These reflections were developed by two Secular Franciscans in the Atlantic area of the Regional Fraternity of Eastern Canada, Doug Hagen and Sherrill Guimond. In a shorter form, they were presented at an Area meeting, and then, these texts became the basis for one of the retreats hosted by St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity, Cornwall, PEI.

We are using the version of the Beatitudes found in Matt 5:1-12.

**Sixth Beatitude – Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

Those who are pure of heart are single-hearted, undivided in their loyalties, without fakery or pretense. They put on the mind and heart of God, looking on others with the eyes of Jesus, accepting them as brothers and sisters, persons of incomparable inner beauty and worth. The pure of heart know what is really important - closeness to the Lord who alone can satisfy their inner longings for love and understanding. The pure of heart will not allow anything - wealth, fame, various pastimes, job, academic achievement, or the opinion of others - sway them from what is really important, seeing God in others and responding to them as other Christs.

St. Francis tells us in his Letter to the Faithful: “…. love God, therefore, and adore Him with a pure heart and a pure mind, because He Who seeks this above all things has said: True adorers adore the Father in Spirit and Truth.”

Sister Helen Swift tells us in her book, “How Blest You Are” that In ordinary conversation when we say a substance is pure, we mean that it is everything it is meant to be. Absent are other substances that might lessen its quality. Pure implies wholesomeness not polluted by any harmful or even inferior ingredient. The message of Jesus is that it tells us that our hearts were made for God. It has a single purpose, one desire. It is a heart uncluttered with anything that can lead it away from God. Jesus says that all those with God-centered hearts will see God. Sister Helen tells us that we think of the heart as the source of human emotions, but the Jews thought of the heart as the source of life, the centre of thought and will. It is the heart that turns to God in repentance. It is the heart that loves God above all things; that longs for his will to be done.

Becoming God-centered depends first of all on being attentive to the words of God. The heart which has heard God’s Word keeps the focus on God and refuses entry to anything that would turn it aside.(pg. 61)

Sister Swift also tells us that the pure of heart pray to know God’s will so that they may faithfully follow it. Discerning God’s will is a daily obligation. In order to be in tune with God’s will we need daily prayer and an awareness of what is happening in our own heart. We must listen in prayer. We must not use the whole time of prayer chattering to God, but give God a chance to reveal himself to us. We must have a listening heart and be willing to wait. If we listen and wait we will recognize God in the desires he places in our hearts, in the circumstances we find in our lives, in the voices of other people, in the urgings to help another, in the movement toward greater truth, love and reconciliation. Each choice is one small step toward God. The person focused on God is ready to hear and reply. (pg. 62-63)

Jesus promised that those who are pure of heart will see God. Because of the Spirit within us, we can see God and his activity in the people around us. Some people look at their neighbour and see faults, defects and evil. The pure of heart see the goodness of God reflected in those around them. As one lives out this Beatitude, God becomes visible in all his creation. (pg. 65)

So what is a pure heart? It is a heart free of possessiveness, a heart able to mourn, a heart that thirsts for what is right, a heart that is merciful, a heart that doesn't look at people merely as bodies or labels or objects to be used. A pure heart reaches out to embrace every person and every creature it encounters because a pure heart sees the handiwork of the Creator in everything. To see God’s hand in everything – we need to be at peace with all creation. Hebrews 12:14 tells us, “pursue peace with everyone and the holiness, without which, no one will see the Lord.”

Jean Vanier in his book “Living Gently in a Violent World”, speaks about possessing a pure heart in this way:….”maybe we will change the world if we are happy. Maybe what we need most is to rejoice and to celebrate with the weak and the vulnerable. Maybe the most important thing is to learn how to build communities of celebration. Maybe the world will be transformed when we learn to have fun together. I don’t mean to suggest that we don’t talk about serious things. But maybe what our world needs more than anything is communities where we celebrate life together and become a sign of hope for our world.”

(taken from an on-line sermon dated Nov.20, 2011, given by Rev. Dr. Thomas Aldworth at the Morgan Baptist Church)

Francis lived this Beatitude “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”. His only desire was to say “'Our Father who art in Heaven …” and the only thing that occupied Francis' heart was doing God's will.

Fr. Fernanda Ventura in his dossier on “Evangelized to Evangelize” writes about how the heart that seeks to adjust its pace to the rhythm of God’s heart will find its balance and will be able to recover its original purity. Those who “see God” are really those who are able to see the other… because God is not in any way in the distant heaven, but in the here and now.

David N. MacNaughton, in his book “The Beatitudes”, tells us that only as wickedness, hatred, vengeance and prejudice are removed from the human heart and replaced with unselfishness, love, trust and respect, can we ever hope to see God and live in peace. A person who is pure in heart manifests three characteristics: sincerity, simplicity and surrender. Sincere people are honest and true in their actions. A person pure in heart is simple in their approach and attitude and finally, the person pure in heart surrenders themselves to Jesus Christ and makes Jesus’ will their own. (pg.44-45)

For Jesus, reference to the heart was not the body organ, but your truest self. The heart is the part of you that feels, delights, grieves, and desires. The heart is

our imagination, the place inside where we conceive, the place where we dream. The heart is the sphere where we meet God, or avoid meeting God. The pure heart is a heart that has been emptied of what is unclean and purged of what no longer belongs.

Thomas Merton wrote that “purity of heart” …means the renunciation of all deluded images of ourselves, all exaggerated estimates of our own capacities, in

order to obey God’s will as it comes to us in the difficult demands of life in its exacting truth. (Contemplative Prayer – pg. 68)

A pure heart is a heart free of possessiveness, a heart capable of mourning, a heart that thirsts for what is right, a merciful heart, a loving heart, an undivided heart. Opposing the purity of heart is lust of any kind – for wealth, for recognition, for power, for vengeance, for sexual access to others – whether indulged through action or imagination. Purification of the heart is the endless struggle of seeking a more God-centered life. It is the minute to minute discipline of trying to be so aware of God’s presence that the heart has no space for our own worries, ambitions, or attention to appearances. Prayer is essential to this endeavor. And it includes all we do in order to turn our attention toward God. A pure heart is a heart full of compassion for the whole of created nature….a heart which burns for all creation, for the birds, for the beasts, for every creature.

The stories of the Desert Fathers are full of accounts of monks whose hardest combat was to overcome the hardness of heart that led them to judge and condemn others. There is the story of two Egyptian monks who happened to come upon a woman stranded on one side of a stream too deep for her to cross. One of the monks picked her up and carried her safely to the other side - an action that scandalized the other monk. Finally, after walking a long distance in silence, he angrily chastised his brother for breaking the vow of chastity by touching a woman. The monk replied, “I carried her across the river and put her down on the other side, but you are still carrying her.”

Fr. Michael Crosby, in his text, “Spirituality of the Beatitudes”, states that the “purity of heart described in this Beatitude, seems to characterize a kind of guilelessness and a wholeheartedness. Seeing God’s face depends on a purity of heart that represents a person’s total commitment to God’s plan. This inner dedication is manifested by doing good, by showing care.” (pg. 140)

Psalm 24 links the experience of seeing God’s face with purity of heart and righteous deeds, ”and who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts”. People whose hearts are centered on God reflect openness and generosity in the way they relate to each other.

Fr. Michael Crosby in his book, “Spirituality of the Beatitudes”, tells us that the process of coming to purity of heart demands that we move beyond our surface cares to be grounded in authentic care. This invites us to begin “looking” in a new way at ourselves, at others, and at God. When we consider our own lives and the life of our society, we can easily see how little genuine care they often reflect. Do I really care? Who and what do I care about? Only when I can see my lack of care – my lack of humanity – can I begin taking the first faltering steps toward a life of care. (pg.151-152)

Ron Rolheiser also poses the question: what is purity of heart? He tells us that to be pure of heart is to relate to others and the world in a way that respects and honors the full dignity, value, and destiny of every person and everything. To be pure of heart is to see others as God sees them. Purity of heart would have us loving others with their good (and not our own) in mind. Purity of heart is purity of intention and full respect in love. (on-line article “Chastity as Purity of Heart and intention dated jan 15, 2012)