November 2007 GS NGO prayer network: 
Inclusion of Older Persons – a Society for all

An Introduction:
Hello, I am Hedwig Jöhl, GS NGO Representative in Geneva. I hope that you will unite your prayer with the new work of GS NGO in Geneva. At my office, in the space of Franciscans International (FI), we pray every Wednesday together. Often we take a life testimonial from our work or we eat fruit together, remembering the good creation of God. You can see the entry to my office in the picture at left.

Managing information is a big issue in NGO/UN work. I want to invite you to read this story, Donal McLaughlin - making complicated information understandable: When Donal McLaughlin received his degree in Architecture in 1933, the centerpiece of his portfolio was a design for an observatory in New York’s Central Park, it was one big circle, that would provide a window to the heavens. The observatory was never built. But his design would be another circular form to become famous: the emblem of the United Nations. McLaughlin’s career began inauspiciously but in his early projects, he learned he was good at something: making complicated information understandable.

Shortly before the US entered World War II, McLaughlin joined the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the Graphics Division. Throughout the war, McLaughlin’s services were constantly in demand. “We weren’t advertisers. We weren’t trying to sell anything. Our whole message during the war was simply to take information and put it into forms that people could easily understand.” Soon McLaughlin was given his most memorable assignment. The US State Department announced its intention to convene the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco in June 1945. The OSS was asked to create displays, certificates, maps and guides for the delegates, and one seemingly modest thing, a symbol. McLaughlin went through dozens of designs, struggling with the challenge of accommodating a suitable image with the conference’s name and purpose, all in a one and one-sixteenth inch diameter circle. His solution was an azimuthally equidistant projection showing all the countries in one circle, flanked by crossed olive branches. It appeared not only on the delegate’s pins, but was stamped in gold on the cover of the United Nations Charter. On June 26 1945, the Charter was signed by delegates of fifty nations, and the United Nations (UN) was established. Donal McLaughlin, without fully intending to, had designed its emblem. This July McLaughlin celebrated his 100th birthday. His modesty and idealism are still very much intact. “I dreamed once of being an architect and building in brick and stone,” he remembers with a laugh. “And instead, the thing I’m best known for is a button.”

Please pray with me so that the little things GS can do in Geneva, even when they may not always be what we expect, can, in some ways, be memorable and make a difference to our world.

This prayer was prepared by Sr Hedwig hedwigjoehl@bluewin.ch
Praying for a Society of All Ages

In 2007 the UN completed a review and appraisal of the UN Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) that had been adopted by the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid in 2002. On October 4th, 2007, the 17th Annual United Nations International Day of Older Persons (IDOP) will have been observed.

What does an older person (60 plus) feel? Are they well integrated in your society? Please consider joining in reflection and prayer during November.

The UN, in the international plan of action on ageing, refers to the areas of independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity that require attention. It could be stated in these points:

- The participation of older persons in social life needs to be assured;
- Older people-friendly environments ought to be created;
- The issue of poverty in relation to aging requires more discussion and attention;
- Maintenance of mental and physical capacities of older persons is often at risk;
- Loss of human rights and vulnerability to exploitation often occurs with aging.

To read the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, see:
http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/olderpersons.htm

Quotes and questions to reflect and use in community for (action and) prayer:

“…Older persons should be able to reside at home for as long as possible.”
When was the last time I prayed with an older sister? It takes time, more than when I pray for here. Lord, I wish I do integrate all ages in my daily life and in my prayer.

“…Older persons should be able to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to there interests and capabilities…”
It makes a difference for them and for me - when they can take part, they are partner. Lord, I want to respect my older sisters as partner.

“Older persons should have access to social and legal services to enhance their autonomy…”
Freedom in moving and speaking is a holy area for everyone. Lord, let me give space to the elders, even the way I like space.

“Older persons should have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual, and recreational resources of society.”
Please, Lord, attending a concert could be a type of prayer for a community.

“Older persons should be able to live in dignity and security…”
Lord, in Lv 19,32 I read: “You will stand up in the presence of grey hair, you will honour the person of the aged and fear your God. I am Yahweh.”
The waters of Lake Geneva reach to heaven with our prayer.

May the God in whose presence my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd from my birth until this day, the Angel who has saved me from all harm, bless...(us / this Sister) Gn 48,16.