



**The Serra Club of Arlington**  
*Minutes for Tuesday 03 October 2023 | Luncheon Meeting*  
*The Portofino Restaurant | Arlington, Virginia*



**GUEST SPEAKER – JIM TOWEY - FOUNDER AND CEO OF “AGING WITH DIGNITY” ORGANIZATION**

Jim Towey was a trusted advisor and personal friend of Mother Teresa of Calcutta for twelve years and did the first reading at her Mass of Canonization in Saint Peter’s Square in 2016. He previously headed the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives under George W. Bush for four years and served on his senior staff. His career includes the presidency of two Catholic colleges for thirteen years, a seven-year stint as a US Senate staffer, and the leadership of Florida’s 40,000-employee health and human services agency.

In 1996, with Mother Teresa’s encouragement, he founded the nonprofit advocacy organization *Aging with Dignity*, where he currently serves as its CEO. Two years later, he created the *Five Wishes* advance directive, which has sold over 40 million copies and is available in 30 languages. Catholic University of America, Franciscan University, and five other institutions of higher learning have conferred honorary degrees upon Towey, and Pope John Paul II awarded him a papal medal for distinguished service.

Towey and Mary Griffith met while volunteering in Mother Teresa’s Washington, DC, AIDS home and were married in 1992. They have five children and three grandchildren. He authored, *To Love and Be Loved: A Personal Portrait of Mother Teresa*, published by Simon and Schuster and available in numerous languages. He and his wife are donating all royalties from the book to charities associated with the saint.

**Highlights:** Jim Towey’s talk chronicled his time with Mother Teresa and his spiritual growth. He noted that all of this is captured in his book: “*To Love and Be Loved*,” a personal portrait of Mother Teresa. Below are some of the highlights of the talk:

- In short, Mother Teresa was “a beautiful human.”
- Became a Saint not in spite of being a human but through being human.
- Mother Teresa had a great laugh. Liked everyone!
- Became Saint through practice of virtue – “heroic” virtue.
- Mother Teresa spoke five languages.
- Received Communion daily when able.
- Mother Theresa had a deep respect for the ordained priesthood, with a rather unreconstructed high view of the priest’s status. Spoke of the priest “replacing” Jesus by acting in his role: There is no comparison with the vocation of the priest.
- Mr. Towey spoke of Mother Teresa’s early years when at eight years old, witnessed her the poisoning of her father and dying at home. At this point, Mother Teresa felt the “calling” and left home at 18 years old with her mother’s blessing (realizing her sacrifice) – the last time she would see her mother.
- Mother Teresa was a “mother” and embraced the unique quality of being a mother.
- It all started with Mr. Towey being a 18 year old working on Capitol Hill. Considered himself “just a Capitol Hill sinner.”
- Wanted to meet Mother Teresa so attended her Mass in Mexico. Wound up running errands for Mother Teresa as she found herself surrounded by crowds.

- Mother Teresa had a “compass.” --- “came from God, and I’m going home to God.”
- Mother Teresa trusted that the Holy Spirit works through the Father. Had trust in the church.
- Mr. Towey recalled when Mother Teresa predicted his daughter’s birth would be on her birthday, October 26<sup>th</sup>.
- Mr. Towey recalled his trip to visit Mother Teresa on her deathbed when Mother Teresa removed her face mask and pointed up and said, “I’m going home.”
- Mother Teresa lived through aging “gracefully” and gave testimony to it.
- Mr. Towey made note of his “Five Wishes” pamphlet from his Aging with Dignity organization.
- Mr. Towey noted that death is a deeply spiritual, personal moment. Also, a life not loved for others is not worth living. Mother Teresa had a humble heart and lived life for others.
- Mother Teresa died at 87 years old with multiple injuries and illnesses sustained during her life.
- Mr. Towey noted that our culture is an undertow pulling people away from God. Pray for unity, charity, Holy Spirit, as his work as it transcends through the love of priests.