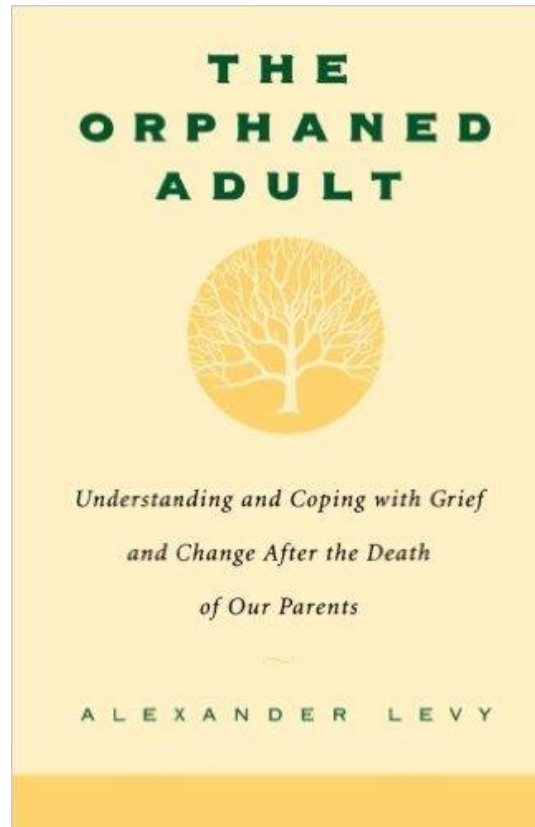


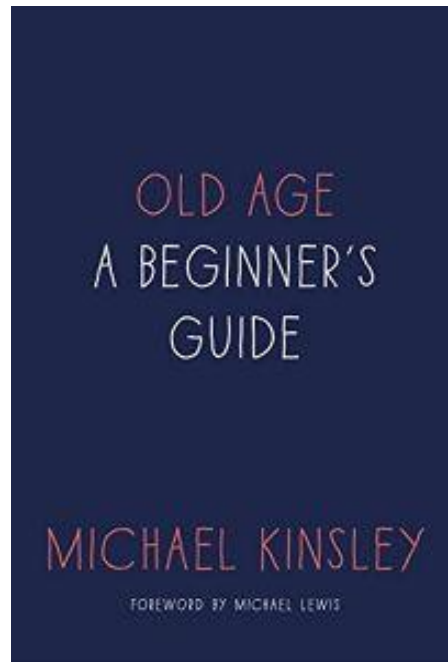
Desperately Seeking Spirituality: A Field Guide to Practice by Meredith Gould, Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN: 2016, \$16.95, 111 pp., ISBN 978-0-8146-4850-6

The author—a Doctor of Sociology who was a convert at age 43 and has 12-step experience—does not mince words when writing about spirituality. When I shared her name with Fr. Jim Greenfield (our 2016 OSFS priest retreat director in Rochester), he said that she is on one of their boards at the Oblates. The Preface of the book gives a great brief guide to the book’s three sections on spirituality being a lifelong journey, the five essential practices of being, and valuable points for self-care on that journey. This book would be particularly helpful for those searching for the most meaningful mode of spirituality or the most appropriate spiritual director for themselves—and/or for those directing others in this pursuit. For “the whole world is a spiritual practice field and opportunities to practice curiosity abound” (p. 43). A helpful aside for those doing a stewardship campaign in their final years of pastoring might be found in chapter 8 where amidst a reflection on “generosity” she lists “Moses Maimonides’ Eight Degrees of Tzedakah”. She writes of “the most infallible sign of the presence of God” (p. 71), the paradox of “communal solitude” (p. 88), and good pointers to give for one’s first exposure to monasticism (chap. 11). Some 102 helpful “Notes” wind up this treasure of a find for our spirituality—no matter *what* age we are!



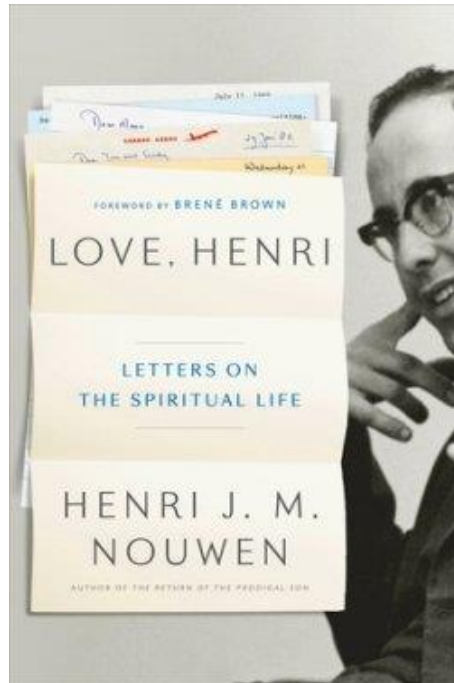
The Orphaned Adult: Understanding and Coping with Grief and Change After the Death of Our Parents by Alexander Levy, Da Capo Press, Cambridge MA: 1999, \$15.95, 190 pp., ISBN 978-0-7382-0361-4

This is a text (with a specific audience) which was given to me in August of 2016 when my mother died. It is written by a Jewish psychologist in private practice for over 25 years. Though not specifically religious in nature, as one who was newly arrived into the category of the title, it was impressive how many of his reflections and stories really hit home. He notes that “We no longer even suspend our routine to grieve—a few days off and then it’s back to work” (p. 11). He delves into the idea that “Parents provide a unique spot on the planet, which is called ‘home’” (p. 31), and when they’re gone, it’s gone. He even calls them “the reference point for our theology” (p. 127). Though Jewish, the author is married to a Catholic in whose church for the first time he felt welcome in a house of God (p. 135). He notes how sickness sometimes accompanies grief (I’ll vouch for that) and how prayer “causes something unexpectedly restorative” (p. 171). A good text to have in your arsenal—for yourself or others!



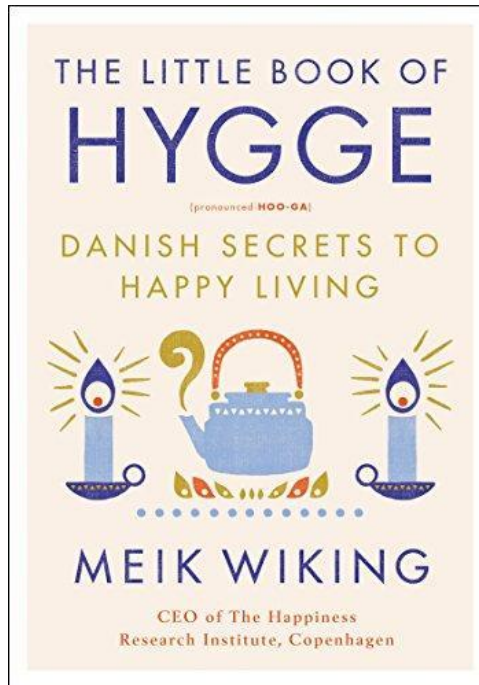
Old Age: A Beginner's Guide by Michael Kinsley, Tim Duggan Books, New York: 2016, \$18.00, 160 pp., ISBN 978-1-101-90376-6

This author has served as the managing editor of *The Washington Monthly* and the editor of *The Economist*. Michael Lewis in the Foreword says of him: “He’s always thought things no one else has thought, and noticed things that other people do not” (p. 6). A key focus for him is on Parkinson’s because he himself has it. Though certainly not to be made fun of, as one who *has* it, his humor helps in his day-to-day striving. I originally picked up this book in order to do some very *remote* research on readiness for my senior years. It very much did help just in seeing how Kinsley approaches things in general, but for those who have Parkinson’s, it would have particular value. Parkinson’s “is not generally considered fatal—meaning that there’s enough time for something else to get you first”—or, as his neurologist told him, “You still have to floss” (p. 19). A great little read for a flight on a plane. You’ll land with a whole new perspective!



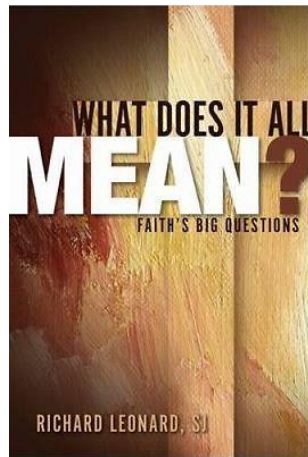
Love, Henri: Letters on the Spiritual Life by Henri J. M. Nouwen, Convergent Books, New York: 2016, \$24.00, 351 pp., ISBN 978-1-101-90635-4

I have read a number of Henri Nouwen’s books over the years, but this collection of over 200 of his unpublished letters—gathered and placed in chronological order by editor Gabrielle Earnshaw, historian and founding archivist of Henri’s Archives and Research Collection in Toronto—reveals a whole new spectrum of the man. This would be a good book to take with you on a vacation or a retreat week or fortnight: as I read it, I found myself pondering where I was (both geographically and on the timeline of my own formation and vocation) at the time he had written each missive. In his age before e-mail or Facebook, he received over 16,000 letters, keeping and responding to each one! This volume was prepared to coincide with the 20th anniversary commemoration of Henri’s death (9/21/96). As Earnshaw explains in the Preface, “Although the letters began as an intimate exchange between two people, their power today speaks to Henri’s belief that what is most personal—our brokenness, our insecurities, our jagged edges—is most universal” (p. x). In the Foreword, Brené Brown posits that “if you asked me what major patterns emerged across all of these letters, I would say there are two: 1. Loving and listening to God and, 2. Carving out God-centered time in our lives” (p. xx). On these pages, we find John Eudes Bamberger (p. 10), Walter Kasper (p. 55), the name by which Henri was known to his Dutch family (p. 73), Senator Hatfield (p. 126), Robert Wicks (p. 172), Mr. Rogers (p. 209), the book of the Bible that most influenced Henri (p. 216), Richard Sipe (p. 278), and much more. Revealing—and causing some wonder as to how all of our correspondence may be viewed or appreciated upon our passing.



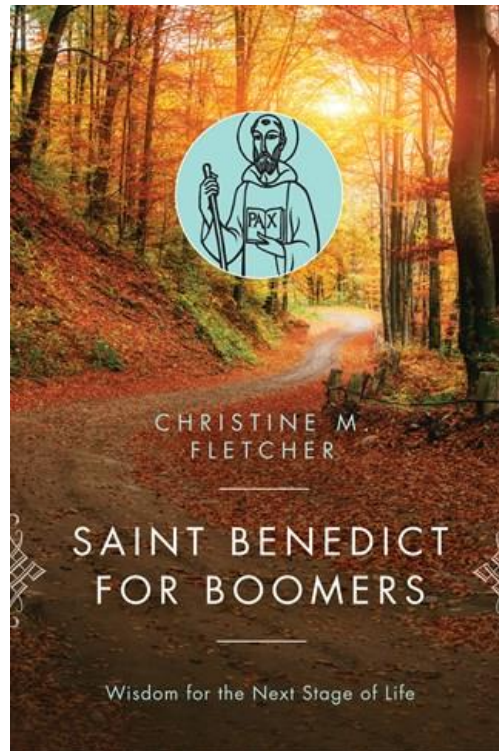
The Little Book of Hygge (pronounced HOO-GA): ***Danish Secrets to Happy Living*** by Meik Wiking, HarperCollins Publishers, New York: 2017, \$19.99, 221 pp., ISBN 978-0-06-265880-7

A delightful find all about your *hygge* (pronounced HOO-GA, as explained in the title), connoting one's sense of comfort, togetherness, and well-being. The author is the C.E.O. of the Happiness Research Institute in Copenhagen. As I read its 14 chapters, many of the fascinating points made for one's personal well-being are easily transferable over to the area of good liturgy and good living in general: lighting, community, meal, vestment, environment. In fact, worship and religious acts rated 4.97 out of 6 for the Danes as far as *hygge* goes. Learn of the Santiago de Compostela Cathedral in Copenhagen (p. 156), the importance of presence to each moment (p. 215), and the impact of plain old gratitude (ibid.). Nice to read in preparation for one's retirement *hygge*!



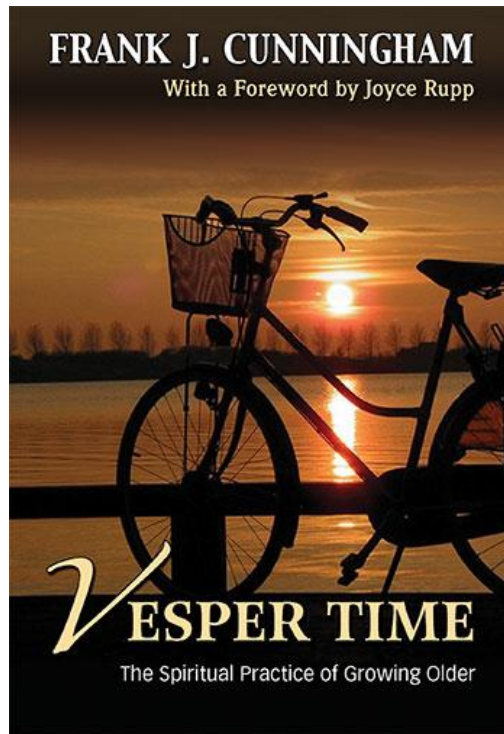
What Does It All Mean?—A Guide to Being More Faithful, Hopeful, and Loving by Richard Leonard, SJ, Paulist Press, Mahwah NJ: 2017, \$19.95, 200 pp., ISBN 978-0-8091-0641-7

As I was reading this work by the Australian Jesuit who is the Director of Australia's Catholic Office for Film and Broadcasting, the thought crossed my mind that this would be a great book to bring along to read during the in-between times on one's next priests' retreat. No matter what the theme of the retreat, this book covers quite the slice of life, being a combining, re-ordering and augmenting of 3 earlier works ('10, '13, and '15) which dealt separately with each of the three theological virtues. Fr. Leonard writes in a humorous vein (the 5 types of people a priest meets on airplanes in chapter 1), in a serious vein (the 68 religious wars in human history in chapter 4), in a down-under hagiographical vein (regarding Australia's only saint in chapter 10—see what she has in common with St. Joan of Arc on p. 72), in a fiscal-artistic vein (regarding reasons for not selling the artwork of the Vatican in chapter 11), in a special pastoral vein (regarding a unique nocturnal ministry in chapter 12), in a tragically personal vein (regarding his sister in chapter 13), in an Ignatian vein (regarding 12 contemporary spins on St. Ignatius' "timeless wisdom about how to minimize evil in our lives and world" in chapter 17), in a liturgical vein (regarding images of God and who should not preside at Eucharist in chapter 23), and in a spiritual vein (regarding the effects of prayer itself in chapter 26). This is a book by a young priest for other young priests, by a seasoned priest for other seasoned priests—it's a book for us *all!*



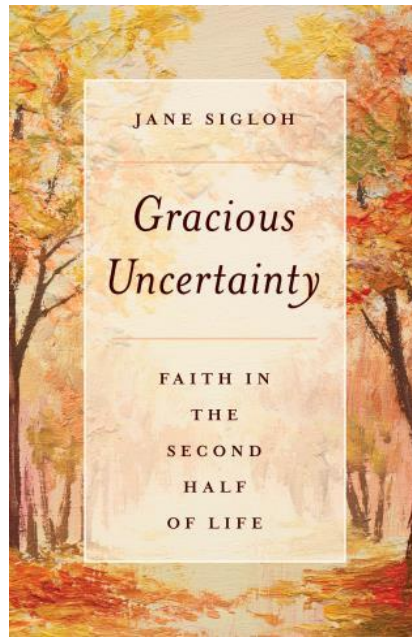
Saint Benedict for Boomers: Wisdom for the Next Stage of Life by Christine M. Fletcher, Liturgical Press, Collegeville MN: 2017, \$16.95, 127 pp., ISBN 978-0-8146-4702-8

As touted in the Preface, “Benedict’s wisdom is perennial, and it remains helpful to those who negotiate new challenges in living well, preserving bodily health, discerning purpose in new stages of living, deepening faith, and ultimately, facing sickness and death” (p. xii). The author is associate professor of theology at Benedictine University and an oblate of St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle, Illinois. Both she and her husband, a retired physician, became Benedictine oblates, and she expresses appreciation to Basilian Father Robert Barringer, CSB for his theological help (p. xiv). Fletcher’s chapters cover “Why Benedict?”, “Long Life”, “Eat Less But Eat Right”, “Purpose After Work”, “Witness of Life”, “Accepting Our Cross, Hoping in the Resurrection”, and “The Art of Dying.” She shares 9 web sites to help one find senior volunteer opportunities (p. 72), 5 thresholds to an active faith in boomerhood (p. 82), Benedict’s original 12-step program (pp. 86-87), the difference between curing and healing (=“the restoration of the wholeness to mind, spirit, and relationships as well as a restoration of coherence to the life story” [p. 100]), the true meaning of hospice (pp. 101-102), the 5 last temptations (pp. 115-126), and 8 questions needing attention before our health fails (p. 123). Boomers, read up!



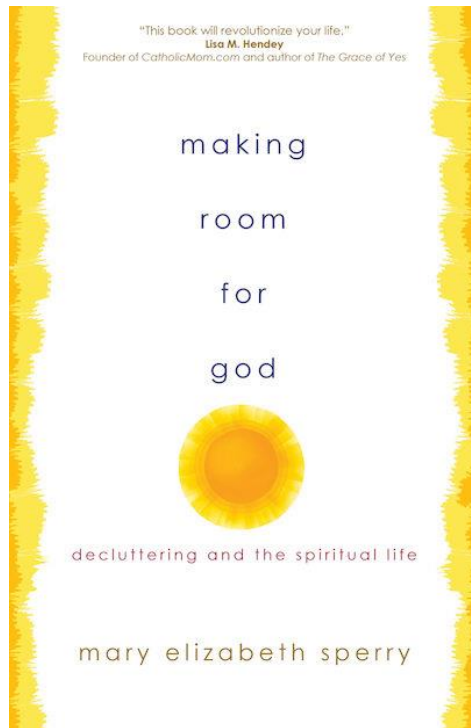
Vesper Time: The Spiritual Practice of Growing Older by Frank J. Cunningham, Orbis Press, Maryknoll NY: 2017, \$18.00, [138 pp., ISBN 978-1-62698-231-4

Wow! This was a great read for this aging Boomer on the cusp of...whatever is to be. “From writer, editor, and publisher [of Ave Maria Press] in his eighth decade, *Vesper Time* addresses the yearning among elders for continued growth, expansiveness of heart, improvement of mind, and a meaningful understanding of their lives....With humor and wisdom, he looks at five facets of this integral spirituality—memory, intimacy, diminishment, gratitude, and acceptance” (back cover). Robert Wicks says that “Reading *Vesper Time* is like taking a long walk with a wise but down-to-earth friend” (Ibid.), and Joyce Rupp in the Foreword writes that “A consistent theme of faithfulness to spiritual growth and personal integrity abounds” (p. xiv). Cunningham writes, “Vesper time is my future arrived. It’s the present moment, a present moment formed by my past” (p. 1). He describes this *memory* phase of life as “a second adolescence, this time around with the benefit of a more settled brain and decades of experience” (p. 14). He connects *intimacy* with the Camino de Santiago (p. 44), *diminishment* with “the phase of life we do not pass through....we can only pass on” (p. 64), *gratitude* with “an engine of generosity” (p. 93), and *acceptance* with the realization of being “that twenty-two-year-old or thirty-year-old residing in atrophying housing” (p. 117). Even *early* AARPers will be saved!



Gracious Uncertainty: Faith in the Second Half of Life by Jane Sigloh, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham MD: 2018, \$16.95, 136 pp. + 11 pp. of Questions for Reflection and Discussion + 5 pp. of Notes + 3 pp. of Bibliography], ISBN 978-1-4422-7625-3

On the day after returning from the 2018 NOCERCC conference on ministering in the “Muddle”, I headed to Barnes and Noble and found this book amongst the new arrivals—a fitting follow-up to the conference. One reviewer on the back cover describes the author as one who “rests comfortably in the divine realm of ambiguity, a place where doubt strengthens faith.” I figured that’s where I am half the time, so this should be a good match—I was not disappointed. Since the topics dealt with are “issues concerning everyone but which intensify as we grow older: loving more fully, dealing with loss, finding consolation, and having the courage to gaze...at the nearing of death” (ibid.), I figured it would appeal to the well-over half of us priests who are 60 or older. In fact, with the eleven pages of Questions for Reflection and Discussion in the back, this would be an ideal personal reflection book for retreat or a discussion group for your parish or priests’ group. A few quotes from her sharings: “Fundamentalists are such experts of the unknowable....Modern physicists....know that there are unknown unknowns that they don’t know they don’t know” (p. 5); “the great mystics seemed to be at home with their unknowing” (p. 6); “Without them [those staying away from church] the community isn’t complete” (p. 49); “As Alistair McGrath said, ‘the hands that flung the stars into the heavens were surrendered to the nails of the cross’” [good for Good Friday] (p. 61); all of chapter 17 for us preachers; chapter 22 on The Big Why Question [which I read the day after the Parkland massacre]; a pertinent “Psychiatric Folksong” (p. 101); chapter 31 on Purgatory; and a great finish on the big finish (chapter 34). Engagingly spot-on!



Making Room for God: Decluttering and the Spiritual Life by Mary Elizabeth Sperry, Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame IN: 2018, \$14.95, 112 pp., ISBN 978-1-59471-797-0

Upon finishing the book above this one with its final chapter on “the big finish” and having to go to my family homestead (for the past 95 years) to help my brothers clean out the four floors of “memorabilia” so that we could put the house up for sale, it was timely that this book was readily findable amongst the new arrivals at Barnes & Noble. The author works at the USCCB and writes humorously yet insightfully about dealing with the mounds of clutter that somehow has accumulated in her own domicile. Cleaning out the homestead is one of the hardest things I’ve had to do, and this book came along at just the right time. Her words address not only the physical clutter that can grow about us but also the clutter we need deal with spiritually. Given that the theme for NOCERCC’s 2019 convention (Feb. 25-28 in Austin, TX) is “The Senior Moment: The Fulfillment of a Complete Priestly Life,” this work is most timely indeed, particularly as I look about myself and find various art forms scattered about my sitting room floor: a variety of colorful afghans covering mounds of files, etc. that “I haven’t gotten around quite yet [in my 14 years of pastoring at my current assignment] to sort through.” I truly don’t want to leave these for another to have to face, nor do I want to take them with me when I retire and move to what will surely be smaller quarters than what I’m in right now. Indeed, blue-skying things, it would almost seem serendipitous for the above two authors, Jane Sigloh and Mary Elizabeth Sperry, to get together and do a tag team workshop at the 2019 convention. Whether that happens or not, the books are worth the read. Enjoy—and employ what is read!

Updated May 17, 2018