

Depressed Teen Creates ‘notOK’ App

An estimated 49.5 percent of young people between the ages of 13 to 18 endure mental health struggles, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. One such teen created light out of that dark period in her life by developing an app to help others battling similar issues.

Hannah Lucas, a high school sophomore from Georgia, was facing depression due to a medical condition that left her feeling isolated from others. As reported by *ABC News*, she “wished there was an app she could use to quickly alert her family and friends when she needed help, either physically or emotionally.”

With assistance from her brother, Charlie, they created the “notOK” app. It enables people in distress to press a button which instantly connects them to five emergency contacts with a text message, such as, “Hey, I’m not OK. Come find me,” along with GPS coordinates.

The response to the app has been overwhelmingly positive. Hannah, who once felt isolated, is now connecting with others in need: “It definitely gave me a sense of comfort.”

**Preserve my life, for I am devoted to You.
(Psalm 86:2)**

Merciful Jesus, guide those living with mental illness towards Your light so they get the help they need.

Nurse Who Made a Difference

Thirty-five years ago, Alyson Brittain of Arkansas became completely paralyzed due to Guillain-Barre syndrome. Her condition was so bad that she couldn't even close her own eyelids. During Alyson's hospitalization, Ceddie Persaud served as her nurse, lovingly caring for her in every way possible. It was Ceddie who would close Alyson's eyelids so she could sleep.

Alyson lost touch with Ceddie after she left the hospital and recovered, but she recently found a photo of the two of them together, which ignited a desire in Alyson to thank her former nurse.

Alyson wrote to *CBS News*' David Begnaud, telling him their story and asking for help in tracking Ceddie down. He learned she was living in California, so Alyson flew out for a reunion. The two women joyfully embraced upon meeting again.

Ceddie still remembered Alyson because she was the only patient with Guillain-Barre syndrome that she had ever cared for. Alyson said, "[Ceddie] was my angel and my light in the time that was so dark. I was scared, and I was lonely, and she and her alone made me think that I was going to be OK."

**May the Lord reward you for your deeds.
(Ruth 2:12)**

Lord, bless all nurses for the good they do.

The Voice, Part 1

One of the most recognizable and distinguished voices in the film and television industry once had trouble speaking. Actor James Earl Jones, who voiced the iconic characters Darth Vader in *Star Wars* and Mufasa in *The Lion King*, died at age 93 in 2024, so many publications looked back on his life and career.

Growing up, Jones lived on a farm in Michigan with his grandparents, who were people with a strong Christian faith. In fact, the youngster listened to his grandfather preach every Sunday in the chapel he had built for his wife.

Jones admired his grandfather's speaking style, but seemed unable to emulate it himself. While he talked to the farm animals without a problem, he would stutter when trying to engage in simple conversations with adults.

As reported by *OSV News*, "When he was 14, a retired college professor began teaching at Jones' school, and began to mentor the teen, who shared his love for poetry. He encouraged Jones to write and recite poetry, helping him overcome his speech impediment."

**Pleasant words are like a honeycomb,
sweetness to the soul and health to the body.
(Proverbs 16:24)**

Father, help young people to overcome their challenges.

The Voice, Part 2

Actor James Earl Jones will always be remembered as the voice of *Star Wars*' villainous Darth Vader, who rejected the Jedi religion in order to utilize "the dark side of the Force." In real life, Jones' spiritual journey was much more positive.

Raised in a Christian home, Jones always felt drawn to God. While serving in the U.S. Army, he met a Jesuit chaplain "who helped me understand who God really was," reported *OSV News*. As a result, Jones converted to Catholicism.

Describing that time of his life, he told *The New York Times*, "The only thing I had that was not geared toward the art of killing was the Catholic Church, to which I had converted in the Army, and the complete work of Shakespeare."

Despite all the accomplishments in his long and varied career, Jones once said, "Perhaps my greatest honor came when I was asked to read the New Testament on tape."

Now, the man who could read words so beautifully and effectively has gotten to meet the Word Himself. Eternal rest grant unto him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.

**Let the words of my mouth and the meditation
of my heart be acceptable to You, O Lord.
(Psalm 19:14)**

*May the words I read and speak guide me to
You, Jesus.*

Mariachi Motivator

High school music teacher Albert Martinez had gotten his students to Texas' state mariachi competition three times. So, when he began a new job in Uvalde, he expected to do the same. Instead, he found an unmotivated group of students who treated the class like a free period, reported *AARP: The Magazine*.

Martinez approached this problem by talking to and getting to know his students personally. They all responded to his interest in them and eventually picked up their instruments. Within a few months, they were invited to perform at regionals, where they got their “butts kicked,” Martinez said. But that experience lit a fire in his students to practice and improve.

The following year, they made it through regionals to the state mariachi competition—and they won! The students felt ecstatic and emotional about what they had accomplished.

The year after that, they made it to state finals again. But this time, they lost. Still, Martinez used the experience as a learning opportunity for his pupils, telling them, “Things aren’t always going to go your way. Your responsibility is just to show up and do the best you can do.”

We do not lose heart. (2 Corinthians 4:1)

*Guide me in striving to reach my potential,
Abba.*

A Mother's Wisdom, Part 1

Author Torrey Maldonado has a gift for finding hope in dark situations. That gift stems from his own life growing up in a neighborhood with drugs and crime—and in a home where he witnessed his mother become a victim of domestic abuse.

Through it all, his beloved mom served as a beacon of light and font of wisdom so that he would choose a better path than some of the people around him. And Torrey has done exactly that through his writing career, penning short novels for tweens and teens that speak to their real lives and emotions.

Several years ago, Torrey earned a Christopher Award for his book *Tight*. And in 2024, he won a second Christopher Award for his semi-autobiographical novel *Hands*, which tells the story of a 12-year-old boy named Trevor who is torn between using his hands to create art—or using them to fight his abusive stepfather, who is soon being released from prison.

This was a difficult choice Torrey himself faced. More tomorrow...

God...will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but...will also provide the way...to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Holy Spirit, guide me in making difficult choices.

A Mother's Wisdom, Part 2

Like the character Trevor in his Christopher Award-winning young adult novel *Hands*, Torrey Maldonado was faced with a difficult choice when he witnessed domestic abuse against his mom in their home.

“Like Trevor, I like to draw,” Torrey explained. “Trevor is an amazing illustrator. People in his village feel he could go on to become an illustrator...But he’s gotten messages that young people get throughout the ages: if someone hits you, you better hit them back. He’s trying to decide, is he going to use his hands to build, create, and elevate—or is he going to use his hands to knock down and destroy [his stepfather]?”

Trevor’s mother in the book, like Torrey’s mother in real life, wants him to develop his artistic gifts and build a good life and career for himself. She realizes that succumbing to an impulse towards violence can lead to unintended consequences, especially for a 12-year-old. His mother then cements her case with some biblical wisdom. More tomorrow...

**I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up.
(Acts 20:32)**

Help young people avoid impulses towards violence, Lord, even when they seem justified.

A Mother's Wisdom, Part 3

In one sense, author Torrey Maldonado—and the semi-autobiographical character, Trevor, that he created for his Christopher Award-winning young adult novel *Hands*—were justified in wanting to fight to protect their mothers from a domestic abuser. But both the real and fictional moms foresee the dark turn this situation could take.

“Trev doesn’t realize that by [seeking] revenge...violence is going to beget violence,” Torrey explained on *Christopher Closeup*. “He has a pure heart and pure intentions in learning how to [fight] because he wants to defend his family.”

“He doesn’t realize that the sword is double-edged, so, it’s hard for him to follow another piece of advice...implicitly in *Hands*, but it’s not explicitly stated. It was explicitly stated to me. My mom loved the Bible quote: ‘If a man hits one cheek, turn your cheek and give him the other cheek.’ Meaning, don’t give in to your anger... because violence will beget violence. Instead, try to be humble because the meek shall inherit.”

Thankfully, both Torrey and Trevor followed that advice, allowing their light to grow rather than be diminished.

Repay no one evil for evil. (Romans 12:17)

*Give me the grace to turn the other cheek,
Prince of Peace.*

Mothers Need a Grandma Tribe

As wonderful as motherhood is, it can be isolating and daunting when faced without the support of family and friends. That's where the "Grandma tribe" can help!

The "Grandma Tribe" are older women who may have raised their own children and can offer their hard-earned wisdom to the younger generation.

Mother of five Anne Marie Williams found her own family's support through her church. As she recalled for *Verily* magazine, the "Grandma" would come and offer a helping hand by reading to the children or taking the older kids to the park to give Williams a breather or a much-needed nap.

It's a reciprocal relationship, offering value to the mother, but also to the grandma who may be facing loneliness or looking for a sense of purpose.

Feeling needed is a gift. As Williams said, "In this house, we are routing the epidemic of loneliness one grandma hug at a time."

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother. (2 Timothy 1:5)

Loving Lord, bless all mothers and provide them with helpers and support along their parenting journey.

A Sweet Reunion

Vamarr Hunter of Chicago didn't discover he was adopted until he was 35 years old—and he didn't look into who his birth family was until age 50. But once the truth came out, the new relationships formed became a blessing to everyone involved.

Genealogist Gabriella Vargas investigated Hunter's background and learned his mother was Lenore Lindsey, owner of the local bakery Give Me Some Sugah. As it turned out, Hunter had been frequenting that bakery for years, so the two already knew each other.

Lindsey revealed that she got pregnant at age 17 and chose to give her son up for adoption. She was thrilled to reconnect with him at this stage of life while she was receiving chemo for breast cancer, reported the *Washington Post*.

When Lindsey had a stroke shortly after their reunion, Hunter became the bakery's manager in her absence. Several months later, he took over running the bakery full-time. Lindsey observed, "It's been a great experience. It further strengthens my faith." Hunter added, "It's a piece of me that was missing. It has changed us both tremendously."

Let her who bore you rejoice. (Proverbs 23:25)

Abba, we give thanks for the gift of mothers.

More Important Than Winning the Race

Kaylee Montgomery of Batesville, Arkansas, was trying to achieve her personal best in the final race of her high school cross country running career. Suddenly, she saw something that made her stop in her tracks.

Julia, a fellow runner, had fallen down when her legs gave out just short of the finish line. Kaylee knew she couldn't leave her behind and was resolved to help her finish the race.

“Jesus wouldn't pass me by if I was falling down and couldn't get up,” Kaylee told her parents afterward, reported *Kait8.com*. “He would pick me up.”

Kaylee held Julia up by the arm, and together they crossed the finish line, as Kaylee encouraged her by declaring, “You got this,” and even asking God to give her strength.

Kaylee Montgomery may not have won that race, but she was surely a winner in everyone's eyes by exemplifying the selflessness of making a personal sacrifice to help someone in need.

I have not run away from being a shepherd in your service. (Jeremiah 17:16)

Jesus, help me to put others' needs before my own.

Letter Carrier's Eagle Eye Saves Life

It was a particularly warm day in May 2024 when Adam Benincosa, a letter carrier of 30 years at the time, was making the rounds on his regular mail route in Roy, Utah. Suddenly, he “saw some frantic waving,” which led him to spot “a woman lying on the ground next to her garden in the front yard.”

Benincosa ran over to check on her, recognizing her as one of his customers, Sherry Jarvis. Sherry told her mailman that she had been stuck on the ground for almost an hour after knocking her head against “the wooden border of her garden.”

“I was weeding, and I went to pull out this big weed,” Sherry told *KSL NewsRadio*, as quoted in *The Postal Record*. “Well...the weed won.”

Jarvis had been able to call her sister on her cell phone to ask for help, but it would take her sister about an hour to get to her. Thankfully, Benincosa was able to get Sherry into her house. He even sat with her until her sister arrived.

“I saw [Sherry] a couple days later, and her face was really beat up, but she was very grateful,” Adam recalled. “I was just in the right place at the right time.”

Rescue the needy...deliver them. (Psalm 82:4)

Lord, may we trust in Your Divine timing.

Volunteer Makes God Smile

Gloria Aqui hasn't let turning 82 slow her down. She continues to volunteer at her home parish of St. Catherine Church in Kapaa, Kauai. As reported in the *Hawaii Catholic Herald*, "You might see [Aqui] in the parish office, the parish gift shop or the food bank; decorating the church with flowers; or participating in various ministry committee meetings."

Aqui credits her mother with setting a positive example for her because she was often praying novenas for the needs of others, as well as helping them in any way she could. "I was brought up to serve Him," Aqui said. "Everything we have is a gift from God. He provides us with talents to serve in various ministries. I guess I inherited my mother's genes!"

Aqui believes that staying involved in church activities has kept her mind and body healthy—and taught her to recognize Jesus' presence in the people around her. "At the food bank on Saturdays, you can see the smiles of people in need," she said. "Then you know you are making a difference. You are helping to put food on their table! You are making God smile."

Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men. (Colossians 3:23)

How can I make God smile today?

The Healing Power of the Rosary, Part 1

As a boy, Gary Jansen believed that Jesus didn't like him. It might seem strange for a Catholic school student to hold that view, but it stemmed more from environment than theology. Recalling his childhood during a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Gary noted:

“My parents and I lived in a basement apartment, and when I was growing up...we had dirt floors. We had carpet that was laid over dirt floors, but those were dirt floors. And so, I started off in a really poor state. My parents worked hard, but neither of them graduated high school, so they struggled.”

“They wanted me to go to Catholic school... but I guess I was the poor kid, and so I was picked on a little bit or felt ostracized. I think some of that rubbed off into how I experienced God...I thought, ‘God must see me that way, too.’”

Over time, Gary learned that wasn't how God actually saw him. And in retrospect, those experiences of being made to feel “less than” taught him not to be judgmental of others based on outer circumstances because you never know what is going on behind the scenes.

Judge not, that you be not judged. (Matthew 7:1)

Help me experience Your love, Jesus.

The Healing Power of the Rosary, Part 2

Another pivotal moment in Gary Jansen's life occurred years later when he was a young man working out at the gym. He was trying to do deadlifts with a lot of weight, thinking that would build up his strength faster. Then, a muscle-bound man walked over and told him, "Hey, bro, you're carrying too much weight on that bar."

This man then removed some weights from Gary's bar and demonstrated proper form to him, so he wouldn't hurt himself. While this approach would build strength more slowly, it was better than overloading, which was what Gary was doing.

"Later on," Gary said, "I started thinking, 'Maybe that guy's an angel.' Not only did he probably save me from hurting my back, but maybe his message was deeper than physical fitness, that it had something to do [with the] way that I was carrying weight in my own life. Whether that's worry or anxiety, whatever I was experiencing, maybe I needed some help and I needed to take some of that weight off. It drove home the idea of Christ as the bearer of the weight of our lives."

Come to Me, all you that are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28)

Help me shoulder my burdens, Jesus.

The Healing Power of the Rosary, Part 3

As the practice of his faith became a key part of Gary Jansen's life, he spent more time in prayer, eventually turning to the Rosary he had learned as a child, but with a more enlightened view of its five decades of saying one *Our Father*, 10 *Hail Marys*, and one *Glory Be*.

“[It’s] something I thought was boring when I was growing up,” Gary recalled during a *Christopher Closeup* interview about his book *The Healing Power of Praying the Rosary*. “It felt repetitive...As you get older, you realize all those people that lived hundreds of years ago, maybe they’re a lot smarter than I. Maybe they were onto something.”

Gary noted that reciting the Rosary engages the senses: “If you’re praying out loud, you have vocal prayer. You have meditation and contemplation going on. There’s a tactile part of it where you’re actually holding a Rosary bead to make sure you’re not losing count of all the prayers that you’re praying. It’s something that incorporates mind, body, and soul.”

**We do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us.
(Romans 8:26)**

Holy Spirit, grant me the grace to pray more fruitfully.

The Healing Power of the Rosary, Part 4

The four Mysteries which comprise the Rosary include moments from Jesus' life, ranging from the announcement of His birth to His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Contrary to assertions by some non-Catholic Christians, Gary pointed out that the Rosary is not praying "to" Mary, but "with" Mary.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview about his book *The Healing Power of Praying the Rosary*, Gary explained, "I like to think of the Rosary itself as a scrapbook of Mary's memories... It's like you're sitting next to Mary. She's going through all these pages, and she's like, 'This is the day I had my son. It was amazing. You're not going to believe who showed up, and they brought all these gifts.'"

"It's a way of making Jesus relatable without taking away the importance of who He is and His story. The Rosary has brought me closer to Jesus over the years because, as I said at the very beginning, I didn't think God liked me. I felt like Jesus was intimidating. But the Rosary was an opening for me to find Jesus and to experience those mysteries in a deeply spiritual way."

Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. (Luke 2:19)

May I draw nearer to Your Son through you, Mary.

The Healing Power of the Rosary, Part 5

Gary Jansen has learned that meditative prayers are not just good for the soul, they benefit the body as well. He explored this idea in his book *The Healing Power of Praying the Rosary*, noting, “Chronic inflammation can lead to heart disease, arthritis, or cancer over time. The leading factor that a lot of researchers and medical professionals see now is stress.”

“It made me think: if chronic inflammation happens in the body, it must also happen in the soul and the intellect. The book talks about spiritual inflammation and physical inflammation. Meditative practices like the Rosary can ease that. There’s been a lot of studies over the years that meditation and prayer can help reduce stress. It can help reduce blood pressure. It can lower your heart rate. It can boost your immune system.”

“The evidence is out there. So, first and foremost, the Rosary is about praying and being in the presence of Jesus. But there’s a healing quality to it that’s a byproduct that can help us mentally and physically.”

**Are any among you suffering? Let him pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing...praise.
(James 5:13)**

Jesus, may my prayer life lead me to greater inner peace.

Stable Recovery

Both the horses and their owners at Taylor Made Farm in Nicholasville, Kentucky, are worth millions of dollars due to their involvement in the racing industry. So, with all that money at stake, it might seem risky to introduce alcoholics, addicts, and felons as the thoroughbreds' caretakers.

It was a risk that Frank Taylor believed was worth taking when he launched the Stable Recovery program. As reported by Beth Harris for *The Associated Press*, Taylor's mission statement for the farm involves "living Christian values," which, for him, meant offering a second chance at life to those who needed it.

Taylor calls the horse "the most therapeutic animal in the world." He quoted Winston Churchill's statement, "The outside of a horse is good for the inside of a man." The facts back that up, as 110 men "have successfully completed the program."

Participant Jaron Kohari struggled with addiction for nearly 20 years and felt "broken." He reflected, "The day I got in this barn and started working with the horses, I felt like they were healing my soul...These horses require your attention 24/7, so it teaches you to love something and care for it again."

I will bring back the strayed. (Ezekiel 34:16)

Guide those who need them towards second chances, Lord.

The Abandoned Poodle

St. John's University student Kathryn Ruiz was driving near the school's Queens, New York campus when she pulled over after spotting a white poodle dodging traffic. With a boyfriend who is a dog trainer, Ruiz knew how to get the canine to come to her. She then brought it to the school's Public Safety office, where they discovered a bloody tumor on its stomach.

Brian Browne, St. John's Associate Vice President, sent out an email blast requesting help, and a veterinarian responded. A microchip helped him learn the poodle's name was Luna and that surgery to remove her tumor would cost \$1,500.

After a photo of Luna was posted on social media, people chipped in to pay for the operation. Then, Christopher Walsh, a St. John's employee whose dog had recently died, volunteered to adopt Luna and give the now cancer-free dog a good home.

Brian Browne observed, "What are the odds that a sick, abandoned dog is discovered by a student adept at handling animals and, through the swift and collaborative efforts of staff and strangers, finds healing while bringing unexpected cheer to a happy new home? Only in New York—and only at St. John's!"

The Lord directs the steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

*Teach us to work together for the good of all,
Lord.*

Valedictorian Tunes Out Naysayers

Throughout his life, Emmanuel Ford was frequently told that he was not “college material.” Rather than letting this negativity crush him, he used it as fuel to become Queensborough Community College’s 2025 Valedictorian.

The odds were stacked against Ford early on because he was born blind with cerebral palsy. Doctors predicted he wouldn’t make it out of infancy. They proved to be as wrong as his college naysayers.

Ford required multiple factors to achieve his educational dreams, from helpful technology to accommodating professors to personal determination. As quoted on his school’s website, he felt “humbled and grateful” after being named Valedictorian.

Ford concluded, “Don’t let anyone tell you that you cannot, especially if you have a disability. Break out of the box you are put in. Pursue your dreams and when you do this, like me, you are paving the way for others to believe in their dreams as well. Tune out the naysayers. Work hard and prove them wrong.”

**Suffering produces endurance...endurance produces character...character produces hope.
(Romans 5:3-4)**

Holy Spirit, fill me with determination to achieve my goals.

The 'Free Bike' Man

Manuel Vera may be retired from his job as a program manager in Silver Spring, Maryland, but he remains active when it comes to helping humanity in his own unique way. As Vera recalled in *AARP: The Magazine*, he has always enjoyed repairing bicycles and often did so for his neighbors.

That got him thinking about people who couldn't afford bikes of their own. He started asking his neighbors to donate any bikes to him that they or their kids no longer used. Vera then fixed them up and offered them for free to people coming out of a local church service. The bikes were snapped up quickly!

Soon, Vera was giving away free bikes near moderate-income apartment buildings. Then, refugees from Afghanistan began being resettled in his part of Maryland, so his efforts were directed towards them.

Vera noted, "I've given away over 550 bikes. And I'm providing them to refugees from not just Afghanistan, but also Africa, Central America, Ukraine, Iran. It brings a lot of satisfaction...One young man, a Syrian refugee, said, "This is a light in the dark.""

**All shall give as they are able.
(Deuteronomy 16:17)**

May I use my talents to help others, Lord.

Saved by a Drone

Unlike most shark fishermen in Florida, Andrew Smith cannot take bait out into the water in a kayak. Due to his seizure disorder, he stays on shore and uses a drone to do that for him. That skill came in handy when a potential disaster struck while Smith was fishing on Pensacola Beach.

He recalled to Hannah James of *WEAR News*, “This girl came running, asking if anybody can swim...and...nobody could swim. Her friend was getting sucked more and more out [into the rip tide].”

Smith realized his drone could help, so he attached a flotation device to it, then flew it out to the teenage swimmer in need. It took Smith two tries, but the second drop was a success! “I lowered it until you could see her hands grab it,” Smith said. “I released it. She climbed on and started floating.”

This happened before Memorial Day, so no lifeguards were on duty yet. According to first responders, if Smith had not intervened, the teen “wouldn’t have made it.” Hailed as “a true hero” by bystander Robert Nay, who filmed the rescue, Smith was happy to have been in the right place at the right time.

I will make you fish for people. (Matthew 4:19)

Abba, may we use any means in our power to save lives.

The Holy Spirit was There

When Pope Francis visited the U.S. in 2015, one of his first stops was Manhattan's St. Patrick's Cathedral, where he led vespers. Sitting in a wheelchair in the congregation that night was Stephanie Gaboud, wearing a bright pink shirt that caught the pope's eye. The 17-year-old suffered from excruciating pain due to a spinal condition that no surgeon was willing to take on.

As reported by Michelle Charlesworth of *Eyewitness News*, Pope Francis came over to Stephanie with a huge smile on his face, then made the sign of the cross on her forehead. Stephanie recalled, "It felt like the Holy Spirit was there with me."

Soon after, Pat, the woman who has served as Stephanie's loving guardian all her life, found a surgeon willing to operate on her. The surgery was successful, and Stephanie declared, "No more pain, no more suffering."

Several years later, Stephanie traveled to Rome and briefly reunited with Pope Francis, thanking him for the miraculous role his blessing played in her life. This encounter meant all the more to her when the pope passed away a month later.

You may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)

Bring healing and hope to all who suffer, Holy Spirit.

The Promise of Freedom

The Richard Nixon Presidential Library in Orange County, California, marked the 50th anniversary of the fall of Saigon on April 30, 2025. One of the speakers was Tony Cordero, a Gold Star son whose father, William, was killed in the Vietnam War. Tony went on to co-found Sons and Daughters in Touch, which brought together thousands of Gold Star children from the war.

In his speech, Tony recalled that “millions of Vietnamese fled to the United States of America. The promise of freedom and liberty that they witnessed being personified by American fighting forces in Vietnam inspired those millions to risk their lives on treacherous seas in hopes of landing on American shores. Today, the Vietnamese community has been absorbed as an integral part of America’s tapestry.”

Tony concluded by noting that the U.S. has become a better country thanks to the contributions of the military members who returned home to become teachers, first responders, doctors, etc.—and because of the Vietnamese “who came to America to live in freedom and contribute to this grand experiment.”

**The memory of the righteous is a blessing.
(Proverbs 10:7)**

Lord, bless all fallen military members and those afflicted by war and violence.

Comfort the Grieving, Part 1

When a friend, family member, or even an acquaintance loses a loved one, knowing what to say or do to help them through the grieving process can be difficult. Writing for *OSV News*, Lorene Hanley Duquin offers some astute observations.

“Bereavement,” she states, means “to be torn apart.” If you’ve ever dealt with grief yourself, you know this to be true. It can feel like your heart, your soul, your whole life has been ripped asunder.

In the early stages of grief, Duquin writes, “You can help by listening. A good listener doesn’t interrupt or try to change the way the person is feeling. A good listener just listens. When grieving people begin to share their story, they sometimes get emotional. Assure the person that it’s OK to cry or to express anger or frustration.”

In addition, “Don’t say: ‘I know how you feel,’ ‘You’ve got to be strong,’ ‘It’s a blessing in disguise,’ ‘God never gives us more than we can handle.’ Instead, say: ‘I can’t imagine how painful this must be,’ ‘It’s okay to cry,’...‘[I’m available] anytime you want to talk.’”

**The Lord is near to the brokenhearted.
(Psalm 34:18)**

Guide me in being a comfort to those who mourn, Father.

Comfort the Grieving, Part 2

In the weeks after a death, the person who lost his or her loved one will likely be surrounded by friends and family. But this support tends to dwindle over time. Writing for *OSV News*, Lorene Hanley Duquin notes the grieving need special support between four months to one year after the death. What to do?

Ask the person if they'd like to talk—and listen with compassion. “Don’t be surprised at questions about God, life after death, right and wrong, and why bad things happen. Some questions you will be able to answer; others have no answer.”

Next, “Let the grieving person know that you still think about their loved one. Use the person’s name when you share your thoughts and memories.” Also, ask them if they’d like you to pray with them.

“Grief has no timetable,” Duquin concludes. “You will know that someone is nearing the end of their bereavement when they...begin to laugh again, they express gratitude, their energy increases...their memories become comforting instead of painful, and they feel a sense of hope for the future.”

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

*May the grieving find hope and new life,
Divine Comforter.*

New Approach to Dementia Care

Ozanam Hall, a nursing home in Queens, New York, recently opened a specialized care center for dementia patients, dubbed Carmel Hall, after the Carmelite nuns who serve there as caregivers. As reported by *The Tablet's* Alexandra Moyon, "The new space was inspired by Montessori principles, which focus on encouraging participation, offering choices, and demonstration rather than instruction."

Sister Philip Ann Bowden noted that it is harmful for dementia patients to "just sit for hours without being engaged." Staff are trained to interact with them in meaningful ways. For instance, residents are "invited" to participate rather than being told to, giving them a sense of control. There are music-based activities, and caregivers are given background on their patients' lives so they can make conversation with them.

The atmosphere and artwork in the facility also help. Volunteer Robert Parmach observed, "What surprised me is how lively it is...The dimensions of the place, the use of color...I think it picks up the spirit."

**Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent.
(Psalm 71:9)**

Guide us to better care for people with dementia, Savior.

Feeding Program Makes a Difference

Like many in the central Ethiopian town of Debre Berhan, widow Etenesh Abebe faced poverty and had trouble providing food for her young daughter. Thankfully, she found help from the Sisters of Divine Providence for Abandoned Children.

Since 1988, the Sisters have run Divine Providence School, which offers an education to needy children. They begin every morning by baking bread so that students can eat a good breakfast. Some students receive daily lunch as well, reported Hikma A. Abdulmejid for the Catholic Near East Welfare Association's *One* magazine.

Abebe said of the Sisters, "Their kindness has been a blessing. The feeding program has lifted a huge burden off my shoulders...[It] allows me to focus on finding work."

Proper nutrition has made a tremendous difference to the children, who now have the energy and brain power to focus on their studies—and who feel happier overall. One person called the food program "a game-changer, significantly improving students' academic performance and well-being."

Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor.

(Proverbs 22:9)

Guide all hungry people towards sustenance, Abba.

A Brother's Love

Two years ago, first prize in The Christophers' Annual Video Contest for College Students went to Alexandra Carson, a film and television major at Missouri Southern State University. Her winning video, "My Friend, David," documents the life of her older brother, David, who has low-functioning autism.

Carson's film delves beneath the surface of what it means to be autistic by letting her audience get to know the person behind the condition. "[David] makes for a great listener," she said in her video, "and he shows me what it means to be alive. Whatever he feels, he feels with his whole being and loves with everything he has."

"When I mention [that] David has autism, most people freeze up. They don't know what to say...Maybe it's fear. Fear of saying the wrong thing...of offending or of looking ignorant... When that fear doesn't hold us back, doesn't stop us...from asking questions and making mistakes, from improving and growing, then maybe the world can change. Maybe understanding can deepen."

**My mouth shall speak wisdom; the meditation
of my heart shall be understanding.
(Psalm 49:3)**

*Guide us to grow in understanding of one
another, Lord.*

A Life-Saving Lick

Financial troubles, work-related stress, and substance abuse “snowballed” into “a perfect storm” for Detroit firefighter Matt Dunaj, who decided to take his own life. Fortunately, he had a furry angel looking out for him in the form of his loving dog, Mia.

After Dunaj went down to the basement that fateful evening, he believes that Mia heard his gun cock and immediately raced down to intervene. “Thank the Lord the dog was home,” Dunaj told *ClickOnDetroit* reporter/anchor Jason Colthorp, “because...as soon as that happened...in that unconditional love, she licked me in my face, and kind of got me out of it.”

The next day, Dunaj relinquished his gun to his brother and was directed by his job to the IAFF Center of Excellence, a facility in Maryland where he was able to get the help he needed. Following the recent loss of a co-worker to suicide, he even went on Facebook to share his experience, in the hopes of saving others from the same fate. “Keep trying,” Dunaj said. “If you want it enough, help is out there. I’m living proof.”

**God is my helper...the upholder of my life.
(Psalm 54:4)**

God, remind me to seek help in times of distress.