

A few of the many organizations within and beyond the church supporting the dignity and needs of the elderly and their caregivers.

Pontifical Council for the Laity - tinyurl.com/47ekywf2

Document: *"The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and in the World"*

Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging - areaagingsolutions.org

Services and programs give older adults and persons with disabilities access to information, assistance, consultation, and long-term care services & support in Cuyahoga, Geauga, Lake, Lorain & Medina counties.

The Ohio Coalition for Adult Protective Services - ocapsohio.org

A statewide coalition that strives to enhance the provision of services to adults at risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation through collaboration, education and advocacy.

Walking with Families Campaign - Dicastery for Laity Family and Life - *Amoris Laetitia*

Features 12 paths to walking with families including #8 "Develop programs of pastoral care for the elderly which seek to overcome the "throw-away" culture and societal indifference and promote initiatives that build bridges across the different stages of life, while also providing opportunities for the elderly to have an active role within the pastoral care of the community." tinyurl.com/sn2hye3z

"What Is Palliative Care and How Does It Differ From Hospice?" - tinyurl.com/7zyx6d9v

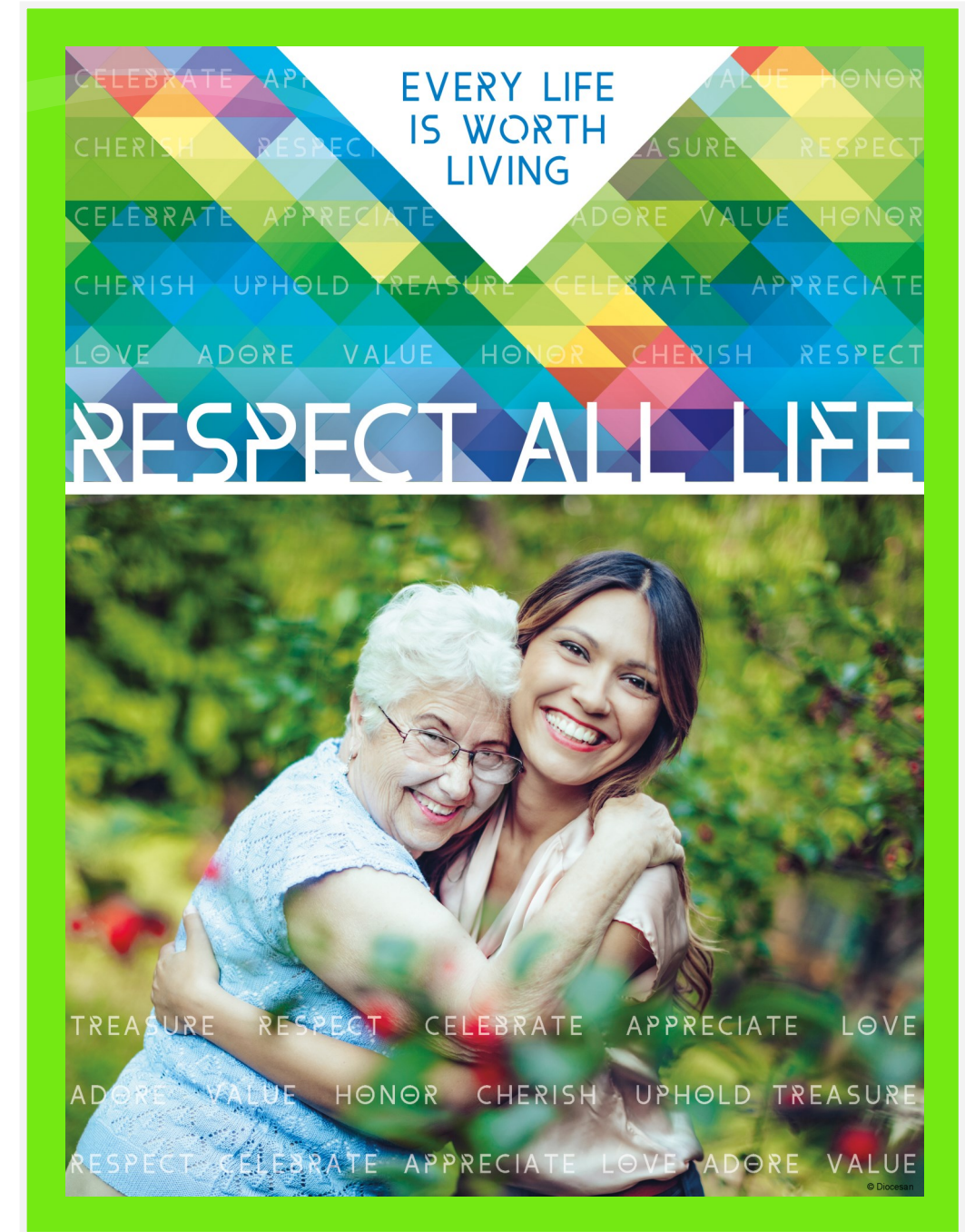
Catholic Charities - Older Adult Services - www.ccdocle.org/service-areas/older-adult-services

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS RESOURCES

- ♦ **Pastoral Message on Growing Older Within the Faith Community**
usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/blessings-age
- ♦ **World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly** - tinyurl.com/5c7jyzyz as well as
usccb.org/topics/marriage-and-family-life-ministries/grandparents-elderly
- ♦ **Elderly Care Materials** - usccb.org/committees/pro-life-activities/elderly-care-materials
- ♦ **"Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services"** - tinyurl.com/ae2835tc

RESPECT LIFE

The Joys and Challenges of Our Seniors and Elderly



Personal Reflection
By Bill Merriman, Deacon, St. Patrick

It has been said that if you’ve met one person with Alzheimer’s, you’ve only encountered one person’s experience of this disease. And the way we respond will be varied as well. My wife Jean was diagnosed with Alzheimer's 12 years ago, and Multiple Myeloma cancer, 9 years ago. In the summer of 2019, we began in-home Hospice care. Later stage Alzheimer’s care has been described as a 36-hour day.



Bill and Jean Merriman
Treasured by many at St. Pat’s and in Ohio City for living as true witness to Christ

After Jean was in her hospital bed by 7:00 p.m., I finished the day’s dishes and laid down in my bed beside her. I set the alarms to be up and check on and care for her through the night (at 10:00 p.m., 12:00 a.m., and 3:00 a.m.) to change or clean her as might be needed. It was like the rhythm of prayerful contemplation.

At 7:00 a.m., our hospice nursing assistant, Angel of God with hands of Jesus, would arrive. Together, we tenderly bathed Jean in bed, toileted and dressed her, helped her into the wheelchair and to the table for breakfast.

By 8:00 a.m. the nursing assistant was replaced by one of our helpers, adding another bright woman's voice to Jean's morning, engaging Jean with some basic exercises, joyful conversation, and ‘doing laps’ with her walker to and from the toilet.

And there was music! While Jean enjoyed singing secular songs, it was contemporary Catholic hymns from church that helped center her when mental confusion was threatening her with darkness or doubt, and provided comfort as she surrendered her life to the Grace and Mercy of God.

By November, Jean slept more, and she had to be transferred between wheelchair and bed with a Hoyer hydraulic sling-lift borrowed from a friend. It was like the Gospel story, about the friends of the paralyzed man, who placed him on a stretcher, and lowered him through a roof. To Jesus. Night after night, our friends gathered to assist with this maneuver.

On Christmas Eve, while Jean was still awake, we sang two hymns, Taste and See, the Goodness of the Lord and We are Many Parts, We Are All One Body.

In a month, Jean had little appetite and had trouble swallowing fluids. On January 27th we sang our last hymn, Servant Song, as she lay in bed:

You are the light in my darkness,
You are my strength when I’m weary,
You give me sight when I’m blinded. Come, see for me.
I am your song and servant, singing your praises like Mary.
Surrendered to your spirit, ‘Let it be done to me.’

The power of her love was, and is, enormous! I am still learning from her, through memories of her, and because she taught me to grow. She is shaping my life, even today. -Bill Merriman



Walking with My Mother
By Gary Pritts, St. Malachi parishioner

In 2013, I had the privilege of walking closely with my mother during her last days.

At 84, having smoked for half a century, she suffered for 20 years from emphysema and COPD. This disease was “death by millimeters”, with gradual decline into disability. Yet, she wanted no part of assisted living! Unbeknownst to us, her cleaning lady had served as a “stealth” caregiver to her, under a pact of secrecy, as she hid her frailty from us. Still, it became clear that stopping by 3 or 4 times a week wasn’t enough.

My wife Stephanie and I moved into her house to care for her on January 1 of that year. Mom also had dementia with short-term memory loss, so we weren’t sure that, when we arrived with suitcases, she would remember she’d agreed for us to move in! Fortunately, all went well, and she was comforted to have us. We had full-time jobs, so after consulting with my brothers, we hired an agency who provided a caregiver during our workdays.



Stephanie and Mom

We were surprised to learn how far she had declined. She was unable to dress or toilet herself alone. God bless my wife for lovingly providing these services. I managed her medications and doctor appointments. We shared cooking and other tasks. Her easy chair was her daytime “station.”

Having worked as a Plain Dealer reporter for 20 years, she began each day with her PD and a cup of black coffee. Instant Nescafe. The first of many. She lived on coffee and sweets.

She liked overmedicating herself with her “breathing pill” (prednisone) and her “happy pill” (lorazepam). So, I supervised her medications and limited her to what was prescribed. She didn’t complain to me, but said (many times) to my visiting son, “David, do you know what your father did? He took my pills. I think he hid them in his car.”

With Stage IV COPD, her inability to breathe became more and more terrifying. By February 1, she agreed to hospice care, and the doctor provided morphine, which magically relieved this discomfort.



Mom with our son, David
Praying the rosary was one of the most intimate times, as we shared our personal intentions.

USCCB STATEMENT
“We are all growing older, not just as individuals but as members of a faith community. The spiritual growth of the aging person is affected by the community and affects the community. Aging demands the attention of the entire Church. How the faith community relates to its older members—recognizing their presence, encouraging their contributions, responding to their needs, and providing appropriate opportunities for spiritual growth—is a sign of the community's spiritual health and maturity.”

“Listening to the elderly tell their stories is good for children and young people; it makes them feel connected to the living history of their families, their neighborhoods and their country.”
Pope Francis’s 2016 apostolic exhortation "Amoris Laetitia" ("The Joy of Love")
Amoris Laetitia Family Year 2021 - 2022