



Engaging Aging

Inside this issue:

From the Offices of NRRO	3
Aging Engaged	4
Editor's Desk	5
Developing a Driving Policy	6
Website Resources	7
Calendar	7

Driving and Dementia

by Reverend John R. Siberski, SJ, M.D.

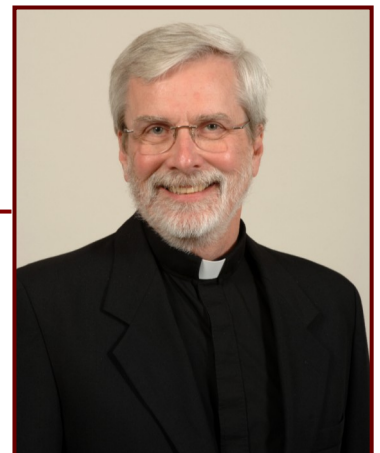
Driving and loss of driving privileges are among the most emotionally charged and neuralgic issues facing the rapidly aging populations in both the U.S. and the many religious orders ministering here. It is estimated that by 2030, 20% of the U.S. population will be classified as elders, a mark most religious orders passed many years ago. As we confront the increasing inability of many of our members to drive we must be aware that how we handle the problem can serve as an example, positive or negative, for American society.

The normal physiological changes of aging usually do not interfere with an elder driver's ability to drive safely. However, the cognitive changes of dementia make all individuals who manifest them, no matter what their age, prematurely unsafe drivers who must be removed from the road.

Dementia, of which Alzheimer's is only one form, is an acquired cognitive disorder that is uncommon under 65 but shows a prevalence of 40% by the late 80's. By definition dementia impairs multiple cognitive domains including: memory, visuospatial abilities, and executive functions. These last are sophisticated integrative cognitive functions that allow the individual to translate simple ideas and actions into complex, goal-directed, problem-solving behaviors. One need not think too deeply to realize how impairment in these functions might impair driving ability.

Both the prevalence of dementia and the incidence of injuries/fatalities per million miles driven increase linearly with age. Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of injury related death in the 65 to 74 year age group and the (Continued on page 2)

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- 20 complex decisions are needed for every mile you drive
- Drivers take less than 1/2 second to act to avoid an accident
- We receive 85% of the information we need to drive through eyesight



Driving and Dementia (Continued from page 1)

second leading cause in those above 75. With a failure rate on formal driving tests between 24% and 60%, drivers with dementia are 2.4 to 4.7 times more likely to be involved in an accident than age-matched non-cognitively impaired drivers. The most sobering analysis of the driving risk of patients with early to mild dementia comes from neurologist Richard Dubinsky who notes that drivers with questionable or early Alzheimer's have a risk of accidents similar to that of intoxicated drivers with a blood alcohol level of 0.08 while those with mild Alzheimer's have a relative risk of crashes greater than what society tolerates for any group, including intoxicated and the youngest of teenage drivers.

There are excellent elder drivers. Many of them set self-imposed limits on their driving such as avoiding expressways at rush hour, not driving in foul weather, and driving only during daylight hours. Unfortunately, many drivers with dementia, like intoxicated drivers, lack the insight to realize that they are impaired. Red flags that suggest a cognitively impaired driver is no longer safe behind the wheel include: getting lost in familiar territory, misjudging distances, inappropriate speed, missing signs and signals, accidents or near misses, and, perhaps most sensitive of all, "passenger panic."

There are no easy solutions though religious may have more options for rides than those who do not live in community. Several years ago the U.S. Assistancy of the Society of Jesus adopted a uniform driving policy for all provinces. At 70 all Jesuits must take the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) "55 Alive" course, a short inexpensive refresher on safe driving. At 75 each man must take an on-road exam under the supervision of a licensed occupational therapist. While he has the option of remediation, should he fail a second time he is no longer permitted to drive. Two moving violations in one year or concern about a man's driving ability on the part of the provincial also trigger a driving test.

The situation will not be any easier as baby boomer religious, many of whom learned to drive young and drove far, fast and frequently, begin to confront the onset of dementia and other conditions which prohibit driving. It will be a time at which the *Suscipe* of St. Ignatius of Loyola, "Take, Lord, and receive, all my liberty..." will take on new poignancy.

***Take, Lord, receive, all my liberty:
my memory, my understanding,
my entire will—
all that I am and possess.
You have given all to me;
I now give all back to you, Lord.
All this is yours,
dispose of it according to your will.
Give me only your love and your grace:
that is enough for me.*** *St. Ignatius of Loyola*

*The National Religious
Retirement Office
has been collecting **samples of
driving policies** from religious
institutes. To view samples
please go to our website at:
www.usccb.org/nrro and
click on the link for
"Sample Policies."
If you would like your policy
added to this collection, please
send it by email attachment in
Word format to:
RMetzger@usccb.org*

From the Offices of NRRO...

Brother Robert Metzger, SM, Associate Director of Planning & Education



Over the last several months staff members of NRRO have been asked to give presentations on current issues facing religious institutes and their elder members. One “hot” topic that seems to arise each time is that of driving policies and testing of elder members. This is one of the reasons why we decided to focus this issue of *Engaging Aging* on driving by our elder members and policies developed by several religious institutes.

Experts predict that 37 million Americans will be age 65 by the year 2020 and at least 90 percent of them will be licensed to drive. More than 196,000 seniors were involved in crashes in 2007, according to statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. With the exception of teenagers, older Americans have the highest crash death rate per mile driven.

Traffic safety is vital for drivers of all ages, but older drivers experience physical changes that can affect driving ability including changes in vision, reaction time and flexibility. However, these skills deteriorate slowly over time, which is why it’s important for drivers to regularly “self-check” their driving skills. Senior drivers are generally smart drivers. They know their limitations, so they drive less, less at night and less in inclement weather. However, senior drivers injure more easily than younger drivers. The problem is not that senior drivers crash more but that they are more likely to die from injuries or get hurt.

In 1997 I was appointed to our Provincial Council with responsibilities for all temporal affairs. Shortly before my appointment our Provincial Chapter passed a new driving policy that I needed to implement. Our policy called for an in-vehicle test every 2 years for all brothers 70 years of age and older, along with all members who had an at-fault accident in the previous two years.

The Provincial and I would review the results of the driving tests and decide which of us would speak to our brothers who failed the test. One of the hardest tasks I had to do was to go to one of my brothers and tell him he was no longer allowed to drive. A few brothers voluntarily gave up driving shortly before their driving test was to be administered. These examples were minimal so it usually came down to telling someone they could no longer drive. Even though this was a difficult task, it was something that needed to be done for their own safety and the safety of others.

In this issue of *Engaging Aging* we have listed websites that contain a wealth of information about aging and driving. **NRRO has begun collecting samples of driving policies from religious congregations around the country. You can find these policies on our website: www.usccb.org/nrro** If you would like to add your driving policy to our website, please send it to me and I will include it. My email address is **RMetzger@usccb.org**

The NRRO Listserv is a good place for a conversation about this subject. If you are not on our Listserv and would like to join, please send your email address to me and I will add your name. We encourage you to share your experience so that we may learn from one another how to provide for the mobility and safety of our elders in ways that respect their dignity and life experience.



Aging Engaged

“It started like a seed, an awareness germinating within me. I could tell that my illness, Multiple Sclerosis, was getting worse. Little things were gradually becoming more than I could handle; shopping, running the sweeper. In December it became too difficult for me to get to the school where I was working. I knew something had to change.”

And change it did! Recently, Sister Ann Francis left her inner city apartment to move into her Motherhouse’s supportive living. One thing, however, remained the same. When it came time to leave, Sister Ann Francis did the driving.



Sr. Ann Francis Hanley, CSJ

“My friends call me stubborn when it comes to accepting help,” she said while laughing. “I prefer to think of myself as independent.” There was a pause, and a wistful wondering as she asked, “Have you ever seen anyone who wanted to be dependent?”

We talked about measures of autonomy that gradually slip away in the face of aging and illness: choices about where you will live; engagement in ministries; the ability to go where you want, when you want. “Bottom line” she proclaimed, “I’m not ready to give up driving yet.”

With that, the questions I posed to her got harder. Still, Sister never wavered in her willingness to continue the interview, sharing her own deliberations about retaining driving privileges. “This is good,” she kept repeating. “These are good questions. I know my friends are concerned, but we don’t seem to talk about it.” After a thoughtful pause, she added, “I think maybe we all need to talk more directly about it together. It might help me to decide.”

Our conversation swayed like a pendulum between points of assurance in her physical abilities to courageous moments of doubt in the face of self-scrutiny. Proud of having passed a professional driving assessment two years ago, Sister was equally humble in acknowledging a decline in her physical strength since then. Confident in her abilities to drive herself, she also addressed a hesitancy to have others in the car with her out of concern for their safety. When asked about objective criteria that she might be using to judge her abilities behind the wheel, Sister replied, “My criteria are my intuition, my own self. I feel like I know myself well enough to know when I need to hang up the keys. For now, I’m cautious, use common sense, and strategize when I drive. I’m careful to plan my routes, avoid heavy traffic, and stay within a certain perimeter.” Then, in the same (Continued on page 5)



Aging Engaged (Continued from page 4)

breath she countered, "But I know that my leg doesn't hold its strength as long as it used to." And the return swing in reasoning: "Maybe I'm hanging on to a thread," she said, "but I believe the regular physical therapy is going to help me get back some of my strength. After only three days, I already have more confidence in myself." We both smiled hopefully.

Eventually, it came; that awkward silence signaling an ending to the conversation. Neither one of us quite knew how to close what had clearly been privileged time. It was Sr. Ann Francis who began. "You know," she said, looking out the window at the snow that had started to fall, "saying 'yes' to moving to the Motherhouse was a giving over. Saying 'yes' to resigning from my school ministry was a giving over. Sure, there are many advantages in my life now. The pros outweigh the cons here in the Motherhouse. But they have come with a cost."

Her voice became softer. We waited together. "I'm realizing the limitation I need to face... I'm in the last throes of my life." She looked directly at me. "You know?" she asked. I held her gaze in silence. "But I don't believe it's over," she continued. "I want to live my life! But, how?"



A Sister of St. Joseph of Baden, Pennsylvania for 55 years, Sister Ann Francis has served in the ministries of education, school administration, elected congregational leadership, and social services to those people struggling in urban poverty. Since 1975, she has done it all while carrying a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis. Sister is currently in discernment regarding her next ministry.

From the Editor's Desk

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

While preparing this issue of *Engaging Aging*, I received a call from my niece, Suzanne, asking for help. She and her husband, Beau, had to plan the children's liturgy for the first Sunday of Lent. Did I have any ideas as to how to catch and hold the attention of 60 kiddos?

In short, no. They are far more imaginative than I. Once, when sharing with their children about the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Beau used Pepperidge Farm goldfish crackers to make his point. I rest my case!



Still, we had a wonderful conversation, exploring the meaning of Lent, prayer, and family. As I hung up, it struck me that we don't talk about such things

very often. I think we might be missing something remarkable. For when we take the risk to speak of matters close to our hearts, it's almost transformative.

That was my experience doing the interview (see page 4) with Sr. Ann Francis. Crossing boundaries of daily banter, we moved to a new place in relationship. Writing the story, I began to wonder how I might be invited into such honesty about my life choices.

This coming May is Older Americans Month (www.aoa.gov/press/observances/oam/oam.aspx). In celebration of the event, we invite you to share with an elder. Take a risk to go beyond the ordinary and watch the extraordinary unfold.

Blessings on your Lent, and may the Easter flame dispel our darkness and unite us in its light! Be well.

Developing a Driving Policy

by Sister Evelyn McKenna, SNDdeN, Boston Provincial Leadership Team



Over a year ago, as Leadership Teams of the Boston and Ipswich provinces of the Sisters of Notre Dame, we met to discuss the safety of our sister-drivers. The issue had been surfaced earlier by a group dealing with health issues, as well as by our cross-province car committee. After discussion as to the

best manner of proceeding, the car committee was asked to formulate a questionnaire (based in part on the policy of our Ohio Province) and this was sent out using the online program, "Survey Monkey."

The questionnaire was designed with a dual goal: (a) to obtain the results for our own analysis; and (b) to serve as a means of sisters' examinations of their own driving.

Following publication of the results of the survey, an education day was held, sponsored by Christian Brothers who cover our insurance needs. Then came the formulation of a policy. It has been accepted by both the Boston and Ipswich Provinces.

In the meantime, research was done to find groups which offer on-road testing. Christian Brothers is providing this service for us. All sisters ages 75 and over are required to take a road test. The one-hour evaluation includes a cognitive element, a driving history and on-road testing. A number of sisters have already been tested. In the spring, when snow is off the roads, the program will continue. We believe that these were very helpful steps which will serve us well in preventing accidents and injuries to our sisters and others.

Survey Questions Used by Boston and Ipswich Provinces of Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur

- Do you think the province should establish safe-driving guidelines and formulate a policy for safe driving?
- Have you imposed limitations on your driving?
- If someone had to approach you with concerns about your driving and asked you to consider not driving, what would you consider the most compelling objective reasons she could give to encourage you to stop driving?
- Do you think the number of accidents a sister causes in a given period of time is a compelling reason to stop driving?
- Do you think ticket violations are a reason to stop driving?
- Would you be willing to take a driver refresher course or driver assessment course at age 60, 70 or 80?
- If a sister has concerns about your driving, would you want her to speak to you directly?
- If you are a passenger, what are some of the signs for you that the driver should not be driving?
- What guidelines would you like to see in place for your own safety and that of other sisters?
- If you have gone from driver to passenger, what was most helpful in making that decision?
- If you were in Leadership, what would you like to see in a safe driving policy?



Click & Learn... Websites on Elders & Driving

<http://www.driver-ed.org> The Association for Driver Rehabilitation Specialists includes a membership directory through which you can locate a driver rehabilitation specialist in your geographic area.

<http://www.seniordrivers.org> Automobile Association of America contains brochures, driving tips for seniors, video clips and other helpful ideas from AAA.

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/olddrive> National Highway Traffic Safety Administration: Research studies, booklets and materials, including "Driving Safely while Aging Gracefully."

<http://www.aarp.org/55alive> AARP 55 Alive Mature Driving Site to locate AARP Driver Safety education classes in your area; take the online Driver Safety course; other information on older drivers.

http://www.aging-parents-and-elder-care.com/Pages/Checklists/Elderly_Drivers.html An article on driving by elders which includes a checklist of telltale signs of decline in driving abilities; also includes ways for elder drivers to adjust to changing abilities.

http://www.iihs.org/research/topics/older_people.html Website for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety contains questions and answers about older drivers; news releases; and a chart showing licensing renewal procedures for older drivers for every state.

<http://driving.php.ufl.edu/> Website for the University of Florida National Older Driver Research and Training Center. Their focus is on helping older drivers to maintain their safe driving ability as long as possible.

<http://www.beverlyfoundation.org> The Beverly Foundation's mission is to foster new ideas and options to enhance mobility and transportation for today's and tomorrow's older population. The foundation pursues this mission through a specialized series of research programs, community demonstrations, and technical assistance products.

<http://www1.aota.org/olderdriver/> The Older Driver Site of the American Occupational Therapy Association includes a link to find a driving specialist or program.

<http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/physician-resources/public-health/promoting-healthy-lifestyles/geriatric-health/older-driver-safety.shtml>

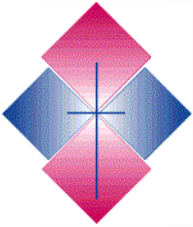
Website of the American Medical Association on Older Driver Safety.



NRRO



- March 15:** Direct Care Assistance Application Forms Due at NRRO
- March 31:** (Arch)Diocesan Collection Proceeds Due at NRRO
- April 1-3:** Planning and Implementation Assistance Workshop; Chicago, IL
- April 15-16:** Person-Centered Care Essentials Training Conference; Chicago, IL
- April:** Distribution of Planning Assistance & Implementation Assistance
- May 12:** NRRO Consultant In-Service; Washington, DC



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Washington, DC 20017-1194
Phone: (202) 541-3215
Fax: (202) 541-3053
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.

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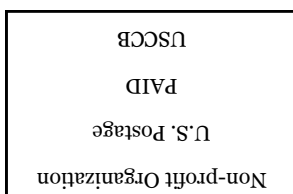
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