jenny**— When going to a call out, I pray *"God please go before me and prepare a way, walk beside me and give me what they will need from me, follow behind me and make right my missteps."* I pray this simply because I am so human and it is immeasurably important to me that my presence leaves a positive mark during someone's weakest moment.

**Gary**— Every morning, I receive an email from [jesuitprayer.org](http://jesuitprayer.org). There are three parts: a reading (usually from Scripture), a reflection, and a prayer. Here is a prayer by Mahatma Gandhi (the Jesuits are inclusive), entitled "A Prayer for All Who Serve":

*"As we serve others, we are working on ourselves. Every act, every word, every gesture of genuine compassion naturally nourishes our own hearts as well. It is not a question of who is healed first. When we attend to ourselves with compassion and mercy, more healing is made available for others. And when we serve others with an open and generous heart, great healing comes to us."*





**Kate**— For some of us, the idea of praying on a call-out is complicated, if not downright terrifying. There are so many variables to consider. The type of faith, lack of faith, or resistance to faith of those we serve. Our own spiritual or religious convictions, hesitancy or ambivalence. It can be hard to know how, when or even if to offer spiritual support.

I'm not the only chaplain afraid to pray. But I may be the only one to research and compile sample prayers for every faith and scenario, editing and revising them to suit my style and comfort level. I created my own "Prayer Resource Guide" and loaded it onto my phone. I review it at the beginning of each shift.

I already knew the Lord's Prayer, but I decided to memorize the Hail Mary (short and so very sweet), and the 23rd Psalm. This last has proven to be my favorite and most-used prayer. Everyone seems to know and love it. It's exclusive to neither Christianity nor Judaism, and I love the shift in perspective from talking about God ("He leadeth me beside the still waters") to addressing Him directly ("Thou anointest my head with oil").

My second-most-used prayer is formulaic. First, I thank God for the life of the deceased, "for the love they gave and received," and "for their sense of humor / devotion to family / the values they modeled" (whatever qualities the family has shared with me). Then I ask God to "guide them gently through the gates of death," or "lift them up into the light" (or some approximation thereof). Finally, and most crucially, I ask God to hold close the person's family and friends, both present and absent, as they mourn the departed in the weeks, months and years to come. Amen.

The handy-dandy file on my phone also includes a prayer for myself, which I recite on the way to a call-out, to be of good service to the people I will encounter. There are prayers for the death of a child or newborn, Jewish, Hindu and Muslim prayers, the words to "Amazing Grace" (you never know), and a lovely poem entitled "We Remember Them." My favorite entry is a very lengthy Buddhist prayer, which begins with the oft-repeated exclamation "Oh great, compassionate Buddha!!!" That's three, count 'em, three exclamation marks at each refrain. I look forward to reciting it, or rather, exclaiming it, when the time comes.

My Prayer Resource Guide, in addition to the first-rate training I underwent at Academy, helps counter "impostor syndrome." Like putting on the uniform, knowing I've got a dozen readings accessible at the flick of a finger gives me the courage and confidence I need to serve as a Law Enforcement Chaplain.

**KathRyn**— This was given to me by a fellow grieving parent when I was a young mom and my son Kai died when he was 10. I have always found it comforting:

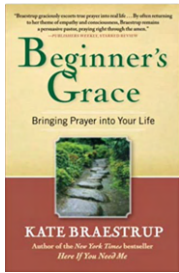
Death is nothing at all.  
 I have only slipped away to the next room.  
 I am I and you are you.  
 Whatever we were to each other, That, we still are.  
 Call me by my old familiar name.  
 Speak to me in the easy way which you always used.  
 Put no difference into your tone.  
 Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.  
 Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed together.  
 Play, smile, think of me. Pray for me.  
 Let my name be ever the household word that it always was.  
 Let it be spoken without effect. Without the trace of a shadow on it.  
 Life means all that it ever meant.  
 It is the same that it ever was.  
 There is absolute unbroken continuity.  
 Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?  
 I am but waiting for you.  
 For an interval. Somewhere. Very near. Just around the corner.  
 All is well.

—Canon Henry Scott-Holland, 1847-1918, Canon of St Paul's Cathedral





## *Beginner's Grace: Bringing Prayer into Your Life* by Kate Braestrup Book Review by Kate Sheridan, Academy XXII



Chaplain with the Maine Warden Service, Unitarian Universalist minister raised agnostic, mother of four and widowed at age thirty-three, Kate Braestrup's life experiences inform her approach to spirituality and her numerous anecdotes. *Beginner's Grace* is loosely organized around types of prayers: mealtime and bedtime prayers, "requests, pleas and petitions," sung prayers, "lovers' prayers" and even "body prayers."

Ruminating on the power of rote prayers, she writes: "Words are made gold through the memory of all the human voices that have joined in this same utterance...until they have shed their meaning and become rhythms, notes, sonic links to a common ancestry." I thought of a call-out where the large extended family, packed into a single small bedroom, clustered around the deceased patriarch. Suddenly, amidst the wailing, I heard the first "Hail Mary, full of grace." The room stilled, the tension softened. Each subsequent verse pulsed like a heartbeat, peace falling like snow over the grieving family.

Regarding spontaneous prayer, Braestrup suggests: "Prayer was made for the human, not the human for prayer...Prayers aren't recipes or formulae. They're love poems." The author's ruminations on her chaplaincy were especially poignant. On her way to a call-out, she prays "Lord, take me where you want me to go...Tell me what you want me to say. And keep me out of your way." Towards the end of the book, she echoes our motto, *Being there*: "Be quick to substitute loving presence and humble silence whenever words might get in the way of love," she writes. Yes.

*Beginner's Grace* was reasonably well-written, but I tired of its tone and lack of structure. If I were to compare it to similar works on the same topic, I'd favor **Annie Lamott's *Help, Thanks, Wow: The Three Essential Prayers***, which reviewers describe as "A refreshingly simple approach to spiritual practice in a pint-sized reflection on prayer," and "A prayer manual for people who wouldn't be caught dead reading prayer manuals." Having read it over fifteen years ago, what I remember most is how funny it was. As Booklist notes, "With a stand-up comic's snap and pop, candid and righteous Lamott tells hilarious and wrenching tales about various predicaments that have sparked her prayers and inspired her to encourage others to pray anytime, anywhere and any way."

**James Martin's *Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone*** also merits mention. A Jesuit priest, his approach is more systematic than either Braestrup's or Lamott's. Comparing him to C.S. Lewis, Gandhi and Mother Teresa, Mary Karr describes the book as "A smart, wise, often side-splittingly funny master class in seeking God." Other reviewers write "Martin teaches that there is no wrong way to pray...that moments of pausing, listening and being grateful are all versions of prayer." I remember being deeply moved by that observation when I read the book myself, having long despaired of my inability to pray "properly." Suddenly I saw I'd been praying all along—that I can, and do pray, while pulling weeds, riding my bike, or singing.

All three books suggest prayer is not nearly so strait-laced an undertaking as we might think, that there are no "wrong" ways to pray. Thank God.

"May love and strength  
be in your hands.  
May love and courage  
be in your heart.  
May love and wisdom  
be in your mind.  
May God go with you  
and work through you  
Today and in all  
your days.  
Amen."

—Kate Braestrup (from  
*Beginner's Grace*)



Academy XXIII

In the home stretch: Chaplain candidates will begin shadowing commissioned chaplains in May



L to R (front row): Rita, Carol, Terri  
L to R (back row) Susie, Justin, Pam, Gary, LT. Brenda Herrington, Jeanette, Dennis, Meghan, Gail, Mike



Director of EMT Training Art Hsieh lectures to the class.



Sheriff's Deputy Travis Perkins presents on the duty life of a deputy to the class and later shows off his cool cruiser.



Commissioned chaplain Gary Passarino and others volunteered in training role plays with the help of uber-Tour de Fuzz coordinator, Windsor Town Councilmember & SRPD Officer Tanya Potter. LECS chaplains also assisted in role plays for EMT trainees at the Public Safety Training Center.



RP Deputy Chief and new LECS Board member Kevin Kilgore drops in on the class. (Ollie photobombs the pic)



LECS in the field

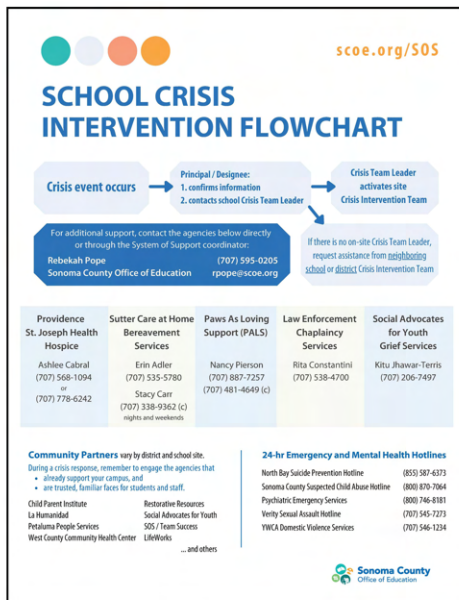
A chat with Chaplain Lynnette Casey, new LECS School Crisis Intervention Team coordinator

Lynnette has worked in public schools in a variety of roles for 16+ years and currently serves as health tech at Piner High School. When the SCIT coordinator role was vacated by retiring Heidi Fortcamp, Rita asked if Lynnette might be interested and Lynnette happily accepted. "Being in a school setting comes naturally to me," she says. "I like having contact with the kids; we relate easily and—bonus points—they keep me young!" The newly-formed SCIT members are KathRyn Barry, Jessica Hernandez-Gerard, Judith Mattingly, Pam Taylor, and Bob Williams.

Our LECS ongoing procedure: If you are on a call-out and are made aware of a child or youth who has been impacted by the incident, try to discreetly ascertain the name and age of the child and forward the information to Lynnette by email as soon as possible: [schoolcrisiscoordinator@sonomacountychaplains.org](mailto:schoolcrisiscoordinator@sonomacountychaplains.org). Lynnette will then contact the Support Coordinator at Sonoma County Office of Education.



Chaplain Lynnette Casey  
Academy XXII

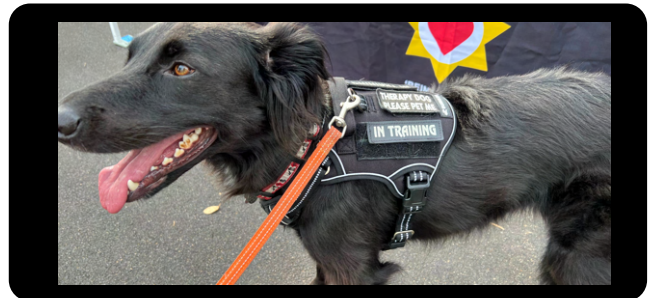
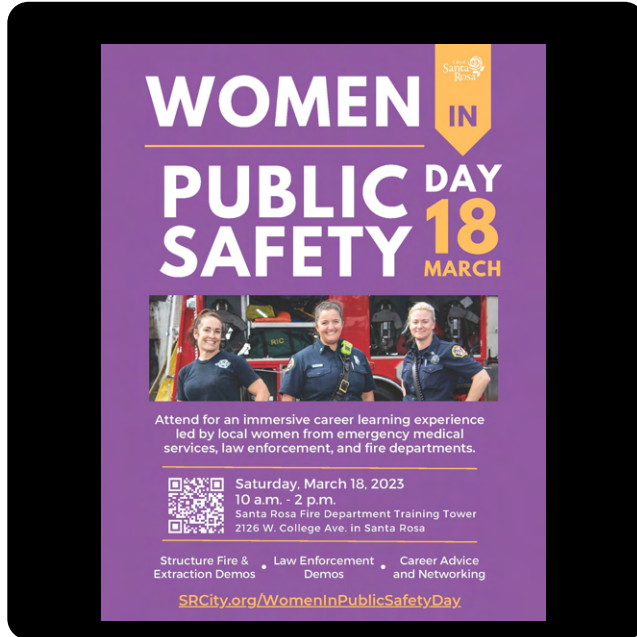


The first call-out for the newly-formed SCI team was the student death aftermath at Montgomery High School in March, a real test of compassion and teamwork.





# Women in Public Service Day



Chaplains Constantini (E.D.), Heinzl, Hernandez, Williams, Sheridan, & Bressick (not pictured) staffed a booth at the WPSD event. Demonstrations of first-responders' derring-do and law enforcement agencies recruiting for more women in public safety jobs highlighted the day. We were also happy to meet up with dispatch supervisor Jasmine Mitchell at the REDCOM booth.

Santa Rosa Fire Department Training Tower, March 18, 2023



LECS in the field

Old Courthouse  
Square, Santa Rosa

April 2, 2023

## SRPD Springtime Event



Sunday, April 2 found Old Courthouse Square in downtown Santa Rosa packed with children and their parents for a Special Spring Event hosted by Santa Rosa PD, Santa Rosa Fire, and Sonoma County Regional Parks. The biggest celebrity at the event was, of course, the Easter Bunny! Along with other public agencies, Chaplain Susan Strong and I ventured over to represent LECS. We met literally every child on site as we gave away candy and LECS stickers. We lasted for the duration of the two hour event until our candy ran out.

We spoke with many adults who asked questions about the Chaplaincy and what a Chaplain is and does. A fun day for everyone, although the wind was a bit challenging as it tried numerous times to carry our canopy away.

These events are fun and a great way to do something not quite as intense as our usual duty. And it is important that we do our best to put the Chaplaincy in the public eye. It is my hope we will do many more of these events and enjoy the interaction and public education of who we are and what we do.

—Bob Williams, Chaplain (Academy XXII)



LECS bi-monthly social gathering

Quincy's Pub & Cafe Rohnert Park

March 2, 2023

# I Karaoke



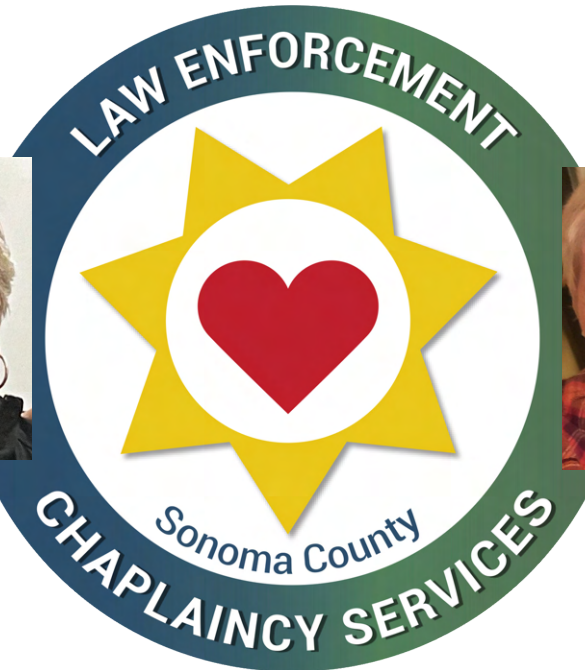
At the LECS social gathering last month, organized by Ve Hsieh, chaplains rocked to the musical stylings of **Harry "Styles" Hollingshead** at Quincy's Pub. Chaplains Leslie Warren, Ve Hsieh and Gloria Morrison (not pictured) also performed, vowing to form *The Chaplainettes* as Harry's backup Girl Group

## Milestones

Jan Varfolomeff and Eva Wolverton retired from the Chaplaincy in March.



Jan Varfolomeff  
Academy XVII



Eva Wolverton  
Academy XVIII

*Jan and Eva: Thank you for your service,  
and Happy Trails to you!*





### July preview: Self Care & Sustenance

"Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you."  
—Anne Lamott

The July issue takes a deeper dive into chaplain self-care, beyond the pop-culture *cure-du-jour*. What works to sustain and energize you in your role as a chaplain? What do you wish would work better?

Please give some thought to these questions and send us your responses and/or suggestions by May 12 to: [inese@sonic.net](mailto:inese@sonic.net) (You don't have to set an alarm: I'll send a reminder in a couple of weeks 😊)

"May I love more.  
May I be more present with those I love.  
And may I lift up the moment before me with tender hands and an awake and available heart."

—Sarah Blondin

### A Thanks and An Invitation

Many thanks to those of you who responded to our prayer request and to those who have offered terrific topics for future issues. Kate and Bob, thanks for your report and reviews appearing in this issue.

For this inaugural year, the newsletter will be published quarterly. The next issue is slated for mid July, and we're open to your comments, kudos, criticisms, and content ideas.

As you get a sense of the tone and feel of this newsletter, we hope you will consider offering some ideas or writing content yourself: perhaps a review of a book or article relevant to our work...or something meaningful to you? Topics you find pertinent?

All ideas are welcome. Call me and let's discuss!

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