

Prayers of the People, Community Church of Vero Beach 10-9-11
By Rev. Dr. Casey G. Baggott
Based on Matthew 22:1-14, the Wedding Feast

Receive our offering today we pray, God, given in token of our gratitude for all we call our own – our assets, our houses and our things, our family and friends, our big dreams and new ideas, and all that enriches our lives. Thank you. Let our generosity today be an indication that we acknowledge you as the first giver of all good things.

We pray that our involvement in all the busy and engaging aspects of our lives will not push from our attention your call to us – your invitation to join your eternal celebration. When we become absorbed in our work and our obligations, too busy to hear you, call to us again. Remind us that your invitation to join you is as pressing as anything else on our calendars. Teach us that when we fail to respond to your call, we are the ones who lose the joy of the gathering and the fun of the feast you offer to your people.

And help us to welcome the chance to join with others, no matter how diverse your guest list may be, in the gathering you have envisioned and planned for all your people. If there are barriers to any you've called, let us not be the cause of their construction. Instead, let us anticipate how we might offer welcome, hope, direction, and support to any and all who might want to come through your open door.

We pray for all those people, close to us or far away, who could use the good news that comes in receiving an invitation from you. For in your midst there is new hope and assurance, strengthening nourishment, and peace. We pray for anyone in need of these things.

The invitation to your great celebration is a great privilege to receive, O God. But Jesus reminded his hearers so long ago that privilege comes with responsibility. So let us take on the responsibility our invitation brings with it. Let us undertake a periodic wardrobe check, for example, assessing the way we step into your presence, and then back out into the wider world. Are we acquiring the garments that demonstrate our respect for you? Can others immediately recognize that we've been in your presence by the way we have clothed ourselves in kindness, goodness, generosity, patience, gentleness, and faithfulness? Let us be spotted as your frequent guests, O God, by our every action, our every word, our every decision and deed.

Jesus' disciples, we are told, will always be recognizable by their love. So above all else, let us wrap ourselves in a blanket of it – a full, rich, life-covering of love.

We pray these things in the name of the Son whose feast table is never emptied, never exclusive, and never without an open seat. In Jesus' own words we pray together now, saying ... *the Lord's Prayer*.