

# PARTING Thoughts

BY WINNIE SANDLER GRINSPOON

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**W**ould you like to meet the pope?

It was both a question and an invitation. The Vatican would be hosting an interfaith conference on philanthropy. Was I interested in attending?

I was intrigued by the opportunity. I would be joining an international group of Christians, Muslims, and Jews brought together to consider how faith-inspired philanthropy could advance the pope's mission to serve humanity. We would meet with Pope Francis and hear his vision. My husband would rework his busy schedule to join me. And we would get to do something very special for a friend.

A few days before my husband and I left for Rome, our friend Sara asked a favor of us. Sara is undergoing cancer treatment and has another surgery ahead. She carries a Mass card with her that contains prayers to St. Jude for healing. She asked through tears if we would take her card to our audience with the pope. "Of course," we said, "we'd be happy to."

With Sara's Mass card in hand, we headed to Rome and a most impressive series of events and conversations. Attendees at the summit included royalty, dignitaries, and leaders of industry, including Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, who told of his gratitude to the parish that housed and educated his immigrant father as a teen. We heard many inspiring examples of how people were working to address some of the world's most pressing challenges. We shared stories of how our faith has inspired our philanthropy and how our philanthropy has inspired our faith.

Our audience with the pope would take place on our final morning together. We had been briefed on proper protocols in advance, down to the dress code. We gathered for



After an invitation to meet Pope Francis at the Vatican, Winnie Sandler Grinspoon and her husband, Dr. Steven Grinspoon, hoped to do a mitzvah for a friend.

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breakfast, all in our dark, conservative clothing, eager for the day ahead.

Minutes before the appointed time, our hosts shared disappointing news. There had been a change of plans. Pope Francis would not be joining us.

The room went quiet, and our hosts suggested a coffee break. My husband and I considered what to do about our promise to Sara. We approached one of the leaders of the group and asked if there was any way to receive a blessing for our friend. Our host made some inquiries, and a few minutes later, she returned with a small pouch containing rosary beads blessed by Pope Francis. She asked that we give it to Sara with best wishes.

You can imagine Sara's reaction.

I left Rome feeling inspired by grand plans of action to heal the world and the power of small acts of kindness toward one person. It also made me proud to be part of a faith-inspired foundation. By working toward a more engaged Jewish people through programs such as PJ Library, we are connecting hundreds of thousands of young people to the inspiration of Jewish values such as *tikkun olam*: repairing the world for all of humanity. There is much to do, and there are many ways to make a difference. ■

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