



# Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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## What Would You Like to Say to the Next Pope?

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on FEBRUARY 25, 2013

The recent resignation of Pope Benedict XVI certainly surprised the world. After all, no pope has resigned in about 600 years. Citing his age and health, the Holy Father said he could no longer perform his duties as pope. I give the man credit. Most popes stayed in office until their death. Benedict's decision says it's perfectly okay—in fact, it can be good—to let go of major responsibilities, to retire, to hand over the reins to someone else.

Soon we will have a new pope. I was thinking, what would I say to the new pope if I had the chance? I came up with many things. Here are a few of them:

**Thank you.** Thank you for saying “yes” to this unique and demanding ministry of leadership. As Jesus himself said, leadership among his disciples is essentially service. Remember how, at the Last Supper, before he washed the feet of his disciples, Jesus tied that towel around his waist? That towel was a makeshift apron! Maybe you could add an apron to your wardrobe as a sign of your service to us, the Church.

**I'm praying for you.** I mean it. Every day. It might not seem like much that you have me praying for you, but it is. Just multiply my teensy prayer by a billion—because that's how many Catholics there are in the world. Then add a few million more good people of other faiths who will also be praying for you. Now that's significant!

**Stay close to Jesus.** I know it sounds trite, but really ask yourself every day, “What would Jesus do? What would Jesus see? What would Jesus think? What would Jesus say?”

**Remember us.** Go outside that wall that encloses the Vatican. Like your predecessors, visit the world. And don't just talk *at* people; talk *with* them. Everywhere you go, slip

## About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame,  
teacher, student, author,  
speaker, listener, friend,  
poet, farm girl.



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## About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality—the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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incognito into a church and sit with the local congregation during Mass. Remember, it is from the pew (or chair, or bench, or rock, or ground) that the vast majority of us see our church leaders and experience a worshipping community.

**Have good women friends.** I hope you have (or had) a good mother. I hope you have at least one sister and sister-in-law, some nieces, and (most importantly) some good women friends. Your celibacy and the all-male hierarchy present challenges to your development of a broad and balanced vision of life that includes a healthy dose of the feminine perspective.

**Make time to play with children.** Jesus did.

**Volunteer regularly.** At a soup kitchen, a homeless shelter, an inner-city school, a nursing home, a prison, a refugee camp, a hospital, hospice, or wherever individuals are in serious need.

**Stay human.** Do those things that keep you human: cook occasionally, wash your own clothes, make your own bed, read the comics, listen to opera or jazz or whatever, play chess or Scrabble or whatever, tend a garden, get a dog or cat or canary, balance your own personal check book, go to a movie, haggle over prices at an outdoor market, browse in a book store, cheer madly for a sports team, take the pope-mobile in for an oil change, host a barbecue in your backyard and do the grilling (you can wear your apron!)

**Venerate our Tradition. Be open to change.** This is one of your greatest challenges you face as pope. I can't tell you how to achieve this balance, but all the previous suggestions should help you! And don't forget, Holy Father, I'm praying for you.

*Is there anything you would like to say to the next pope?*

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**Georgia Auckly** February 25, 2013 at 9:39 am

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What a clear way to put it! Being human would mean being relevant.  
Thank you for this unique perspective on being pope.



REPLY

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**Helen Burdenski, SND** February 25, 2013 at 11:50 am



Melannie,

As always, well said! Perhaps these words of wisdom can be forwarded to all the cardinals who will be taking an active part in the election; they would serve as a wonderful guide in choosing the right person for this important leadership position.

REPLY

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**Larry** February 25, 2013 at 1:31 pm



All marks of a true leader, often forgotten in the rush to make sure that he measures up to someone's idea of what should be expected from the pope as described by tradition alone. As one who comes from the people, he needs to be among those he serves. Otherwise, true service is virtually impossible. I would add that it would be good if he could have a good sense of humor as well.

REPLY

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**Chris Keil** February 25, 2013 at 6:58 pm



I couldn't have said it better myself!

I might add just one more thing along with your "venerate our tradition, be open to change". Truly being "open the Holy Spirit" I believe means many times having to look "outside the box" for an answer or solution. If we truly are open to the Spirit, we may have to listen to the voices of the people in the pews and how they view our Church and how it can best meet their needs. It may be that it's time to re-think celibacy, or church attendance. Just because it's always been that way doesn't mean it will always work that way. If we are "stuck in our ways", then are we truly being open to the Spirit? Many times the Spirit is speaking, but because it may not be what we want to hear, we stop listening, or dismiss it out of hand.

God Bless the next pope!

REPLY

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**Mo** February 25, 2013 at 7:07 pm 

Melannie.... so beautifully said. I could just hear you saying this in person if you had the chance. Wonderful and inspiring words of wisdom from a wise person. Thank you for taking the leap and risk to put it all in words.

REPLY

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**Sr. Joyce Marie Bates** February 25, 2013 at 9:41 pm 

I really liked the one about having some women friends. We need to help men, and especially clergy to get in touch with their feminine side of self.

REPLY

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**Joan** February 26, 2013 at 9:10 am 

Melannie,

Thank you for your reflections! I too like your suggestion about having women friends and getting in touch with the feminine. It goes right along (in my mind and experience) with Chris's comment about openness to the Holy Spirit. Fear of the feminine, which is often coupled with fear of the movement of the Holy Spirit, has impaired our Church's growth in countless ways. God bless Benedict, the cardinals, and the soon-to-be new pope! May the Spirit truly be allowed to guide this process!

REPLY

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**marian** February 27, 2013 at 5:31 am 

Please share with us your everyday experiences that Melanie speaks of and offer reflections and prayers with us.

REPLY

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**Annette** February 27, 2013 at 5:52 pm 

Oh, I love this! What beautiful, thoughtful comments as well. . . .

REPLY

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**Maryanne V. Tuite** February 27, 2013 at 7:05 pm



Sr. Melanie,  
Loved your 'suggestions' to whomever will be our new Pope. I think you need to mail them to the Vatican!  
Thank you.

REPLY

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**Rose** March 1, 2013 at 1:59 pm



Sr. Melannie,  
  
Wonderful advice for our new Pope...and for us all. I must say I am so thrilled to share my prayer time with you every morning especially in the March issue of Living with Christ as Today's Good News is written by you each day. Thank you.

REPLY

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**Bridget Holy** March 16, 2013 at 10:01 pm



Once again you wrote something so meaningful. I suggest you send this by Certified Mail to the Vatican, Attn: Pope Francis.  
B

REPLY

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**Melannie Svoboda SND** March 17, 2013 at 8:56 am



Dear Bridget, It seems as if the new pope already does (or has done) many of my "suggestions." God bless, Pope Francis! Sr. Melannie

REPLY

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**Bridget Holy** March 26, 2013 at 6:22 am



You are correct, your prayers and thoughts reached Him Quickly! I am very pleased.

REPLY

**Melannie Svoboda SND** March 26, 2013 at 10:27 am



Dear Bridget, Our new Pope has surprised us in many ways! I too am pleased! Melannie

REPLY

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