

---

# FROM THE CHAPLAINCY

---



## Dear Woodrose Parents

Like most people in the world, we welcome the New Year with joyful hope. We want to make very good use of the year 2018 because it is God's gift to us. It is a wonderful time for us to love and serve the Lord by loving and serving those whom God has placed around us, beginning with our family, then our colleagues at work, and then our friends and acquaintances.

A few days ago, I read an article that caught my attention. It reminded me of a New Year tradition in Naples, Italy which consisted in throwing away personal belongings and house items including furniture and appliances that are old and not being used anymore. On the morning of January 1, one could find a bed, a stove, an aircon unit, a computer, tables, chairs, etc. littered on the streets on Naples. There is indeed a need to declutter not only our homes but also our lives. Below is an excerpt of the article I read in Catholic Exchange written by Jeannie Ewing about simplifying our life, so appropriate for the year that is just beginning.

## Three Simple Ways to Declutter Your Life

by JEANNIE EWING

We all want peace in our lives, yet it seems to be the single most elusive fruit of the Holy Spirit we possess. We never seem to get enough of understanding practical steps toward that inner calm that we chase but never capture.

Like most everyone, I, too, struggle with maintaining that deep and abiding serenity promised by God, the kind that surpasses all human understanding. There have been fleeting moments in my life where God has graced me with such a gift, but they are infrequent. Most of the time, I am trying to keep up with the rat race of daily life, and at the end of the day, my emotional and spiritual reserve is nil.



It seems that the largest obstacle to acquiring spiritual tranquility is related to all of the clutter we carry. Clutter weighs us down. It distracts us. It depletes us. And it becomes discouraging. However, most of us become accustomed to the burdens we carry. Rather than feeling contempt for our excess, we become comfortable with what has become familiar. We do not rid ourselves of what clamors within, of what we wrestle with. Instead, it becomes a part of us — a sick, diseased extension of ourselves.

**“...He is not the God of disorder but of peace.” (1 Corinthians 14:33)**

But God is not a God of disorder. Scripture is very clear about God’s orderly and patterned nature. If I ever need to realign myself with this truth, I simply take a walk outside and take note of the beautiful symmetry that surrounds me: the patterns of leaves and flowers, shapes of trees, rhythm of night and day. It doesn’t take long for the reality to be absorbed, and once again, I return to that inner sanctuary of my heart to question why and what needs to

change.

This new calendar year always presents us with fresh opportunities to amend our lives. Of course, we can and should spiritually evolve throughout the year. But we tend to take a deeper look at

ourselves, a more honest glance at our mistakes and patterns of behavior that may have become sinful, and thus new desire and drive to become something greater is born.

Here are three suggestions I have — advice I myself will take — to declutter your life this year. Each focuses on one aspect of your identity: spiritual, emotional, and physical clutter. Consider each as you browse through closets, plan for spring cleaning the curtains and freshening up your home, or make good on your gym membership. When the soul is properly aligned with order rather than chaos, then all the visible excess will eventually vanish.

## Simplify Your Life

Start small. Begin by assessing your home and areas where too much “stuff” has invaded your living space. Pick one spot to start organizing. For me, this tends to be my bookshelves and seasonal decor. Take one drawer, closet, or shelf at a time, and begin sifting through your items. Ask yourself if this is something you really love, need, or have justifiable reason to keep.

What you hold may have sentimental value to you, because your grandfather gave it to you. But do you have other items in your home that mean more to you from your grandfather? Sentimentality is not justification for retaining your junk. Is this a useful item? Something you use often? A particularly thoughtful or important gift from someone? The point is to take time with each item and consider why you have kept it.

The general rule for decluttering is to get rid of 75% of what you own in each category. It may seem impossible or at the very least unreasonable, but it's a good goal for which to strive.



You may find that once your living space becomes less crowded, overstuffed, and messy, that peace for which you long will settle upon your soul and give you greater motivation to continue. The key to simplification is to maintain what you have rather than keep rotating through the latest and greatest, whatever that may be this year.

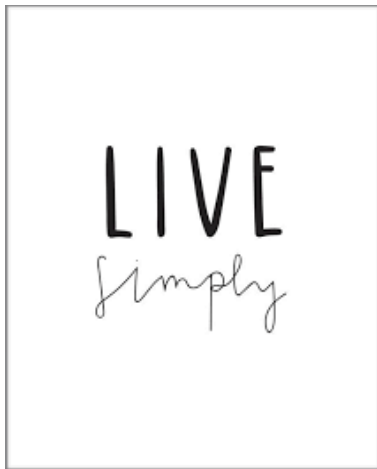
## Clean Up Your Digital Devices

If there's something I radically disdain, it is digital clutter. But as a writer, I tend to accumulate a lot of this: hundreds of emails to sift through, a melange of social media accounts, memes, and updates to keep up with, and generally a lot of junk files saved to my laptop or cloud. This is the

area that has become the most oppressive and distracting aspect of my life to date, and I have a gut feeling that many others are struggling similarly.

The tough aspect of this suggestion is really this: ditch at least three-fourths (keeping to that 75% rule) of your digital excess. Think about what is really meaningful to you and whether or not social media sites, like Facebook or Instagram, honestly help you achieve it. These can be the bane of daily living, or they can be the boon of moderation. Either way, take some time to carefully discern proper, healthy use of your digital devices.

In my home, we have two laptops, one television, one tablet, and two smartphones. Ben and I each have a computer and phone for our respective work, but we all share the rest among our family members. And we only have the television on when we engage in our weekly family movie night, complete with popcorn and hot chocolate, or when Ben and I are supervising what the girls watch.



This year, take one aspect of your digital life and analyze it. Start with the junk files on your computer. Yes, it is tedious, but go through them all and just get rid of what you don't need, what's outdated, and what you never use. Then, take each social media account and take a thirty day hiatus, one at a time. If you don't end up missing anything, delete it or consider deactivating for a period of time.

New scientific research suggests that constant streaming of online gaming, social media scrolling, and internet searches are actually changing the way our brains function. We are no longer a people

capable of engaging in deep work. Instead, we are enslaved to the instant gratification of fast-paced downloads, videos, and short articles. That's definitely food for thought.

## Replace Time Online with Prayer

Maybe you don't spend an inordinate amount of time on the internet, but rather, your particular vice is shopping or indulging in dystopian post-apocalyptic novels. Maybe you're a work-a-holic (like many are today). No matter, replace whatever is a "time suck" in your life with something that is far more important: time spent with God.

It's interesting to note how lonely people are these days. Yet we are far more "connected" than ever before in history. The issue is that we are constantly plugged in to something, constantly moving or doing something, and we have neglected the very essence of what feeds our souls and re-energizes us: time spent in solitude with God.

I saved this suggestion for last, because it is the one point I pray you will remember out of everything else written here. It has unfortunately become a cliché to say, "Spend more time in

prayer,” and despite our best laid plans, we tend to fall short time and again in this area of self-improvement.

Don't just add time to pray. Take something else away! We are all given the same amount of time every day, and the key is not to waste the time we have. I have three little girls, all at home, and I'm the primary caregiver for our middle daughter, Sarah, who has a rare disease. But prayer is integral to my daily life. It is something I do not neglect, regardless of what else might need to be set aside for the day.

And when you enter into that sacred space that silence and solitude affords you, God will grant you kairos time – His time – so that you can accomplish far more than you realize.

Here's a final thought from St. Peter Canisius: *“If you have too much to do, with God's help you will find time to do it all.”* Indeed. Give him what little you have, and He will multiply your efforts beyond human comprehension.

If you give to God what belongs to Him anyway – your time, your life, your day – you will find your heart residing in a more homeostatic state of peace.

