

# Senior cites prayer, cod liver oil for longevity

By Father Paul Quinter  
Catholic News Service

PHILADELPHIA — More than a century ago, Helen McGarey Hoey learned two secrets to long life: prayer and cod liver oil.

"I took the cod liver oil from the time I was able to walk," said Hoey, a charming woman who doesn't look her age.

"I never thought I'd ever live this long," she told *The Catholic Standard and Times*, Philadelphia's archdiocesan paper. "Little did I think the day would come when I would have a special Mass for turning 105."

But that liturgy took place recently at her residence, St. Francis Country House in Darby. It included one of Hoey's favorite hymns, "Ave Maria," a fitting song for a lady born on Dec. 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

"I ordered flowers for the altar for the holy day," she said. "It's first Mary's day. It's my birthday too."

Hoey, who calls practicing the Catholic faith "a wonderful gift," said her favorite devotion is the rosary. "I say seven in the morning and the prayer to 'My Crucified Savior' is my favorite prayer. I pray that those who have gone before me have all gone home to the Lord, where we all should be."

The chaplain at St. Francis Country House, Father John J. Van Stone, said Hoey, who uses a wheelchair, "spends a good part of her day in chapel and wears out a half dozen rosaries a year." He went on to describe her as "always in a good humor, a genuinely kind lady."

Hoey was born in Philadelphia, the second of four children. Her mother died in childbirth with the fourth child,

so she barely remembers her. But a framed photograph on the nightstand next to her bed constantly reminds her of the "wonderful woman who gave me life."

Her father remarried and there were 10 more children. "We would take care of each one of our stepbrothers and -sisters like they were our very own. And they were," she added.

"Family is so important to me," she

continued. "I love a big family and had the opportunity of having a wonderful family experience, something everybody should have."

She married Louis S. Hoey in 1924 at age 34, after they met on a blind date. They had two children, Louis Jr. and Joan Hoey Schoultz. After 35 years of marriage, her husband died in 1959.

She also buried her son in 1987. Few things are more painful for a parent than

burying a child. Hoey's eyes filled with tears when she thinks about her son, who was "full of life."

Before entering St. Francis Country Home last February, she lived for more than 30 years with her daughter and husband and their six children. Hoey has 12 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren.

Certain experiences stand out during her 105 years, such as the six-week European tour she and her two sisters took in 1963. While in Rome, they stayed in a hotel near the Vatican and Mrs. Hoey caught a glimpse of Pope Paul VI.

Another special time was when Cardinal Anthony J. Bevilacqua of Philadelphia visited her for her 100th birthday.

She said she has always kept on top of events through *The Catholic Standard and Times*, though she can no longer read the newspaper's print.

While at St. Francis, she said, she has learned a lot, primarily that people are good. "So many help all of us here, and they do all in their power to be kind," she said.

Her advice to young people is: "Always try to be good. You do what's wrong and you'll pay for it. So do good and try hard with God's help. Don't give in to this free thinking (in modern culture) ... and keep your lives as if you were ready to go to heaven."

Prayer has always been a constant for her.

"I used to pray so hard everybody thought I'd go into the convent, but I never really thought that," Hoey said.

"All I know is that when I die and stand before our dear Lord," she added, "he'll just care about how I lived."



S. John Wilkin/Staff photographer

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