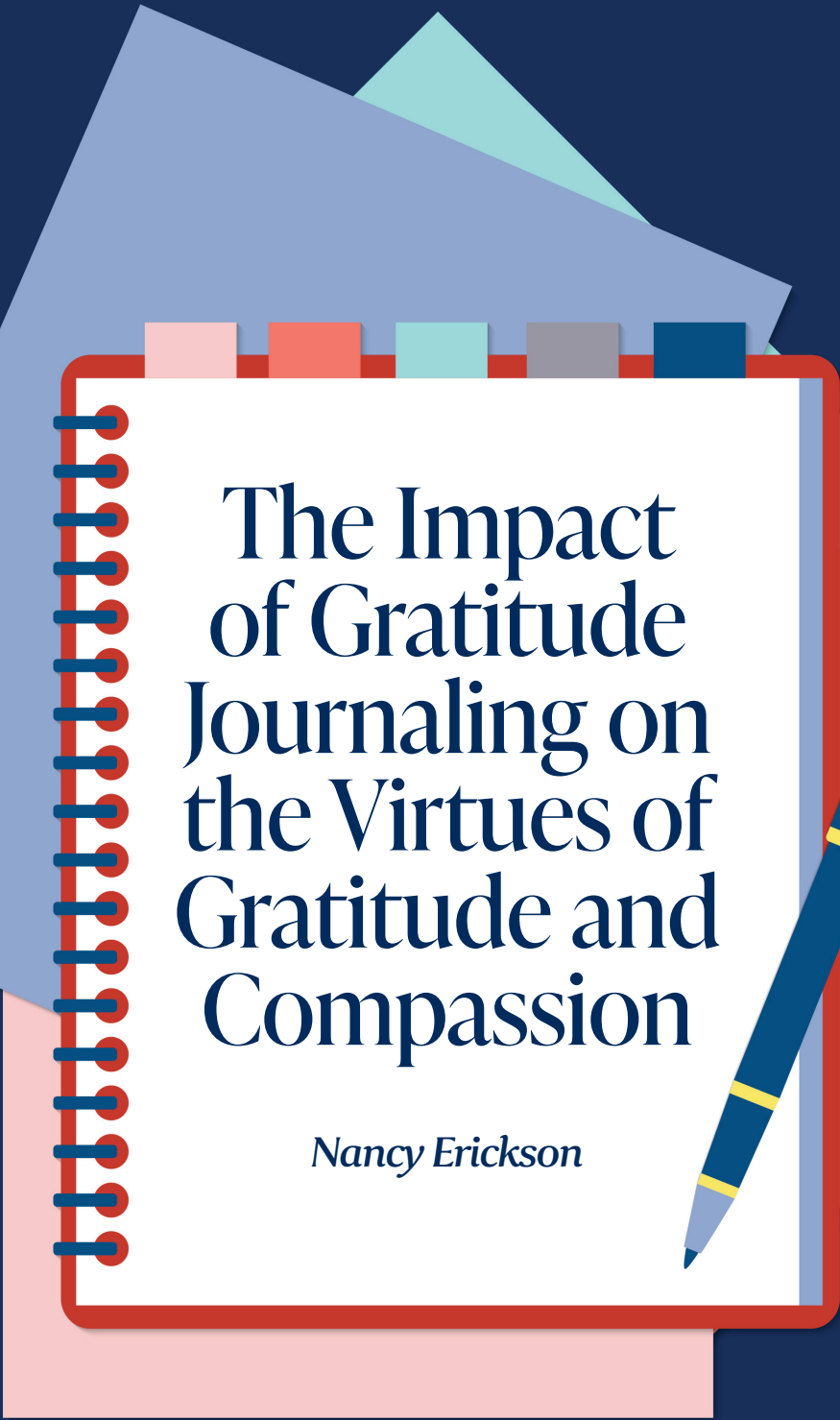




The Impact of Gratitude Journaling on the Virtues of Gratitude and Compassion

Nancy Erickson



**Saint Mary's
University**

CHARACTER *and*
VIRTUE EDUCATION

The Catalyst Grant created the opportunity to develop a gratitude journal that every student in the Graduate School of Education at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota receives as a tool to develop the lifelong practice of gratitude journaling. Evidence shows cultivating gratitude helps individuals to flourish.

The newly designed gratitude journal was also used to conduct a research study, examining if individuals experience growth in the virtues of gratitude and compassion from gratitude journaling.

Research has found that the simple act of:

Writing three things a person is grateful for in their life, can lead to a positive change. A small subtle shift toward focusing on a grateful perspective can have such a powerful impact.

Gratitude Journaling:

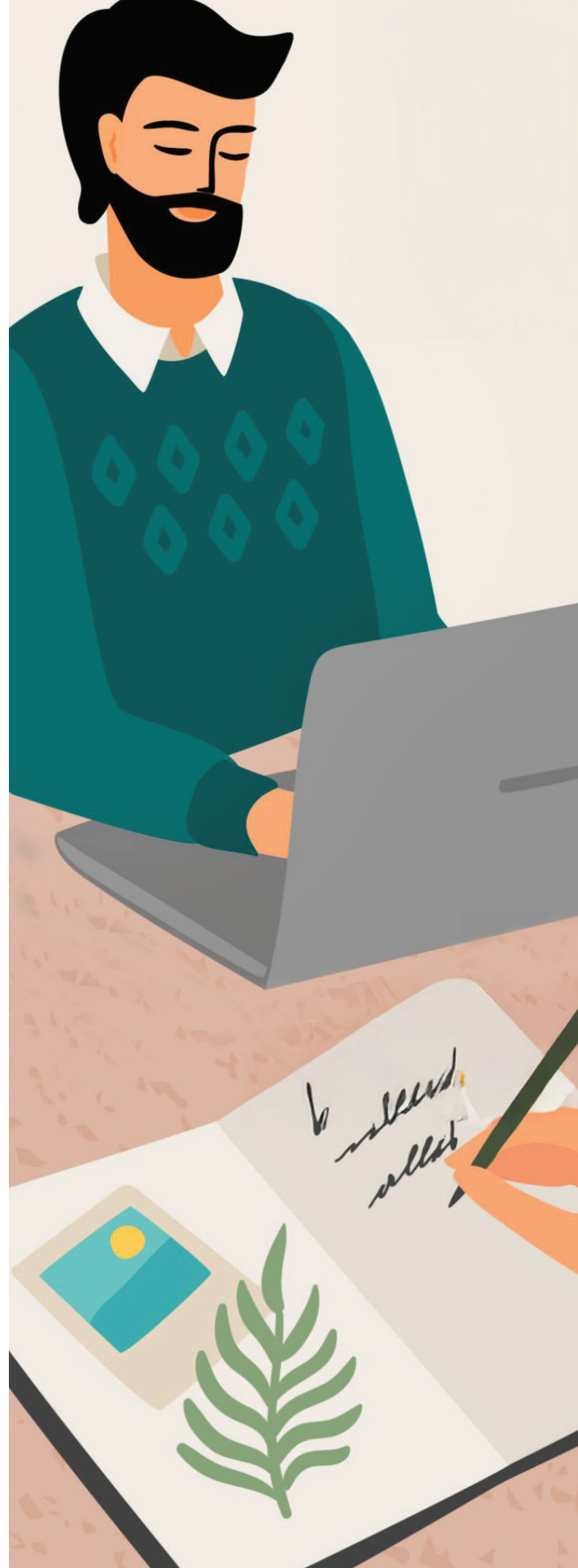
Research studies have found that journal writing specifically focusing on gratitude has a strong link to:

- Happiness
- Helps focus on what a person has and appreciate it.
- Being grateful, reflecting on positive experience, and noticing the good, unlike other journaling experiences, which might include writing about difficult experiences.

Gratitude:

Gratitude is a feeling of appreciation for what is valuable and meaningful to oneself. Gratitude allows people to discover the many blessings they have.

- Gratitude boosts self-esteem, enhances empathy, and appreciation for the benefits in one's life.





- Studies have documented a positive correlation between a grateful disposition, better physical health, and a desire to develop and strengthen social relationships.
- Gratitude matters for happiness. It makes individuals feel good but also inspires individuals to do good.
- Gratitude has been found to have a lasting positive benefit that can be cultivated and developed through intentionality and practice.

Compassion:

Compassion is recognizing others' suffering, feeling emotionally connected to it, and being motivated to act and help.

- Compassionate behaviors have been found to be directly related to increased positive state of happiness, feeling socially connected, and life satisfaction.
- Compassion can be seen in infants, and the characteristic has been found in primates, suggesting that it has evolved over time and contributes to social connections.
- Like gratitude, there is evidence that compassion can be cultivated and developed through intentionality and practice.

Research Study on the connection of Gratitude and Compassion

Aristotle believed all human virtues are connected and the unity of the virtues in an individual is essential for practical wisdom. Researchers Liz Gulliford and Robert Roberts proposed grouping virtues into “unity” and “clustering” based on the commonalities they share. One group they proposed was the Virtues of Intelligent Caring: gratitude, Compassion, justice, truthfulness, generosity,

forgiveness, and humility — suggesting these virtues are interconnected, relying on and depending on each other in a person's overall character. These benevolent virtues all focus on wellbeing, caring for others and comfort and safety.

As a researcher, this sparked my interest. I felt that if this theory was proven, it could benefit education by helping develop an effective curriculum for students at all learning levels. The research study focused specifically on the connection between gratitude and compassion and whether gratitude journaling would have a positive impact on both. The results of the study did not indicate a statistically significant impact, but over 75% of participants' scores increased for gratitude and compassion at the end of the study. These positive results indicate that gratitude journaling may have a positive impact on gratitude and compassion, and there may be a connection between these two virtues.

Saint Mary's Gratitude Journal

Gratitude is all about being thankful. When someone takes the time to practice gratitude, they focus on and give importance to the good things in their lives. The goal of the journal was to incorporate gratitude into people's everyday routine.

The journal was designed simply for ease of use, but also to be something that a teacher might want to replicate and use in their classroom with their students, creating a larger movement of individuals looking at the world through a grateful lens.

The journal contains a brief description of why gratitude is important to human flourishing, along with a page of suggested writing prompts. Explaining that gratitude doesn't have to be about big things. It can be





small everyday events such as a walk, talking to a friend, a great cup of coffee, or an incredible sunset. It is about appreciation for the things around us rather than taking them for granted.

Kindness:

The journal also included a section on Acts of Kindness. Kindness is often associated with benevolent virtues. Studies have shown that individuals who perform kind acts to themselves and others also report having increased levels of happiness and feelings of connectedness. This section was also designed simply so that a teacher could replicate it in their classroom.

There are suggestions on acts of kindness one can do such as giving a compliment, sending a positive letter or text to a friend, volunteering, or simply saying something kind to oneself. There is a place to write down their acts of kindness as a reminder and enabling one to look back and reflect.

Final Thoughts:

I am so grateful the Catalyst Grant gave me an opportunity to give gratitude journals to students in the Graduate School of Education that can be used to develop their gratitude skills, a positive outlook and help them to flourish.

Positive comments from students that received a gratitude journal this year:

- “It has helped me center my mindset on school days.”
- “This is helping me be positive as I am thinking about what I will or want to write in my journal.”
- “The journal caused the first thoughts I had to be positive and thus set each day off on a good note.”



Saint Mary's
University
CHARACTER *and*
VIRTUE EDUCATION