

April, 2006

Volume 1, Issue 1



Engaging Aging

Inside this issue:

A Spirituality of Aging	2
Men Who Can Teach Us	3
Unfolding Changing Realities	3
Educational Opportunity	4
Did You Know	5
Q & A	5

One of the most important aspects in providing quality care is the way members are treated by those who care for them.

From the hallways of NRRO...

Sister Janice Bader, CPPS, Project Director of Retirement Services



Welcome to *Engaging Aging*, a forum for professional updating and discussion among those who walk with senior religious through the transitions of elderhood.

In 2004, the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) completed a Best Practices Study entitled *Planning for Retirement and Mission*. As a follow-up, we convened several focus groups to surface ways of disseminating our findings. Among the many wonderful suggestions we received was the idea of a newsletter through which NRRO and religious institutes could share developments and best practices in elder care.

Another impetus for this newsletter comes from those who have expressed a longing to connect with their peers about issues that are unique to their role as retirement directors of religious institutes. We view this newsletter as one venue for such sharing. We welcome suggestions of topics that are of critical interest to you, and we would be happy to know of expertise that you might be willing to share via a newsletter article.

Planning for Retirement and Mission, found that “one of the most important aspects in providing quality care is the way members are treated by those who care for them.” Your companionship of our senior religious is crucial. Your understanding, respect and professional services help sustain elders in their quest to keep their faces ever turned toward the Light of God’s being. We pray that this newsletter will provide some measure of support for you in your ministry.



From the editor’s desk...

Sister Sherryl White, CSJ, Ph.D., Psychologist, Pittsburgh, PA

Dear Readers,

As a psychologist and consultant for religious communities, I have found a growing commonality that transcends congregational distinctions: our human condition of aging and the growing importance it assumes in our lives as religious. At the invitation of NRRO, I am delighted to serve as editor of their newest publication, *Engaging Aging*, and look forward to working together with you, our readers, to address the challenges and blessings of aging.

We have chosen as our banner design the sunflower, a plant always turning to face its source of energy and life. We believe that everyone must consciously choose to engage their aging, individually and collectively, as the path to the ultimate source of Light and Life. Please join us in *Engaging Aging*.

Sherryl White, csj

A Spirituality of Aging

by Sister Bette Moslander, CSJ

Growing older is both an opportunity and a challenge. It can be a time of continued psychological and spiritual growth, but this is not something we can take for granted. Living into our seventies and eighties is a privilege and grace we must not neglect. With longer life spans, improved health care, and increased opportunities, we need to choose to be involved in our own aging process.

By the time we enter the last decades of life, we are expected to know what our lives have been about. In fact, that may or may not be true. We may still have work to do in terms of self-knowledge and our relationships with God and others. These are years for entering ever more deeply into the mystery of our lives. To do this, we have choices to make; choices about loving and forgiving. If that is the case, it is time we get started.

When we enter old age, we would hope to find our spirits still alive, searching, loving more intensely than ever before. This is the time for embracing our second maturity, aging into grace and wisdom about our life project. It is a time for falling in love all over again, wildly, passionately—with God, the universe, this dear planet and all the people in it. It is a time for healing our relationships, especially with all those people whom God has given us to love in the immediacy of our every day lives. It is a time, not for “retiring” from mission, but for finding new ways to live it radically.

It is important to forgive all that needs to be forgiven—starting with myself. This will call us to view our lives with compassion and gentleness. We are invited to forgive our selves for the time we have wasted on trivialities; for our pettiness and subtle cruelties of judging others; for our jealousies and need to be recognized. And then there is the other side of forgiveness—letting go of all the hurts, pain and distress we have experienced at the hands of others. Forgiveness of self and others frees us to recognize and claim the ways God has gifted us through life. We deepen our experience of the ways God has loved and empowered us to love one another, even life itself.

Our wisdom must also come to grips with the diminishment that often accompany the aging process. These changes may come incrementally or catastrophically. There is no guarantee that we will be able to avoid suffering, for it is the very nature of finite beings. We become more vulnerable in the face of disease and the simple deterioration of our bodies, minds, and psyches. We can find ourselves trapped in depression, discouragement, and anxiety. Old age inevitably brings us up against our limits.

Often, in our old age, the mystery of the cross is written in a bold hand across the pages of our lives. In the experience of complete powerlessness, in being subject to forces over which we have no control, we are conformed and transformed into the Christ, helpless on the cross. With him, if we are graced, we may be able to pray “Into your hands, oh God, I commend my spirit.” This total self-abandonment, this trusting surrender de-



*Bette Moslander, CSJ
Director,
Manna House*

“This is the time for embracing our second maturity, aging into grace and wisdom about our life project...

It is a time not for ‘retiring’ from mission, but for finding new ways to live it radically.”

(Continued on page 4)

Men Who Can Teach Us

by Brother Mark Knightly, CSC

In Society Without the Father, social psychiatrist Alexander Mitscherlich observes that children raised in the industrial and post-industrial age grew accustomed to the absence of their fathers. In the face of changing societal structures, a man was forced to work outside of the home in order to support his family. Unfortunately, the children were deprived of a special relationship and source of mentoring.

As a product of our culture, I sometimes find myself expecting just such an

absence in local community living. Yet experience is teaching me that so much is readily available from our elder members.

Each time that I visit a community on behalf of NRRO, I am struck by the wealth of wisdom and spiritual energy available in the elder men's community. The longer I stay among the "fathers" of my own community, the more I see that the fruit of their reflection and prayer – their teaching – is available to help us.

We men who still live in

"father-absent" communities might discover that deliberately forging a connection with a senior member would be a wonderful gift for everyone involved. In addition to insights gained from sharing experiences in ministry, we might find a needed mentor for the "inner work" of our own character growth. In turn, our fathers might experience a new source of affirmation and an outlet for their gifts. In the balance of relationship, we will be able to communally move deeper in God's spirit.



Br. Mark Knightly, CSC
Director,
Aging & Health Care

Unfolding Changing Realities

by Sister Marjorie Robinson, OCD

In 2000, after prayerful discernment, three monasteries of Discalced Carmelite nuns came together to form a new community, the Carmel of the Incarnation in Beacon, New York. Our decision to unite was made so that we might live Carmel's mission of a life of prayer with greater authenticity, foster new life among our members, and facilitate future growth of our community.

Six years later, we find ourselves called to re-visit our vision of community. The realities of our collective aging and acute-care needs challenge our ability

to continue time honored traditions. Historically, a sister in the infirmary has always been a blessing for the community. Every sister was assured of remaining in the monastery until her death. Now, while each sister remains a source of grace, we are faced with the difficult reality that we can no longer provide full-time care for one another here at Beacon Carmel.

Returning to prayerful discernment, we affirmed among ourselves that we wanted to engage the life God was unfolding in our midst. With the help of a facilitator, we began a

process to intentionally reflect upon our aging. Together, we created guidelines that offer direction to our community and to leadership in providing health care for one another. Sisters are encouraged to assume a proactive role in their personal health and that of the community. Our new guidelines focus our attention on wellness, offering a flexible tool that reflects our evolving realities in a new light.

I am proud of our community for its courage and creative strength in developing our new guidelines. Together, we continue to live our mission and look forward to our future in prayerful hope.

"The third age is also the age of simplicity and contemplation. The affective, moral and religious values embodied by older people are an indispensable resource for fostering the harmony of society..."

Human societies would be better if they learned to benefit from the charisms of old age.

Vatican Documents,

"The Dignity of Older People and Their Mission in the Church and in the World."



Sr. Marjorie Robinson, OCD,
Prioress,
Carmel of the Incarnation
Beacon, New York

Educational Opportunity from NRRO

Person Centered Care Seminar to be offered Fall 2006

The lead article in this newsletter refers to the Best Practices Study completed by NRRO in 2004. The Retirement Research Foundation (RRF) of Chicago generously funded that project. We are happy to announce that NRRO has received a generous follow-up grant from the RRF to implement a program on person-centered care in long-term care settings. NRRO has been working with Mather Lifeways Institute on Aging (Evanston, Illinois) to design this program.

This “Train-the-Trainer” seminar will be held in Chicago on **October 31 and November 1, 2006**, and will be open to 2 staff members from 75 religious institutes. The seminar will consider four content areas—team development, physical environment, programming and dementia care. Participants will receive the training and materials necessary to teach other staff of the institute.

The grant from RRF will cover all costs related to the conference and the training materials. Participants will need to cover the costs of travel and hotel. Those institutes that are 50% or more under-funded for retirement may request additional funding assistance from NRRO.

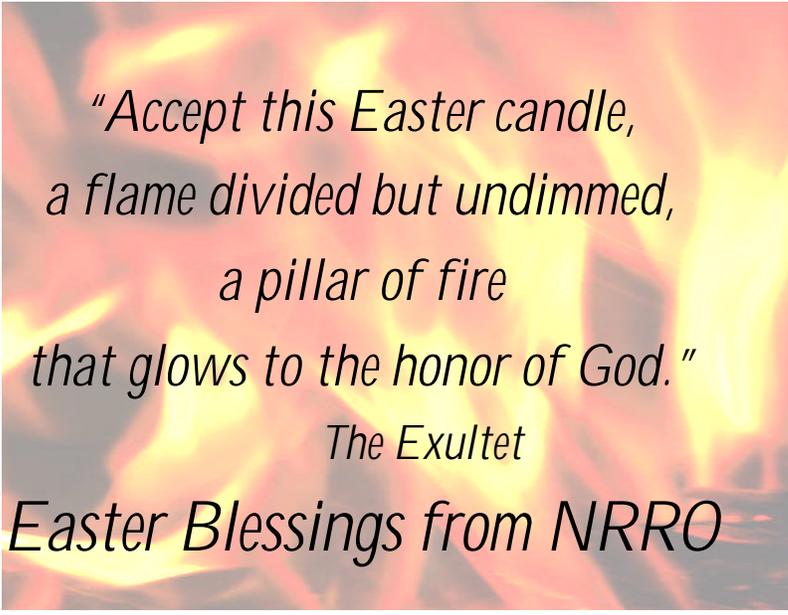
NRRO sent preliminary information about this seminar via e-mail to institutes with 50 or more members. A brochure and registration information will be mailed to these institutes within the next month. Smaller institutes also are welcome to attend. If you would like further information, **please contact Sister Janice Bader at NRRO (jbader@uscgb.org or 202/541-3215).**

Spirituality of Aging...

continued from page 1

livers us into the hands of a God who has emptied the God-self in love for each of us and for the world.

How we come into old age and are able to abandon ourselves in complete trust to the providence of a God who is Love depends, in no small degree, on how we have lived our active lives. The patterns of how we have lived, loved and served--how we have let go, emptying the ego-self to make room for the other, will continue to shape how we enter into the closing act of our lives, the act of dying.



*“Accept this Easter candle,
a flame divided but undimmed,
a pillar of fire
that glows to the honor of God.”*

The Exultet

Easter Blessings from NRRO

Did you know...



◆ **That May is Older Americans Month?**

The Administration on Aging has materials available for download at http://www.aoa.gov/press/oam/May_2006/Materials_Downloads.asp

◆ **That NRRO hosts a ListServ for persons involved in ministry to elder religious?**

To become a member of the ListServ, contact Monica Glover, mglover@usccb.org.

◆ **That NRRO offers grants for workshops in eldercare, finance and development?**

To further information, contact Sister Janice Bader, jbader@usccb.org.

◆ **That NRRO offers a workshop on Retirement Policies, Programs and Procedures based on the Best Practices Study completed in 2004?**

The workshop is available to regional groups as a service of NRRO; no speaker stipend is necessary, but if the group can help cover travel costs that is greatly appreciated. Contact Sister Janice, jbader@usccb.org.

◆ **Applications for the next cycle of Supplemental Grants are due on April 15?**

For more information, contact Brother Hank Sammon, hsammon@usccb.org.

◆ **Applications for the next cycle of Special Assistance Grants are due on September 30?**

For more information, contact Brother Hank Sammon, hsammon@usccb.org.

Time for Q & A...

Q. How do I contact the editor if I want to submit an article or ask a question about a story?

A. Her email address is engagingaging@verizon.net

Q. Who should I contact if I'm having trouble opening *Engaging Aging* in my email?

A. For assistance with the electronic version of *Engaging Aging*, contact Jean Smith at jsmith@usccb.org or telephone Jean at 202-541-3215.

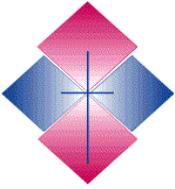
Q. I don't have access to the internet. Can I get a copy of *Engaging Aging* mailed to me through the postal services?

A. Yes, of course. Contact Jean Smith at NRRO as listed above. However, in order to keep our expenses down, our primary mode of distribution for *Engaging Aging* is the Internet. Still, we will make every effort to accommodate our readers' needs.

Q. May I duplicate an article in *Engaging Aging* to pass along to friends?

A. Yes, certainly. We have made it clear to our writers that their material will become free for the use of our readers. This newsletter is a service for you and your ministry. We'd enjoy hearing how you used our stories.





Publication of the National Religious Retirement Office
Sponsor of the Retirement Fund for Religious
3211 Fourth Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20017-1194
Telephone: (202) 541-3465
Fax: (202) 541-3053

The National Religious Retirement Office coordinates the national collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious and distributes these monies in grants to eligible religious institutes for their retirement needs.

The National Religious Retirement Office supports, educates and assists religious institutes in the U.S. to embrace their current retirement reality and to plan for the future.

National Religious Retirement Office Staff

Sister Andrée Fries, CPPS, Executive Director

Brother Henry M. Sammon, FMS, JCL, Associate Director

Sister Janice Bader, CPPS, Project Director of Retirement Services

Monica Glover, Database Manager

Jean Smith, Administrative Assistant



We're on the WEB!

www.usccb.org/nrro
