

Season of Hope



Prayers & Reflections on Aging

Little Sisters of the Poor



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Foreword

We are in the midst of a demographic revolution as the world's population rapidly ages and the very old begin to outnumber the very young. According to United Nations estimates, today there are about 600 million persons aged 60 and over worldwide. This total will double by 2025 and will reach virtually two billion by 2050.

In traditional societies, the elderly were generally supported by their children and grandchildren as their strength waned. But in many parts of the world today seniors are forced to remain in the workforce longer in order to support themselves or their families. In some cases, they find themselves isolated from younger family members who have relocated, while in others they assume care-giving and homemaking roles within their extended families. At the same time, health and social services for senior citizens are often inadequate, and professionals working in these fields commonly lack the training and the empathy necessary to understand the unique needs of the elderly population.

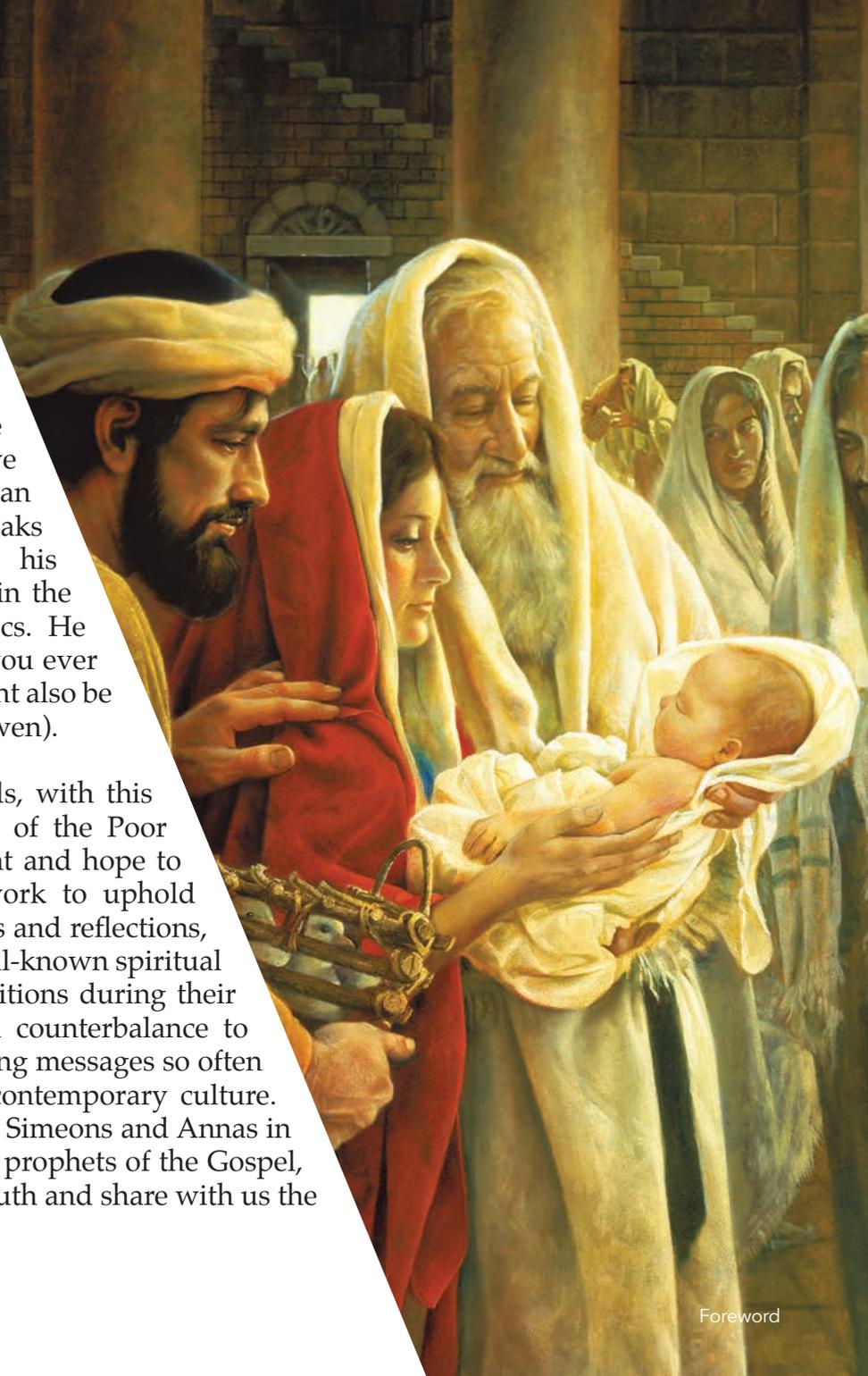
As children, many of us learned the old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." But as we grew up we realized that words really are powerful, with the force to make both war and peace, to both lift up and tear down the human spirit. How difficult it must be for the elderly and those serving them to avoid becoming discouraged by our popular culture's constant barrage of negative words and images associated with aging! A sampling of online articles refers to the elderly as socially isolated, marginalized, unproductive, powerless, misunderstood, underserved and even discarded by family and friends – and the list could go on. Even Pope Francis, a great witness to the joy of the Gospel, has repeatedly evoked the term "cultural euthanasia" to describe the tendency of western cultures to cast older persons aside.

But just as the leaves fall and die each autumn in a glorious blaze of color, for those with a contemplative spirit the inevitable burdens and losses of old age are accompanied by rich gifts and graces. When all is said and done, the greatest task of the final years may be to uncover and transmit these spiritual treasures to the younger generations. Perhaps old age is not, as many suggest, a shipwreck, but a season of hope and a unique vocation with its own rewards and challenges.

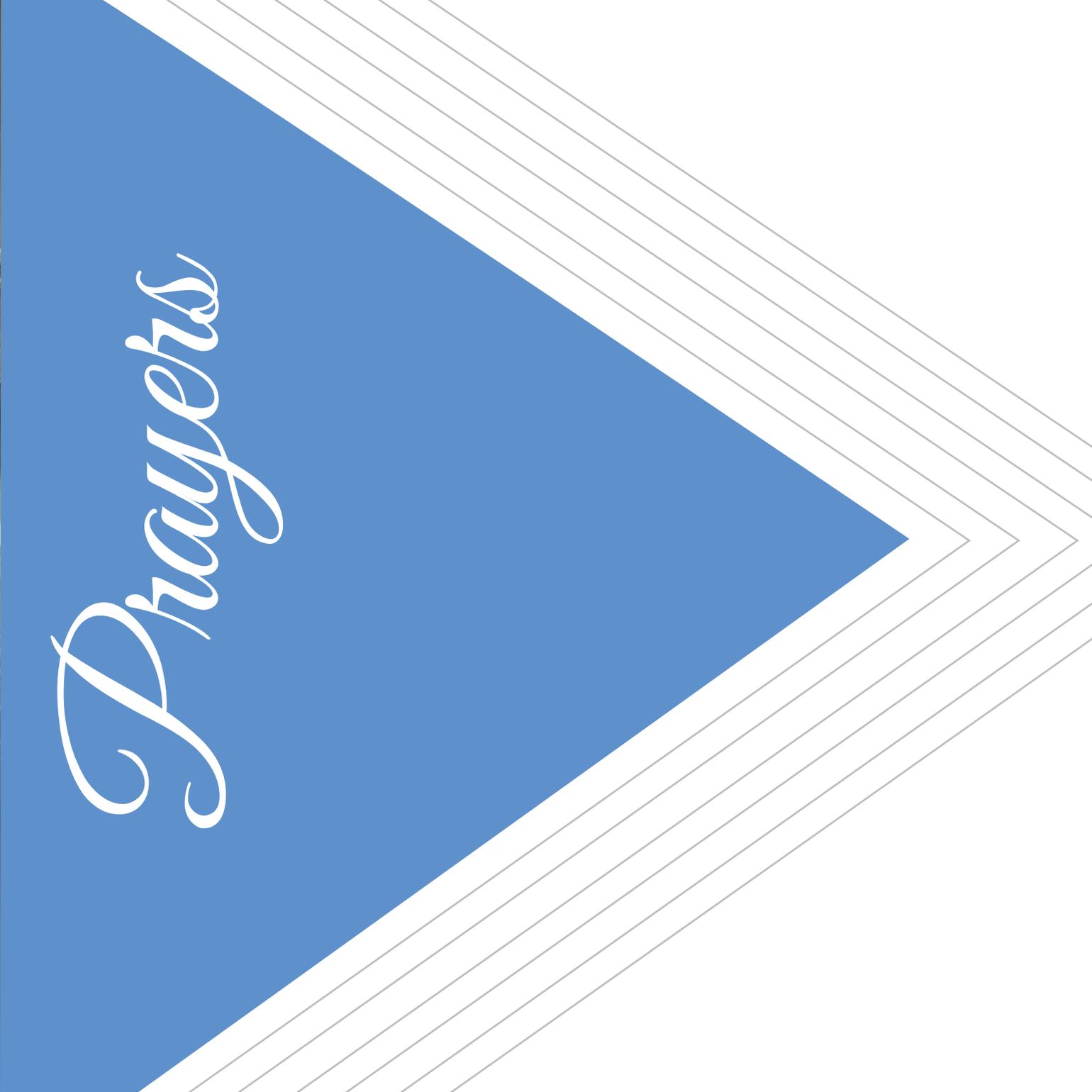
Several of the writers included in this book point to the Gospel figure of Simeon, who

awaited the Lord's coming with eager anticipation and rejoiced as he entered into the Temple. "Growing old offers us a time to behold more fully, as Simeon did, the glory of the Lord.... He became in the end the contemplative soul he was meant to be" (van Kaam and Muto). "Simeon breaks through our pessimism, and his blessing is like a gentle smile in the face of our depressive statistics. He looks at us as if to say: 'Have you ever thought that coming of age might also be the way to light?'" (Henri Nouwen).

Mindful of the power of words, with this modest book we Little Sisters of the Poor wish to offer a message of light and hope to the elderly and those who work to uphold their dignity. May these prayers and reflections, many of them composed by well-known spiritual writers from various faith traditions during their own autumn years, provide a counterbalance to the steady stream of discouraging messages so often associated with aging in our contemporary culture. We dedicate this book to all the Simeons and Annas in our midst, who like the elderly prophets of the Gospel, show us the way to light and truth and share with us the wisdom of their years.



Prayers

A decorative graphic featuring a large blue triangle pointing to the right, set against a white background. The triangle is bordered by multiple thin, parallel white lines that create a layered, arrow-like effect.





PRAYER IN OLWD AGE

Lord, you know better than I know myself that I am getting older and will someday be old. Keep me from the fatal habit of thinking I must say something on every subject and on every occasion. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful but not moody, helpful but not bossy. With my vast store of wisdom it seems a pity not to use it all, but you know, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end. Keep my mind from the recital of endless details – give me the wings to come to the point. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. They are increasing, and my love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter. I dare not ask for grace enough to enjoy the tales of others' pains, but help me to endure them with patience. I dare not ask for improved memory, but for a growing humility and a lessening cocksureness when my memory seems to clash with the memories of others. Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be mistaken. Keep me reasonably sweet. I do not want to be a saint – some of them are so hard to live with – but a sour old woman is one of the crowning works of the devil. Give me the ability to see good things in unexpected places, and the talents in unexpected people, and give me the grace to tell them so.

– *Attributed to a 17th century nun*

PRAYER FOR A GOOD OLD AGE

God, you set the stages of human life
And made old age one of them.
Do not permit me to become
one of those old grouches,
always putting people down,
moaning and groaning,
feeling sorry for themselves,
unbearable to be around.

Let me keep my smile and my laughter,
Whether my open mouth reveals
a full set of teeth
or my latest set of dentures.

Let me keep a sense of humor
that puts things and people,
including me,
in their rightful place,
and lets us laugh
at our own faults
and transform our woes
into pleasantries.

God, you put a heart of flesh into me
so that I can love and be loved,
just like the pierced heart of your Son.
Never let me become old and selfish,
turned in on my little self
like a smoldering peat of fire
that is trapped by its limitations
as though by four walls,
ceaselessly struggling against the fear of failure
and the wind which threatens to blow it out.
Keep an open heart within me,
a hand always ready to shake other hands
and to be open in giving.
God, make me a generous old person,

Someone who shares the last penny
with those who have none,
and shares the flowers in the garden
with those who have no land at all.
Let me be one of those people
who strokes cats and dogs as they go by,
who smiles at little children
and throws bread to the birds in the park.

God, you are the eternal present;
don't let me become yesterday's person,
always talking about the good old days
when it was never cloudy,
and devaluing the today of young people
where it never stops raining.

Let me relive my past with joy,
but teach me to understand
and live this present day
which is yours just as much as
the past and future.
God, let me be an old person
who has not forgotten my own youth
and refreshes that of others.

God, you set the seasons of the year
and the seasons of life.
Make me a person "for all seasons."
I don't ask for happiness,
for I know too well that no season can bring this,
not even spring.
I simply ask
that my latter days be beautiful,
so that they may bear witness
to the beauty which is you.

– **Joseph Folliet**





LORD OF OUR GROWING YEARS *(a hymn)*

Lord of our growing years, with us from infancy,
Laughter and quick-dried tears, freshness and energy:

Your grace surrounds us all our days,
For all your gifts we bring you praise.

Lord of our strongest years, stretching our youthful pow'rs,
Lovers and pioneers, when all the earth seems ours;

Your grace surrounds us all our days,
For all your gifts we bring you praise.

Lord of our middle years, Giver of steadfastness,
Courage that perseveres, when there is small success:

Your grace surrounds us all our days,
For all your gifts we bring you praise.

Lord of our older years, steep though the road may be,
Rid us of foolish fears, bring us serenity:

Your grace surrounds us all our days,
For all your gifts we bring you praise.

Lord of our closing years, always your promise stands;
Hold us when death appears, safely within your hands:

Your grace surrounds us all our days,
For all your gifts we bring you praise.

– **David Mowbray**



FRIENDS IN NURSING HOMES

Lord Jesus Christ,
hope of the frail and the infirm,
remember Simeon and Anna,
the aged prophets who longed to see your face
and held you as an infant
brought to the Temple in your mother's arms.
Come today to comfort and redeem
my ailing friends in nursing homes,
especially *(name)*
together with all those
who devote nights and days
to serve them in their needs.
Give us all the grace to see your face
in one another
in peace and joy.

SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things that I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time;
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardship as the pathway to peace;
taking, as Christ did, this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;
trusting that Christ will make all things right,
if I surrender to his will;
that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy with him forever in the next.

– **Reinhold Niebuhr**



DAY BY DAY

Give me more light as evening falls. O Lord, we are now in the evening of our life. I am in my seventy-sixth year. Life is a great gift from our heavenly Father! Three-quarters of my contemporaries have passed over to the far shore. So I too must always be ready for the great moment. The thought of death does not alarm me. Now one of my five brothers also has gone before me – my beloved Giovanni. Ah, what a good life and a fine death! My health is excellent and still robust, but I cannot count on it. I want to hold myself ready to reply *adsum* at any, even the most unexpected moment.

Old age, likewise, a great gift of the Lord's, must be for me a source of tranquil inner joy, and a reason for trusting day by day in the Lord, to whom I am now turned as a child turns to his father's open arms.

– Cardinal Roncalli, one year before he was elected Pope John XXIII

REDEEMING MY LIFE

A part of me
Refuses to forgive
Myself
For my errors, my mistakes,
My oversights and misdeeds.
How can I redeem my life from inside
This place of judgment,
Of harsh words and
Somber requirement?

God of Old,
God of Justice and Truth,
Teach me to restore my life
Through acts of love and kindness,
Thoughtfulness and care,
In support of my
Family and community.
Teach me to surrender my days
To the joy of service to others,
The joy of concern for this world
And generations to come.

Heavenly Guide,
Revive me with Your light,
Restore me with Your truth,
Refresh me with deeds
Of righteousness and charity.

– **Alden Solovy**





OUR ADVANCING YEARS

Heavenly Father, whose gift is the length of days; help us to make noble use of mind and body in our advancing years.

As thou hast pardoned our transgressions, sift the in-gatherings of our memory that evil may grow dim and good may shine forth. We bless thee for thy gifts, and especially for thy presence and the love of friends in heaven and earth.

Grant us new ties of friendship, new opportunities of service, joy in the growth and happiness of children, sympathy with those who bear the world's burdens, clear thought and quiet faith.

Teach us to bear infirmities with cheerful patience. Keep us from narrow pride in outgrown ways, blind eyes that will not see the good of change, impatient judgments of the methods and experiments of others.

Let thy peace rule our spirits through all the trial of our waning powers. Take from us all fear of death, and all despair or undue love of life, that with glad hearts at rest in thee we may await thy will concerning us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

– *Lena Sorabji*

THE PRAYER OF AGING

Because you love all ages,
Allow this voice
To sing your praises
In the tender evening
Of my waning life.
The sweet beginning
Of eternal light
Stills the drive
To succeed in countless things.
Lifted by the wings of a night
Fast approaching.
A night more radiant
Than the day.
Worries fade away
Like twittering birds
Migrating to warm places.

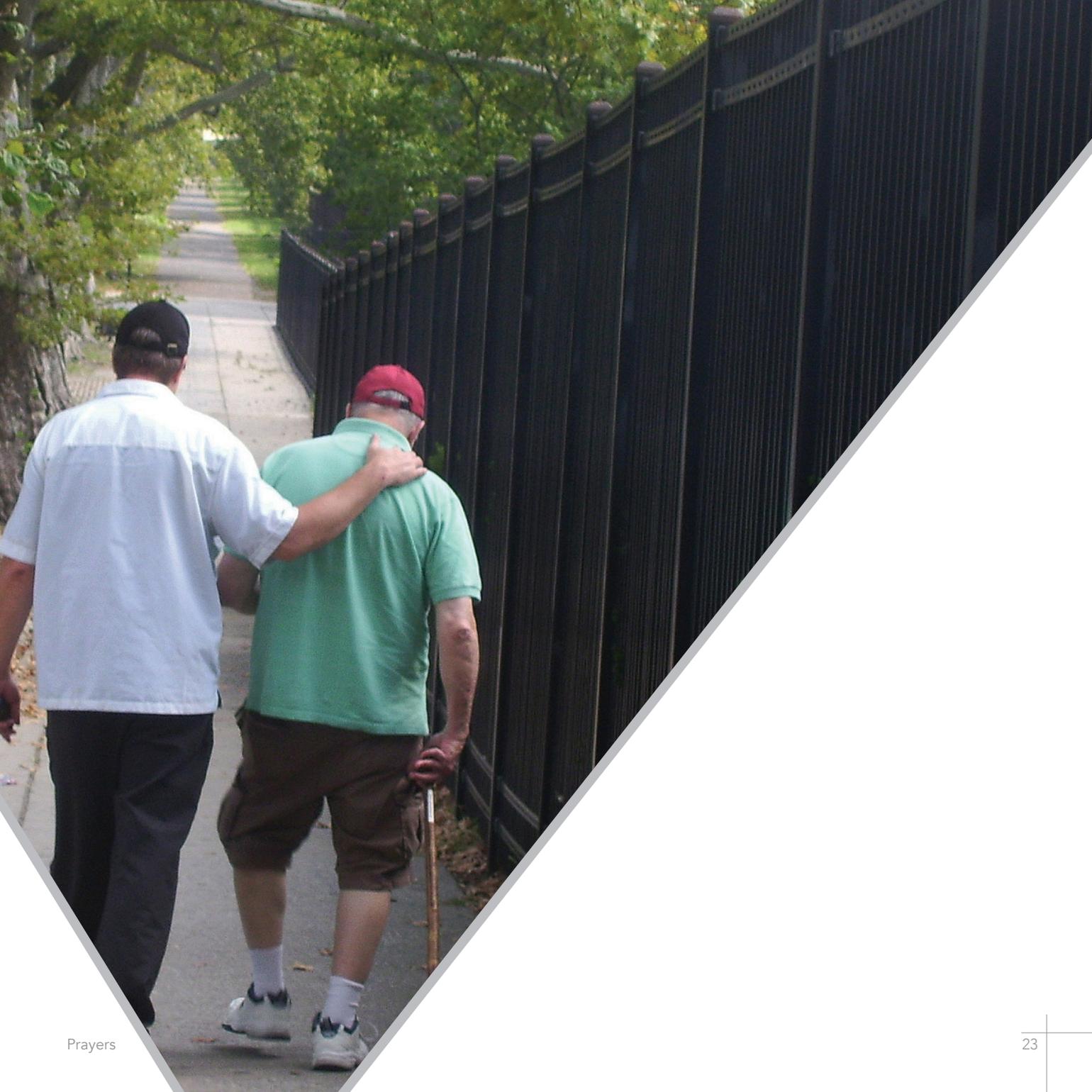
Legion are the traces
Of failures in my past.
Gently you cast
Them far from me,
Relieving my anxiety.
They dim in twilight
As the disappearing faces
Of those you've called already home
From the waiting room of life.
Let me not dwell on

Disappointed drives,
On what I have lost,
On the painful cost
Of love and labor,
On what might have been
If the stream of events
Would have gone otherwise,
Would have found a different end.

Let me rise and take my stand
In the midst of failing strength.
Disclose your bent to me
In little gems of small events.
Grant me an open eye
For the deeper why
Of pain, defeat, decline.
Let me not whine
Or whimper helplessly,
But reveal to me the mine
Of daily treasure
That is the measure
Of your gentle presence
To those who travel faithfully
To their gracious, luminous end.

Amen.

– **Father Adrian van Kaam & Suscan Muto**





FOR GRANDPARENTS

Lord Jesus,
you were born of the Virgin Mary,
the daughter of Saints Joachim
and Anne. Look with love on
grandparents the world over.

Protect them!

They are a source of enrichment
for families, for the Church and for
all of society. Support them!

As they grow older, may they
continue to be for their families
strong pillars of Gospel faith,
guardians of noble domestic ideals,

living treasuries of sound religious
traditions.

Make them teachers of wisdom
and courage, that they may pass
on to future generations the fruits
of their mature human and
spiritual experience.

Lord Jesus,
help families and society
to value the presence and roles of
grandparents.

May they never be ignored or
excluded, but always encounter

respect and love. Help them to
live serenely and to feel welcomed
in all the years of life which you
give them.

Mary, Mother of all the living,
keep grandparents constantly in
your care, accompany them on
their earthly pilgrimage, and by
your prayers, grant that all families
may one day be reunited in our
heavenly homeland, where you
await all humanity for the great
embrace of life without end.

– Pope Benedict XVI





DAILY PRAYER

May He support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in His mercy may He give us a safe lodging, and a holy rest and peace at the last.

– *Blessed John Henry Newman*

EVENING PRAYER

Now, as I watch the fading soft colors of dusk, I pause, breathe deeply, and remember You.

My heart is tired, yet I am filled with hope.

My body aches, but my spirit is at home.

As I stretch and lie down for the evening,
Let my worrying cease,
my tired muscles relax,
my nose stop running,
my plans wait for morning...
my heart be at peace.

Yes, let me sleep in Your arms
Until a fresh clear morning awakens me,
So I can greet You with love...once again.

Amen.

– **Robert J. Wicks**





PRAYER FOR A HAPPY DEATH

Oh, my Lord and Savior, support me in that hour in the strong arms of Your Sacraments, and by the fresh fragrance of Your consolations. Let the absolving words be said over me, and the holy oil sign and seal me, and

Your own Body be my food, and Your Blood my sprinkling; and let my sweet Mother, Mary, breathe on me, and my Angel whisper peace to me, and my glorious Saints smile upon me; that in them all, and through

them all, I may receive the gift of perseverance, and die, as I desire to live, in Your faith, in Your Church, in Your service, and in Your love. Amen.

– ***Blessed John Henry Newman***

SAVOR THE SEASONS

Grant, O Lord of life, that we may savor every season of our lives as a gift filled with promise for the future.

Grant that we may lovingly accept your will, and place ourselves each day in your merciful hands.

And when the moment of our definitive “passage” comes, grant that we may face it with serenity, without regret for what we shall leave behind.

For in meeting you, after having sought you for so long, we shall find once more every authentic good which we have known here on earth, in the company of all who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith and hope.

Mary, Mother of pilgrim humanity, pray for us “now and at the hour of our death.”

Keep us ever close to Jesus, your beloved Son and our brother, the Lord of life and glory. Amen!

– **Saint John Paul II**



LOOKING AT LIFE

Heavenly Father, in our journey through life teach us to look back with gratitude and count our blessings; to look around with compassion and serve those in need; to look forward with confidence and trust you for all that's to come; in the faith of Jesus Christ our Lord.

– ***Anonymous***

IN YOUR HANDS

O God, our times are in your hands.
Look with favor, we pray, on all your servants as our days increase.
Grant that we may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen our trust in your goodness all the days of our lives; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

– ***Anglican Prayer Book, adapted***

ANOTHER DAY

This is another day, O Lord.
I know not what it will bring forth,
but make me ready,
Lord, for whatever it may be.

If I am to stand up, help me to stand bravely.
If I am to sit still, help me to sit quietly.
If I am to lie low, help me to do it gallantly.
Make these words more than words,
and give me the Spirit of Jesus.

– ***Theodore Parker Ferris***

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

O God, the Giver of life: we yield You thanks and praise for every season of life.

For the nurturing springtime of birth and childhood: for its times of sweet innocence and wide-eyed discovery; for the gift of play and laughter and tears, and for the endless hope.

For the busy summer of the adult years; for the privilege of creating and nurturing; and for the hard learnings, the joys and sorrows, the pain and fulfillment, which this time always brings.

For the brilliance of the autumn season: for fruitful harvest from past labor; for the sense of new beauty, capacity and opportunity amidst the anxiety of falling leaves.

O God, we give thanks to You for the shorter days of the winter years; the burdens and joys which they bring; for the longer days and nights of remembering loving support from others.

We give thanks to You for all the seasons of life; for increased vision and wisdom with our days; and for high hopes for the next spring and new life in Your eternal presence. Amen.

– *Based on a prayer by
Rev. Lloyd Casson*



FORGETTING OUR PAINS

O God, when I think of thee I forget my aches and pains.

Fill my mind with cares and concerns so great that they will crowd out my little complaints.

Help me to accept my physical limitations and take them without wishing I were made in a different way.

Thou hast made me as I am and I have not always done the best with what I have.

Let me always remember what I have come through.

If I must miss things that other people seem to enjoy, help me to let them go, without losing either my gladness or my love.

– **Theodore Parker Ferris**





AS I GROW OLDER

May I grow warmer as I grow older, O Lord,
gentler as I grow wiser, unafraid of life
and undismayed by death.

May we who feel the infirmity of years
be constantly aware of Your enfolding presence.

Compose our spirits, O Lord, for a change of worlds,
and at the end give us rest in the Everlasting Arms.

O God, be with me when I enter
the Valley of the Shadow.

May I fear no evil, for the death of my Lord
has made Him Lord of Death.

– Mary B. Edgerly



BEAR ME AWAY

When the signs of age begin to make my body
and still more, when they touch my mind,
when the ill that is to diminish me and
carry me off, strikes from without,
or is born within me,

When the painful moment comes in which
I suddenly awaken to the fact that I am ill,
or growing old, and above all,
at that last moment
when I feel I am losing hold of myself
and I am absolutely passive
within the hands of the great unknown forces
that have formed me,

In all those dark moments, O God,
grant that I may understand that it is You
(provided only that my faith is strong enough).

You are painfully parting the fibers of my being
in order to penetrate
to the very marrow of my substance
and bear me away within Yourself.

– *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.*

Reflections

A decorative graphic featuring a large blue triangle pointing to the right, set against a white background. The triangle is bordered by multiple thin, parallel white lines that create a layered, arrow-like effect.



IN THE WORDS OF ST. JEANNE JUGAN

When you are old, you will no longer see anything. As for me, I no longer see anything but God ... He sees me, that is enough.

– *Saint Jeanne Jugan*



FORGIVENESS

If we live for service, and if we practice forgiveness,
we will be ready for God's appointed time.

– *Johann Christoph Arnold*



OUR NOBLE INHERITANCE

We live in a time when the elderly don't count. It's unpleasant to say it, but they are set aside because they are considered a nuisance. And yet, the elderly pass on history, doctrine, faith and they leave them to us as an inheritance.

They are like a fine vintage wine; that is, they have within themselves the power to give us this noble inheritance. St. Polycarp was advanced in age and of noble presence. When he was sentenced to the stake and the fire began

to burn, those around him could only smell the pleasant odor of fresh-baked bread. This is what the elderly are for us, fine vintage wine and good bread.

– **Pope Francis**



COMING OF AGE

Simeon breaks through our pessimism, and his blessing is like a gentle smile in the face of our depressive statistics. He looks at us as if to say: "Have you ever thought that coming of age might also be the way to light?"

– *Henri J. M. Nouwen*

REMEMBER

We must remember that no matter how weak our bodies may become, the soul remains strong, constantly yearning for nourishment.

– *Rebbe Menachem Schneerson*

GOD'S PLAN

Old age can be a gift given to the young. Did you ever notice how very young children are attracted to the elderly? Isn't that part of God's plan?

– *Johann Christoph Arnold*



HIS PURPOSE

Many ask themselves, "How can I make my last years more enjoyable, more exciting? Wouldn't a better question be, "How can God use my last days to his purpose?"

– *Johann Christoph Arnold*



A REAL TREASURE

There was a father, mother and their many children, and a grandfather lived with them. He was quite old, and when he was at table eating soup, he would get everything dirty: his mouth, the napkin ... it was not a pretty sight! One day the father said that given what was happening to the grandfather, from that day on he would eat alone. And so he bought a little table, and placed it in the kitchen. And so the grandfather ate alone in the kitchen while the family ate

in the dining room. After some days, the father returned home from work and found one of his children playing with wood. He asked him: 'What are you doing?' to which the child replied: 'I am playing carpenter.' 'And what are you building?' the father asked. 'A table for you, papa, for when you get old like grandpa.' This story has stayed with me for a lifetime and done me great good. Grandparents are a treasure.

– *Pope Francis*





SING LIKE A HERO

So live your life that the fear of death can never enter your heart. Trouble no one about their religion; respect others in their view, and demand that they respect yours. Love your life, perfect your life, beautify all things in your life. Seek to make your life long and its purpose in the service of your people. Prepare a noble death song for the day when you go over the great divide. Always give

a word or a sign of salute when meeting or passing a friend, even a stranger, when in a lonely place. Show respect to all people and bow to none. When you arise in the morning, give thanks for the food and for the joy of living. If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault lies only in yourself.

Abuse no one and nothing, for abuse turns the wise ones to fools

and robs the spirit of its vision.

When it comes your time to die, be not like those whose hearts are filled with fear of death, so that when their time comes they weep and pray for a little more time to live their lives over again in a different way. Sing your death song and die like a hero going home.

– **Chief Tecumseh**

OUT OF VIEW

When the sun finally drops below the horizon in the early evening, evidence of its work remains for some time. The skies continue to glow for a full hour after its departure. In the same way, when a good or a great person's life comes to its final sunset, the skies of this

world are illuminated until long after he is out of view. Such a person does not die from this world, for when he departs he leaves much of himself behind — and being dead, he still speaks.

– **Henry Ward Beecher**

A RICH HARVEST

Compassion makes us see beauty in the midst of misery, hope in the center of pain. It makes us discover flowers between barbed wire and a soft spot in a frozen field. Compassion makes us notice the balding head and the decaying teeth, feel the weakening handgrip and the wrinkling skin, and sense

the fading memories and slipping thoughts, not as a proof of the absurdity of life, but as a gentle reminder that “unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain, but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest.”

– **Henri J. M. Nouwen**

REVELATION

Growing older offers us a time to behold more fully, as Simeon did, the glory of the Lord. ... Think of Simeon.

Though old of body, his spirit was alive, young, forever anticipating the

revelation of the Lord. He became in the end the contemplative soul he was meant to be.

– **Father Adrian van Kaam
& Susan Muto**





THE YOUNG AND THE OLD

If you see life as a straight line, where the young and old are weak and those in the middle are strong, and if you think that to be important you must be useful, you do not see value in the young and the old. You see them as burdens, not as gifts, because they cannot lift their hands to be of use to the community.

But the young and old both have other gifts ... The old have the wisdom of experience. They have traveled far on the journey of life and give us knowledge about our own road ahead. They have lived what we are still waiting to learn...

Do you understand this, how children are a gift to the elders and how the elders are a gift to the children? How they complete the circle of life like morning and evening complete the circle of the day?

– *Johann Christoph Arnold*





APPROACHING OLD AGE

I must not disguise from myself the truth, I am definitely approaching old age. My mind resents this and almost rebels, for I still feel so young, eager, agile, and alert.

But one look at my mirror disillusioned me. This is the season of maturity; I must do more and better; reflecting that perhaps the time still granted me for living is brief, and that I am drawing near to the gates of eternity. This thought caused Hezekiah to turn to the wall and weep. I do not weep.

No, I do not weep, and I do not even desire to live my life over again, so as to do better, I entrust to the Lord's mercy whatever I have done, badly or less than well, and I look to the future, brief or long as it may be here below, because I want to make it holy and a source of holiness to others.

– Pope John XXIII



Afterword

In our foreward we referred to Simeon and Anna, elderly prophets in the opening pages of the Gospel of St. Luke. During his first official gathering with senior citizens on September 28, 2014, Pope Francis evoked another scene from St. Luke's Gospel, the Visitation of Mary to her elderly cousin Elizabeth. He called it a "gospel of encounter: the encounter between young and old, an encounter full of joy, full of faith, hope and love."

In the words of Pope Francis, Mary shows us the way, the way of encounter between the young and the elderly. "The future of a people necessarily supposes the encounter," he said, "the young give the strength which enables a people to move forward, while the elderly consolidate this strength by their memory and their traditional wisdom."

Our Holy Father's words during his gathering with the elderly echo what he wrote in *Evangelii Gaudium* (n 272, 24) about "a spirituality of drawing nearer to others." This spirituality, which includes becoming involved in the lives of others, bridging distances and standing by people every step of the way, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others and embracing human life, is at the very heart of our mission as Little Sisters of the Poor.

For our foundress, Saint Jeanne Jugan, the charism of hospitality was a matter of being little and humble in order to be close to the elderly – and of being close to them in order to make them happy. This is still the heart of our mission as we minister to elderly persons in need in over thirty countries around the world. Continuing the work of our foundress, we offer the neediest elderly of every race and religion a home where they will be welcomed as Christ, cared for as family and accompanied with dignity until God calls them to himself.

We consider it a great privilege to serve and share our lives with the elderly, for we agree with Pope Francis that they are like "fine vintage wine," passing on a noble inheritance of wisdom, history and faith. We agree that the aging of the world's population poses many challenges – not because old age is a shipwreck, as some have suggested – but because of the lack of specialized services for the elderly and our own limitations and poverty. Yet we are filled with hope, believing, as the angel Gabriel assured the Virgin Mary, "Nothing is impossible with God."

References

Johann Christoph Arnold is senior pastor of the Bruderhof, an international communal movement dedicated to a life of simplicity, service, sharing and nonviolence. In 30 years as a family counselor, he has advised thousands of couples and individuals, including the terminally ill, veterans, prison inmates, and teenagers.

Henry Ward Beecher (June 24, 1813 – March 8, 1887) was an American Congregationalist clergyman, social reformer, and speaker, known for his support of the abolition of slavery.

Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Pope Francis was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina on Dec. 17, 1936. He became a Jesuit on March 12, 1960 and ordained on Dec. 13, 1969. He served as the master of novices and became a professor of theology. He took the fourth vow of obedience to the pope on April 22, 1973 and was named provincial superior several months later. He was named auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires in 1992 and then coadjutor archbishop in 1997. He became archbishop of Buenos Aires in 1998 and president on the Argentine Episcopal Conference in 2005. Archbishop Bergoglio was created a cardinal by Pope John Paul II on Feb. 21, 2001. He was elected pope, succeeding Benedict XVI, on March 13, 2013.

Canon Lloyd Casson is rector emeritus of Saints Andrew and Matthew Episcopal Church in Wilmington, Delaware. He has provided leadership for over 30 years in urban community affairs and world issues. He is also active in ecumenical and interfaith causes.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (May 1, 1881 – April 10, 1955) was a Jesuit paleontologist who worked to understand evolution and faith. His life included priesthood, living and working in the front lines of war, field work exploring the early origins of the human race and adventurous travels of discovery in the backlands of China. He is also known for his mystical writings on the evolutionary nature of the world and the cosmos.

Mary B. Edgerly was a member of the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross, a “dispersed community” of Episcopal women founded in New England in 1884. Companions share a vocation to a life of prayer, transformation and reconciliation within themselves, their Companionship, their faith communities, and the whole creation.

Theodore Parker Ferris (Dec. 23, 1908 – Nov. 26, 1972) was an Episcopal priest, seminary professor and ecumenist. From 1937 until 1942, he was rector of Emmanuel Church, Baltimore; from 1942 until his death, he was the rector of Trinity Church in Boston.

Father Joseph Folliet (Nov. 27, 1903 – Nov. 12, 1972), also known as Brother Juniper, was a French priest, activist, sociologist, writer and co-founder, along with René Beaughey, of the Pilgrims of St. Francis, an ecumenical international Christian movement of Catholic origin.

Abraham Joshua Heschel (Jan. 11, 1907 – Dec. 23, 1972) was a Polish-born American rabbi and one of the leading Jewish theologians and philosophers of the 20th century. A professor of Jewish mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, he authored books on Jewish philosophy and was active in the American Civil Rights movement.

David Mowbray, a priest in the Church of England, is vicar of St. Matthew’s Darley Abbey, Derby, England. His original hymn texts appear in Christian hymnals throughout Great Britain, Canada and the United States.

Bl. John Henry Newman (Feb. 21, 1801 – Aug. 11, 1890) began his religious career as the vicar of St. Mary the Virgin Church in Oxford, England. At the age of 44, he converted to Catholicism and founded the first English-speaking Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Birmingham, England. He was made a cardinal in 1879. His many scholarly works shaped religious thought during the 20th century. Newman was beatified on Sept. 19, 2010.

Karl Paul Reinhold Niebuhr (June 21, 1892 – June 1, 1971) was an American theologian, ethicist, public intellectual, commentator on politics and public affairs, and professor at Union Theological Seminary for more than 30 years. He is known for authoring the Serenity Prayer, and received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1964.

Henri J. Nouwen (Jan. 24, 1932 – Sept. 21, 1996) was born in Holland but spent much of his life in the United States. An internationally known priest, author, professor and pastor, he wrote more than 40 books, published in over 22 languages, on the spiritual life. He spent the last 10 years of his life ministering to the l’Arche community in Ontario, Canada.

Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, Pope John XXIII (Nov. 25, 1881 – June 3, 1963), was born to a poor family in the Lombardi region of Italy and ordained a priest on August 10, 1904. He served in a number of diplomatic posts, including in France, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey. Pope Pius XII named him a cardinal and patriarch of Venice in 1953. He was elected pope on Oct. 28, 1958. As Pope John XXIII, he called the historic Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the first session of which opened on Oct. 11, 1962. “Good” Pope John was beatified by Pope John Paul II on Dec. 20, 1999, and canonized by Pope Francis on April 27, 2014.

Alden Solovy is a Jewish poet and liturgist, a writing coach and an award-winning essayist and journalist. He began writing poetry, prayer and meditations as a spiritual practice aimed at a deeper understanding of love and loss, joy and sorrow, healing of body and spirit and reconnecting with the divine.

Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (April 5, 1902 – June 12, 1994), known as the Rebbe,

or the Lubavitcher Rebbe, was born in 1902 to a dynasty of Chabad-Lubvaitch rabbis. Following the death of his father-in-law, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, he transformed Chabad-Lubavitch from a small movement into the largest and most dynamic force in Judaism today, and is one of the most influential Jewish leaders of the 20th century.

Lena Sorabji was born in Nashik, India, in the late 19th century, one of nine children of Reverend Sorabji Karsedji, a Parsi Christian convert, and his wife, Francina Ford, an Indian Hindu. Ford helped to establish several girls' schools in Pune. Lena and her sisters considered their mother to be the heart and soul of the Sorabji family, the very embodiment of its conviction that "we are in the world to serve others."

Chief Tecumseh (March 1768 – Oct. 5, 1813) was a Native American leader of the tribal confederacy that opposed the United States and became an ally of Britain in the War of 1812. American forces defeated the confederacy at the Battle of the Thames, and killed Tecumseh in October 1813. Tecumseh became an iconic folk hero in American and Canadian history.

Rev. Adrian van Kaam (April 19, 1920 – Nov. 17, 2007) and **Susan Muto**, co-founded the Epiphany Association in 1979 in response to the deep spiritual hunger they observed among the people they encountered. They were professors of formative spirituality at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh. Father van Kaam was born in The Hague, Netherlands and was ordained in 1946, after witnessing the horrors of World War II in Europe. In 1979, he founded the Epiphany Association, a resource center dedicated to the study of formative spirituality, with Susan Muto. Muto, a native of Pittsburgh, is an expert in the field of literature and spirituality. She worked with Father van Kaam from 1966 to 1988.

Robert Wicks, a clinical psychologist and leading writer about the intersection of spirituality and psychology, received his doctorate in psychology from Hahnemann Medical College and Hospital in Philadelphia. He is a well known speaker, therapist and spiritual guide who for more than 30 years taught at universities and professional schools of psychology, medicine, nursing, theology, and social work. He is a recipient of the Holy Cross Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice, the highest award given for distinguished service to the Catholic Church.

Karol Józef Wojtyła, Pope John Paul II (May 18, 1920 – April 2, 2005), was born in Wadowice, Poland. The future John Paul II began clandestine seminary studies in October, 1942. Ordained on Nov. 1, 1946, he served as both a parish priest and college ethics professor. On July 4, 1958, Karol Wojtyła was appointed auxiliary bishop of Krakow. He participated in the Second Vatican Council, became archbishop of Krakow in 1964, and was named a cardinal in 1967. Karol Wojtyła was elected pope on Oct. 16, 1978, and served until his death in 2005. Beatified on May 3, 2011, John Paul II was canonized on April 27, 2014. Many refer to him as Saint John Paul the Great.

Acknowledgments

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