



Engaging Aging

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Productive Attitudes to Growing Older

by *Brother Cornelius E. Hubbuch, CFX*

The late John F. Kennedy said, "It is not enough to add years to life, one must add new life to years." As we know, how to do this is a challenge that is not easily met. Since life changes are variable, the manner in which each of us moves through our 60's, 70's and 80's is unique to each person. So first of all, it is important for each of us to take it upon ourselves to do something about our own personal life pattern of prayer, ministry, rest, relationships, diet, exercise and mental attitude, so our senior years do not become the greatest cross of our lives. One thing certain these days is that we live in a rapidly changing world, and yet, it remains God's world despite the atrocities created by humankind. Since it is God's world, it becomes our obligation to serve God in that ever-changing world. And one of the ways of serving God is to recognize that we too have changed over the years — that we are no longer the same person we were when we entered religious life or were ordained.

Hopefully, the intervening years have seen us grow in wisdom and grace, just as some of us have grown in waist and weight and forehead. Hopefully, too, we have grown as persons, so that now in our mature years, we have outgrown the impetuosity, the brashness and the unbridled ambition that can often characterize youth. How can we grow older gracefully so that our later years will truthfully reflect the beauty of God? So that the words of St. Paul still hold: "...forgetting what is behind, I strain forward to what is before, I press on towards the goal to the prize of God's heavenly call in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:13-14)

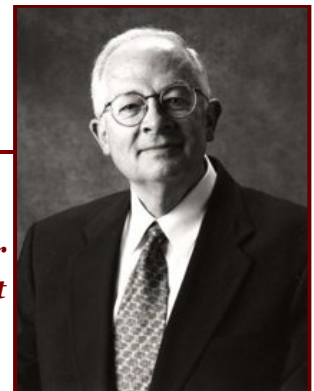
We all probably know of older women and men who became "retirement problems" because they failed to recognize that growing older is part of the life cycle. Just as we were given our youth and good looks, and then our (Continued on page 2)

"Those who have chosen God still have before them in old age a future without end and without threats. It is therefore vital to choose well, not to destroy the future. And the first and fundamental choice must be God, God revealed in the Son Jesus Christ... which at the same time offers us company on the way..."

Pope Benedict XVI,

May 18, 2008

Cornelius E. Hubbuch, CFX, is currently serving on the Xaverian Brothers Leadership Team and is based in Baltimore, MD. Previously, he was a staff member of Southdown Institute where he also became the first Director of the Carter Centre for Leadership Development.



Productive Attitudes to Growing Older (Continued from page 1)

middle years and more mature judgments, so also does God give us our senior years and those characteristics, some unflattering though they be, that are associated with age. God does call us to a specific role in our later years. Because we are seniors, we can render a great service to the People of God by serving as role models as we adapt to the aging process. Unfortunately, aging and retirement are two words that hold great fear for many.

To be more specific, we can first of all adopt a positive attitude — growing older is not so much retirement *from* something as much as it should be retirement *to* something. Growing older can be much more than a mere post-script to a full and productive life in ministry. Our attitude needs to be one of new beginnings, a positive approach to a new life.

Each of us as an individual does have *some* control over this. There is no one but ourselves responsible for determining whether or not the golden years will really be so, or whether they will turn out to be tarnished years.

The poet, Robert Browning, has written, “Grow old along with me; the best is yet to be.” And that is what we can be pointing towards — the best is yet to be — and that dream can then become a reality in the life of each of us. Many of us belong to a generation of fighters who have come through some tough times: we have experienced a great depression and a world war; we have survived the upheaval of the 60’s and the reforms and renewal of Vatican II; we have experienced crisis within the Church — and yet we have held together through it all.

Now we face a new challenge in our lives, the challenge of aging. We need to keep in mind and heart that aging is all part of God’s plan for us. Looking through the Scriptures, we find example after example of God calling older persons as prophets to do God’s bidding (e.g. Moses and Abraham). Each of us is being called by God to enter a new stage of life in which God will have some specific task for us. As we read in the prophet Isaiah (46:4), “Even to your old age, I am the same, even when your hair is gray I will bear you; it is I who have done this; I will continue, and I who will carry you to safety.”

Another major attitudinal adjustment is the acceptance of the physical changes that come with age. We simply will not be able to do all that we did earlier. But that does not mean we stop living and doing anything that is physical. It just means we have to select new activities that are appropriate to the capacities of our aging body. Walking, swimming and gardening are examples of healthy activities that are possible for many of us well into our 80’s.

As we grow older the challenge is to adapt to our new situation with dignity and self-esteem. We need to set new goals for ourselves, goals that include new balance in our lives around prayer and reflection, service to others, leisure activities, and our close relationships. Older age does not need to be a period of waiting to die. We want to be and can be vibrantly alive. We should feel the world is a better place because of our positive energy and presence in it, even though we may no longer be active in full time ministry. The secret of successful aging is found in the ability to develop a new life for ourselves.

The 30th Chapter of Deuteronomy speaks eloquently of this: “See, today I set before you life and prosperity, death and disaster. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live in the love of Yahweh, your God.” (Continued on page 3)

Productive Attitudes to Growing Older (Continued from page 2)

Consider these guidelines for growing older gracefully

- ◆ **Face reality.** *Face the facts of life; don't live in a dream world.*
- ◆ **Take responsibility.** *Don't blame others for your problems.*
- ◆ **Be interested in other people.** *Keep open the lines of communication.*
- ◆ **Be active.** *Too many people are content to settle into a comfortable chair instead of being up and doing.*
- ◆ **Learn new skills.** *This adds interest to life.*
- ◆ **Keep your intellect stimulated with new interests.** *There is less mental disorientation found in those who keep their minds alert.*
- ◆ **Live in the present and look to the future, don't live within the past.** *The past can be a pleasant memory and is to be respected, but keep up with the world. Don't fear the future; accept changing times. Adapt to changing circumstances.*
- ◆ **Avoid stress.** *Be flexible; rigidity will cut you off from the world around you.*
- ◆ **Know how to relax.** *Learn not to take yourself too seriously. Develop an attitude of leisure. Discover new joys.*
- ◆ **Practice good health habits.** *Exercise, proper diet, adequate rest, regular check-ups. Don't make a hobby of your aches and pains.*
- ◆ **Develop and sustain friendships.**
- ◆ **Develop your love relationship with God.**

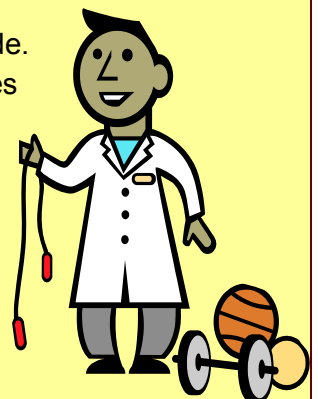
From our readers...

Sister Kay Cota, PBVM, sent this joke to us to brighten those long snowy days we experienced in February. We hope it will bring a smile on your way to practicing positive attitudes toward aging.

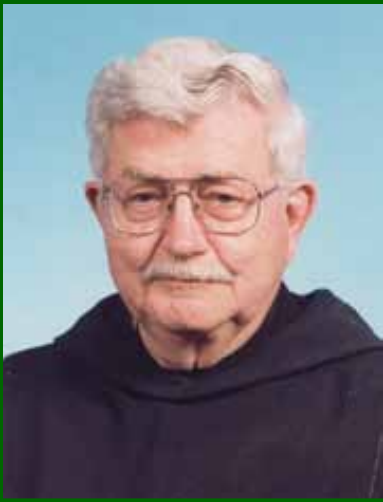
Begin by standing on a comfortable surface where you have plenty of room at each side. With a 5 pound potato sack in each hand, extend your arms straight out from your sides and hold them there as long as you can. Try to extend for a full minute, then relax.

After a couple of weeks, move up to lifting 10 pound potato sacks, then 50 pound sacks. Eventually try to get to the point where you can lift a 100 pound potato sack in each hand and extend your arms for longer than one minute.

When you are comfortable with this level of exercise, put a potato in each of the sacks!



Aging Engaged



Now that I am the second-oldest monk in the monastery (Fr. Hilary at Altus is older), that should give me the right to say something about aging. One morning when I was in church trying to get focused for Mass, the thought came to me that I might write something of the thoughts, feelings, concerns, worries, temptations, and scruples that come with age.

Coming back to live in the monastery has been a trying experience. Most of the present monks are strangers to me. In a sense it is like going through a novitiate again in my eighties.

We change with age and we change a lot. Physically there are things that we cannot do which we could do easily when we were younger. When you drop something it is a chore to retrieve it. Getting out of bed—that has become very

Fr. Placidus Eckart, OSB

difficult and takes some time. I have lost more than 27 pounds in the past 15 months. This loss of “padding” makes me feel like I am between a rock and a hard place, making it difficult to find a comfortable position. I have just recently learned that I am short of red blood corpuscles. This makes me feel tired, weak, sluggish, chilly, and like I am going to fall. My legs almost always hurt. I feel like I am carrying 25 pounds and can’t find a place to put it down.

In some ways you feel like another person. In the past when someone said something to hurt you, you could shake it off. Now it hangs on. It was easy to be gentle and kind most of the time. When you get older, that becomes more difficult. When I was younger, it was easier to keep rules and regulations. With age those things become burdens. Looking back over my life, I feel that I have had too much religion, and not enough God.

Our eating habits change with age. When I was younger I could eat almost anything. Bread and sugar now make me feel weak. To eat cereal is a penance. What is left for breakfast on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday? Prunes and raisins!!

Since living in the Health Center, the things I miss are being the celebrant at Mass, driving a car, being able to play golf and other physical activities, and being able to go where you want and when you want. I especially miss contact with children. Sometimes you see people older than you doing things you can’t do, and this makes you feel frustrated and guilty. You worry that other people think you are a sissy and a weakling—can’t take it.

It seems to me that when a monk reaches the age of 80 (before 80 for some) he should be free from most monastic practices. He should have a special freedom that comes with age so that he should not feel guilty when he does not keep up with others. We should never feel guilty because we are old. God would rather have our love and trust than our guilt and penance. *(Continued on page 5)*

Aging Engaged (Continued from page 4)

It takes special grace, love and patience to care for the elderly. May God bless our health care personnel for their dedication.

Old age makes us think more about death and dying. More and more I begin to see how vain, proud, egotistical, judgmental, and pleasure seeking I have been. I thought that I was working for the honor and glory of God. Now I see that I was working for my own honor and glory. Chapter three of the book of Genesis [the Fall] is my story too. God uses age to make us trust in Him. The prayer of the tax collector becomes ours: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). May the Lord come soon.

Father Placidus Eckart, OSB, monk of Subiaco Abbey, Subiaco, AR, died on December 14, 2009. He wrote this article a short time after returning to the Abbey in 2007. Declining dialysis in 2009, he said farewell and made his peace with his confreres. At the time of his death, Fr. Placidus was 84 years old. This article first appeared in "The Abbey Message," Spring, 2009, and is reprinted with the kind permission of Abbot Jerome Kodell, OSB.

From our readers...

Sister Mary Joan Meyer, FSM, is the Pastoral and Spiritual Life Coordinator for the Franciscan Sisters of Mary in St. Louis, Missouri. We're delighted to publish this poem submitted by Sister Mary Joan.

I Really Do Feel... by Sister Mary Joan Meyer, FSM

I really do feel...

My brain does not function as fast as yours

But my feelings and emotions want to come out

Thank you for your faith and trust in me

The patience to listen to what is deep inside of me

Your kind eyes and warm smile along with your gentle touch

Unlock the boxed-in feelings and set me free

I can tell you how I feel...

But no one takes the time to listen to how I feel...

Thank you for listening to my plea

Inside this masqued frame is a soul that wants to be free

They tell me that I don't have feelings

Don't ask how she feels...

But I am a person like everyone else

I really do feel...

It may take awhile for me to express what's in my heart

But it's there buried deep inside and often unheard

Thank you for listening to my story!



Sister Mary Joan Meyer, FSM

Retirement—A New Chapter of Life

by Sister Mary Hopkins, OP, Sinsinawa, Wisconsin



The Sinsinawa Dominican Retirement Philosophy proclaims that “each stage of life calls us to mission in a new or continuing way. We believe that the call to retirement continues the mission of proclaiming the Word and the mission of the Sinsinawa Dominicans.” Although our call to formal ministry may end with retirement, the call to live out the mission of the Congregation doesn’t end until we breathe our last breath.

All endings open the possibility for new beginnings. Early on in life we experienced loss, e.g., letting go of creeping in order to walk, and that experience of loss has been with us throughout life. As we move through our losses, we can discover entirely new beginnings in life, and this is especially true in retirement. The gift of retirement is something that people in many societies are not blessed with because they don’t live as long as people in the United States. Our life of retirement can last as long as 30 years if we are blessed with an abundance of years.

Retirement offers us the opportunity to develop gifts that have yet to be discovered due to our previous ministry demands. Although with age the body diminishes, the mind and spirit continue to grow. Aging in the past focused to a great extent on care of the body, a medical model, while the mind and the spirit were not given much attention. Today we’ve come to appreciate the fact that the body, mind and spirit function in sync with each other, and when one is ignored the others suffer.

Individuals who choose to live out of a holistic and wellness philosophy of aging are assertive in creating rather than passive in reacting. They see the possibilities in life and build on them, even in retirement. Such persons are responsible decision makers and not simply passive recipients of decisions made by others. They find ways and are encouraged to use their gifts, skills, interests, talents, and knowledge for the good of others no matter how small the act. A simple smile raises the spirits of those around them.



Retirement is not a time for looking at what is not but rather a time for seeing the possibilities in life. As in every other stage in life, retirement needs to be envisioned and planned for. Because we are all unique, there will be a unique flavor to each person’s retirement plan.

Loss is bound to take on new meanings in our retirement years. The loss of family members and dear friends can deepen within us the courage to face our own final diminishment. It is said that the most traumatic event in life is birth; therefore, what have we to fear in death? We’ve already been through our most traumatic life event and don’t even remember it. Throughout our lives we’ve been gifted with opportunities to grow in our relationship with God and with one another. This new chapter of life called retirement offers us new opportunities for growth filled with the wisdom of age.

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From the Offices of NRRO...

Brother Robert Metzger, SM
Associate Director of Planning & Education



As I write this article we are in the first week of Lent so I would like to start by wishing everyone a Happy Lent! One of the themes of Lent is reconciliation and forgiveness. I believe this fits in perfectly with the focus of this issue of *Engaging Aging*, which is on the aging process.

I am a Marianist brother and have lived in community for more than 40 years. Over those years I have seen several of my brothers become “grumpy old men” as they move through the aging process. They are very bitter and sad people and, sometimes, very difficult to live with. One of the reasons for this is that they have never learned how to forgive others and/or themselves.

Aging is a process that never stops throughout our life. A definition of process is: a continuous action,

operation, or series of changes taking place in a definite manner. As you read the articles in this publication you see how the authors talk about this

continuous action during our entire life. One of those actions we all need to work on always is forgiveness.

Many of the readings in our Lenten liturgies proclaim the power of reconciliation and forgiveness. Lent is a wonderful time to meditate on this theme and to think of those whom we need to forgive. My prayer during this season of Lent is that we are able to forgive someone whom we feel has wronged us in our life or to forgive ourselves.

From the Editor’s Desk

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

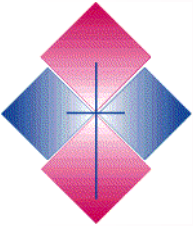


This issue of “Engaging Aging” has once again taken up the subject of the process of aging. With its changes and challenges, aging is a dynamic we are rarely neutral about. Our attitude toward growing older is comprised of our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, each one influencing the other. In the weeks to come, we invite you to examine your own attitudes toward aging, be it yours or that of others. Consider what you think retirement should look like. How do you feel about growing older? How do you act toward elders who take up the microphone in community meetings? How do you feel as death becomes more immanent? What would be your response if asked to return to your community’s care center? How does it feel when people walk quickly around you as you move down hallways? As you grow older, do you think of yourself as a vital, contributing member of your community? If you don’t like your answers, remember, attitudes can be changed. And apropos the season of Lent, consider the words of author Ruth Wiebe: “...you repent not by feeling bad, but by thinking different.” Be well!

NRRO



- March 31:** Direct Care Assistance Applications due at NRRO
- March 31:** Retirement Fund for Religious collection proceeds due
- April 20-22:** Planning and Implementation Workshop, Dayton, OH
- May 24-28:** RCRI Workshop—Orientation to the Management of Religious Institutes, Chicago, IL
- June:** Distribution of Direct Care Assistance



National Religious Retirement Office
 3211 Fourth Street, N.E.
 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 this money 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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