

Decluttering - Do your spiritual practices bring you joy?

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Like anything, the spiritual life can become stale or predictable, and cease to bring the joy that Jesus came to give (John 10:10).

Unless you've been living in a monastic community, I'm sure you would be at least minimally aware of the Marie Kondo approach to 'decluttering'. In previewing a "Life Matters" (Radio National) segment on the phenomenon earlier this year, journalist Fran Kelly said, "My socks don't give me joy." She was referring to Kondo's injunction that in reviewing your possessions, you must remove everything except that which is useful or gives you joy. As her website proclaims, "Marie is a renowned tidying expert, helping people around the world to transform their cluttered homes into spaces of serenity and inspiration."

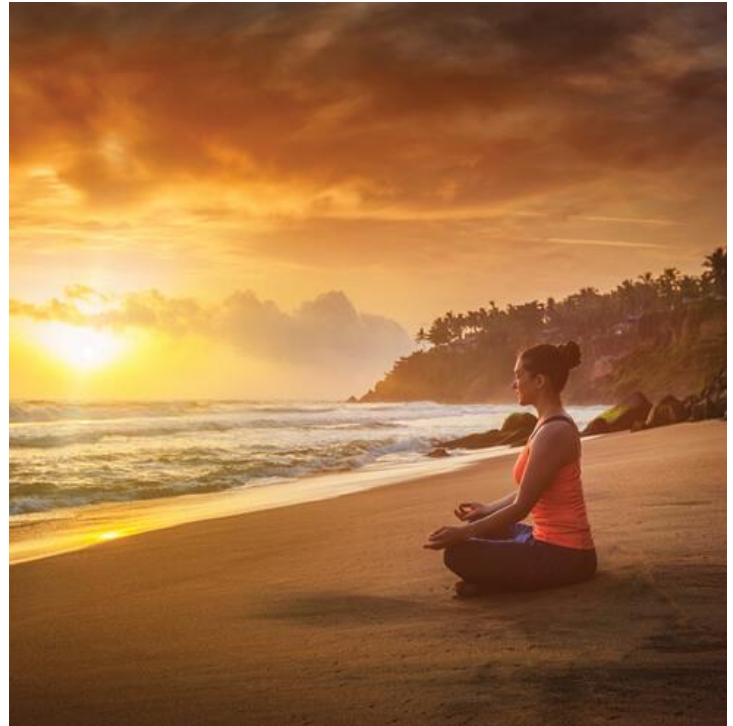


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The Kondo method – or mission – could be summarised as, “Keep only those things that speak to the heart, and discard items that no longer spark joy. Thank them for their service – then let them go.”

I think one of the aspects of 'decluttering' that appeals to many is instant gratification. So much of what we do requires patience and long term vision. If you tidy a drawer, the drawer's tidy!

However, the things that really make a difference do take time, and benefit from consistent effort and a committed approach. Think exercise (must I?), paying off a mortgage, learning a new skill, even maintaining a friendship.

Almost a year ago, I stopped working full-time. The routines that had sustained my life had to be reconsidered. In fact, my whole life had to be reconsidered – and this task continues.

Since I had worked for the Church, the line between my 'work-life' and my 'life-life' was blurred – happily so. My work included planning, participating in and reporting on liturgies and other diocesan events. This is no longer required and I participate on my own terms.

In taking the opportunity presented to declutter my home, I have also been reflecting that the spiritual life can use some 'decluttering' from time to time.

Practices that once sustained – or were simply not optional – may have served their purpose. Other opportunities may present themselves and I believe it's good to be open to them.

Meditation has been part of many faith traditions for...well, forever. Whether one practices meditation from a religious or broader perspective, it offers benefits in terms of well-being, taking time out from a busy schedule, promoting relaxation and effective sleep and mindfulness.

Mindfulness has been a 'buzz word' for some time and the practice – or at least talking about it – shows no sign of waning! Like so many spiritual practices, it fits well within the Christian tradition. How often does Jesus take himself away from his disciples, to a quiet place, to pray? It seems to me that mindfulness – a state in which one is calm, heedful and focused – is a prerequisite for prayer.

Spiritual reading is a practice worthy of consideration.

To me, spiritual reading occurs when what you read – fact or fiction, novel, poetry, short story or scripture (not only Christian scripture) – lifts, encourages, challenges, stirs you – and it may well offer respite from whatever else is happening in your world. That could be the biggest blessing!

I have something of an obsession with books about writing – and I write a lot – and books about walking – and I walk a lot! My walking practice includes not carrying a phone and not wearing a watch. I know how long my regular routes take and I don't want to be disturbed by calls or text messages. Some of my best ideas land while walking!

When you drive, you sometimes have that odd experience of thinking, for example, 'I obviously drove over the bridge because here I am ten kilometres south, but I have no memory of doing so.' That can be disconcerting. However, I find it doesn't happen while walking. There seems to be something about a regular route (or routes) at a regular pace that incites the required degree of attention to the path and enough mindfulness to reflect fruitfully.

My latest spiritual practice - although not all would see it that way - is swimming. The black line concentrates the mind wonderfully and I was pleasantly surprised to find that the local pool's a judgement-free zone. I tell my friends I have no style and no speed but I love being immersed in the cool. Often, I have the pool to myself. I think air-conditioning and backyard pools have reduced the appeal of the town's pool. Like women in the church, it's a vastly under-utilised resource!

I've barely scratched the surface of the vast array of spiritual practices available and have deliberately focused on those that are not immediately apparent. Cycling and singing, painting, pottery and poetry, dancing and drama offer more possibilities.

What brings you joy?

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