



Engaging Aging

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Retirement: Ministry of Being Present

*By Mr. Ray Mattes, MSG, MFA, MA,
Administrator of Home Care, Sisters of St. Joseph, Carondelet, Los Angeles, CA*

A number of years ago, an elder religious shared with me her experience of approaching the Leadership Team of her community regarding her intentions to retire as coordinator of senior care. At the time, she was in her early eighties. When asked what her new ministry would be after her current ministry ended, she simply responded: "I plan to engage in the ministry of being present and exploring the numerous interests I have held over the years."



For religious, the concept of retirement can be a foreign one as it raises the essential questions of meaning and purpose while conjuring up secular myths of endless leisurely pursuits. Since religious do not retire from religious life, but rather from specific ministry roles, duties and responsibilities, a clear understanding of what one is "retiring to" may generate far more questions than answers. There are those within every community who are determined never to retire from a specific ministry and prefer to "die with their shoes/sandals on". There are also members who long ago embraced a notion of retirement while seemingly never

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"...the concept of retirement can be a foreign one as it raises essential questions of meaning and purpose."

From the editor's desk...

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

Dear Readers,



Thank you for your enthusiastic responses to our first edition of *Engaging Aging*. Your emails and letters were energizing and affirming as you told us of your appreciation and interest regarding our efforts to create a forum for professional sharing among those involved in care for elder religious.

In fact, we seem to have touched upon a larger need than anticipated, as some of you wrote about using "Engaging Aging" with entire communities. So, our conversations have broadened and our questions deepened as we planned for this issue.

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Retirement: Ministry of Being Present

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fully engaging in anything. And still yet, there are those who view retirement as a period of life where ministry occurs but in a fluidity of ways. While the religious and secular understanding of retirement may differ, both share the same reality: that there exists no single definition that captures this period of life since it means different things to different people.

In reflecting on the concept of “retirement”, however, the words of Mary Oliver, in *Messenger*, appear to capture its essence: “Let me keep my mind on what matters, which is my work, which is mostly standing still .” Retirement is essentially a period of “standing still and learning to be astonished.” It is an ongoing process of discovery. At some point along the journey, one may discover that the old familiar ways in which one has been engaged in ministry now take greater time and energy. The roles once occupied in education, healthcare, social service, parish ministry and the fulfillment which they had provided now may shift and no longer be as essential to the sense of self as they once were. The areas of life where very little attention had previously been paid may now present themselves with much greater urgency and invite one to a place of greater clarity around what these areas of life have meant. One may come to a place where the old ways no longer work and one finds it necessary to develop new strategies, make new adjustments as to how one has functioned in the past, and adapt to the changes which are happening both around and within. This discovery process holds within it the invitation to embrace the uniqueness of one’s individuality, gifts, and talents, as well as brokenness and shortcomings that have formed one into a unique individual. One discovers the process of transformation from performing the activities of life to examining those aspects of un-lived life that still seek to be affirmed and further developed.

Retirement, therefore, is where the invitation is about extending to embrace all the accomplishments, as well as failures. It is embracing the lives touched as a result of past ministry endeavors and the immeasurable ways in which grace manifested itself throughout the years, exploring all the while as one moves from actively “doing” toward actively “being present” to the situations that life has yet to unfold. Retirement is where one hears the call to embrace the unique vocation of elderhood and model for others

“the gift of years”. It is a time that requires planning, preparation and inner awareness. Retirement involves relinquishment and renewal, transition and change, transformation and continued grace as the exploration of un-lived life and possibilities of new interests, goals and dreams are engaged and shared. Retirement is far from being the ending of a particular ministry, but rather, it becomes a ministry of being present in and of itself.



“Retirement is an ongoing process of discovery... “

“The areas of life where little attention had previously been paid may now present themselves with much greater urgency and invite one to a place of greater clarity....”

“Retirement involves relinquishment and renewal, transition and change, transformation and continued grace...”

The View from the Top

by Sister Myra Rumsey, PBVM, St. John's, Newfoundland, Canada

“Unless you climb the mountain, you cannot appreciate the view.” I can't recall the author of those words, but they bring to mind a wonderful memory of mountain climbing while studying at St. Bonaventure's University in New York many years ago. Surrounded all summer by seven mountains, a group of us finally accepted the invitation from a Franciscan Father to scale the heights. Encouraged by a friend, my tentative first steps grew more bold as we moved easily through the foothills. But gradually, with every three steps forward, I seemed to slide back four. I was becoming exhausted and wanted to rest, but the cry “Onward, mountain climbers,” cheered us toward the top.

Finally we were there – the crest. Each of us fell silent, standing in a heart-shaped patch of grass where Thomas Merton is said to have written portions of his book “Seven Story Mountain.” Here, atop the first mountain, the other six summits seemed to beckon us forward; but they were for another day, another year.

Though I never returned to scale those other peaks in New York, they have become the geography of my heart. Each crest has come to symbolize a phase of my life's journey. The first, easily climbed with energy and joy, laughing in the companionship of friends, was the mountain of childhood and my maturing years. No task was too hard, no quest too great. In those years, I often found myself searching for wisdom in the life and words of others, stepping forward, then slipping backwards, all on the way to finding who I was in God's design.



Now, in my retirement years, I am enjoying the mountain of the present moment. I no longer stand in that heart shaped patch of grass, awed by the journey of Merton. I've moved on to a second mountaintop, living in the heart of God. My retirement is a time of hope, joy, peace, and love. I belong to God and God belongs to me. How can I not live my retirement by giving and receiving love? I am blessed by these sacred years that allow me to bask in God's love and to have God love me through others and all creation. On this mountaintop of retirement, I need God in an intimate way – to touch, feel, hold. I embrace God in everything and everyone.

Mountaintops have a way of urging us on to more. There are still five peaks left in my heart. Mountain number three is a particular street in our city of St. John's, Newfoundland. Regularly, I climb its slopes to visit the families in need. I sit at their kitchen tables and listen to their stories, the beauty of their hearts matching any vista on this earth. “Your presence means more than a million dollars,” someone told me. Little did she know the intimacy of God's love that she made available to me.

My fourth mountain is named The Gathering Place. Once a week for the past ten years, I have been helping in the social room where people come to enjoy a game of cards and get a hot meal. It's a mountain of laughter and fun to ease the valleys of poverty they must struggle through each day. Ours is a shared love and respect that has grown through the years.

Scripture is my fifth mountain. Weekly for eighteen years, I gather with women from the Basilica Parish for a cup of tea and sharing of God's workings in our lives.

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The View from the Top

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Over the years, we have taken strides that have brought us into the homes of the poor, reaching out to those in need. Moving faith into action, I've come to be known as the "Laughing Nun" in the nursing homes we visit, as I jolly along those without family or friends.

The sixth mountain of amusement is familiar with my footsteps. I delight in dressing up as a celebrity and making surprise appearances as Queen Elizabeth, Pope John Paul II, and Jean Beliveau (my favorite hockey player). My sisters enjoy my antics, and before long, we all find ourselves smiling, enjoying the view from a better place than the doldrums of self concerns.

And the seventh mountain? Yet untrodden, it holds forth a personal invitation for me. "Come and dwell with me," it echoes across the hills of aging. It is as if God is telling me not to be afraid, for I am going to a place of love, peace, and complete joy for eternity. Someday I will climb that peak, taking each step with confidence, supported by the love of all those I have loved and served in joy. And what a view it will be!

Sister Myra Rumsey, the author of *The View from the Top*, is a member of the Presentation Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Sister lives in her community's Motherhouse overlooking the Bay in St. John's, Newfoundland. You can access her community's WEB Site at <http://www.presentationisters.ca/>

Each Day is a Gift

by Most Reverend John J Snyder, Retired Bishop of the Diocese of St. Augustine, Florida

Retirement means different things to different people. To some it confers the meaning of being finished – of no further value. However, it can also mean a welcome change of pace, new opportunities for ministry and more time for quiet prayer.

I "retired" almost five years ago after twenty eight years as a bishop – twenty-two of which were spent as the Bishop of Saint Augustine. They were for the most part happy and fulfilling years.

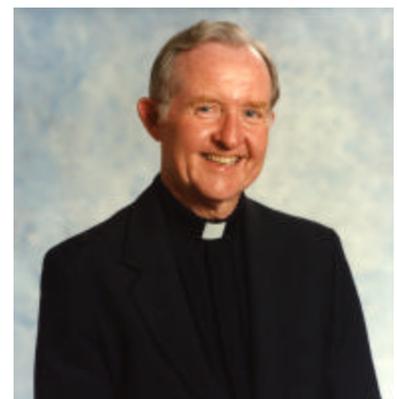
However, the past five years have been a gift to me – a time of peace and a time for giving

thanks. I think a key to moving gracefully into the next stage of your life is to "let go" of the past and acknowledge that it belonged to the Lord and you were just a care-taker. It really wasn't "mine!"

I am very much aware that I have been blessed with good health up to this point and that provides me with choices concerning ministry. Pastoral ministry was always at the core of my desire to be a priest, and now, I find doors opening constantly and I have the freedom to make choices.

Since the area I live in has one of the largest death row popu-

lations, I have been blessed to minister to these men and provide the sacrament of reconciliation and communion.



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A Sunflower by Any Other Name...

by Sister Janice Bader, CPPS, NRRO Project Director for Retirement Services

“We don’t retire.” I often hear this when I visit religious communities.

At times the speaker may be equating “retirement” with leaving religious life. Granted, we do not retire from religious life just as married persons do not retire from marriage.

At other times, the statement seems to spring from an uncertainty about what “retirement” is for religious. We do not retire to a life of leisure, the predominate portrayal of retirement in the media. But to what do we

retire? What do the elder years hold? What is our focus when we no longer are engaged in the ministry that filled so many of our days?

Religious have coined many creative phrases to name the time of life commonly called “retirement.” I believe these are attempts to give a meaningful name to the elder years as they are experienced by religious. This issue of **Engaging Aging** opens a discussion about the meaning of “retirement” for religious. We encourage you to continue the conver-

sation in your own communities and on the NRRO ListServ.

What does retirement mean in your community? Let us hear from you.



“... a key to moving gracefully into the next stage of your life is to let go of the past and acknowledge that it belonged to the Lord and you were just a caretaker.”



Each Day is a Gift

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To those not of our faith, there are opportunities to assure them of God’s love for them and our love for them. Jesus’ words keep echoing in my heart – “I was in prison and you visited me.”

In our area there are presently two communities of men recovering from addictions – a program started twenty-three years ago by Sr. Elvira Petrozzi in Italy. It is an extremely demanding program focused on the Eucharist and Mary. It is a minimum of three years and I have had the joy of seeing men come back to life.

To balance these two areas of ministry I spend time with the developmentally disabled as well as young people at one of our new high schools.

Yes, I am busy but it is different – no pressure, a freedom to choose and be what I always wanted to be – a priest.

What’s ahead? Each day is a gift – Thank you Lord.

Did you know...



- That Cornell University researchers have established a website where older people can pass along life lessons about family, work, religion, or other areas of life? Encourage your senior Sisters and Brothers to share their wisdom at http://www.citra.org/surveys/life_lessons/
- That the Kaiser Family Foundation hosts an interactive online resource, the Medicare Health and Prescription Drug Plan Tracker, which provides local, regional, and national information about Medicare Advantage and stand-alone prescription drug plans? Visit <http://www.kff.org/medicare/healthplantracker/>
- That if you are having problems accessing medications under the new Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) wants to know? They advise that you communicate with your regional CMS office. The list of regional offices can be found at <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/RegionalOffices/>
- That the AARP website includes links to over 300 major libraries, clearinghouses, databases, directories, bibliographies, texts, and Web metasites around the world that focus on aging or allied subjects? Updated bi-monthly. Visit <http://www.aarp.org/research/agesource/>
- That Beatle Paul McCartney who wrote the song, “When I’m Sixty-Four” celebrated his 64th birthday on June 18? He says that if he were to write the song today he probably would title it “When I’m Ninety-Four.” (Quoted by Robert Hilburn, *Special to The Los Angeles Times*).

Alphabet Soup...



Shown at left are participants in the National Association of Treasurers of Religious Institutes (NATRI) Workshop, “Orientation to Financial Management.”

Several participants were able to attend the workshop by virtue of grants received from NRRO.

Let us know if you are interested in workshops related to retirement, financial management or development. Maybe we can help!

*Contact Sister Janice Bader,
jbader@usccb.org.*

From the Editor's Desk

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I think most of us would agree that past the age of 50, we are probably closer to the end of our lives than the beginning. This very movement in the pattern of Paschal Mystery calls us, therefore, to live each day deeply. The time and events that comprise our lives are, indeed, sacred. Why then does there seem to be a measure of resistance among religious to the mere word "retirement?" Isn't it just another time, another opportunity in our lives for meeting the Divine in a new way?

Judging from the news articles and multiple books about retirement, it seems that most everyone else is planning for and working toward that magical goal. In fact, one book began by stating that retirement would be ours whether we chose it or it was imposed upon us. I found myself chuckling, thinking that the author had not spoken to any men or women religious of late.

We have asked our three authors for this edition to engage the question, "What does retirement mean in the context of religious life?" from their personal perspectives. We found their responses eloquent and hope you will enjoy their reflections as well. Like most questions, however, this one begs to be answered by more than a few. The question of retirement is one that, we suggest, all of us need to engage, reflect upon, and begin to share.

To this end, you will find in this edition a detailed explanation of how to sign up for NRRO's ListServ. This simple tool, which is just another word for email as best I can figure it, will enable us to "chat" with one another and move our personal wisdom and wonderings into the collective whole. And isn't that an essential task of our lives... to continually broaden our experience of community, thereby sharing in the unioning love of Jesus?

Blessings on your summer - an advancing taste of retirement - and thank you, again, for your interest and support. We look forward to hearing from you. What does retirement mean to you?

Sherryl White, csj, Ph.D.

Editor

SIGNING UP FOR NRRO's LISTSERV!

- Send an email to Monica Glover (mglover@uscbb.org) requesting to be added to our ListServ.
- You will receive an email from Monica, telling you that you've been added.
- To begin your chat, just follow the instructions given in Monica's message to you.
- Your email will automatically be sent to everyone on the ListServ.
- You also will receive emails sent by others on the ListServ.
- **It's easy. It's safe. It's summer.... Let's chat!**

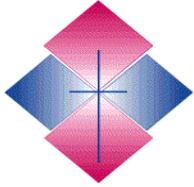


HELP KEEP COSTS DOWN

If you received this newsletter via the U.S. postal service and have an email address, we would like to send future issues to you via email.

- Please notify Jean Smith (jsmith@uscbb.org) of your email address. Please include your name, street address and institute name for identification purposes.
- Then, please put our mass email address (jsmith@xmr3.com) in your list of trusted senders.

Thank you for your help!



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Website: www.usccb.org/nrro

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 Sammon, FMS, JCL, Associate Director

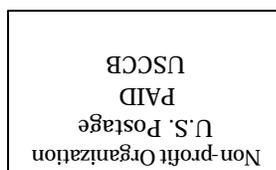
Sister Janice Bader, CPPS, Project Director, Retirement Services

Monica Glover, Database Manager

Jean Smith, Administrative Assistant



Visit our website to learn about the up-coming Person-Centered Care Training Conference, October 31 - November 1, 2006.



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