



# LUKENOTES

SAINT LUKE INSTITUTE INC. • 8901 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVENUE • SILVER SPRING MD 20903

LUKENOTES is a bi-monthly publication of Saint Luke Institute • Tel. (301)445-7970 • [lukenotes@sl.org](mailto:lukenotes@sl.org) • [www.sli.org](http://www.sli.org)

"Icon of St. Luke" - Copyright© 1985 by Monastery Icons

## CASE STUDY

### "Sister Mary" • Managing Anger

*Lynn M. Levo, CSJ. Ph.D. is currently the Director of Education and Editor of Lukenotes at Saint Luke Institute.*

Sr. Mary serves on her Provincial Leadership Team as the Assistant Provincial, with the major responsibility for ministry and placement. She had a lot of experience working with others in her former position as an administrator and the team believed that her experience would make her the best team member to work with the sisters regarding ministry. Sr. Mary has been in the position for about eighteen months.

Sr. Mary is struggling in this liaison role and has decided to talk about her experience with the other members of the team. She realizes that lately she is having difficulty sleeping, is experiencing some digestive difficulties and is feeling angry more often than not, sometimes about inconsequential issues. Sr. Mary has struggled with anger in the past and realizes that her physical symptoms are related to her anger. She does not want to fall back into old patterns.

Prior to talking with the team, Sr. Mary decided to take some time to examine a couple of recent experiences in order to understand what is happening, what her anger is about and her responses. She remembered being very angry last week after she met Sr. Ellen at a community meeting and Sr. Ellen informed her that she had left her ministry position the week before. Sr. Mary was surprised and asked to see Sr. Ellen. When Sr. Ellen came in, she related, "I just cannot work any longer in an institution that is so insensitive to its employees." Sr. Mary realized that she was becoming angry and was even struggling to listen to Sr. Ellen because of her personal belief that you do not leave your ministry position until you have another one in place.

In addition, Sr. Mary had helped to write a clear policy and guidelines about changing ministries that Sr. Ellen seems to have ignored. The guidelines clearly state, for example, that changes in ministry include consultation with the liaison for ministry prior to leaving a position. Sr. Mary also realized that she was angry because Sr. Ellen is one of the younger members of the community, someone who is counted on to bring in a stipend or salary, and she appears insensitive to the community's financial needs. Sr. Mary is well aware that many older women in the community continue to minister, some even who need to retire. Seeing a younger member not working is "pushing her anger button." Finally, when Sr. Mary heard herself saying, "it must be nice to have free time to do what you want," she realized her anger was

related to the fact that she has been overworking of late, attending lots of meetings and finding little time for herself. In essence, her life was out of balance.

Sr. Mary recalled a second incident that she responded to angrily that involved the other team members and some work being done by a company printing some timely materials for the community. She was the person responsible for the project and had worked very hard to meet the deadlines necessary for the project to be completed on time. There was some tension between herself and another team member because she had set early deadlines for them in order to have time to proof read and edit the materials. She recalls being particularly frustrated when the team member who questioned deadlines handed in her materials late, resulting in little time to proof read the section prior to sending the materials to the printer. When the materials were delivered to Sr. Mary from the printer, she discovered that the printer had not used the paper they had selected and that there was a typo in the materials that had arrived late. Sr. Mary was having a hard time celebrating the completion of this task because of her anger about the errors.

### **Anger Triggers**

By taking some time to review these two recent experiences, Sr. Mary was able to be more aware of her anger and to remember what she had learned about what is likely to cause or trigger in her an angry response.

Both of these examples helped Sr. Mary to recall major anger triggers: **expectations and cognitive distortions**. Mary was reminded that unmet expectations often lead to anger and that all persons, even members of the same community, may not share the same expectations. Expectations of herself (doing error free work), as well as those of others (expecting Sr. Ellen to do her part by earning a salary and to follow the rules; expecting the printer to keep his agreement and the team member to meet the deadline) are responsible for her anger. In addition, she realized that by **labeling** Sr. Ellen as insensitive, this common cognitive distortion permits her to feel superior and contributes to feeling anger. In addition, letting one typo disqualify all the good work that she and the others had done is a form of **magnification**, another common distortion that is likely to lead to anger.

With a bit more reflection, Sr. Mary was able to name that both her lack of sleep and the lack of balance in her life are clearly two anger intensifiers, factors that increase her sensitivity and are likely to lead to increased or even pervasive anger.

### **Managing Anger**

By paying attention to her anger and examining these two recent experiences, Sr. Mary was able to constructively deal with her anger. First, she decided to evaluate her expectations of self and others to determine if they were realistic and reasonable. She is well aware that unrealistic expectations set her up for disappointments and anger while realistic expectations are more likely to be met and anger will not be triggered. She realizes that her thinking (shoulds, magnifying events or perfectionistic thinking) often contributes to her being angry. Monitoring and altering her thinking will be big helps in reducing the amount of anger that she feels.

In addition, Sr. Mary also noticed that at times, unrealistic expectations of others are difficult to cope with and can trigger an angry response. In these instances, she needs to be better able to negotiate with others what is mutually agreeable and to assert herself when necessary.

Sr. Mary also needs to make better choices regarding work and leisure. Being overextended and undernourished are contributing to a pervasive irritability and only she can make the necessary adjustments.

By slowing down and examining recent events, Sr. Mary honored her anger, felt her anger, thought about and talked about her anger and decided upon some appropriate action. She put into practice a very constructive way of dealing with anger: **Feel -Think-Talk-Act**.

***LUKENOTES is a bimonthly publication of Saint Luke Institute. Permission to use these materials must be requested in writing by contacting [Lukenotes@sli.org](mailto:Lukenotes@sli.org).***

Telephone (301) 422-5499 • Fax (301) 422-5519 • [www.sli.org](http://www.sli.org)

Copyright © 2008 Saint Luke Institute, Inc. All rights reserved.