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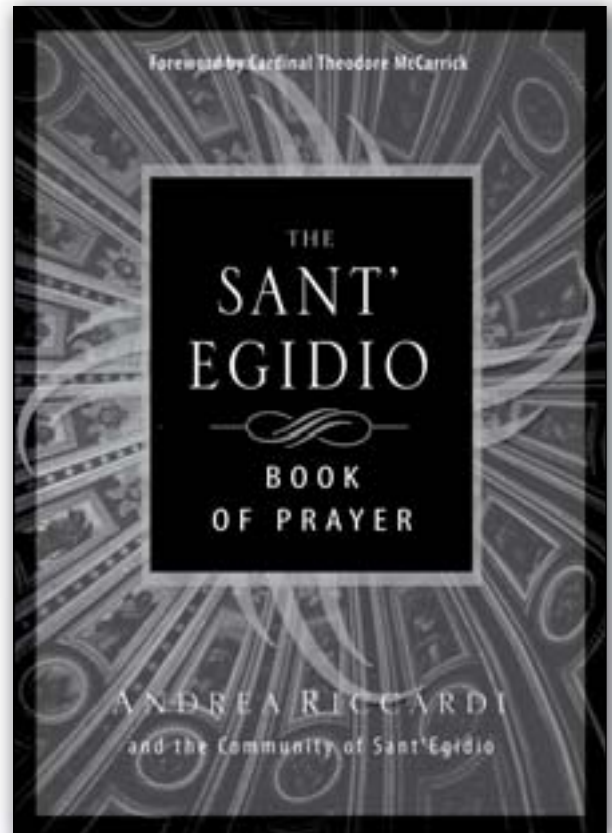
THE SANT'EGIDIO BOOK OF PRAYER

Andrea Riccardi and the Community of Sant'Egidio

According to *America* magazine, the Community of Sant'Egidio is "The most important Catholic group that you may never have heard of." *National Catholic Reporter* stated that Sant'Egidio has managed to "broker peace accords in war-ravaged countries, pressure the United Nations to pass a worldwide moratorium on the death penalty, and run one of the most successful anti-AIDS programs in sub-Saharan Africa."

Yet for all of its accomplishments, the community of Sant'Egidio sees itself primarily as a group committed to prayer. *The Sant'Egidio Book of Prayer* brings the community's daily prayer to readers, inviting them into its spiritual life and into solidarity with its mission of service and peacemaking.

ISBN: 9781594712067 / 212 pages / \$14.95



A PREVIEW OF THE NOVEMBER 2009 SELECTION

SACRED SPACE THE PRAYER BOOK 2010

Jesuit Communication Centre, Ireland

Now in its sixth year of publication, *Sacred Space: The Prayer Book 2010* is the ideal year-long prayer book for thoughtful Christians with busy lives. With daily scripture readings and meditations in the Ignatian tradition, this well-respected book is a refreshing introduction to Jesuit spirituality.

ISBN: 9781594711947 / 384 pages / \$15.95

FINDING STRENGTH IN THE “WEAK POWER” OF PRAYER

Those who lived through the tumultuous year 1968 as teenagers and young adults will never forget it—it was a time of great hope and of crushing disappointment.

In response to largely peaceful student-led attempts to gain greater freedom, the Soviet Union entered into Czechoslovakia with tanks. The Vietnam War escalated, as did protests against the war. An assassin took the life of Robert F. Kennedy just as his hope-filled candidacy for President appeared to be taking off. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, and African-American communities across America exploded in grief and rage. French students revolted in what became known as “Bloody Monday”; violence erupted in Mexico City’s Tlatelolco Square; protesters rioted outside the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

During that turbulent year, another group of young people took to the streets, but at the time, their actions went largely unnoticed. In Rome, a small group of Italian high school students, led by a teenager named Andrea Riccardi, asked themselves, “What does God want us to do with our lives?” Aware of the difficult times they were living in, but inspired by the universal call to holiness proclaimed at the Second Vatican Council, the answer was deceptively simple: pray together, live the Gospel, and serve the poor. This small group of students formed a new kind of religious community. They committed themselves to common prayer, the study of scripture, and service to the poor. Fortified with fellowship and the Scriptures, the youths went to the outskirts of Rome, where immigrants from Italy’s southern region lived. There, they tutored children, built houses, and fed the homeless.

For the first five years of its existence, the new group was known by the generic name, *la comunità* (the community). After it became clear that the group was putting down real roots and that its good work was destined to continue, the community was given an abandoned church called the Church

of Sant’Egidio, in the Trastevere district of Rome, from where they could pray and expand upon their work. From those humble beginnings, the Community of Sant’Egidio was born.

During the past forty years, the Community of Sant’Egidio has grown tremendously. The community numbers more than sixty thousand members in more than seventy countries worldwide. According to recent reports, volunteers serve more than ten thousand people in Rome alone—providing shelter for the homeless, companionship for the elderly, language instruction for immigrants, and food for working families who struggle to make ends meet.

Branching out from these initial acts of charity, the community has taken on other social issues as well. Beginning in the 1990s, Sant’Egidio became involved in some of the most innovative and successful endeavors to bring better health care and lasting peace to war-torn African regions. In 2002 Sant’Egidio launched the DREAM program (Drug Resource Enhancement against AIDS and Malnutrition) based on a holistic approach of treating AIDS in Africa, which became Mozambique’s first nationwide AIDS treatment program.

Throughout Europe, Sant’Egidio has become known as the “United Nations in Trastevere.” Community members have mediated conflicts for leaders of numerous countries, from Algeria to Guatemala to the Balkans. The peace accords that have brought Sant’Egidio the most attention were those signed in 1992 to end the Mozambican civil war.

Dr. Andrea Riccardi, their founder and the author of *The Sant’Egidio Book of Prayer*, has received the University of Notre Dame’s international service honor, the World Methodist Peace Prize, the Niwano Peace Prize, UNESCO’s Mahatma Gandhi silver medallion, and the United Nation’s Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize. In 2003, *Time* magazine named Dr. Riccardi a European hero.

READER'S GROUP GUIDE

In May of this year, Dr. Riccardi accepted the International Charlemagne Prize of Aachen, a recognition bestowed upon people who have contributed long-lasting service to humanity (especially in Europe), European unity, and world peace. Previous recipients include German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, United States President Bill Clinton, and Pope John Paul II.

The Sant'Egidio Community itself has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times, and last December, a *New York Times* editorial lauded the community for leading the coalition that succeeded in persuading the United Nations to declare a moratorium on the death penalty. The World Coalition against the Death Penalty procured more than five million signatures from individuals in 153 countries.

How does Sant'Egidio accomplish all that they do? In *The Sant'Egidio Book of Prayer* Dr. Riccardi writes, "In both the prayer of community and in personal power, the disciple believes in the power of faith. It is something that does not appear powerful. It is a 'weak power.' But faith moves the mountains."

Riccardi defines this "weak power" as daily contact with the Holy Scriptures and people in need. "There is nobody who is unsuitable to be with Jesus, and no one is unworthy to receive his word." The community treats as friends all those they encounter, irrespective of race, gender, ethnicity, or creed. "The secret of this common citizenship is intimacy with God," Riccardi writes. "The poor are the friends of the community; they are its relatives and its children, those for whom it cares. When a brother or a sister loves someone who has nothing to give in return, a small miracle occurs. On the one side, a hardened heart opens; on the other, a person in need is not abandoned in distress."

Prayer remains at the heart of all Sant'Egidio does. The

community hosts the annual Religions and Peace conference, an interreligious prayer gathering to which they invite political leaders, a variety of religious leaders, and the public. It is billed as the largest interfaith meeting in the world. In years past, the conference has attracted as many as five thousand participants including five hundred religious leaders from fifty nations.

Along with prayer, members of Sant'Egidio practice daily conversion and ask others to do the same. "Conversion is to become a disciple of Jesus, and one encounter alone is not enough; encounters with Jesus continue for the whole of one's life."

Dr. Riccardi even describes high-profile peace negotiations as acts of conversion. Through a change of heart, deadly enemies become political opponents who are able to sit at the same table.

When asked by a *Time* magazine correspondent how Sant'Egidio has the power to enact such changes, Dr. Riccardi responded, "We are all volunteers. Our lack of vested interest gives us moral authority."

In a UNESCO publication, Sant'Egidio's head of the West African section wrote: "The community's weakness is also its strong point. It cannot mobilize an army or sign enormous cheques. This 'weakness' is in fact a guarantee of its sincerity—that all it's interested in is peace-making, that it has no weapons except its belief in friendship and peace."

In April 1968, Robert F. Kennedy eulogized Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., calling men and women to "tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world." What made the early members of Sant'Egidio different from their peers in 1968? In their own way they were both radical and revolutionary. As Dr. Riccardi says, they chose history over ideology. Sant'Egidio continues to choose the Bible over revolution, and in doing so, they tame savageness and make gentle the life of this world.



FOR INDIVIDUAL ENRICHMENT

In Aesop's fable "The North Wind and the Sun," the two rivals decided to compete to see who could make a man take off his coat. The North Wind blew with all his fury and ferociousness and caused the man to grasp the coat even more tightly; whereas the Sun shone upon him with warmth and persistence until he removed it. Some might say that the Sun exercised weak power.

The members of Sant'Egidio embrace the concept of weak power—the power of prayer in action. What seems passive can prompt monumental change. In a quiet place, such as a chapel

or a quiet room in your home, reflect upon the Sant'Egidio description of weak power found on pages 104–105 of *The Sant'Egidio Book of Prayer*. Ask yourself, "How has weak power manifested itself in my life?"

Then, choose a prayer from pages 107–188. Meditate on the meaning of the prayer. Then, line by line, think about how the prayer draws you closer to God. As you meditate, think about what the coming day will bring. How can you be a friend to the poor?



FOR GROUP ENRICHMENT

Prayer is at the root of Sant'Egidio's solidarity with the poor. They remain centered and derive strength from their mutual time in prayer. Use the reflections on pages 101–104 of *The Sant'Egidio Book of Prayer* to create your

own group prayer sessions. For a week, pray together or separately at the same designated time. Read the intent for the day of the week and then recite the corresponding hymn, psalm, litany of the saints (pp.107–142).

WEBSITES OF INTEREST



THE COMMUNITY OF SANT'EGIDIO

www.santegidio.org/en

This official website of the Community of Sant'Egidio presents current news, information about the organization's history, and a calendar of events. Offered in twenty-three languages, it also features ecumenical meetings in which they are participating and events that celebrate the movement's fortieth anniversary. The website also includes pages about ways Sant'Egidio has befriended the world's children, elderly, those in prison, people with mental disabilities, immigrants and refugees, and those who are homeless and hungry.



DREAM

http://dream.santegidio.org/x__Homep.asp

To learn more about the Community of Sant'Egidio's DREAM (Drug Resource Enhancement against AIDS and Malnutrition) program in Sub-Saharan Africa, go to this website. Available in English, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, and Swahili, the website explains the history, scope, and successes of DREAM. It also gives information on how to support the program.



THE BEATITUDES

www.interviewwithgod.com/beatitudes

The members of Sant'Egidio live out the beatitudes. With quiet peacefulness, this beautiful website depicts the beatitudes. The website gives viewers an opportunity to reflect on God's creation and goodness. It also offers an option to download the flash presentation as a movie or a screensaver and to e-mail it to a friend.

MORE PRAYER BOOKS FROM **ave maria press**

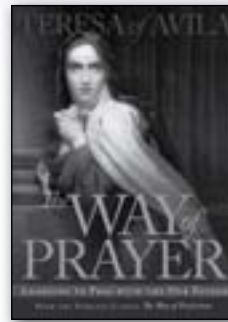


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Edited by William J. Doherty, C.S.C.

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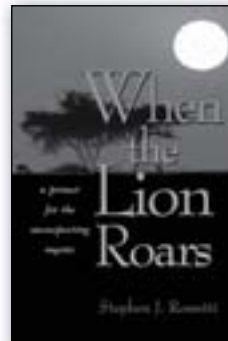


THROUGH THE CHURCH YEAR *Reflections for Feasts and Seasons*

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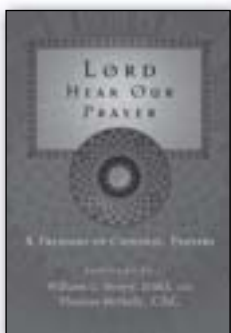


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