

# Quick Interview



Photo by the Rev. Doug Earle.

**The Rev. Mary C. Earle** has authored six books, two in collaboration with her friend Sylvia Maddox. Her latest is *Days of Grace: Meditations and Practices for Living with Illness*. Earle writes from her experience of living with chronic pancreatitis for the last 13 years. The little book (“I wanted it to be something people can put in their purse or take with them to treatments,” says Earle) is a series of 30 meditations based on the psalms, each with a prayer and a spiritual practice suggestion. One need not be ill to benefit from it.

In her retirement, Earle is associated with St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, San Antonio, and author-in-residence at the Work+Shop, a ministry of St. Mark’s.

Reflections spent a few minutes with Mary Earle earlier this month discussing her life and her work.

**R:Your illness came on suddenly and unexpectedly. How did it disrupt your life?**

ME: One day I was well, and the next day I was in the Emergency Room. Now the disease has become a permanent visitor. In 2004 I was told I had to retire. Since then I have been learning how to live with it.

**R: So, the disease has curtailed your professional life as a priest.**

ME: At first I thought of it in that way. But I have come to realize that this is how I am to live out my vocation. Because the medical condition created limitations, I began to write more. Now I see that as how I do evangelism. My gift of writing is my distinctive way of living my vocation. And I am grateful to the clergy and the community of St. Mark’s who have supported this expression of priestly vocation.

**R:What is the hardest part of living with a chronic illness?**

ME: One has to constantly be learning a new equilibrium; today I can do a certain thing, tomorrow maybe not. I have to be in an ongoing mode of discernment. I cannot schedule things too far out – something I re-learn about once a month when I find myself overcommitted again. The hardest part is being willing to let go of what you think you can accomplish; you have to hold it lightly.

**R:And the blessing in all of this?**

ME: Living with illness presents us with the core of what it is to live in the spiritual way – one day at a time and always dependent on God’s grace. When doctors told me I had to retire in 2004, it was shortly after our oldest son had surgery for brain cancer. Through my illness and his, I learned there is a parallel world out there of people who are living with chronic illness and those who love and support them.

Mary Earle’s new book, *Days of Grace: Meditations and Practices for Living with Illness* is available from Viva Bookstore ([www.vivabooks.booksense.com](http://www.vivabooks.booksense.com) or phone 210-826-1143) in San Antonio as well as at other book dealers including online at Amazon.com. *Days of Grace* is also available as an MP3 audio file and an audio CD.

