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**January 1**

**Save the World, Do the Dishes**

Author, speaker, and former high school teacher John Perricone shared a story on social media about inviting a monk to speak to his class several years ago. Its lesson for the new year can apply to people of any faith or no faith.

“As he entered the room, he didn’t say a word,” Perricone recalled. “He just walked to the board and wrote this:

‘EVERYONE WANTS TO SAVE THE WORLD, BUT NO ONE WANTS TO HELP MOM DO THE DISHES.’

“We all laughed. But then he went on to say this to my students: ‘Statistically, it’s highly unlikely that any of you will ever have the opportunity to run into a burning orphanage and rescue an infant. But, in the smallest gesture of kindness—a warm smile, holding the door for the person behind you, shoveling the driveway of the elderly person next door—you have committed an act of immeasurable profundity, because to each of us, our life is our universe.’

“This is my hope for you for the New Year—that by your smallest acts of kindness, you will save an other’s world.”

**Show kindness and mercy to one another.**

**(Zechariah 7:9)**

*Remind me that little acts of kindness mean a lot, Father.*

1 **January 2**

2 **God Doesn't Make Bums**

3 Ellen Cheng works with LAMP Catholic Ministries in New  
4 York, offering material and spiritual support to those who are  
5 poor. One day, while out in LAMP's truck serving sandwiches, a  
6 man named Angel approached her group and told them he  
7 couldn't stop drinking despite trying various programs.

8 Ellen questioned whether Angel had ever asked God for  
9 help. He responded, "God won't help me. I'm a bum." Ellen then  
10 revealed that she, too, once had a drinking problem, and believes  
11 that God helped her. Angel noted that Ellen was "not a bum."  
12 She replied, "My family thought I was when they threw me out.  
13 Bosses, friends, and others called me that. But I discovered that  
14 God doesn't make bums."

15 Angel stepped aside to eat his sandwich and ponder Ellen's  
16 words. Before leaving, he told her, "A lot of people come by  
17 with food, but that's it. You come here, you see us, look us in the  
18 eye, and talk to us. You listen. [We] appreciate it so much."  
19 Ellen prayed that Angel would experience God's unconditional  
20 love and move forward towards recovery.

21 **My steadfast love shall not depart from you.**

22 **(Isaiah 54:10)**

23 *Guide alcoholics towards help and healing, Messiah.*

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**January 3**

**Mr. Bill's Village**

Despite the fact that he is legally blind, Bill Moczulewski of Cabot, Arkansas, never missed a day of work. A store janitor during the overnight shift at Walmart, he began his five-mile trek to his job in the early evening. And yes, you read that right! Bill walked to and from work every day, regardless of the weather. At least he did.

As reported by Steve Hartman of *CBS News*, Christy Conrad saw Bill walking one day three years ago and offered him a ride. She got to know him and started giving him a lift whenever she was able. But, of course, she wasn't always available, so she created a Facebook page called "Mr. Bill's Village," looking for volunteers to help him out.

Christy hoped the page would attract a few people willing to do a good deed. Instead, it generated 1,500 followers and a large group of volunteers competing to drive Bill to Walmart. Today, Bill gets a ride to work almost every day. He concluded, "There's a lot of good people in this world, all over the place."

**Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. (Romans 15:2)**

*Jesus, help me to go out of my way to be a good neighbor.*

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January 4

## No More Bad Days for Jeremy Renner

Actor Jeremy Renner, who played Hawkeye in Marvel’s *Avengers* movies, endured a major accident in 2023. After seeing that his nephew was about to be crushed by a runaway snowplow, Renner tried jumping onto the vehicle to gain control. His jump fell short, and he got run over himself, resulting in 38 broken bones in his legs, spine, face, and ribs.

The fact that Renner survived at all is something of a miracle. And though his recovery process will never fully be over, he is walking and talking normally again. The experience gave him a new perspective on life.

On *The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon*, Renner noted, “There’s so many great gifts that being tested to your limits [brings]...I won’t have a bad day for the rest of my life...Also, the idea of learning how not to panic and how to focus.”

“In order to walk, you have to put one foot down, then the other foot in front of it, then you’re walking...I think it’s a great reminder of what we all should be looking at in life. If we get too stressed or if things get too difficult...just put one foot down, then put another foot down, and then move towards it.”

**Suffering produces endurance. (Romans 5:3)**

*In times of struggle, Lord, help me to keep moving forward.*

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**January 5**

**The Collective Goodness of People**

Actor Jeremy Renner’s recovery from getting run over by a snowplow not only gave him a new perspective on life, it introduced him to a new view of humanity.

Renner was on life support for several days in the hospital. His loved ones didn’t know if he would survive. When he regained consciousness, the amount of love he received felt overwhelming to him, and he wasn’t comfortable with it at first.

“It was sort of like a living wake kind of thing,” Renner told Jimmy Fallon. “Everyone’s coming to say their goodbyes...To receive that much love is also, I think, a very difficult thing for anybody to do. I was terrible at it.

“But because there was so much goodness and good will that came my way, I tell you, Jim, it’s not goodness that I really believed existed. I just didn’t think that existed. And I certainly believe it now. I think it’s ultimately what got me to survive and come back and be strong. I will be stronger than I’ve ever been as I continue in my recovery. The collective of goodness in people, it’s astounding.”

**Endurance produces character, and character produces hope. (Romans 5:4)**

*May humanity’s goodness shine and flourish, Savior.*

1 **January 6**

2 **Jesus and Java**

3 You might not think of a coffee shop as an appropriate  
4 place to pray, but that's one of the goals at St. James Coffee in  
5 Rochester, Minnesota. It was founded in 2012 by Father Matt  
6 Fasnacht, who wanted to offer the general public a "non-  
7 intimidating" venue to "encounter Christ," reported Joe Slama in  
8 *Our Sunday Visitor*.

9 Today, the shop attracts both believers and non-believers  
10 looking for great coffee and deep conversations. St. James even  
11 houses an adoration chapel and offers themed drinks like  
12 "Capuchin-O." Melissa Scaccio, who runs St. James, said,  
13 "Some of my best customers are actually atheists."

14 Brandon Hendrickson, an agnostic who was raised  
15 Protestant, noted he loves St. James because "it allows people to  
16 open up to one another. So, it easily becomes a more friendly  
17 place, even for people who are not part of that tradition...The  
18 assumption is not that everybody is strangers, and maybe they  
19 have radical disagreements...but rather that people like each  
20 other and know each other. And that is infectious."

21 **They devoted themselves to...fellowship, to the**  
22 **breaking of bread and...prayers. (Acts 2:42)**

23 *Teach me to grow in fellowship with all, Father.*  
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January 7

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## Connecting Despite Dementia

When her late father was battling dementia, actress Nikki DeLoach went to visit him, but he was unable to recognize her. Nikki then remembered something they had always done when she was a child. Because they had the same size hands, they would put them palm to palm as a way of connecting.

Nikki now had her father put his palm up against hers, and she told him, “We have the same size hands!” He examined and traced her fingers slowly. Then he looked up and started crying. “You know who I am now, don’t you?” Nikki asked him. He nodded his head.

Several weeks later, when Nikki was leaving, her father walked her to her truck, and they hugged goodbye. As soon as she sat in the driver’s seat, Nikki burst into tears, overwhelmed by the emotion of her father’s condition. Suddenly, she heard a knock on the window. It was her father, putting his palm up against the window. Nikki returned the gesture.

On the show *Comfort Food with Kelly Rizzo*, Nikki said she shared that story to tell people, “Don’t give up on [your loved one with dementia]. They are in there.”

**He gives power to the faint. (Isaiah 40:29)**

*Bless all dementia patients and their caregivers, Father.*

1 **January 8**

2 **A Naples Tradition of ‘Hanging Coffee’**

3 A century ago in Naples, Italy, when a customer at a café  
4 had a bit of good fortune, that person would buy a “caffè  
5 sospeso” for someone in need. In the past decade, this Neapolitan  
6 tradition has spread to coffee houses around the world and has  
7 become known as the practice of “hanging coffee.”

8 Despite the name, hanging coffee does not involve a bunch  
9 of mugs dangling from the ceiling. Rather, customers can request  
10 that hanging coffees be added to their bill. These purchases then  
11 act as a credit for anyone coming into the shop who needs a hot  
12 coffee, but lacks the means to pay for it. The barista can serve  
13 this person a fresh brew, and even food, courtesy of the client  
14 who bought a spare in advance.

15 This generous act has spread far beyond Naples, thanks to a  
16 social media post that went viral, reported *Aleteia*. The post read,  
17 “Small kindnesses like this can impact so many lives, in ways we  
18 could never imagine. Maybe we should all try it.”

19 **Let them drink and forget their poverty.**

20 **(Proverbs 31:6-7)**

21 *God, help me to pay it forward and spread kindness today!*

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1 **January 9**

2 **Two Brothers, Two Choices**

3 Many years ago, the publication *Bits and Pieces* shared a  
4 story about two brothers convicted of stealing sheep. As  
5 punishment, the letters ST, for sheep thief, were branded on their  
6 foreheads.

7 One brother couldn't stand the shame. He moved away, but  
8 wherever he went, he was asked about the letters and what they  
9 meant. Eventually, he became embittered and died a lonely  
10 forgotten man. But the other brother stayed put. "I can't run  
11 away from my past," he reasoned, "but I can try and win back the  
12 respect that I once had."

13 This brother began to build a reputation for kindness and  
14 fair dealing. He went out of his way to be friendly and helpful.  
15 Years later, he was a revered member of the community. One  
16 day, a stranger came to town and asked a villager about the  
17 letters on the old man's forehead. The villager said, "It happened  
18 a long time ago. I've forgotten the details. But the letters are an  
19 abbreviation for saint."

20 **This son of mine...was lost and is found! (Luke 15:24)**

21 *May I honestly confront my mistakes, Redeemer, and work*  
22 *towards becoming the good person You created me to be.*

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1 **January 10**

2 **Wall Streeter Found New Direction**

3 The late John Kennedy Bingham embodied the values of  
4 love and service that he learned from his Catholic parents and at  
5 his alma mater, St. John's University in Queens, New York. For  
6 instance, during the 1980s, he secured a high-level job at a Wall  
7 Street firm. However, when John discovered an insider trading  
8 scandal, he exposed it and decided to leave the finance industry.

9 As reported by *St. John's Magazine*, John "headed to  
10 Thailand to work as a \$248-a-month Catholic Church volunteer  
11 with his uncle, [a] Jesuit missionary, to assist refugees from  
12 Cambodia's 'Killing Fields.'" In addition, he met his wife,  
13 Agnes, there, with whom he went on to have four sons.

14 John returned to New York after eight years to work with  
15 Catholic Charities on behalf of immigrants and refugees. His  
16 friend, Salvatore Barcia, R.Ph., said John's work "in the  
17 Cambodian refugee camps reminds me of Jesus' gospel  
18 encounter with the rich young man. Unlike the young man, who  
19 could not eschew his wealth to follow Jesus, John literally gave  
20 away his suits and headed off to a life of service."

21 **Store up almsgiving in your treasury. (Sirach 29:12)**

22 *God, may we remember true wealth comes from helping*  
23 *others.*

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1 **January 11**

2 **Foxworthy Focuses on the 85 Percent**

3 Comedian Jeff Foxworthy, best known for his “You Might  
4 Be a Redneck” jokes, has been making people across America  
5 laugh for more than three decades. And that’s just how he likes it  
6 because he wants to appeal to a broad audience.

7 During an appearance on the podcast *Mayim Bialik’s*  
8 *Breakdown*, Foxworthy explained, “I think, for the style of  
9 comedy I do, that we’re looking for that connection. I think if  
10 you gathered everybody in this country together, sat them down,  
11 and said, ‘What is it that you want out of life?’—and I’m talking  
12 about pegging left and right politically—I bet you people would  
13 agree on 85 percent of the same things. So, that’s what I look for.

14 “Even though, Mayim, you grew up Jewish, I grew up  
15 Christian; you grew up in California, I grew up in Georgia; I’m  
16 gonna look for those things that we have in common...As a  
17 country now, we don’t focus on that 85 percent...We focus on  
18 the 15 percent where we differ, and we yell at each other about  
19 that. But there’s basic human wants and needs that are universal.  
20 You want to be able to take care of your kids. You want to be  
21 able to eat today...That’s the part of it that I tend to [focus on].”

22 **Maintain constant love for one another. (1 Peter 4:8)**

23 *Help us focus on what we share in common, Creator.*

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**January 12**

**Food for Hope, Part 1**

Food banks are a blessing to hungry people around this country and around the world. But did you ever wonder how they got started? Well, a Christopher Award-winning children’s book has the answer. Written by Jeff Gottesfeld and illustrated by Michelle Laurentia Agatha, *Food for Hope* tells the story of John van Hengel, the Catholic man who created food banks.

During the early part of van Hengel’s life, there were no indications he would ever go hungry. He grew up in Wisconsin during the Great Depression, but his family never lacked food. He attended college and grad school, moved to California, married a model, had two children, and thrived as a salesman.

Then, it all fell apart. Van Hengel lost his job, got divorced, lost custody of his children, and endured a spinal injury while breaking up a fight. Despite surgery, he was in pain and needed rehabilitation, so he moved to Arizona, where the warm weather might help his recovery. That’s where he found a new path in life.

**He was...a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity. (Isaiah 53:3)**

*When I lose my way, Jesus, guide me towards the light.*

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**January 13**

**Food for Hope, Part 2**

After getting divorced, losing his job, and sustaining a serious injury, John van Hengel was left destitute. That’s how he wound up in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1967, at a St. Vincent de Paul-run soup kitchen at St. Mary’s Catholic Church.

In the Christopher Award-winning children’s book *Food for Hope*, author Jeff Gottesfeld writes, “John liked people. He talked with everyone in the dining room—disabled veterans, the homeless, and kids whose parents had to choose between rent and food. Their stories opened his heart. He found work at the kitchen, shelter in a cheap room above a garage, and faith in prayer with Father Ronald at St. Mary’s Church.”

The menu at the soup kitchen was minimal (soup, rice, beans, powdered milk), so van Hengel took the initiative to ask a local citrus orchard if he could collect the grapefruits that had fallen off their trees and would otherwise be thrown away. They agreed, and fresh fruit made its way onto the menu. But it was an encounter with a woman on one of his food runs that changed the course not only of van Hengel’s life, but of our country.

**Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. (Romans 12:13)**

*May my misfortunes lead me to help others, God.*

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**Food for Hope, Part 3**

One day in 1967, while collecting fruit for St. Mary’s soup kitchen, John van Hengel met a woman who told him she had plenty of food for her 10 kids, and she didn’t pay for any of it.

He was skeptical, but she led him to the dumpster behind a supermarket, which was full of discarded food that was completely edible. The woman said, “I just wish I could put this stuff in a bank.”

Excited by this idea, van Hengel went back to St. Mary’s and told Father Ronald, a Franciscan priest, that they should start a bank to store food. Father Ronald agreed and told van Hengel, “Do it.”

Van Hengel protested that he already worked at the soup kitchen and didn’t have time. But Father Ronald insisted, “You heard the call, John. Decide if you want to listen.”

Van Hengel did listen. Father Ronald allowed him to use an abandoned bakery on Phoenix’s Skid Row for the project. That first year, they collected 125,000 pounds of food.

**He looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves...And all ate and were filled. (Matthew 14:19-20)**

*I can’t multiply loaves and fishes like You, Jesus, but help me do my part in feeding hungry bodies and souls.*

1 **January 15**

2 **Food for Hope, Part 4**

3 After John van Hengel opened the St. Mary's Food Bank, it  
4 quickly became successful. During an interview about his  
5 Christopher Award-winning children's book *Food for Hope*,  
6 author Jeff Gottesfeld said, "I had the opportunity to speak at St.  
7 Mary's...I met a number of people who knew van Hengel, and  
8 they're proud as can be."

9 "This past year, the St. Mary's Food Bank [collected] 125  
10 million [pounds of food]...They have a couple of hundred full-  
11 time employees...and they're helping people get job training."

12 Above his desk, van Hengel wrote a Biblical quote, but  
13 gave it his own twist: "The poor we shall always have with us,  
14 but why the hungry?"

15 Motivated by his faith, van Hengel kept growing the food  
16 bank idea and turned it into the nonprofit America's Second  
17 Harvest, which helped create food banks around the country. He  
18 also chose to live in relative poverty because he looked back on  
19 his life and realized that money had not made him happy.

20 **Is not this the fast that I choose...to share your bread**  
21 **with the hungry? (Isaiah 58:6-7)**

22 *Remind me that money alone doesn't bring happiness,*  
23 *Lord.*

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1 January 16

2 **Food for Hope, Part 5**

3 Jeff Gottesfeld was thrilled to share the story of Catholic  
4 hero John van Hengel in his Christopher Award-winning  
5 children’s book *Food for Hope*. And as a person of faith himself,  
6 albeit a different faith, Gottesfeld admires the spiritual  
7 motivations that governed van Hengel’s life.

8 Gottesfeld said, “Not only am I Jewish, I’m pretty  
9 observant. I go to synagogue on Saturdays, I read Hebrew, I  
10 study Torah...But I’m interested in religion, and my respect for  
11 the Roman Catholic Church is enormous.”

12 Gottesfeld hopes that children and families who read *Food*  
13 *for Hope* are motivated to make a difference. He said, “Don’t  
14 take food for granted. It is not automatic for big segments of our  
15 society...Volunteer, whether it’s for food or something else.”

16 “What’s great about food: it’s completely nonpartisan. All  
17 it has to do with is feeding people. And there are plenty of things  
18 like that out there that are nonpartisan. Get in there, do the work.  
19 Know that you’re working alongside other Americans doing the  
20 same thing...What matters is your energy and your goodness.”

21 **If you offer your food to the hungry...your light shall**  
22 **rise in the darkness. (Isaiah 58:10)**

23 *Help me direct my energy towards good works, Abba.*

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January 17

**Life for the Bereaved**

When a person loses a spouse, friends and relatives often form a “casserole brigade,” rallying around the bereaved. This usually lasts about two months. Then, the widow or widower is on her own or his own.

Consider Mrs. Geneva Broadhurst. After her husband died many years ago, she felt her whole world crash around her.

Mrs. Broadhurst, who lived in Atlanta, heard about a program for widows and widowers called Life Enrichment. When she first attended, others in the program helped her through the grieving process. Later on, she became a volunteer coordinator.

“Getting involved changed my life,” she said. “By reaching out to others during my grief, I found a new meaning to my own life.”

Mrs. Broadhurst learned that death is a part of life—a painful part—and that we need support when a loved one has passed from this world, just as others need us in their grief.

**Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)**

*Jesus, make my shoulders strong enough and broad enough to ease another’s burdens.*

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## **Jesus Was Observant and Sensitive**

Jesus was both observant and sensitive. Nothing was too insignificant for Him to notice. Consider the time He was on His way to help someone who had sought Him out.

Though Jesus was surrounded by a crowd, a woman hoping to be cured of the bleeding that had troubled her for 12 years touched the hem of His garment. Jesus noticed this light touch, turned to the woman, and told her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well.”

On another occasion, Jesus was teaching in the temple and watched as people put money into the treasury. Some put in large sums, but a poor widow came along and put in two copper coins. Jesus noticed her generosity and observed that she had given more than everyone else because she donated out of her poverty, not abundance.

In these two stories, Jesus is teaching us to be observant, to notice even the smallest events of each day. He is also telling us to develop our sensitivity, our ability to respond. The observant, sensitive individual is the person who makes things happen. Count yourself among their number.

**Let us work for the good of all. (Galatians 6:10)**

*Lord, help me to be an observant, sensitive person.*

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**January 19**

**Teacher’s Words Save Young Man’s Life**

When Anthony Swann was nine years old, the Department of Social Services abruptly took him out of his classroom to be placed in foster care. His fourth-grade teacher, Jerretta Wilson, told him everything was going to be alright. Little did Swann know at the time how this teacher would impact his life.

Wilson never forgot about her student, but in those pre-Internet days, it took her five years to find him. His life was in a downward spiral at the time, so Wilson told him to “make something of himself, to take the bitterness and hatred and make something of it.” When Swann said he wanted to become a teacher, Wilson supported him every step of the way.

As reported by the *Chatham Star-Tribune*, Swann was named Virginia’s Teacher of the Year in 2021. In a speech to teachers at G.L.H Johnson Elementary School, he noted that it was Wilson’s words that saved him: “It’s the power of your influence that is going to change the trajectory of a child’s life. That’s what happened with me.”

**Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.  
(Psalm 119:105)**

*Loving Lord, bless all teachers as they guide the trajectory of a child’s life.*

1 January 20

2 **Tuskegee Airmen Legacy Remembered**

3 The Tuskegee Airmen, also known as the Red Tails for  
4 their illustrious red jackets and red-tailed aircrafts, were the first  
5 African American military aviators in the United States. In 2023,  
6 centenarian fighter pilot Lt. Col. James Harvey—one of the only  
7 Tuskegee Airmen still alive—remained committed to sharing  
8 stories of the group's triumphs for future generations.

9 Before World War II, it was not an option for a Black man  
10 to become a fighter pilot. So, when the opportunity arose to be  
11 one of the Red Tails, Harvey jumped at it. The pilots faced racial  
12 prejudice, but despite the tough training, Harvey told *ABC 10*  
13 *News San Diego*, “We knew what we were capable of.”

14 The Red Tails brought down more than 100 enemy aircraft  
15 in WWII, and their success contributed to the military being  
16 desegregated. They even won the first Top Gun competition in  
17 their category in 1949. This victory was finally recognized 73  
18 years later in 2022. Present at the ceremony was 100-year-old  
19 Harvey, who remains determined to keep fighting for their  
20 legacy, so that the Red Tails are never forgotten.

21 **Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our**  
22 **Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:57)**

23 *Lord, bless the Red Tails for their service to our country.*

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**January 21**

**Healers Come in Many Guises**

Bob A. was a man with intellectual challenges who made the world a better place. Bob worked as an orderly in a Birmingham, Alabama hospital. He did his routine tasks with great care to make patients comfortable and cheer them up. He treated them with consideration and respect, remembering their preferences and problems.

More importantly, he cared deeply about their welfare. His interest and concern had a way of warming the impersonal atmosphere of the hospital whenever he came into a room. If a patient had no family or friends who visited regularly, Bob often brought a small gift, such as a few flowers or a newspaper.

When one of his patients was moved to another part of the hospital for some reason, he found time to stop by for short visits during his lunch hour or when he went off duty.

“It’s my calling to help the sick,” he once said. “It wasn’t God’s will that I could be a doctor, but I help the doctors.”

Handicapped? Not Bob! He used his talents well and found fulfillment in his work by brightening the lives of others.

**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.**

**(Matthew 5:7)**

*Help me make one person’s life better, Redeemer.*

1 **January 22**

2 **Keeping a Prayer Journal**

3 Several years ago, when she was studying abroad in  
4 London, Sarah Zentner began keeping a diary because she  
5 wanted to remember her experiences accurately. It became more  
6 than a record of events, however, because her writing also  
7 expressed gratitude to God for the blessings she was receiving.

8 In an article for *Busted Halo*, Zentner recalled that the  
9 experience became so “inviting and restorative” that she kept it  
10 up, even after she returned home. She calls her efforts “prayer  
11 journaling,” and encourages others to do the same.

12 Zentner said, “A prayer journal can take any shape, really,  
13 but for me, it’s always been most helpful to think about it as a  
14 written dialogue with God...An entry in your prayer journal can  
15 address anything and everything on your heart. You can  
16 celebrate, or you can grieve. You can ask questions or state bold  
17 truths inspired by Bible verses.”

18 “You can speak, and you can listen. A prayer journal is  
19 simply another avenue for expressing your relationship with  
20 God, and there’s no right or wrong way to do that.”

21 **O Lord, let Your ear be attentive to the prayer of Your**  
22 **servant. (Nehemiah 1:11)**

23 *Messiah, may we always keep the lines of prayer open.*  
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January 23

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**The Older Woman in the Pew**

When she was a young wife and mother, Maria Morera Johnson remembers chuckling whenever she saw the older women at daily Mass praying their rosaries. Now, a couple of decades later, Johnson laughs because she herself has become “the older woman in the pew.”

In reflecting on the past at *CatholicMom.com*, she treasures the years she spent raising her kids, but also wonders if she could have carved out a little more time for practical and spiritual self-care, maybe by going on a weekend retreat occasionally instead of simply learning about the Catholic faith from books.

Johnson wrote, “It is not selfish to take a small break in the day and breathe. To set aside for a moment the many hats and remember who we are. It is all the more important to remember whose we are...I need to tend to my own continuing spiritual well-being. To seek those groups of women with whom...I can pray, and learn, and let down my hair, and even explore new devotions and new experiences related to growing in relationship with Christ.”

**See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God. (1 John 3:1)**

*Remind me to slow down and seek You, Jesus.*

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**Salvation Comes to Girls Town**

In Chalco, located on the outskirts of Mexico City, the Sisters of Mary seek out girls in need, between the ages of 11 and 16. throughout the Mexican countryside. These young women are then offered an education and home at the boarding school, Girls Town, for five years.

Father Christopher O’Connor, pastor of Blessed Virgin Mary Help of Christians Parish in Woodside, New York, recently paid a visit to Girls Town. He was impressed by the spiritual enthusiasm of the “3,000 young girls” he ministered to, particularly when it came to the sacrament of reconciliation.

“The whole set-up they have at Girls Town is amazing,” Father O’Connor explained to *The Tablet’s* Paula Katinas. “Each dorm is like a family, with a Sister serving as a mother to the girls in that dorm.”

“A lot of [the girls] came from broken homes,” Father O’Connor concluded. “There were a lot of tears. The main thing was to listen to them and allow them to tell their story...to make sure each girl knew she was loved.”

**I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go.  
(Psalm 32:8)**

*Abba, send us loving and humble examples of service.*



January 25

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## Strawberry Brings Hope to Prisoners

“Heathen, womanizer, alcoholic, addict.” That’s how former baseball player Darryl Strawberry described himself to inmates at Maryland Correctional Institution in Hagerstown. At least, that’s how he acted before he got into recovery and accepted God in his life. Now, he gives talks to others who have gone down the same wrong roads that he traveled, encouraging them to make better choices.

Regarding his visits to prisons, Strawberry told *MLB.com*’s Anthony DiComo, “I get a chance to speak with a lot of broken people, hurting people, because once upon a time, that was me.” Warden Gregory Werner added, “[Strawberry is] a living example of change. I hope that the incarcerated population takes that to heart.”

Strawberry plans to speak more to juveniles in the future because an increasing number of them believe “going to prison is cool.” He concluded, “It brings them hope for someone like me to come in there...and deliver a message to them about their life...and how they can make the best out of their situation.”

**Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them. (Hebrews 13:3)**

*Guide the incarcerated toward rehabilitation, Jesus.*

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January 26

**House of the Good Samaritan, Part 1**

The House of the Good Samaritan in Fatima, Portugal, was buzzing with joy and purpose the day journalist Leopoldina Reis Simões came to visit to write a story for *Global Sisters Report*. She quickly learned that this is the norm at the facility.

Its 87 female residents—ranging in age from 18 to 94—all have some form of mental challenges, but that doesn’t stop them from leading fulfilling lives. They especially love greeting visitors with warm hugs and smiles.

Sister Ana da Paz Nunes runs the facility for the Franciscan Sisters of Divine Providence, and noted it was created 40 years ago for “the service of the poorest.” The physical capabilities of “the girls,” as all residents are called, varies, so each takes part in tasks that match what they can do. That includes helping with services, embroidering, reading, painting, singing, and more.

“Here, no one is more important than anyone else,” Sister Nunes said. “We live like a family, and everyone has their mission and role.” More tomorrow...

**By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established. (Proverbs 24:3)**

*May we love and learn from people with mental challenges, Savior.*

1 **January 27**

2 **House of the Good Samaritan, Part 2**

3 Residents and staff at the House of the Good Samaritan are  
4 a culturally and religiously diverse group. As Sister Ana da Paz  
5 Nunes told *Global Sisters Report*, “Here, we learn to look at  
6 everyone as a person, as a being created by God.”

7 The nine Portuguese and Timorese Sisters who run the  
8 facility are able to do so by staying grounded in their faith. “We  
9 do everything we can on our part, and what we can’t, we hand  
10 over to God so that God can do His part,” Sister Nunes said.

11 The residents, all women with some form of mental  
12 disability, find purpose and guidance through the daily  
13 celebration of the Eucharist. Sister Nunes added, “Some  
14 residents also have catechesis. The spiritual aspect is important  
15 in their lives. They are sensitive to the problems of the world,  
16 pray, are informed, and like to watch the news. I have a lot of  
17 confidence in their prayer. It’s pure.”

18 In the end, the House of the Good Samaritan is a visible  
19 testament to the ways that love and acceptance can bring forth  
20 the Kingdom of God on earth.

21 **It is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs.**

22 **(Mark 10:14)**

23 *Teach me to see Your image in all people, Creator.*

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1 January 28

2 **From Shy Freshman to Confident Senior**

3           When Antonia Dey entered Archbishop Molloy High  
4 School as a freshman, she initially felt shy and unsure of herself.  
5 By the time she became a senior at the Queens, New York  
6 institution, she had gained confidence and mapped out a clear  
7 vision of her future.

8           An immigrant from Guyana, Dey had never been in a  
9 school with as many teachers and opportunities as Molloy. She  
10 took advantage of them all, joining up to 16 different clubs,  
11 reported Bianca Basone in *Stanner Life* magazine.

12           In addition, Dey displayed a talent for computer science,  
13 and was encouraged by teachers and staff to pursue that road.  
14 She plans to study engineering at Northwestern University,  
15 where she has received a scholarship. Dey explained, “I want to  
16 help engineer sustainable housing and agricultural practices, so  
17 that I can give back to Guyana.”

18           Noting she felt “cared for right away” after starting at  
19 Molloy, Dey is a testament to how talented teachers can guide  
20 students. She is grateful to those who “always have my back.”

21           **Teach the righteous and they will gain in learning.**

22           **(Proverbs 9:9)**

23           *Guide students towards wise, encouraging mentors, Lord.*

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January 29

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## **The World Needs Great Responders**

The late journalist Bette Dewing pointed out the need for what she called “great responders,” people who have learned the art of listening sympathetically, and responding with caring words.

The victims of violent crime or tragic accidents, people who have lost loved ones, and people who are depressed about some family or personal problem are among those who need the moral support of a caring listener.

Too often, our well-meaning response to someone’s sorrow is, “Don’t worry. Forget about it.” But taking a positive approach doesn’t mean denying the existence of sorrow. Acknowledging the feeling is a first step in moving through it.

By listening with love, we can help heal the emotional wounds of others. We can all learn to be great responders to those in need of God’s comfort—and ours.

**Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.**

**(Isaiah 40:1)**

*Jesus, may we comfort others with the understanding and compassion with which You comfort us.*

1 January 30

2 **Puppies Behind Bars**

3 Some police dogs sniff out drugs or catch criminals, but the  
4 canines in the NYPD's Employee Assistance Unit have a  
5 different job: to make people happy. These dogs, from Puppies  
6 Behind Bars, were recognized for their service at MetLife  
7 Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey in 2023, and they are  
8 lifting the spirits of cops and civilians, one wagging tail at a time.

9 Puppies Behind Bars is a nonprofit organization that has  
10 raised more than 3,000 dogs. As puppies, they are trained by  
11 incarcerated individuals. The program's approach is twofold:  
12 helping to rehabilitate prisoners, while also giving back to  
13 communities by training these service animals. The dogs then go  
14 out into the world as therapy dogs for wounded veterans, for  
15 police officers, and others who are in need.

16 Susan Lobel of Puppies Behind Bars told *WABC-TV* that  
17 these dogs have a positive effect on the community, and that it is  
18 also great watching incarcerated individuals give back to society  
19 "and do something wonderful that keeps on giving."

20 **Let Your steadfast love become my comfort according**  
21 **to Your promise to Your servant. (Psalm 119:76)**

22 *Merciful God, bless the therapy dogs who provide healing*  
23 *and comfort to so many in need.*

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**The Power of Music Therapy**

The time that Julene Johnson spent working at a senior center during her college years was life-changing. In an interview with *AARP Bulletin*, she recalled that she was studying performance and music therapy. But one day, she witnessed a woman with dementia begin playing the piano at the center.

Johnson said, “Everyone in the room came to life and started moving, tapping their feet, and dancing. I was struck by how impactful something as simple as playing a tune had on the whole room. That inspired me to better understand what it is about music that affects us.”

Today, Johnson works as a cognitive neuroscientist at the University of California, San Francisco’s Institute for Health and Aging. She points out that music can help people get a good night’s sleep and give seniors meaningful moments throughout the day. “Dancing with music will improve physical function,” she added. “And our research shows singing in a choir eases loneliness and improves self-esteem. If you’re a caregiver, music is something you should think about as part of your care plan.”

**Be filled with the Spirit...singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts. (Ephesians 5:18-19)**

*Allow music to fill me with joy and life, Creator.*