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Editorial

Jane Kuepfer and Andy Brubacher Kaethler

Interest in the theme of spirituality and aging is strong. Church leaders, seminaries and theological schools, secular universities, continuous care facilities, publishers, non-profit organizations, and even governments realize that the wellbeing of the growing elderly segment of our population includes a spiritual dimension and requires attention to spiritual health.

The average human life span has increased dramatically in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. With persons now regularly living into their eighties and nineties, and with the percentage of the total population in the later stages of life approaching equality with the percentage of the population in earlier stages of life, our congregations and societies are becoming much more aware of both the opportunities and challenges of life in what we often refer to as the retirement years. In many congregations, the over-sixty population is larger than the under-sixty population, making challenges and opportunities even more acute.

With the passage of time comes change—in our bodies, minds, roles and relationships, vocation, circumstances, home, society, and church.

This issue of *Vision* focuses on the opportunities and challenges associated with three aspects of spirituality and aging in particular: changes, questions, and resources. Through these themes we honor the experience of aging, with all its emotions, ponderings, and questions. We hear about ways to challenge ageism and engage life more fully with and as older adults. We open ourselves to the voices of older adults and those who know them well and love them deeply to better appreciate the marvelous interrelationship of spirituality and aging.

One way to think of aging is in terms of *change*. With the passage of time comes change—in our bodies, minds, roles and relationships, vocation, circumstances, home, society, and church. Sometimes change is experienced as loss or decline. Often change is experienced as a maturing, a becoming, that takes time. Life ages us. How do we navigate the changes that come with time? And what does our spirituality have to do with it?

Spirituality is the awareness of God's presence—the life-affirming sense that we are not alone, that our Creator who loves and cares is present with us. Spirituality is intimately connected with physical, emotional, relational, and financial health. While the focus of this issue is on the challenges and opportunities of spiritual health, we acknowledge and embrace the interconnection of multiple dimensions of health.

Spirituality can be an anchor in the midst of change. It can also lead us on a search for meaning in change. Our personal and communal spirituality may offer tools and resources for engagement with both stability and change. In this issue we consider spirituality to be about both rootedness and aspirations or longings. Spirituality is about connection, identity, and belonging. We also consider spirituality to embrace meaning and mystery, convictions and commitments, while recognizing our Christian faith from a Mennonite—or more broadly Anabaptist—perspective. This recognition leads us to ask questions like these: How do we follow Jesus as we age together with persons at various stages of life? How might the church both listen to and speak into the experience of aging and its implications for all of us?

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The themes of changes, questions, and resources help structure and animate this issue of *Vision*, though most of the essays include elements of more than one theme. We hope these themes provide helpful entry points into the world of spirituality and aging.

The first three essays address changes in bodies, activities, and relationships. Ardith Frey considers changes in later life and spiritual practices that help seniors transition with faithfulness and grace. Ingrid Loepp Thiessen explores changes brought on by dementia and provides practical suggestions for how to be a pastoral presence to those with declining cognitive abilities. Velma Swartz invites readers to embrace the emotions that accompany life changes with honesty and integrity.

The next five essays highlight questions older persons may be asking. Cynthia Brubacher Noel considers questions older persons might ask toward the end of a long life and the role of service, ritual, and spiritual autobiography in addressing these questions. Barbara Bowman ponders what is gained by viewing death as a natural part of life and what a "good death" might entail. Marian Wiens asks about the role of spirituality in

the experience of grief. Lisa Heinrichs helps us to think through questions pertaining to medical assistance in dying—questions prompted by relatively recent legal changes in Canada and some states in the United States. Kathryn Cressman prompts us to be curious about the meaning of home and decisions about where to live in later life.

The final essays suggest resources for embracing aging in communities of faith. The piece by Jane Kuepfer highlights considerations for families and congregations as they accompany seniors who continue to explore and grow spiritually. Wes Goertzen reminds us that no one "ages out" of discipleship and offers reflective resources for renewing a sense of vocation. Bev Suderman-Gladwell advocates for the power of music and provides practical suggestions for ministry in long-term care living. Moses Falco models how to lead intergenerational conversations that foster self-discovery for both older and younger participants. Elsie Epp finds herself in the biblical story, in Philippians, as she discerns what it means practically to transition from the pulpit to a pew. This issue of *Vision* ends with an annotated bibliography of resources curated by the editors, which we hope you find helpful for personal reflection, group discussion, and church leadership.

About the authors

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Navigating the transitions of aging

A spiritual direction perspective

Ardith Frey

Years ago I accompanied my parents to visit a relative in a long-term care home. We found her in bed, quite withdrawn and difficult to draw into conversation. She was unhappy about her care and generally with needing to be where she was. After some time with her, we went down the hall to see another acquaintance. This woman was sitting in her chair and warmly welcomed us. While having limited eyesight, she had positive comments about her care and expressed gratitude for our visit. The contrast was vivid, and ever since I have carried the question, *How can I develop habits and attitudes that will help to navigate aging with a positive outlook?* At the time, I was pursuing a Master of Divinity at Canadian Mennonite University on a part-time basis alongside congregational ministry, and I recall the seminar leader, Dan Epp-Tiessen, in a discussion about character-based theologians, making a comment along the lines of this: "We do not prepare for adversity in the instance we experience it; we prepare by the habits and character we develop day by day over time." In this article, I explore what kinds of habits, spiritual practices, and perspectives may help us navigate the transitions of aging over a lifelong journey.

I have carried the question, *How can I develop habits and attitudes that will help to navigate aging with a positive outlook?*

But first, let me offer a brief description of what I bring to this discussion, including some of the transitions I have experienced. I am a young senior, retired for eight years after twenty years of congregational ministry. In retirement I am engaged in a small spiritual direction practice and in hospice volunteering, among more personal pursuits. Prior to congregational ministry, I worked for Mennonite Central Committee over a fifteen-year period in three different African countries and in Winnipeg. After fifteen years in Winnipeg, our family moved back to southern Ontario largely to be closer to aging parents following the death of one of

them. Two more parents died in the following year, and five years later my husband died from a malignant brain tumour.

It may also be helpful to touch briefly on a definition of spiritual direction (SD). While the more classic area of focus for SD pertained to seeking advice regarding spiritual practices, there is currently a broader understanding that involves fostering an awareness of God's presence with us in all spheres of life. I understand SD as a ministry of prayerful listening for underlying questions or themes related to the directee's framework of meaning and experience of God within the stories they share.

Transitions through the life journey

In the editorial to this issue of *Vision*, Jane Kuepfer and Andy Brubacher Kaethler define aging in terms of *change* that comes with time. Here I expand on this to include the notion of *transitions* that include several phases, each with their own inner work. We experience transitions throughout life, and learning to negotiate earlier ones can give us the resiliency to know we can navigate the later transitions of aging. While not all transitions will carry easily identifiable phases, they will likely all involve some form of acceptance that something is coming to an end, a period of disorientation, and a new beginning—the classic stages first identified by William Bridges.[1] Sometimes these phases are easier to see in retrospect.

Marjory Zoet Bankson adds some helpful components to the discussion of aging from an SD perspective.[2] Bankson breaks Bridges's three stages of transitions into smaller steps, while identifying tasks for each part of the transition as well as accompanying spiritual practices. For Bridges's *ending* stage, Bankson adds the steps of (1) *release* (letting go of vocational identity), with the spiritual practice of *gratitude*; and (2) *resistance* (feeling stuck), with the spiritual practice of *silence* (time for reflection). For Bridges's stage of *disorientation*, or a neutral zone, Bankson adds the steps of (1) *reclaiming* (looking back to re-claim gifts), with the spiritual practice of *tracking dreams*; (2) *revelation* (forming new identity for the future), with the spiritual practice of *writing*; and (3) *crossing point* (moving from stagnation to generativity), with the spiritual practice of *discernment* (or forming a clearness committee). And, finally, for Bridges's period of *new beginning*, Bankson adds the steps of (1) *risk* (beginning again with new vision), with

1 William Bridges, *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1980).

2 Marjory Zoet Bankson, *Creative Aging: Rethinking Retirement and Non-Retirement in a Changing World* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2011).

the spiritual practice of *developing a "rule of life"* (vision statement); and (2) *relating* (finding new structures, creating community), with the spiritual practice of forming *intentional community*.

I illustrate negotiating these phases of transition with a personal story about a major decision. As I approached my sixtieth birthday with the keen awareness that I would be outliving my husband who had passed at age fifty-nine, the realization that life can be short hit home, making me examine priorities for my remaining years. While engaged in a vocation I loved, I yearned for a more spacious rhythm of life not as defined by the deadlines of weekly worship planning, preaching, pastoral care, and other ministry tasks. I longed for more time to spend with my children as well as for reading, contemplation, and creative pursuits. And so began a year of discernment with my spiritual director and financial planner about taking an early retirement. In this time I looked back over previous transitions in my life, some of which had felt risky at the time, recalling how these decisions were guided by trusting an inner call and how God was faithful in providing the needed resources in all of these transitions. I was also able to see in retrospect how much I had learned and grown through these new experiences. This review gave me the assurance to let go of security in order to step out in faith once again.

While engaged in a vocation I loved, I yearned for a more spacious rhythm of life not as defined by the deadlines of weekly worship planning, preaching, pastoral care, and other ministry tasks.

After announcing my decision to retire to the congregation, I worked at ending well. One of my last commitments was to speak to the seniors' group. Recognizing the wealth of wisdom in that group, I decided to focus on life transitions, giving some examples from my own life before inviting them to discuss in table groups and then report on some of the transitions they had experienced, along with life lessons that arose.

Some described moving to a new country, province, city, or form of housing. Others described becoming empty-nesters or returning to work after raising kids. Others described the death of a loved one (child, spouse, or friend) or illnesses and diminishing strength and physical abilities that accompany aging. Still others described retiring from a fulfilling occupation. Life lessons included trusting God in the midst of changes, enjoying the gifts that accompany new life stages, taking time to process

the grief that accompanies loss, focusing on finding good closure and moving forward without regrets, and listening to the body as it changes. In general, there was a sense that clarity about change often comes after the fact rather than in the midst of it.[3]

With leaving the role of pastor, I experienced the unease that stepping into a vacuum of a yet-to-be-determined role and identity entails. My spiritual director was especially important during this time in reminding me that I was following a new calling that required trust and that this step into the "wilderness" was spiritually formative and would eventually bear fruit and new direction. I heeded the advice of other retirees to stay in this vacuum for a while—not to be too quick to pick up volunteer roles since it was easy to get as busy after retirement as before. I knew I would need companions on this journey, and eventually a group of newly retired women came together. Together we explored books on aging and spirituality and shared on these themes from our own lives. This group became—and continues to be—a place of trust and belonging. After a while I began to imagine how I might use gifts that had previously given meaning in new ways, with the guidance of a "rule of life" I wrote for helping to identify priorities for involvements and balance. While the middle, murky phase of transition was uncomfortable at times, in hindsight I have not regretted the decision to retire, and I continue to work at aligning involvements with priorities.

Spiritual practices for navigating the transitions of aging

Margaret Silf, who writes from an Ignatian perspective, uses the term *inner compass* to describe how we can find true readings for the directions we want to go.[4] Silf discusses this within a framework of concentric circles depicting the different parts of our outer and inner landscape, with the outermost circle representing the *where* of our given circumstances over which we have little control, a middle circle representing *how* we experience and respond to events over which we have some choice, and an innermost circle representing *who* we are in which we get in touch with God and our true identity. It is especially in the inner circle that we find our bearings for negotiating changes in the outer circles. Silf also talks about character and habits—how choices we make contribute to making us who

3 This paragraph summarizes notes from the table group discussion at Waterloo North Mennonite Church, May 8, 2013.

4 Margaret Silf, *Inner Compass: An Invitation to Ignatian Spirituality* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1999).

we are, how "choices turn into habits and habits become character."[5] Here I describe spiritual practices or habits that can help to shape our character and inform how we respond to life circumstances and transitions. The following spiritual practices are not an exhaustive list but are gleanings from my own life as well as observations from spiritual direction and hospice work. While these practices can apply to all stages of our life journey, numerous authors comment how it is in the second half of life that we are more ready for the journey inward.

Spiritual guides. Having someone listen prayerfully to our stories and questions is critical for understanding them and getting in touch with our inner longings and fears. While telling our stories to a trusted confidant who offers compassionate presence, perceptive questions, and observations is helpful to seeing new elements, including how God is present within them, I also believe that hearing ourselves tell our stories can reveal things we didn't see before. In my experience it is helpful to engage with a guide who accompanies us over a period of time that is long enough for trust to build, allowing us to go deeper, and provides the perspective to see repeated themes or shifts and movements in our story, helping us to see the contours of our journey more clearly.

Peer listening companions. We can also benefit from a small group of trusted peers who may be on a similar journey. In my story this was a retired women's group, but it could be a book club, a prayer group, or some other small group where personal sharing is encouraged and "holding the space" for each other's sharing is practiced. Peer travelers can remind us that we are not alone, that others care and understand some of what we are experiencing. While it may not be as intimate, we can also experience a sense of community and empathetic understanding in larger peer groups such as the seniors' group described above, where faith and life stories are frequently shared.[6]

Faith community and practices. Participating in a faith community can also shape us in ways of which we may not be consciously aware. Hearing Scripture read and reflections on it shared help to situate our personal stories within a larger narrative. Encountering God through Scripture,

5 Silf, *Inner Compass*, 2.

6 Storytelling has come up frequently in this article. For a fuller discussion on the significance of storytelling and aging, see William L. Randall, *In Our Stories Lies Our Strength: Aging, Spirituality, and Narrative* (self-published, 2019).

hymns, and prayers puts us in touch with our inner *who* circle and provides an avenue for expressing a range of praises, longings, and laments. Experiencing these practices in community reminds us of our need for one another to support each other both spiritually and also in practical ways. Literature supports the observation that persons who are part of faith communities or have personal spiritual practices are often more resilient in facing crisis. This is true across different faith traditions, as I have had the opportunity to experience in hospice work.

Encountering God through Scripture, hymns, and prayers puts us in touch with our inner *who* circle and provides an avenue for expressing a range of praises, longings, and laments.

Our personal spiritual practices beyond our communal worship can also shape and equip us with resources for navigating the journey. Besides the more traditional practices of personal Scripture reading and prayer (sometimes using prayer books or other guides such as lectionary calendars), there are also more contemplative forms of prayer that many find helpful, such as centering prayer, journaling, praying with icons or art, poetry writing, listening to music, and nature walks.

Cultivating acceptance and gratitude. One of the premises undergirding the hospice movement is that persons receiving care and supports have accepted that they are on a palliative journey. While it can be difficult to accept such a diagnosis, doing so seems to provide clarity for how they will live their remaining days and allows their energy to go into unfinished life tasks and quality time with loved ones rather than resisting what is happening to them. One of my clients would speak honestly about the difficult symptoms of her illness and then go on to say, "Oh well, what can I do?" I saw this not as a statement of resignation but rather as one of acceptance. I would remind her that while she did not have a choice about her diagnosis, she did have a choice about how she responded to it. I consistently saw her choose to focus on things that brought her enjoyment, such as watching the hummingbirds at her feeder or experiencing visits from her grandchildren. I saw how she would end every conversation with words of thanks and appreciation. My husband also demonstrated acceptance by embracing his palliative journey as a pilgrimage rather than a

"battle with cancer," and his acceptance and openness set the stance for the rest of us as we journeyed with him.

Gratitude seems to open our eyes to the gifts around us and helps us to live more fully and experience life from a more expansive place. I am personally grateful to the folks I have accompanied through hospice for demonstrating that the lifelong practices we have nurtured, along with the support of loved ones and caring professionals, can give us the comfort, peace, and equanimity we need to end well. I am also grateful to the folks I accompany through spiritual direction and to my own spiritual director for the reminder of the importance of listening carefully to our own stories. And I am most grateful to God who accompanies us throughout life and beyond death.

About the author

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Holding a lamp

Ministry as memory fades

Ingrid Loepp Thiessen

God lights a lamp

Songs we love become part of our life story and our memory, ready for retrieval when we need them most. They can stay with us forever. There is a new song in *Voices Together* with a melody that rises to celebrate the enormous joy of angels and softens as love is found. The song has won my heart with its comforting, expansive text, a short, simple melody, and such joy. I repeat it again and again because it speaks to my soul.

> *God lights a lamp,*
> *And she searches ev'rywhere*
> *For the hidden, lonely heart.*
> *God lights a lamp,*
> *And she searches ev'rywhere.*
> *When she finds you, oh, she sings:*
> *"I have found my treasure, my precious silver coin.*
> *I have found my love!"*
> *Even angels will hear the news,*
> *What once was lost, is found.*[1]

The song retells Jesus's parable about a woman who loses a coin and searches until she finds it. It is a picture of God, who is searching for us. We are precious, lost treasure. In this story, we are joyfully and lovingly found, safe again at home, and celebrated.

This parable—and the song that retells it—speaks to me as a chaplain in a long-term care setting for a couple of reasons. First, personally, I can identify with being lost sometimes, far from who I am meant and called to be. As a chaplain, I know the desperate feeling of being lost, not knowing

1 "God lights a lamp," lyrics by Katie Graber; composed by Anneli Loepp Thiessen, *Voices Together* (Harrisonburg, VA: MennoMedia, 2020), 299. Text reprinted here by permission of the authors. For a recording of the song, see https://www.commonword.ca/ResourceView/82/22687.

what to say, when to show up, when to leave, or how to be present in a difficult situation.

Second, I identify with the woman holding the lamp, sweeping, searching, finding, and celebrating. In this story is a calling. As a chaplain, it is my task to light a lamp and continuously search for a way to connect to the human treasure, the precious silver coin, the hidden lonely heart, the loved one who has dementia. Everything I do as a chaplain is about communicating God's peace in the midst of fear, finding hidden treasure in a vessel that is changing, and celebrating moments of grace and love on a difficult journey. It is about shining a light into ancient memories to find a lost spark, a hidden glimmer, a deep hope, the seeds of faith, the eternal beauty of a soul—and then to have a party. Yes, *I have found my treasure, my precious silver coin. I have found my love!* And *even angels will hear the news!* This is my calling as a chaplain among people with dementia, and perhaps it is the task of all who seek to provide spiritual care.

Journeying alongside those with dementia

Dementia is a disease of the brain. The brain increasingly fails to do what it has always done, and over time this affects every aspect of life for the person with dementia and for those who share life with them. The most common type of dementia is Alzheimer's disease; some other types include Vascular Dementia, Lewy Body Dementia, and Frontotemporal Dementia. There are also other diseases, like Parkinson's disease, which can impact a person's cognitive functioning. Each disease has different expressions. Dementia is progressive, getting worse over time as the failure of the brain intensifies. At the very end of the disease, a person may no longer walk or sit up. They may barely move, their muscles becoming increasingly rigid. The person may or may not be able to eat or use the washroom independently. They may need assistance with all the activities of daily life. Attempts to speak may not be understood by listeners. Swallowing might become difficult. The immune system may fail to send warning signals.

The journey to this later stage can take a long time and will begin with more subtle but equally frightening changes. In the earlier stages, dementia may result in a reduced ability to solve problems and understand directions. There may be forgetfulness, personality and behavior changes, memory loss, and frustration that increasingly affects all areas of life. A seemingly simple thing like going for a walk may become increasingly challenging as the disease progresses.

Amid all these difficulties, there are many kindnesses and gifts to be found: the support of friends in the midst of grief, a beautiful smile indicating recognition or understanding, a playful laugh between new friends, an old friend who comes alongside, moments of insight amid memory loss, and the meaningful management of a difficult diagnosis are among them. The zeal of everyone involved to make it work and the expanded circle of people showing their love, music that draws out the best in us, prayers, Scripture verses that offer faith and comfort, and the joy that children bring are all mercies along the way.

The journey with dementia and the journey alongside someone who has dementia can leave us feeling bereft, grieving, and lost, and this can go on for years.

The journey with dementia and the journey alongside someone who has dementia can leave us feeling bereft, grieving, and lost, and this can go on for years. As spiritual care providers, we can feel lost. We do not know how to begin, where to shine the light, how to interpret the responses, and sometimes even what we are looking for. Family and friends who support people with dementia might also use the language of lost-ness. Grieving, they may say things like *I just can't anymore* or *She is lost to us* or *He is a shell of who he used to be*. This is such a painful place to be.

For those people who have dementia, the pain and the losses are compounded. Dementia can lead to intense anxiety that rises when thoughts are jumbled, repeated, or forgotten. There is the panic of not knowing how to get home or find a wallet or purse. There is the deep, long grief of knowing what is coming and that everything is only going to get worse. There is a painful awareness that control is being lost.

Lost-ness is seldom, if ever, a good thing. It's painful for all involved, and it can make us frantic and afraid. Yet, Christine Bryden, who writes about her own journey with dementia, reminds us that all is not lost. The human soul, the human treasure is always still there. "As we [persons with dementia] become more emotional and less cognitive," she writes, "it's the way you talk to us, not what you say, that we will remember. We know the feeling, but don't know the plot. Your smile, your laugh and your

touch are what we will connect with. Empathy heals. Just take us as we are. We're still in here, in emotion and spirit, if only you could find us."[2]

Lighting a lamp

The spiritual care task is to keep lighting a lamp and to illuminate the space around us, until we find what we are looking for: a spiritual and emotional connection to the person who is still in there. This connection, no matter how fleeting, communicates the message, *You are treasured and valued, loved and honored, and I'm celebrating that with you.*

There are some basic things to consider before and during a visit with someone who has dementia or their support people.

Know the person and the situation. It is important to know what kind of dementia the person has and how advanced it is. Determine whether there is a preferred time to visit. For some people with dementia, the hours before supper are the most difficult and may not be the best time to visit. In the early and middle stages of dementia, a person may have regular activities or routines that shouldn't be disrupted. Conversely there may be activities that the spiritual care provider can join in on. If visiting a long-term care home, call ahead so the staff can help the person be ready for the visit. Talk to family and friends about the person's accomplishments, career, joys, and hobbies; use this information in conversation with the person with dementia. It is also critical to find out about the family and caregivers to determine if they are receiving adequate support themselves and are not isolated.

Create success. Dementia is a failing of the brain; this means that words, instructions, memory, logic, and script are increasingly problematic. In supporting a person with dementia, it is important to make repeated adjustments, over time, so that the visit leads to good feelings rather than failure. As the disease progresses, avoid phrases like *You remember me, don't you?* Avoid testing a person's memory by asking them to provide details about their children or career. If the person with dementia cannot answer your questions, it can be embarrassing and discouraging. Instead, considering the stage of dementia, try weaving details that may trigger a memory into your own words. For example: *Marcie, it is so good to see you. I was just*

2 Christine Bryden, *Dancing with Dementia: My Story of Living Positively with Dementia* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2005), 138.

talking to your son Paul and thought I would just drive over from Yatton Mennonite Church to see you. I wanted to tell you about our church service on Sunday.

Connect through emotions and senses. The language of dementia is feelings and emotions. A person with dementia increasingly cannot access words, but their feelings and emotions are there. Spiritual care for persons with dementia needs to rely less on words and more on creating an experience. The presence, grace, kindness, and gentleness of the spiritual caregiver will be felt even if the words cannot be comprehended. So it is important to find ways to connect on an emotional level. Bring along some things that may produce a smile, such as a picture of a baby or puppy, a nice photo, or a fresh flower to celebrate the beauty of creation. Show joy at seeing the person. Delight in their surroundings. Walk together. Be silent together. Laugh together with funny pictures or even toys. (I have a battery-operated cat that giggles while it rolls on the floor; it always gets a smile or a laugh.) Sing and repeat the first verse of well-known heart songs. Use familiar scriptures. Provide something to hold like a large print bulletin with a few short Bible verses, the first verse of a song, a picture, and a short prayer or blessing and go through it together. Play familiar music on your phone and just listen together.

The presence, grace, kindness, and gentleness of the spiritual caregiver will be felt even if the words cannot be comprehended.

Kathy, a resident experiencing end-stage dementia, celebrated her wedding anniversary one weekend. Days later, I ran into her. I sat down directly in front of her and said, "Kathy, I'm so happy to see you." Kathy looked at me, and I said, "You had a great big wedding anniversary this weekend. How wonderful! Congratulations!" She smiled. "The girls were here and the grandchildren." She kept smiling—no words. "And they all wanted to be here because they love you so much." Kathy smiled and nodded. "It's wonderful how your family loves you so much." Kathy smiled, lifted her hand, and patted her heart. In this case there were no words that Kathy could speak, but there was so much that she could feel. She could remember love. This is an emotional and spiritual connection that is good for the heart and soul.

Consider sensory abilities. Many people experience changes in their eyesight and hearing as they get older. For a person with dementia, making eye contact is critical and requires you to sit at eye level, directly in front

of the person. Teepa Snow, a dementia educator, describes the vision challenges this way: In early dementia, a person loses their peripheral vision; they are seeing things as if through a scuba diving mask. In mid-stage dementia, it is as if everything is seen through binoculars. In late-stage dementia, it is as if you are looking through a monocle.[3] Spiritual caregivers need to bear this in mind, get close, and sit in the line of vision of the person with dementia. There may also be hearing loss, which may require the use of a simple voice amplification system and a headset so that you can avoid raising your voice at the person. Having a pastoral visit in the nursing home living room may work sometimes; at other times, though, it is important to find a quiet place, like the chapel, so the person can more easily focus on the visit.

Celebrate. Emotional and spiritual connection with someone is always a gift. We can celebrate the courage and resiliency of people who are living with dementia—people who, despite the failure of the brain, smile brightly, hold a hand gently, participate in life, and love their family and the people around them. One can also celebrate and affirm family caregivers: partners, children, friends who faithfully visit and inspire us with their commitment, flexibility, and love. This is a beautiful thing; what an honor it is to be in the presence of such beauty. Prayers spoken during a visit can celebrate a lifetime of work, faith, and resilience. As lamplighters, we celebrate the human treasure in a person with dementia and thank God for them. This gratitude can be spoken at the end of any visit.

Conclusion

None of us knows how our years will unfold, and rarely do we know ahead of time that dementia will be part of our journey. I hope, though, that if I am ever living in long-term care and have dementia, someone like my pastor or an elder or a spiritual friend will come looking for me again and again. They will light a lamp and gently remind me of my faith and my hope, repeating words lodged in my distant memory. If I cannot chime in, they will speak the words for me, gently holding my hand. My spiritual care provider will express hope in the simplest of words and in so many different ways. If I cannot pray, they will pray for me. They will know about my life, my accomplishments, my gifts, and my struggles, and they will honor me. They will love my family and support them as they

3 See Teepa Snow, "Dementia Video: Changes in Vision," https://youtu.be/iaUsRa5k-Nyw.

support me. If I do something unexpected or awkward, there will be so much grace. My pastor will remind me of how God sees me, in case I have forgotten. My spiritual caregiver will search for music that speaks to my soul, music I have always loved, music like the new song from *Voices Together*, and they will sing it with me:

God lights a lamp,
And she searches ev'rywhere
For the hidden, lonely heart.
God lights a lamp,
And she searches ev'rywhere.
When she finds you, oh, she sings:
"I have found my treasure, my precious silver coin.
I have found my love!"
Even angels will hear the news,
What once was lost, is found.

And I will draw on all my strength—perhaps managing just one raspy note—and we will sing together. We will have a connection. My whole being will be singing, and for one brief, wonderful moment, we won't be lost at all. We will hold the lamp together. And, as with that parable of the woman finding her lost coin, all of heaven will rejoice with us.

About the author

Ingrid Loepp Thiessen lives in Kitchener, Ontario. She graduated with an MDiv from Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary and previously graduated from Canadian Mennonite Bible College. She has worked as a pastor and has spent the last fifteen years working as a chaplain in long-term care homes. As a child she enjoyed simply being in the presence of her Great Aunt Maria (her Tante Michi). This may have paved the way for her life's work. She counts it an honor to spend time with people in the final years of their lives. She is married to Jim, a pastor, and they are parents of three adult children. Ingrid enjoys singing and all kinds of music-making, cooking, and a not-too-hard Sudoku. Recently she has found great joy in witnessing the many miracles that a garden provides every day.

Embracing emotions with honesty and integrity

Velma Swartz

A morning in March

I remember the day well, even though it is now more than twenty years ago. It was late March, and two days prior to this one my mother had died unexpectedly. She had been ill off and on her whole life, and the past year had been particularly difficult, but death was not expected. She had signed her living will only eight hours before her death, stating that she did not want to be taken to the hospital one more time. She was ready for whatever came. The question became for me, *Am I ready?*

My mother was a strong woman with leadership gifts. She was also a frustrated woman who I believe never grew into those gifts, as she was not understood or valued for those gifts. As the middle child of seven, I experienced her frustration deep within myself and often wondered about my own giftedness.

I moved into my own life journey, marrying at twenty-four and, in the course of time, birthing four children. We were a busy family with commitments to school and all its activities, helping to pastor a church, and staying in touch with and helping my aging mother. (My father was quite healthy until his late 80s.) What I became aware of over time was my deep desire for affirmation from my mother. I wanted to know, first and foremost, whether she liked who I had become. Was she proud of me? I knew she loved me, but I wanted to hear her say and affirm that I was a good mother, a supportive wife, an attentive friend, and, yes, a helpful daughter. I discovered later that what I wanted was my mother's blessing. This naming was discovered as I grieved her death.

What I became aware of over time was my deep desire for affirmation from my mother.

That morning in March I was on my way to my father's house where we siblings were gathering as we prepared for a visitation that afternoon and evening. I needed to pass my home church on my way to Dad's house, and I knew that Mother's body was already there. I had not planned to

stop there as I left home that morning, but as I got nearer to the church house, I thought, *I'm going to stop in and talk to Mom*. I wasn't quite sure what I would say, but I knew instinctively that I needed and wanted to do this.

There was one other car in the parking lot, but I saw no one in my hour with Mom. I wonder now if they observed me. I stood quietly beside my mother's casket and then carefully opened it, removing the napkin from her face and folding the linens out over the edges of her casket. I pulled up a chair and sat beside her. I sat in silence for a while, beholding the face, the image of the one who birthed me, gave me life, but being fully aware that this beholding held no life. The breath had been snuffed out, the life had been drawn—it was now the before and the after, and I was painfully aware that I was entering into the after. Grief surrounded me, my questions bubbled to the surface, and I asked my mom the *why*s of my pain. I named the groans of my desires for affirmation and asked why they weren't named. My anger, frustration, and longings spilled out into that casket, and I wept—not so much that she was no longer living, for I knew her body was worn and not functioning well, but for what I had longed for but now knew I wouldn't receive.

After a time, I did one of the most difficult actions of that hour, and that was to again fold in the linens and place the napkin on Mom's face—an ending, a finality, a letting go.

The journey of healing from grief

I could not have known how much that beginning of grief would also be the beginning of healing from my grief. I affirmed again during that hour my belief that what I can name I can also work with. What was sitting deep within my soul, causing pain, doubt, and frustration, was now named out in the open, no longer holding me captive. It was given air. It had room to move. It could begin to heal.

It wasn't that my mother was negligent. I think my mother did her best to raise us seven children as faithfully as she knew how. She gave us many gifts of her presence and care, teaching us valuable lessons. We are human, and we fail each other. I'm keenly aware that I have failed my four children, and they will in some ways fail their children. It is as Kate Bowler says in the title of her book: there is *no cure for being human*.

I experienced my mother differently in some ways than my siblings, although we identify many commonalities. My grief journey thus has looked different from my siblings'. I need to be willing to walk this journey in my

way and not insist on others walking it the same way. It wouldn't work for me to do it their way. I have a particular place in the family, a different personality, with different giftings, so we each need to make room for our unique journey and give room for the unique journey that is each of theirs. Valuing each other's journeys is a gift we extend to each other, and we learn from each other.

Part of my healing journey included asking the hard questions: What does it mean to live with honesty and integrity as it relates to my emotions? Where and with whom do I process my emotions? Does my spirituality allow me to be honest? Does God care about how I feel? Have I learned to deny my feelings because I was taught they are bad?

If the essence of God is in each one of us (as creatures formed in God's image), then it seems to me that all of who and what we are—all of life experienced in that fundamental essence—is good. We do not need to run from or hide from life—all of life, whatever it may bring. God is not threatened by our emotions, questions, or doubts. We can trust that God is with us in times of pain or pleasure. To explore all of life is a gift, a learning leading to a fullness of living.

Living honestly with our emotions

Living honestly doesn't begin when we are old. I believe I was able to name my emotions around my mother's death because I had already learned something about naming what is. I do believe that that experience helped me affirm that naming and that living into the reality of what was true continued to give me motivation to be open and honest. I don't always live into this truth well. There are people and situations that I shy away from, not giving who I am in the moment. The question then becomes this: Why or why not be honest?

While I believe it is important to name my emotions, whether they are negative or positive, I also need to remember that they are not permanent. They have a life span, so I don't need to deny or claim anything other than what they are. Intensity of emotions comes and goes.

"If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it," writes Richard Rohr.[1] To be able to transform my pain I needed to be willing to face it, to hold at bay the desire to run from it or blame someone else for it. As I named the pain, I also became stronger in continuation of the naming. Strength didn't come quickly, but it did come over time.

1 Richard Rohr, *A Spring within Us* (Albuquerque, NM: CAC Publications, 2016), 119.

I needed to be willing to live into the pain, to let it be and believe that in the willingness healing would come—and indeed it has. It may mean living in the dark of the pain for a season, but while I can still get in touch with the pain of that day twenty-some years ago, I think of my mother with different emotions now. I have had times of feeling my mother's blessing, encouragement, and love, and I am grateful.

Instead of trying to rid myself of the pain or emotion, I can let it open and teach me something about myself or the situation.

Allowing our emotions to give us information about ourselves is the work of honesty. Trying to fix our pain, to hold it down, or to deny that it exists can literally make us sick. Deep emotions and pain let us know there is something going on that needs attention. Instead of trying to rid myself of the pain or emotion, I can let it open and teach me something about myself or the situation.

As a verbal processor, I have often found that I gain insights into my own feelings as I'm willing to explore them. Hearing myself talk or observing my strong emotions as I talk gives me information about how to let them work for me. I have observed myself at times and thought or said, *I didn't know I believed this so strongly*, or *That seems really unbalanced as I listen to myself*. That could also be the case for those who process by journaling. Choosing honesty and integrity as a primary focus rather than perfection, control, or pleasing someone else has the potential of healing—maybe not in the moment but over time.

In my work as a chaplain and pastor to senior adults, I have learned much from listening and attending to those who are grieving. I have watched the progression of cancer take the life of a loved one and heard the deep anguish, loss, feelings of betrayal, and bewilderment of being left alone. But I have also seen the deep love and commitment of couples who were able to name their feelings of loss and love amid dying. Being open and honest about the process has been helpful as they journey through the grief process in the wake of the death. This is not easy work, but it is so helpful for the one left behind, the one who will experience the grief.

While there are almost always some regrets (another sign of being human), being able to live honestly with what one feels and experiences is essential to healing. A regret I heard was from a spouse who did not explore or ask any questions as the other was dying and now wishes they had.

It is also important to choose wisely those to whom you will give your emotions. Our emotions and feelings speak of our essence. They are windows into our souls, and we open those windows carefully. Having one or two close friends with whom I can be who I really am at any given moment has been a game changer for me. I am so grateful for those people I can trust with the realities of life—whether I'm experiencing deep grief or great joy—people who walk beside me, hearing and caring but not taking over and trying to fix me.

We can choose to live in anger, blame, resentment, or we can choose to let the losses and emotions lead us to something new.

I remember years ago complaining to a friend about something trite my spouse had done that annoyed me, and at one point she started to get angry with him. I stopped and looked at her and said, "If you get mad at him, I can't tell you what I'm feeling." This was my way of saying, *Yes, hear me but don't take it from me. Don't let my emotions at this point dictate how you feel about me or my spouse. I'm giving my emotion an airing, a naming, and then I will move on, deciding how I will respond to the event.*

Our lives from beginning to end give us many opportunities to experience many and varied emotions. Some are fleeting and felt in passing; others are profoundly deep and painful. We all experience losses; life is far from being perfect. We hoped and planned for something other than what we received through our own failings and the failings of those around us, but we do have choices. Every loss, however large or small, asks for a response from us. We can choose to live in anger, blame, resentment, or we can choose to let the losses and emotions lead us to something new, something deeper, something that is life-giving and productive. We will not avoid the pain and loss that life gives us, but we can choose to transform the pain so we will not transmit it. Living with honesty and integrity with our emotions gives us the freedom to live fully, with both delight and suffering.

About the author

Velma Swartz is a retired chaplain and pastor serving mostly senior adults, both in a nursing care facility and at Waterford Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana, where she is a member. She has a passion for accompanying the aging and the dying. Her training at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, and clinical pastoral education at St. Joseph Medical Center in South Bend were formative and life changing.

Finding meaning in old age

Cynthia Brubacher Noel

I was blessed to have my grandma—and her wisdom, faith, and humor—in my life until she was ninety-four-and-a-half years old. When she was eighty-nine, having already lost her first husband and many loved ones, and being a woman of deep faith, she longed to rejoin them in the presence of God. However, being used to trusting God's ways for her life, she confided, "At this stage, my job is to be ready to go but willing to stay if that is what is asked of me." Five years later, her patience was tested as pain and debilitation overtook her days, and she began to voice the plaintive question of so many others in this period of old age: *Why am I still here?* Having lived a life of service and care for others, she was struggling to find meaning and purpose in her growing state of helplessness and suffering.

Many people from all walks of life utter such questions as these: *Has my life mattered? Were my contributions worthwhile? Do my remaining days count for anything?*

For those who tend to the spiritual care of older people, encountering this state of melancholy is not uncommon. While the experience of aging is certainly affected by health, financial comfort, relationships, and life experiences, many people from all walks of life utter such questions as these: *Has my life mattered? Were my contributions worthwhile? Do my remaining days count for anything?* Rather than eliciting stumbling words of empty reassurance, these questions can begin a rewarding process of spiritual exploration.

Victor Frankl, a psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, viewed life's purpose as a process of meaning making that did not merely look inward but transcended the self. Frankl believed that meaning could be found through what one contributes or creates; through what one receives from the world in the experience of beauty, truth, and loving intimately; and, finally, through the attitude one takes toward an unalterable situation,

even if it is painful or results in death.[1] Within this framework, a spiritual care provider (SCP) or pastor can facilitate the meaning-making journey.

Finding meaning through service

For older adults nearing the end of their lives, loss has become one of the primary themes in their stories. As with my grandma, they have lost loved ones, their homes and belongings, often some physical abilities, their work and hobbies, which represent their ability to create and contribute, and their independence. In the face of so much loss, with no hope for recovering their previous state, it is no wonder people may begin to question the meaning of their current existence. As they experience the limitations of life, they are forced to reckon with their humanity and mortality. In this task, Frankl claims that, even in the face of unavoidable pain, suffering, or death, we are all still responsible for our attitudes—for how we choose to respond and find meaning in our circumstances—and this becomes part of the calling of old age.[2]

For people of faith, the source of meaning in the final years of life is rooted in spiritual traditions and devotion to God, and here they discern their continued call to serve God and others.

For people of faith, like my grandma, the source of meaning in the final years of life is rooted in spiritual traditions and devotion to God, and here they discern their continued call to serve God and others. Older adults can show hospitality and love to those who tend to them. They can provide encouragement and a listening ear to caregivers, and through their own need they cultivate in caregivers the spiritual fruits of patience, kindness, and gentleness. By graciously receiving care with humility and trust, they participate in others' fulfillment of their vocation, and in return older adults experience the love and care of God through their caregivers. Vocation at this stage in life is deeply rooted in interdependence and intergenerationality.

In a society that overvalues productivity, we often miss the God-given gifts offered by older adults. I recall my later visits with my grandma where

1 Melvin A. Kimble and James W. Ellor, "Logotherapy: An Overview," in *Victor Frankl's Contribution to Spirituality and Aging,* ed. Melvin A. Kimble (Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press, 2000), 14.

2 David Guttmann, "A Logotherapeutic Approach to the Quest for Meaningful Old Age," *Social Thought* 20, no. 3-4 (2001): 122, 124.

her pace and processing were slower, and as I joined in relationship with her, I was also invited to slow down, which became a gift in my own hectic stage of life. This interconnectedness of caregivers and those cared for reflects and reveals God's inclusivity and invitation to relationship.

Finding meaning through ritual

Rediscovering vocation is not the only way in which older adults can find purpose in their later years. Embracing ritual and Scripture within pastoral care is also helpful in the meaning-making process. Rituals add value and richness to the struggles of daily life and provide a place of security and comfort in changing and unknown territory. Rituals may include prayer, music, reading Scripture, liturgical practice, and celebrating communion.

Rituals add value and richness to the struggles of daily life and provide a place of security and comfort in changing and unknown territory.

Through familiar rituals, older adults are tied to God and to others as they recognize that they are part of something greater than their own present suffering. Through the taking of communion, they are reminded of God's suffering and that they do not suffer alone. Communion was given by Christ to his disciples as a means to look back on their time with him in the past while awaiting his promised return in the future, and its practice gave structure to the present. This intertwining of time is a great gift to older adults for whom time is often an enemy.

In joining together to lament and celebrate, the SCP leads older adults to recognize and rejoice in the gift of life and then provides a means for them to offer their own individual gifts, their worship, and their attitudes back to God, knowing they are received by a loving God with rejoicing (Zeph. 3:17).

When sharing the ritual of reading Scripture, there are many opportunities for older adults to find connections, and therefore meaning, in the larger themes of the Bible. Some may identify with feeling in exile when shifted off to long-term care and now on the periphery of their community, having left behind all they have known. Some may identify with the pilgrimage motif in the Bible, feeling on a journey to an unknown destination as they confront the mystery of death. Others may identify with a particular person in the Bible, such as Naomi who lost her husband and both her sons and looked to find new meaning in her life or Simeon who

asked that God dismiss his servant when he felt his purpose in life had been accomplished (Luke 2:29).

Whatever their situation, older adults receive this assurance from Scripture: "Even to your old age I am he; even when you turn gray I will carry you" (Isa. 46:4a). The reading of Scripture is a rich resource for older adults who look to find meaning in their suffering. Practicing rituals of prayer, singing, and reading Scripture point to beauty and truth and remind seekers that they are enveloped in the most intimate love, the love of their Creator. The Spirit of God that inhabits all these rituals can permeate their minds and hearts and refocus their attitude to one of seeking God and God's calling even during suffering.

Finding meaning through spiritual autobiography

The ultimate calling for older adults is a call to let go, to die well. The tasks of dying well are summed up in the statements: "Please forgive me, I forgive you, Thank you, I love you, and Good-bye."[3] Fulfilling the vocation toward dying well is a process involving reflection on the past, present, and future.

While many older adults spend time in retelling their life story, engaging in spiritual autobiography or life review is more intentional. Through this process older adults make meaning through creativity, through seeking beauty, truth, and love within their stories, and by choosing to respond fruitfully amid their present state of suffering. This process helps older adults to bring order and cohesion to the events of their lives and gives them purpose. Creating a spiritual autobiography is a process that can be done individually or with others. The SCP's role is to ask probing questions in memory-provoking ways and to help the older adult to find patterns or themes.

In his work *Remembering Your Story*, Richard Morgan outlines a number of techniques that can be used in a spiritual autobiography: creating a timeline or other visual of significant events, places, and relationships; creating a diagram that tracks highs, lows, and turning points in one's life and considering where one experienced God in those times; considering life in seasons or comparing the years of one's life to months in the calendar or traced through a biblical narrative; creating an audio or visual

3 Joyce Ann Mercer, "Older Adulthood: Vocation at Life's End," in *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation throughout Life's Seasons*, ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bonnie. J. Miller-McLemore (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 297.

recording; journaling, scrapbooking, or creating a piece of art such as a decoupage box.[4]

Whatever the method chosen, the role of the SCP is to elicit reflection and to support the older adult in looking for connections to the greater web of God's story, while affirming the good that came from their lives. The SCP's primary task is to listen carefully and empathetically and to provide validation. The SCP, although spiritually attuned to God's presence, is not telling the older adult how to feel, respond, or make meaning, as this must be their own discovery.

While the author cannot go back and change the events of the past, they have the ability to reshape their perspective; they can see difficult times more positively as steps along the path.

The older adult is the author of their story. While the author cannot go back and change the events of the past, they have the ability to reshape their perspective; they can see even difficult times more positively as steps along the path. The process also helps older adults to remember that all that has been meaningful in the past is still with them and cannot be taken away. In creating a spiritual autobiography, the older adult may find places in their story where they need to explore forgiveness, express gratitude, give love, or relinquish regrets, thus fulfilling the tasks of dying well.

Spiritual autobiography is not only a task for looking backward. As they review their stories, older adults are reminded of the ways God has been present on their journey and active in their lives and has invited them into God's story; this can rejuvenate faith in the present. Hope is renewed for their remaining days, and there is assurance that they will remain in God's proven care even into the next mystery after death.

While many older Mennonites in particular are uncomfortable with drawing attention to themselves, encouraging participants to share their story with their family or congregation in order to build up the faith of others is also vocational. My grandma's faith informs mine still, and when her last days finally came, we were able to attest together through the Psalms from her well-worn *Living Bible*: "Let each generation tell its children what glorious things he does. . . . The Lord lifts the fallen and those

4 Richard L. Morgan, *Remembering Your Story: Creating Your Own Spiritual Autobiography* (Nashville: Upper Room, 2002).

bent beneath their loads. . . . He is close to all who call on him sincerely. He fulfills the desires of those who reverence and trust him; he hears their cries for help and rescues them" (Ps. 145). And then to her, true meaning was revealed.

About the author

Cynthia Brubacher Noel is a registered social worker and holds a Master of Theological Studies degree from Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario. At home in Salem, Ontario, with the five lovely children gifted to her and in her professional practice with people with various challenges, she strives to create welcoming spaces in which people recognize their infinite worth as children of God.

Though my body wastes away

Pursuing a healthy spirituality while dying

Barbara Bowman

In North American culture, the expression "dying well" has gained recognition in both religious and secular contexts. But this expression raises some questions: *What does it mean to die well? How can someone die well? If we are all going to die anyway, why does dying well matter?* To die well sounds like an oxymoron. It is perplexing to hold the thought of death and anything good as compatible. A more complicated but intriguing question might be this: *Is it possible to have a healthy spirituality as the body dies?* All are valid questions and ones worth exploring both theologically and personally.

To die well sounds like an oxymoron. It is perplexing to hold the thought of death and anything good as compatible.

However, to answer these questions one must ask some more foundational questions: *What is death? Is death the enemy or does death mean hope for resurrection? How does the knowledge that I am going to die inform how I choose to live?* The answers to these questions are both personal and based in one's theology of life and death. Of all the events within creation, birth into life and one's departure in death are experiences we all have in common, but each can only be perceived as individuals. Our perceptions about death come from what we have heard and what we have experienced.

Pondering the nuances of death and dying well requires the exploration of theological and culturally personal perspectives. Gaining this awareness can then inform a healthy spirituality that prepares oneself and loved ones for the inevitable death experience. The ultimate hope is to be empowered to embrace practices that inform dying well in a way that honors both life and death in body and in spirit.

Difficulties dealing with death and dying

It is not impossible to imagine death as part of life. We unquestioningly recognize birth and death in the animal world as the way the life cycle works. "Dying is a natural thing, and left to its natural self, each living

thing knows how to die."[1] However, when it comes to our own thoughts of dying or the death of a loved one, death and dying can carry more theological, cultural, and emotional baggage. This baggage is our embedded theology—thinking and beliefs that we gather implicitly from our cultural surroundings or religious teachings. Generally speaking, we don't like to talk about death. Theologically, it is difficult to explain. Culturally, it may carry a variety of implications that can feel burdensome. Emotionally, it requires a level of vulnerability and maturity that can be elusive.

In addition, our perceptions of death and dying often do not surface until we are directly faced with it. This is complicated by the fact that these are times when we are enveloped in highly stressful circumstances. During these stressful times, our embedded theology may feel inadequate and our dependence on a deliberative theology may prove to be more useful. Deliberative reflection allows a person to step back from the immediate situation and one's preconceptions to reflect on alternative understandings and pertinent data to formulate a meaning of faith that makes sense to them.[2] So how does one maintain a healthy spiritual self in tension with the death of the body?

Religious conceptions of death and dying

In Genesis 1–2 God creates light and darkness; land, sea, and sky; plants and animals; and, finally, humankind in God's image. God creates these all to work together, each having what it needs to be sustained and to thrive. We can see life in plants bursting forth from the earth, fish swimming in the seas, and animals grazing in the fields. As we inhale and exhale, we can experience life itself in the *ruah*, the breath or spirit of God breathed into Adam's nostrils as Adam "became a living being" (Gen 2:7). The implication is that "at death the life-breath returns to God and the flesh returns to earth; hence human destiny is already implied or anticipated in the creation of [humans]."[3] The understanding of death being a natural boundary of life can run in contrast to the interpretation of death

1 Stephen Jenkinson, *Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2015), 51.

2 Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke. "Faith, Understanding, and Reflection," in *How to Think Theologically*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2013), 13–28, especially 18–20.

3 Ronald Hendel, "Genesis," in *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version, with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books*, ed. Wayne A. Meeks et al. (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 8.

as the enemy, present in much of the Hebrew Bible, where "death is presented as a destructive force."[4]

Paul S. Fiddes articulates the influence of scriptural references that undergird this ambiguity. He interprets Psalm 88:11–12 and 115:18 as identifying death as a loss of "relationships within family and the nation and between persons and God."[5] He highlights the finality of death in the Hebrew understanding that corresponds more with a modern biological view of psychosomatic unity versus the Greek view of a soul imprisoned in the body. According to Fiddes, death "is the event that ends the whole human person, not just the cracking of an outer cocoon of flesh so that the butterfly of an 'eternal' soul can emerge."[6] These fundamental differences can have significant implications regarding not only how one perceives death but also how one may choose to view life in the acknowledgement of the inevitability of death.

Discerning what an individual believes about death and what comes after is useful for understanding how that individual may be experiencing the inevitability of their death.

Often, when faced with illness or the impending death of oneself or a loved one, individuals may seek understanding or solace in religious traditions or beliefs. Discerning what an individual believes about death and what comes after is useful for understanding how that individual may be experiencing the inevitability of their death or that of a loved one. For example, if a dying individual believes in a final judgment as with many Christians and Muslims, they may be distressed if they feel they are not "worthy." For those who embrace Hindu beliefs in reincarnation, there may be relief in anticipating the soul's movement on its path to Nirvana (heaven).[7] Similarly, Scientologists may find comfort in their immortal spiritual being simply moving into a new life.[8] "Among Native American tribes and certain segments of Buddhism, the dead and the living coexist,

4 Paul S. Fiddes, "Acceptance and Resistance in a Theology of Death," *Modern Believing* 56, no. 2 (2015): 223 and 226.

5 Fiddes, "Acceptance and Resistance," 226.

6 Fiddes, "Acceptance and Resistance," 226.

7 "An Outline of Different Cultural Beliefs at the Time of Death," Loddon Mallee Regional Palliative Care Consortium, https://lmrpcc.org.au/admin/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Customs-Beliefs-Death-Dying.pdf.

8 "Outline of Different Cultural Beliefs," 14.

and the dead can influence the well-being of the living."[9] In some cultures, death is seen as an "abrupt and permanent disengagement."[10] There are those who believe that death is the ultimate enemy, that God did not intend death for mankind. They believe that the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden resulted in humans having to experience suffering and death. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:26, "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." Interpretations may vary even among Christians regarding God's intention for creation, but if one's theodicy is that death is an enemy or God's punishment for sin, this will surely color one's experience of death and dying.

North American experiences of death and dying

North America is a melding pot of religious and cultural influences, which makes it difficult to identify a specific death culture. These influences can add tremendous richness to life—and death—experiences but can just as easily create insecurity and anxiety and even conflict within families during a stressful time. Nevertheless, there are some commonalities among North American experiences of death and dying, which stem from current North American medical care practices.

From his decades of experience sitting with hundreds of dying patients and their families, Stephen Jenkinson refers to North America as a "death-phobic culture" that "despises dying for the competence-reducing, control-dismissing, meaning-annihilating random chaos it makes of the end of someone's life."[11] Contributing to the death-phobia is the lack of direct experience with dying in North America. Prior to the twentieth century, death was frequently witnessed in person as families cared for the dying in their homes from illness to burial. Changes in the late nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century made experiences of death invisible.[12] Medical advances allowed "physicians and hospitals to assume control over dying, death, and mourning became private, the handling of dead bodies and funeral rites were transferred from private

9 James Gire, "How Death Imitates Life: Cultural Influences on Conceptions of Death and Dying," *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 6, no. 2 (2014): 4, https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1120&context=orpc.

10 Gire, "How Death Imitates Life," 5.

11 Jenkinson, *Die Wise*, 85.

12 Deborah Carr, "Death and Dying in the Contemporary United States: What are the Psychological Implications of Anticipated Death?" *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 6, no. 2 (2012): 185.

homes to funeral parlors, and people were encouraged to deny the inevitability of death and stake their hopes on the promise of nascent medical technologies."[13]

Prolonging the life of the body has become a dominant medical expectation in North America. We expend much effort on prevention of disease. If that doesn't work, we expect that the offending body part or system can be replaced or repaired. When those things fail and specialists can do no more to help, we are left to care for the dying—a task for which we are largely unprepared. As with any life experience, when we are centered in fear or misunderstanding, we rely unintentionally on embedded thinking or beliefs that may or may not serve us well in the areas of decision-making. There may be inconsistencies or unexplainable reasoning that can cause confusion and uneasiness within the individual and among loved ones. With less visibility and few, if any, hands-on experiences with the intimacy of death, we have become unfamiliar with death and dying. When faced with death for oneself or one's loved ones, this unfamiliarity can breed fear, death-anxiety, and misunderstanding.

Prolonging the life of the body has become a dominant medical expectation in North America.

Finding meaning in death and dying

In his research into various studies of cultural influences on conceptions of death and dying, James Gire notes that "it is the reward expectation of afterlife rather than a mere belief in it that is associated with low death anxiety. Even if a person believes in life after death but the person also happens to expect to encounter punishment and not reward, such a person would display much higher death anxiety than even those who do not believe in an afterlife."[14] Gire acknowledges that discovering the underlying reasons for death anxiety is probably more important that qualifying the level of anxiety within a society. [15] What seems to be most important is that the individual is able to acknowledge and see how their own perception of death and dying informs their thinking. Once that is unveiled, the work of dying well—and living well, for that matter—can begin. Out of

13 Carr, "Death and Dying," 185, quoting R. Blauner, "Death and social structure," *Psychiatry* 25 (1966): 378–399.

14 Gire, "How Death Imitates Life," 9.

15 Gire, "How Death Imitates Life," 10.

his own tragedy of losing three generations of his family in a car accident, Jerry Sittser shares his evolution back to God: "in coming to the end of ourselves, we can also come to the beginning of a vital relationship with God. Our failures can lead us to grace and to a profound spiritual awakening."[16]

Dorothy Jean Weaver reflects on Paul's passionate proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus as the power of God to transform lives: "For Paul the powerful hope of the resurrection to come brings all of life into focus and calls forth faithful living in every moment of every day."[17] This hope of resurrection has already manifested in Jesus but is awaiting believers. This time of waiting for the future glory described in Romans 8:18–30 can hold those who trust in Christ during challenging times. In these verses there is hope to be set free from bondage and redemption of our bodies. "The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). Many find comfort and reassurance in Paul's words: "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). For some it is too hard at the point of facing their mortality to find solace in an intangible God, particularly if their faith has not been part of what has sustained them through past trials.

For some it is too hard at the point of facing their mortality to find solace in an intangible God, particularly if their faith has not been part of what has sustained them through past trials.

The old saying, "There are no atheists in a foxhole," implies that fear of imminent death inspires a desire to believe in some sort of a supreme being. It reflects the thought that this fear of death pushes people toward relying on religion and its promise that there is something yet to hope for. As Christel Manning writes, "Many people assume that facing death without religion renders life pointless and unbearable, that only exceptionally strong and stoic individuals can face the void that is death without a religious

16 Jerry Sittser, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Grows through Loss*, enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 90.

17 Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The redemption of our bodies: A Pauline primer on resurrection," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 10.

framework."[18] Yet, in her two-year study on seniors in nursing homes, in senior centers, and in their own homes, Manning found that "awareness of death pushes us to find meaning, and secular sources like science can be as rich a source of meaning making as religion is."[19] She explains:

> *Religion is often touted as the only way to address the fear of death, but perhaps it's just the oldest and most popular. What I've found significant about these generic secular narratives is how well they work to give meaning in the face of death. Secular meaning-making maps are actually quite similar to religious ones, at least in structure and function: they build coherence and control, they place human experience in relation to something bigger than ourselves, and they lend moral significance to our lives as we face its inevitable end.*[20]

Regardless of the source of meaning, the knowledge that we are closer to death—either by age or illness—leads us to search for meaning in life. Finding that meaning informs how to die well.

Conclusion

Dying well matters because it allows for both the one who is dying and their loved ones to feel a sense of completion of the life cycle. Stephen Jenkinson presents a beautiful and poignant representation of the inevitability of death and the process of dying: "How we die is the ripples of the river of life, little signs for others to come; that we die is the shore that the river of life obeys."[21] As one comes to terms with mortality, there is opportunity to resolve unfinished business within oneself, with others, and with one's beliefs regarding what is after death. Attempting to define a *good death* is challenging because individual religious and cultural influences and one's level of exposure to death and dying impacts one's perceptions of dying well. It is a common sentiment among hospice and palliative care workers and those who research death and dying that the more prepared one is for dying, the better. This preparation comes in the form of exposure to

18 Christal Manning, "Facing Death without Religion: Secular sources like science work well for meaning making," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Autumn/Winter 2019, https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/facing-death-without-religion/.

19 Manning, "Facing Death without Religion."

20 Manning, "Facing Death without Religion."

21 Jenkinson, *Die Wise*, 16.

the dying, recognition of one's beliefs about life, death, and dying, and communication with loved ones about end-of-life issues.

The goal of dying well is to live while dying rather than dying to live. This is counterintuitive to the contemporary North American medical climate. While theological perspectives, cultural interpretations, and personal experiences of death are varied, what binds us together in our humanity is that we are born and we will die. We share this commonality with those who have gone before us, those with whom we are present, and those who will come after us. Birthing and dying are opportunities to teach and to learn, to be cared for and to care for one another. A healthy spirituality acknowledges that this journey from birth to death is part of sharing in the circle of life's fullness. It honors death as the natural boundary of life that returns the *ruah*—God's breath of life—back to the Creator with whom one's spirit rests in peace, grace, and hope.

About the author

Barbara Bowman is a hospice chaplain in Harrisonburg, Virginia, who recently completed her MDiv at Eastern Mennonite Seminary. She is a healing touch practitioner with training as an end-of-life doula and has a Bachelor of Science in nursing from Villanova University. She is passionate about encouraging individuals toward healing and wholeness of body, mind, and spirit.

Navigating grief

Reflections on grief and aging

Marian Durksen Wiens

Grief and spirituality

Grief in later life is an everyday occurrence. At first glance this would not be obvious since we tend to hide or discount our grief. We name the aging process *annoying* or *challenging* or other words rather than *grief*. In small ways and in larger ways our lives are infused with losses causing grief.

Our spirituality informs how we live in this daily grief. Daily spiritual practices invite us to focus our attention on *God with us*, every day, even as grief is part of our daily living. Our daily spiritual practices allow, encourage, or assist us to live a both/and way of thinking and being: both with the losses *and* with the blessings of our age and stage; both with the grief of limited seeing, hearing, moving, and energy *and* with valuing and enjoying relationships, nature, music, reading, and many other life-giving experiences; both intensely missing our loved one *and* thankful for the memories as well as holding onto God's love.

Daily spiritual practices invite us to focus our attention on *God with us*, every day, even as grief is part of our daily living.

Grief may also call us to find spiritual practices other than what we have done previously. There are a variety of reflective and nurturing ways to spend time with God in meditation and prayer. Listening to God is crucial for ongoing awareness of God. Every single day the Spirit moves as we take time for spiritual practices. Every day the grief is touched with love from the Spirit moving. It may be with tears. It may be with new thoughts. It may bring smiles of memories. It may be in a sense of peace.

We may be guided to Scriptures and psalms of lament and sorrow, allowing them to speak into our grief. Grief invites us to look at Scripture in new ways, allowing for new insights and ways of thinking about our relationship with the Holy as we grieve.

In her book *The Cure for Sorrow*, Jan Richardson writes blessings for expressing her grief. She explains, "A blessing helps us to keep breathing—to abide in this moment, and the next moment, and the one after that."[1] Other authors may bring encouraging words as they speak their grief in their spiritual journey. A Buddhist teacher shares his discovery that suffering is a part of life, and there is no escape from it. This it the first Noble Truth, and acknowledging it can help us to suffer less. If we can accept where we are and not judge the disruption in our life as wrong or bad, we can touch great freedom. This is because fighting what is doesn't actually work. As the saying goes, "Whatever we resist persists." Spirituality helps us allow God and the reality of life to come together. Spirituality is life-giving in our times of grief.

Healthy expressions of grief

Grief needs expression. Grief has a way of being expressed regardless of our choosing. Choosing our own way of grieving gives it a focus and meaning.

Acknowledging grief is crucial. Naming experiences of grief is important. We not only name the persons or situation we are grieving, but we also realistically name how this grief causes us to think and feel. Naming both the small griefs of fumbling fingers and aching joints and the much bigger griefs of the death of a loved one are significant. It is helpful to name both kinds of grief. Healthy expressions of grief keep us from becoming bitter and cynical and move us to become more mellow in aging, rather than complaining and harsh.

Acknowledging and naming our grief is not a sign of weakness or lack of faith but a way of being realistic about our losses. It frees us from hiding and pretending. Naming our grief allows us to be more compassionate to ourselves, which then brings out a more caring spirit for others and for life.

Acknowledging our grief can even lead us to see humor in our experiences. Realistic dry humor can lighten our lives and our relationships with those close to us. Remembering our loved ones with their own funny comments can both make us sad and give us relief. Expressing humor does not discount our grief.

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1 Jan Richardson, *The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief* (Orlando: Wanton Gospeller, 2020), xv.

Complaining drags us down emotionally and causes friction with others. Acknowledging our grief in healthy ways keeps us from wallowing in negative thinking and speaking.

Each of us is different in our temperament and characteristics. There is no right way to grieve. An introvert will likely choose to express their grief with writing and other self-focused expressions. One-on-one conversation with a trusted friend can be helpful. I am an introvert and was introduced to writing by my spiritual mentor some years ago. I find I write best in my own short sentence style. When struggling with a relational grief or other frustrations, I find writing psalms to God helpful in clarifying my thoughts and feelings. An extrovert will more likely need more other-focused interactions for expressing their grief.

Each of us is different in our temperament and characteristics. There is no right way to grieve.

Because grief can last for an extended period, it is helpful to explore compassionate and caring ways to carry or live with our grief. Visualizing a room or pocket or space to hold our grief can assist us in continuing on with our lives without being overwhelmed or stuck. Visualizing in this way helps us not feel guilty when we take time for enjoyment of life: we know we will take time when needed to visit the place of grief. Visualizing in this way honors our grief while allowing us to keep on living in peace. When we acknowledge and name our grief, we will find healthy ways of expressing it.

Tears allow us to feel the depth of our sorrow. They release the emotional strain of being sad, and they bring relief. Writing often helps express our grief. It may be helpful to write in ways that best fit for us: words, sentences, poems and psalms, or stories. Often this writing can come alongside our time with God. It can be interesting and eye opening to write out conversations with God. Writing comments or questions and then taking time for sitting and waiting for a response from God allows for new insights. God speaks through our thoughts, so we must trust that which comes to us in these conversations.

Because grieving affects all areas of our being, there are many ways of expressing it. Such activities may include:

1. creating visuals with colors, textures, and shapes as with mandalas or pottery;

2. listening to or creating music as an emotional way to express grief;
3. utilizing Scripture through contemplative reading, Scripture memorization, or using Scripture in conjunction to writing and visual art;
4. visualizing a favorite relaxing place (either imagined or real) to create a peaceful setting to calm the mind and heart;
5. holding and sipping a warm drink of tea or hot chocolate;
6. walking alone or with another in nature, swimming, or engaging in other light physical exercises such as biking or yoga as a form of healthy body care, which settles the mind and spirit;
7. talking with a trusted friend, spiritual director, or other listener as a way of sharing grief in a safe setting with compassionate persons.

Finding the right combination of expressions for our grief helps to keep us balanced. Having a discipline of spiritual practices and other disciplines for physical, emotional, and mental expressions of grief and self-care enhance our well being for the extended period of our lives.

Grief in old age

I conclude by offering my own expression of grief through poetry:

Grief in old age
Is nothing new
The journey
Has been going on
For many years
The small deaths
Of leaving childhood (no responsibilities)
Leaving the teen years (trying out the new)
The young adult years (new ventures)
Left behind as aging happens
It hurts to acknowledge
Lack of strength, the need of help
Smaller losses adding up
Age mates sick and dying
Pain intensifies

Looking back
Years quickly gone
Replaced by helps
Like aids for seeing
And hearing
Facing grief
Acknowledging sadness
Speaking the pain
Living the Psalm
Of aging

About the author

Marian Durksen Wiens has walked with many as a counselor and spiritual director. Now in her eighties, she is making her way through the grief of her daughter's death and her husband's Parkinson's diagnosis, alongside the losses of age. She spends her time reading, walking, swimming, quilting, and doing puzzles, often while listening to various kinds of music, depending on her frame of mind. One of her favorite nature spots is a rock on the Grand River (her prayer rock).

Medical assistance in dying

Spiritual care at the end of life

Lisa Heinrichs

On June 17, 2016, the parliament of Canada passed bill C-14, which legalized and regulated assisted suicide in Canada. Known as Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID), this law has changed the face of end-of-life care in Canada. My interest in MAID soon grew when I started taking courses on pastoral care at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS). As an aspiring chaplain, I realized that this was likely an issue I would encounter in my future vocation. I did not know much about the regulations surrounding MAID—and even less about the spiritual care for those involved in the process—and I wanted to learn more. It was daunting to delve into such a controversial topic, but I wanted to sift through my own tangle of ethical questions and concerns. I wanted to explore the themes of suffering, death, faith, ethics, and family relationships—themes that emerge in many end-of-life scenarios but which stand out starkly when MAID comes into play. Most of all, I wanted to establish some guideposts for myself as I shape my identity as a chaplain who may walk alongside palliative patients and their families on this difficult journey.

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID) has changed the face of end-of-life care in Canada.

I found that I was not alone in asking these questions and that there are no easy answers. For instance, one group of chaplains at a spiritual care retreat in Alberta engaged in a role play on MAID. They found that "there were no stock answers or scripts forthcoming. All of the participants found themselves reflecting on the issue of assisted death which left them feeling grossly inadequate, humbled, at loss for words."[1] It is from this place of seeking that I write this essay and invite readers into discussions about spiritual care for those at the end of life, particularly

1 Gordon Self, "Caring for Our Common Home Also Means Caring for People Pleading to Leave It, Too," Ethics Made Real newsletter, Covenant Health, June 2015, https://www.covenanthealth.ca/media/91015/emrfinal19june15.pdf.

those who are at the point of considering MAID. I acknowledge that I write to a diverse readership who will have different levels of comfort with MAID. Many may live in states or countries where MAID is not legal. In the United States, it is illegal for physicians to directly administer lethal medication, although physician assistance in dying (where the physician assists a patient in ending their own life) is legal in ten states. Some pastors or chaplains will choose to conscientiously object, while others may have already participated in MAID rituals. Some will not feel ready to discuss the topic of MAID at all, so I invite readers to enter this discussion when ready.

Now is the time for the church to discuss the topic of MAID, particularly in the area of pastoral and spiritual care.

I hope that this essay may be an opportunity to unite Christians of divergent political and theological leanings around the specific goal of caring for a person at the end of life. In these vulnerable end-of-life moments, there is an opportunity for ideologies to be laid aside to leave room for compassionate companioning. There is an opportunity for us to leave our divisions at the door and make room for the Holy Spirit to work in mysterious ways. Now is the time for the church to discuss the topic of MAID, particularly in the area of pastoral and spiritual care. MAID has been legalized in Canada for six years. At this point we can learn from family, friends, and healthcare workers who have walked alongside patients who have considered or chosen this path. These narratives can help the church craft appropriate guidelines for care.

I begin with a story to guide the discussion in this essay. I then focus the discussion on common themes that arise in these times and offer a couple of considerations for spiritual care. Throughout, I offer questions to deepen our reflections on spiritual care at the end of life, particularly for those who are involved in the MAID process.

A story of choosing MAID

One story that stood out to me out of the many personal accounts I read and listened to in my research was the story of Corinne Johns-Treat, a Californian mother of two adult children and a lifelong Christian with stage 3 lung cancer. In an article written for *Time*, she shared that as a

non-smoker, the diagnosis was a surprise to herself and her family, but she stated, "God has a plan for what I do and where I should be."[2]

Johns-Treat disagreed with Christian advocates who opposed assisted-dying laws: "The more I learned about the safeguards and autonomy in the law, and the more I prayed about it, having seen people suffer so much at the very end of their lives, I came to believe that it fit into my faith. I found comfort in this law."[3] Her rationale was that if God gave humans the intelligence to create treatments that prolong life, then conversely doctors can also use their knowledge to relieve suffering at the end of life.

Johns-Treat emphasized her desire to live. She explained that if she wished to die, she would have chosen against surgery or would have given up during the agony of chemotherapy. But she stated that when death was imminent, she did not want her family to see her suffer. Instead, she imagined the end: "I have seen myself taking the drug. I'm in my room, lying comfortably in my bed surrounded by my family, feeling peace and tranquility, embraced by God and those I love."[4]

Themes and questions for MAID

I share Johns-Treat's story not to advocate for or against MAID but rather as a starting point for the discussions around spiritual care of those involved in the MAID process. Johns-Treat's reflections touch on many themes common to stories about MAID and end-of-life decisions. Here I highlight some of these themes and present some questions that arise from a spiritual care perspective.

Suffering. The desire to end suffering is a major reason for seeking MAID. Often this has been influenced by the experience of watching a loved one die. Many care-seekers, such as Johns-Treat, express the desire to save their own loved ones from watching them suffer in their final days.

The Judeo-Christian tradition has grappled with the theology of suffering from its early beginnings, from Job through the suffering and death of Jesus, and continuing through the martyrs and apocalyptic writings of the early church. Some of the theologies that have emerged from this tradition (such as those used to oppress others) have been downright cor-

2 Corinne Johns-Treat, "I'm a Christian with Cancer. I Want Death with Dignity," *Time*, August 10, 2016, https://time.com/4445019/christian-death-with-dignity/.

3 Johns-Treat, "I'm a Christian with Cancer."

4 Johns-Treat, "I'm a Christian with Cancer."

rupt. Other theologies of suffering are more nuanced and may bring some amount of comfort to those who suffer.

The theme of suffering raises the following questions: What is our implicit and explicit theology of suffering? What implications does our theology of suffering have for those who face unimaginable pain (physical or psychological)? What does the Bible teach us about suffering and God's presence in times of trial?

Life and death. An interesting theme that emerges when reading stories of people choosing MAID is the desire for life. Johns-Treat emphasized her desire to live and demonstrated this desire by fighting through grueling physical symptoms and cancer treatments. MAID was considered a last resort when death was imminent. Most of us have such a strong desire for life that it is difficult to discuss death. Yet, having conversations about death in advance can ease the awkwardness of end-of-life decisions.

This theme raises the following questions: What sort of conversations about death have you had with your family, friends, or church? What are some ways we can make these conversations about end-of-life decisions feel more comfortable? Can we use storytelling, humor, or role-play? How can discussions around MAID highlight the importance of quality palliative care?

Matters of faith. Johns-Treat articulated how she went through a time of prayerful discernment before deciding on a medically assisted death. We cannot assume that only non-Christians choose MAID, nor that these decisions are made lightly while most faith traditions continue to oppose MAID.

Questions of faith include these: How can we keep our relationship with God at the center of the discernment process? How do we nonjudgmentally walk alongside those in times of ethical discernment?

Family relationships. Johns-Treat's story highlights the importance of family in the dying process. Many stories of people choosing MAID include accounts of loved ones present at the time of death. Perhaps one of the motivations for choosing MAID is the fear of having to transition from life to death alone. However, I also acknowledge that the controversy that surrounds MAID also means that the MAID process can be a difficult one for family, especially if they disagree with a palliative patient's choice to pursue MAID.

These complications around family relationships raise the following questions: What do families need in the MAID process? In what ways is it appropriate for them to be involved in the decision making? What rituals can they partake in at the end of life? How do we support families who experience conflict about MAID decisions?

Considerations for care

In addition to the themes mentioned above, there are specific considerations for those offering care to people considering MAID. Here I address two and raise questions for each.

Conflicting values. There is no doubt that MAID is a controversial topic. A pastor or chaplain may find that their ethical and moral stance on MAID may be at odds with the choices the care-seeker is making. This may be the case even when both individuals are members of the same religious denomination. In such situations, the caregiver is left with the tension of respecting the care-seeker's choices, while remaining true to personal beliefs. Chaplain Vicki Farley, who has experienced accompanying individuals choosing assisted death, explains that the choice to respect an individual's decision, even when it runs counter to her own values, is a "response to God's gift of free will."[5]

If a pastor or chaplain does choose to accompany a person choosing MAID even when it goes against personal beliefs, it may lead to lingering doubts about the choice. The Bishops of Belgium have been dealing with these pastoral concerns since euthanasia was legalized there in 2002. They suggest, "It is important that [the pastor] can communicate openly with others about this. The necessary self-care of a pastor is certainly of great importance here."[6] When we face conflicting values in our care, we always have the power of prayer—prayer for the care-seekers, prayer for their families, and prayer for ourselves that God will sustain us through our ministry.

Questions for consideration regarding values of caregivers include these: What are your own beliefs about MAID? How do you envision accompanying a patient or family member whose beliefs conflict with yours?

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5 Vicki Farley, "The Chaplain's Role: Where Aid in Dying Is Legal," *Health Progress: Journal of the Catholic Health Association of the United States* 95 (2014): 13.

6 Bishops of Belgium, *Uw Hand in Mijn Hand: Pastorale Zorg Bij Het Levenseinde* [Your hand in my hand: Pastoral care at the end of life] (Brussels: Licap, 2019), translated by Google Translate.

A ministry of presence. Chaplain Carolyn Herold accompanied Jean Guy Toussaint and his wife, Deanna, through Deanna's fight against cancer. Deanna struggled for a year through difficult treatments and questions of faith. She eventually decided to apply for MAID, and her husband says her entire demeanor changed, as she found inner peace. In the end, Deanna's application for MAID was denied. At this point she began refusing all food and water, doing what she could to hasten death. Accompanying her on this journey was challenging and emotional for both husband and chaplain. But Herold's work proved fruitful. Jean Guy credits her spiritual accompaniment for being "one of the only true lights in this journey." He writes, "I would probably be dead if not for her and her husband."[7]

One of the key themes in stories about MAID is the importance of community—children, grandchildren, spouses, clergy, and other loved ones—walking alongside palliative patients.

One of the key themes in stories about MAID is the importance of community—children, grandchildren, spouses, clergy, and other loved ones—walking alongside palliative patients. One might wonder whether presence is all that is left when nothing else can be done, whether presence is enough, and what the significance of presence is in such moments. In reality, the ministry of presence is perhaps the most powerful ministry we can give to those who are suffering. As Calvin Shenk writes, "If we presume to approach [incarnation and presence] biblically, we are not free to choose or reject a theology of presence. Presence as incarnation is fundamental to all witness."[8] We feel God's presence in the community that embodies God's unconditional love and grace. In the face of unbearable suffering, it often feels that there is little else we can do than sit helplessly by a care-seeker's side. Yet, as we see in the story of Jean-Guy, the presence of a caring individual on the journey can make all the difference.

Gloria Woodland explains how the ministry of presence reveals the nature of God:

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7 Joelle Kidd, "Spiritual Accompaniment: Chaplains Navigate Medical Assistance in Dying," *Anglican Journal* (blog), November 14, 2019, https://www.anglicanjournal.com/spiritual-accompaniment-chaplains-navigate-medical-assistance-in-dying/.

8 Calvin Shenk, quoted in David Augsburger, *Pastoral Counseling across Cultures* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 38.

> *The role of the pastor, chaplain, or counsellor, then, is to abide with the individual, to hear their story for what it is, and to be a reminder of God as present and active there. Christians must remember that God is and that his presence is not contingent on the situation. It is in relationship, in lingering with the story, that ministry becomes a revelation of a caring and reconciling God.*[9]

The Anglican resource *In Sure and Certain Hope* notes, "Being present to another requires the sacred ability to listen, to speak and to touch. It is within the sacred conversation of being present that one can sometimes discern most clearly the needs, questions and desires of the other."[10] This ministry of presence can take other names as well. Joelle Kidd describes it as spiritual accompaniment, while Mike Harlos uses the phrase, "Sit down, lean in."[11] Whatever we choose to call it, the ministry of presence embodies God's love and grace. It is a ministry of relationship, compassion, and listening to another's story. How God's transformative love transmits through this presence is a mystery God alone understands.

To conclude these reflections, I leave the following questions: Have you ever experienced the ministry of presence in your own life? How do you see this ministry being applied in an end-of-life situation involving MAID?

Conclusion

The legalization of MAID in Canada presents an opportunity for renewed conversations about end-of-life spiritual care. It calls us to consider how God is calling us to talk about suffering, death, faith, ethics, and relationships, how we deal with conflicting values when accompanying someone in their final days, and how we embody God's compassionate love as we minister to those at the end of life. May these considerations spark conversations, build relationships, and guide us to faithful practices for end-of-life care.

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9 Gloria J. Woodland, "Ministry amid Competing Values: Pastoral Care and Medical Assistance in Dying," *Direction* 47, no. 2 (2018): 150.

10 *In Sure and Certain Hope: Resources to Assist Pastoral and Theological Approaches to Physician Assisted Dying* (Toronto: The General Synod of The Anglican Church of Canada, 2018), 22, https://www.anglican.ca/wp-content/uploads/In-Sure-and-Certain-Hope.pdf.

11 Mike Harlos, "Sit Down, Lean In," Canadian Virtual Hospice, https://www.virtualhospice.ca/en_US/Main+Site+Navigation/Home/For+Professionals/For+Professionals/The+Exchange/Current/Sit+Down_+Lean+In.aspx.

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Home in later life

Kathryn Cressman

Home. This is a loaded, complicated word with many meanings, feelings, and descriptors attached to it. Consider the various common phrases and words that include the word in it: *home away from home*; *home sweet home*; *there's no place like home*; *homebody*; *homesick*. These phrases and words all suggest a longing for somewhere, someplace. Home can be a noun: a house or particular space. It can be an adjective: used to describe something of belonging, such as a home community or home church. Home can also be a feeling: when one describes a place as feeling *homey*. In this essay, I explore more deeply what home is, focusing specifically on home from the perspective of older adults who often face transitions in their living arrangements. I investigate what makes a place home for any age and what the idea of one's eternal home might look like. I explore questions such as what needs to be considered when an older adult makes decisions around their living arrangements and how can they be supported, what challenges they commonly face, and how spirituality and religion can shape one's transition when leaving one's family home.

What is home?

In her book *Homebody*, interior designer Joanna Gaines labels herself as a homebody. Her home is her favorite place to be. She describes this feeling:

> *I'm a homebody. There's really no other way to say it. The world can feel overwhelming with its pace and noise, its chaos and expectations. Home for me is like the eye of a hurricane. There's a certain calm I experience there no matter what is swirling about on the outside. Home is where I feel safe, it's the place where I am most known and most loved. If you were to ask my family, I'm pretty sure they would tell you the same thing about themselves: there is nowhere they would rather be than home. I think it's because our story is all around us there.*[1]

1 Joanna Gaines, *Homebody: A Guide to Creating Spaces You Never Want to Leave* (New York: Harper Design, 2018), 8–9.

Gaines's description of home provides insight into the various aspects of what makes a particular space a home: comfort, security, and a place of belonging. Holly Nelson-Becker suggests that "home serves as a metaphor for being comfortable in the world and finding one's place."[2] There are endless metaphors that symbolize home. Home acts as a nest or a refuge and is perhaps where one has deeply embedded family roots.[3] Home is an anchoring point.[4] It is the place we depart from and return to each day. Walter Brueggeman suggests there is historical meaning to our homes: "It is the place where we raised our children, returned to after hard days at work, celebrated birthdays, and mourned the loss of loved ones."[5] Our home has the opportunity to tell the story of our lives; indeed, there is an autobiographical sense to how our homes tell such stories.[6]

Houses, assisted living residences, and long-term care rooms are all empty spaces. A transformation from space to place must occur to create a home within these spaces.

A dwelling, however, does not simply become a home without intentionality and the process of habituation. Houses, assisted living residences, and long-term care rooms are all empty spaces. A transformation from space to place must occur to create a home within these spaces.[7] This transformation relates to any conversion of space to place, whether it is unpacking a suitcase in a hotel room or taking an empty apartment and filling it with personal, meaningful contents. Rowles and Bernard explain that "the creation of place involves the *use* of an environment, our pattern

2 Holly Nelson-Becker, *Spirituality, Religion, and Aging: Illuminations for Therapeutic Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2018), 197.

3 See Douglas Burton-Christie, "Living Between Two Worlds: Home, Journey and the Quest for Sacred Place," *Anglican Theological Review* 79, no. 3 (1997): 416.

4 See Graham D. Rowles and Miriam Bernard, "The Meaning and Significance of Place in Old Age," in *Environmental Gerontology: Making Meaningful Places in Old Age*, edited by Graham D. Rowles and Miriam Bernard (New York: Springer, 2003), 11.

5 Quoted in Gerald W. Kaufman and L. Marlene Kaufman, *Necessary Conversations: Between Families and Their Aging Parents,* 2nd ed. (New York: Good Books, 2017), 81.

6 See Graham D. Rowles and John F. Watkins, "History, Habit, Heart, and Hearth: On Making Spaces into Places," in *Aging Independently: Living Arrangements and Mobility*, edited by K. Warner Schaie, Hans-Werner Wahl, Heidrum Mollenkopf, and Frank Oswald (New York: Springer, 2003), 79.

7 Rowles and Bernard, "Meaning and Significance," 9.

of behaviour within a setting."[8] I would suggest that in addition to the use of the environment, the creation of place is also dependent on others who are occupying the space. While reading between the lines of Joanna Gaines's words, one gathers that her feelings of being known and loved are connected to the other individuals occupying the space alongside her. The transformation of space to place results in many feelings: "familiarity, security, centering, ownership, control, territoriality, display, comfort and identity."[9]

Having a home brings freedom but also responsibility. One has the responsibility to look after a home; there is regular upkeep and maintenance. Yet, there is reward to this responsibility in that one has the freedom to express identity and showcase their interests and personality with home decor and perhaps an outdoor garden.[10] A huge amount of emotion is attached to home. Maya Angelou puts it well: "The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned."[11]

Eternal home

A spiritual person may wonder about their eternal home. Jesus speaks of the home waiting for us in heaven, as paraphrased by Eugene Peterson: "You trust God, don't you? Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father's home. If that weren't so, would I have told you that I'm on my way to get a room ready for you? And if I'm on my way to get your room ready, I'll come back and get you so you can live where I live. And you already know the road I'm taking" (John 14:2, MSG). Richard Rohr believes home is bi-directional. One direction points to where we came from and the other to where we are going, almost like our life is a full circle.[12] Perhaps our eternal home is one that is familiar since this is where we originally came from. God sent us on this journey of life, anticipating our return. As Henri Nouwen writes,

> *This is what life is about. It is being sent on a trip by a loving God, who is waiting at home for our return and is eager to*

8 Rowles and Bernard, "Meaning and Significance," 9.

9 Rowles and Bernard, "Meaning and Significance," 9.

10 Rowles and Bernard, "Meaning and Significance," 12.

11 Quoted in Rowles and Bernard, "Meaning and Significance," 3.

12 Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011), 88.

> *watch the slides we took and hear about the friends we made. When we travel with the eyes and ears of the God who sent us, we will see wonderful sights, hear wonderful sounds, meet wonderful people . . . and be happy to return home.*[13]

Inside each of us is what Rohr describes as a "homing device," often referred to as one's soul, spirit, or True Self.[14] Until we have encountered this Spirit and connected with God, Rohr would say we are still searching for home. He suggests we are homesick, which presents itself in today's context as many emotions and experiences: "loneliness, isolation, longing, sadness, restlessness, or even a kind of depression."[15] Rohr believes that this finding of True Self or one's soul (however we want to name it) is eternal. This can only be found by digging deep and responding to what God planted inside of us from the beginning. Rohr suggests that religion's mistake is believing that this discovery is pointing toward heaven, to the next world, rather than accepting it can occur now. According to Rohr, we have the opportunity to enter our eternal home on earth. This home is a state of being, a state of knowing one's true self and living out what God has called us to do. Nevertheless, for many Christians, the words from John's Gospel are also comforting in anticipation of what comes next. Home is the safe, loving, welcoming destination of being in relationship with God. Eternal home is both a feeling and a destination.[16]

Home is the safe, loving, welcoming destination of being in relationship with God. Eternal home is both a feeling and a destination.

Housing options for older adults

Most older adults prefer to remain in their home—a home of familiarity.[17] This could be the home they have raised their family in or a home they

13 Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Image, 1994), 106–107.

14 Rohr, *Falling Upward*, 88.

15 Rohr, *Falling Upward*, 91.

16 For an Irish folk worship song that resonates with this perspective, see Rend Collective, "Coming Home," by Chris Llewellyn and Gareth Gilkeson, Thank You Music Ltd., 2015.

17 In this essay, I use the term *older adult* interchangeably with *senior* and *elder*.

downsized to later in life. For this option to be viable, things like ramps, widened hallways, main floor bedroom and bathroom, walk-in showers, and grab bars may need to be considered. One's local health integration network (LHIN) can provide in-home care, which helps seniors remain at home. These services include health care, personal care, home care, and end-of-life or palliative care.[18] Retirement homes, or senior communities, are an option for individuals who, for various reasons, need to move from their family home. Many communities provide a tiered level of living, offering living arrangements to suit the needs of the individual. Communities such as Parkwood Senior Community in Waterloo, Ontario, offer assisted living, supported living, and independent living options, which, based on the tier one chooses, have various services included. These could include meals, housekeeping, personal care services, or medication administration. In addition to these various tiers, homes such as Parkwood also offer a long-term care residence for seniors who require a higher degree of support, most often due to health and mobility issues.

Some seniors choose to move from their family home to a neighborhood composed of others in their same stage of life, often referred to as adult lifestyle communities. These communities typically have recreational programs available targeting the age and stage of the residents. This option still allows for independent living with the advantage of yard upkeep and maintenance provided. Home sharing or multigenerational living is another option for seniors and families to consider. Pearl Lantz writes about home sharing as an opportunity for the housing situation to be a win-win for both sides of the agreement. She suggests that home sharing can take various forms.[19] One option is for the older adult to be paired with someone who is not a family member. A Canadian program called Home Share Canada helps individuals partner together to create a living situation that provides the older adult with extra help and the

A Canadian program helps individuals partner to create a living situation that provides the older adult with extra help and the younger person a place to live.

18 "Home and community care," Ontario Government, 2019, https://www.ontario.ca/page/homecare-seniors.

19 Pearl Lantz, "Home Sweet Home: Housing Options," in *Reinventing Aging*, edited by Shirley Yoder Brubaker and Melodie M. Davis (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 100–101.

younger person a place to live, who could possibility not afford it on their own.[20] Home sharing could also look like multigenerational family living where the senior family member moves in with their adult children or grandchildren. Perhaps part of the house is converted to a "granny flat," or as with traditional Mennonite communities, a *dawdi haus* is part of the farm and the grandparents live there.[21] Lantz also suggests the idea of multiple seniors moving in together as housemates, helping to look after each other.[22] Such options are dependent on the individual care needs of the senior and what is manageable for others to provide.

What to consider when making a housing decision

People are living longer than previous generations, which makes the decision of where to live more complicated than in the past. It is no longer the norm or expectation for families to take in an older parent, and more commonly adult children are not living near their aging parents to provide care. Even if adult children are close by, many seniors feel opposed to the idea of placing the burden of care on their children.[23] According to Gerald W. Kaufman and L. Marlene Kaufman, "Various studies show that eighty percent of us say that we want to stay in our homes as long as possible, but few of us have given much thought to other possibilities. It doesn't seem to be on our adult children's minds either."[24]

Many aspects of life need to be considered when discerning the best housing situations for older adults. These include the ability to carry out activities of daily living such as cooking, cleaning, and yard maintenance; age; health status; whether both parents are living; the size, condition, and adaptability of current property and the cost of maintaining the property; the proximity and availability of family members; access to community services such as doctors, hospital, church, and shopping; transportation needs; financial status; and personal preferences, such as whether one prefers to be with peers or people of varied ages.[25]

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20 "Home," Home Share Canada, https://www.homesharecanada.org/.

21 Lantz, "Home Sweet Home," 101.

22 Lantz, "Home Sweet Home," 101.

23 Kaufman and Kaufman, *Necessary Conversations*, 82.

24 Kaufman and Kaufman, *Necessary Conversations*, 84.

25 This list is derived from Kaufman and Kaufman, *Necessary Conversations*, 85; Lantz, "Home Sweet Home," 96–97.

Staying at home poses greater challenges if the health and mobility of the older adult begins to decline. Older adults spend much more time at home compared to their younger counterparts, and it is common for seniors to adopt their favorite place in the house as a home base that is comfortable, provides a good view to outside, and allows for necessary items to be in reach. This concentrated time at home binds them to their home even more, while still allowing them the control of their environment.

Leaving a familiar home, whether to long-term care or simply downsizing to a smaller house, can be approached with two basic mindsets or attitudes. One can approach a move with openness and preparedness. Lantz suggests the opportunity for seniors to "seize the moment." She writes of the opportunity to "enter this stage just as you would the college age: with curiosity, with anticipation, by doing self-inventory and researching the options."[26] Alternatively, one could have a more passive mindset, waiting for others to make decisions. This leaves the senior with the feeling of being taken captive.[27]

One's mindset is determined by many life variables. Perhaps an individual has relocated many times throughout their life and one more move is not a big deal. Some individuals may be open and energized by the opportunities awaiting them; perhaps a move to a retirement home is exciting. There is opportunity to make new friends and devote more time to favorite hobbies and less time to responsibilities like chores and maintenance. For some the idea of downsizing is fearful. It is difficult to let go of personal objects, and for some there is fear of losing memories tied to a physical location. The physical cues of a familiar environment are no longer there to prompt a memory.[28] Openness and preparedness might also be influenced by whether the senior is married, single, or widowed. If the older adult is widowed, it can be more frightening to approach a move.

Some individuals may be open and energized by the opportunities awaiting them; perhaps a move to a retirement home is exciting.

26 Lantz, "Home Sweet Home," 104.

27 See Lantz, "Home Sweet Home," 91.

28 See Rowles and Bernard, "Meaning and Significance of Place," 16.

When leaving home is challenging

Home provides a place of emotional safety and refuge. It is a place of comfort and belonging. Imagine the feelings provoked when home no longer exists. As Rowles and Bernard observe, "to take [home] away is an often unknowing but generally pernicious cruelty."[29] Such a description can feel heavy by well-meaning family members who have to make such decisions and can leave them feeling guilty for urging their parents to move against their will. Consider an example from writer Valerie Schultz who was left to make the decision of moving her mother to assisted living in a senior residence. Despite attempts to live with the Schultz's sister, this eighty-year-old mother with Parkinson's needed the care provided by a senior residence. As a daughter, however, Schultz felt guilt: "I feel that I have failed to live up the multigenerational ideal for a functioning family, of providing a home where the wise grandmother enriches the daily life of her offspring's family with wit and grace, of caring for an aging parent with the same love and attention with which she once cared for me. Instead, I have warehoused my mother."[30] In this case, the mother adjusted and is thriving in her new home.

The challenge of leaving one's familiar home could be compared to the biblical narrative of exile faced by the Israelites when the Babylonians took over.

Knowledge of the difficulties of leaving one's home might propel family members to help their aging family members transform their new space into home as best as possible. Consider the consequences if one is not able to make their new space into a place of home; they are left to feel "out of place" or "homeless." Rowles and Bernard suggest this is the fate of many older people in these vulnerable years and is a terrible way to spend one's final months or years of life.[31]

The challenge of leaving one's familiar home could be compared to the biblical narrative of exile faced by the Israelites when the Babylonians took over. The feelings experienced by the Israelites are like those of many older adults who are forced to leave their beloved home. Feelings of loss,

29 Rowles and Bernard, "Meaning and Significance of Place," 12.

30 Valerie Schultz, "It Takes a Village: Finding a Place My Aging Mother Can Call Home," *America*, May 27, 2013, 15–16.

31 Rowles and Bernard, "Meaning and Significance of Place," 18.

grief, and captivity are reasonable during circumstances such as these. There are only memories left from their home. Lantz suggests that individuals be encouraged to lament their circumstances just as the Israelites did in their situation thousands of years ago.[32]

For many individuals the move to a long-term care facility is a painful journey of loss.[33] Most often it is the loss of physical capacities to care for themselves that propels a move in the first place. Perhaps cognitive health is also failing. These older adults are grieving what they have had to give up: their home, personal environment, and autonomy, which scarcely exists in an institutional setting.[34] Individuals enter this new phase of life with many anxieties, including the concern of sharing space with strangers and the lack of privacy.[35] The transition can be a lonely one with the past feeling absent since no one at this new place shares their personal history.[36]

For many individuals the move to a long-term care facility is a painful journey of loss.

Friedman explains three critical spiritual challenges in long-term care settings. First is the feeling of empty, burdensome time. All of a sudden, one's daily life is scheduled, and the routine is not individually controlled. Time feels like an endless desert. Days pass by slowly, and time is spent waiting—for medications, meals, or toileting. Second, one often feels that their life is meaningless. They are no longer contributing to a greater purpose in the same way they once did. Finally, it is common for individuals to feel disconnection. They are isolated and feel "cut off from the past, from familiar surroundings, from past life roles." It is likely they have lost many friends and family members to death or distance.[37]

32 Lantz, "Home Sweet Home," 92.

33 See Dayle A. Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," in *Aging, Spirituality and Religion: A Handbook,* edited by Melvin A. Kimble, Susan H. McFadden, James W. Ellor, and James J. Seeber (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 362.

34 Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 362.

35 See Susan H. McFadden and John T. McFadden, *Aging Together: Dementia, Friendship and Flourishing Communities* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 131.

36 See Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 363.

37 Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 363–65, quote from 364–65.

Since "many older people resist calling places of care home,"[38] it is important for family members and care providers to know how to alleviate some of these challenges, allowing the feeling of homelessness to be avoided. Rowles and Bernard make a few tangible suggestions. Prior to the move it is helpful for the older adult to have actual or simulated visits to the new location, while also ensuring that there will be space for special personal objects to come along when they relocate. If possible, the opportunity for return visits to cherished residences or neighborhoods proves to be beneficial in sustaining continuity. Additionally, maintaining memberships and participation in various clubs or church is significant in reducing loss. In his retirement, my dad was a volunteer driver who took seniors from local long-term care homes on afternoon drives. Typically, they would end up driving through the countryside where these individuals grew up or raised their family—a special excursion for these residents who otherwise are physically isolated from their past. Rowles and Bernard explain that many long-term care homes are using reminiscence groups as a means for seniors to connect to their past, even with others who have no connection to them at all. Photographs of former houses are helpful for reminiscing and prove to be significantly helpful for individuals with Alzheimer's. In today's age of social media, technology is becoming a popular way for long-term care residents to connect to their family members outside of the home.[39]

Many long-term care homes are using reminiscence groups as a means for seniors to connect to their past, even with others who have no connection to them at all.

From a spiritual perspective, Friedman offers suggestions to curb the challenges faced in a long-term care setting. I especially find her emphasis on "ritual time" profound, especially for individuals struggling with the reality of empty, meaningless time. Ritual time focuses on the pattern of significant moments in life.[40] Friedman explains that "in religious life, time is divided into cycles of the week, month, and year."[41] In the Jewish context this weekly cycle would be Sabbath to Sabbath; perhaps in

38 Nelson-Becker, *Spirituality, Religion, and Aging*, 197.

39 See Rowles and Bernard, "Meaning and Significance of Place," 18–19.

40 Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 365.

41 Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 365.

the Christian context a yearly cycle would be Advent to Advent. When looking at time from a ritual perspective rather than from a present, chronological perspective, one can see that "today exists in relationship to significant moments. There is always something to look forward to and something to savour."[42] It creates security and continuity. One can remember the past while in the present context—perhaps remembering the same religious events from childhood, such as what one grew up doing on the Sabbath or a yearly tradition to mark Advent. One can see that life is linked by many moments of rituals. It is a continuum, and the older adult can connect where they are now to something familiar.[43] Additionally, by focusing on ritual time, one can find comfort knowing that rituals will come again, some weekly. The significance of ritual time is important for family members, pastors, and caregivers to be aware of and is a simple way for the older adult to feel at peace in their environment.

The significance of ritual time is important for family members, pastors, and caregivers to be aware of and is a simple way for the older adult to feel at peace in their environment.

Religion in general is helpful for seniors in long-term care homes who see themselves as powerless, worthless, and dependent.[44] Despite the societal norm of worth being connected to productivity, everyone has worth as a creature made in the image of God. Everyone "has a contribution to make in the community of faith and in service to the divine."[45] I think of an elderly woman once part of our church family, who contributed significantly to the assisted-living community around her. She edited the community newsletter and provided friendship to the people in her midst. Religion can build community within the residence. Through passing of the peace or singing a hymn together, people connect in ways they might otherwise not.[46]

Religion can build connections between the residents and outside faith communities as well. Churches can provide worship experiences for

42 Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 366.

43 Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 366.

44 Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 366.

45 Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 367.

46 As Friedman writes, "Sharing in worship forges community within the long-term care institution" ("Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 368).

those in long-term care homes or offer programs of special music throughout the year. I remember various occasions of having the responsibility as a child to lead worship at local long-term care homes. This is an important experience for the child and the senior. The child becomes exposed to seniors, and the older adults welcome the visit from young children. Religion helps residents to know they are connected to the outside world. There is faith beyond the walls of the residence; participating in the yearly religious calendar connects them to that broader world even from inside the long-term care home.[47] Connection to a former church community can also still be maintained if the long-term care home is in the same community. Church pastoral care teams often have programs in place to stay connected with their members who have moved to long-term care. Regular pastoral care visits are often meaningful experiences for both the resident and the visitor.

Conclusion

I have often been concerned about the concept of institutionalized senior living, while understanding that for some this is the only feasible option. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I questioned the institutionalization of such vulnerable people even more. I visited my ninety-three-year-old aunt recently. As I left, I felt sad knowing how lonely and isolated she is as a widow with adult children living hours away. I have witnessed the stress of grandparents, mine and my husband's, being urged to move off the farm to a place in the nearby town, making care more manageable. This was met with resistance and took time for the new space to be transformed into home. I watched my mom care for my ill and aging father at home and the incredible patience, strength, and courage that took. Despite the toll this took on the caregivers, with the help of nurses and personal support workers, my father was able to live out his days in a familiar environment.

A recent conversation with my mother-in-law provided a glimpse into the rich experience of multigenerational living. She grew up on a traditional Mennonite farm with the farmhouse divided into two parts. The young family lived on one side and grandparents were on the other—two homes within one house. Each home was independent of the other, with separate kitchens, bathrooms, and living spaces. Living closely like this provided a relationship of reciprocity. It was helpful for the younger generation to have an extra set of hands next door and a place for the

47 Friedman, "Spiritual Challenges of Nursing Home Life," 368.

children to visit when they needed a break from the immediate family. It also provided a safe, familiar place for the grandparents to age where they still found meaning and purpose. Grandma would help with tasks like mending, and Grandpa had regular farm and garden chores right up until he died. Thankfully, this situation did not require intense physical and personal care, as both Grandma and Grandpa died quite suddenly from a stroke and heart attack, respectively. Once Grandma died, more responsibility was put on the younger mother to care for her aging and now widowed father. This was a busy time for her, often making meals in stages to feed her father and her busy, growing family. She also looked after doing her father's laundry. My mother-in-law reflects fondly on this experience of growing up with grandparents as part of the family.[48] Sadly, this multigenerational living seems to be a thing of the past in Western society. Yet, it is much more common in other parts of the world and has biblical resonance with stories like Jacob moving to Egypt to be cared for by his son Joseph or Ruth leaving her homeland behind her to accompany her mother-in-law, Naomi, to her home.

Sadly, multigenerational living seems to be a thing of the past in Western society. Yet, it is much more common in other parts of the world and has biblical resonance.

Ultimately, there may be no one right answer for what home should look like for older adults. Although I struggle with the institution of long-term care homes, some individuals are brought back to life by the care they receive. Like many things in life, the best option is based on the individual. In this instance, many variables determine what is best. For those making the transition from one home to another, I conclude with this prayer of transition:

> *God of protection and provision, we are grateful for your security, for the roof over our heads every day of our lives. All over the world there are people living in desolate circumstances. We thank you for the privilege we have.*
>
> *Today marks a transition for our loved one. Today they embark on a new journey, a journey that is bittersweet.*

48 Lois Cressman, interview by author, Plattsville. March 27, 2020.

As they leave their family home of many years, may they be reminded of the precious time experienced within its walls—the comfort, refuge, warmth, protection, growth, joy, and even sadness felt there over the years. May they carry the memories made with their family.

As they approach this new home, may their anxiety be minimal. May some excitement dwell within them as they enter a new phase of life. We pray for this space to quickly transform into a place of comfort and become home. May this be a home filled with love and with many cheerful visitors.

God, help us to remember our home here on earth is only temporary. We know an eternal home is found in you. May this knowledge be a comfort to us in times of transition.

We pray this is Jesus's name. Amen.

About the author

Kathryn Cressman is a recent graduate of the Master of Theological Studies program at Conrad Grebel University College. She has been called to a part-time pastoral ministry position at Hillcrest Mennonite Church in New Hamburg, Ontario, where she anticipates the joy of encouraging others as they walk the journey of faith. Kathryn lives with her husband and children on a dairy farm in Wilmot Township.

God just isn't finished with me yet

Meaning, memory, and mystery

Jane Kuepfer

I was raised in a family with Scottish Presbyterian roots, where no one talked about faith for fear of being "too religious."[1] We trusted that seniors had it all figured out and their faith carried them, although we would be stretched to say we understood how. I wonder sometimes about their experience with God and meaning in later life and how my grandparents would have talked about their faith if they had felt free to put it into words.

Spirituality is not only for those blessed with a heritage of comfortable faith conversations.

My husband's grandparents, Amish Mennonites, were more vocal about what sustained them. Relationship with God provided companionship through lonely times, Scripture and prayer brought comfort, and an understanding of something waiting beyond death was a source of enduring hope. They took seriously the responsibility of transmitting that faith to younger generations and showed their love through prayer.

Many Mennonites have memories of grandmas who, at difficult times, would say, "I don't know how anyone can get through life without faith." But spirituality is not only for those blessed with a heritage of comfortable faith conversations.

While, for some elders, a simply articulated faith has profound depth, others cringe at simple words in the face of a complex array of life experiences and a relationship with God or religion characterized by struggle and challenge.

As a spiritual-care provider in long-term care, I am finding that generations aging now are more inquisitive and less likely to lean on assumptions, and that their honest questions help us all to think about what we mean when we say a spiritual life helps with aging.

1 An earlier version of this essay was published as Jane Kuepfer, "'God just isn't finished with me yet': Meaning, memory and mystery are part of the aging process," *Canadian Mennonite*, June 18, 2018; it is reprinted here by permission of the author.

Many seniors have not been part of a church for some time. They are not interested in saccharine definitions of spirituality. And some would not call themselves "people of faith" at all.

Yet we all have spiritual needs right to the end of life. We are sustained by whatever resources are available to offer us hope, love, peace, and joy in our circumstances. For example, we might find hope in children, in the cycle of nature regenerating, in conviction that problems are not permanent. We receive and give love in networks of family and friends, old and new. Peace comes with reconciliation in relationships, quiet space, unhurried time. And joy is often in the little things: beauty, surprise, music, humor.

Spiritual resources found within and without

Recently, I conducted research with baby boomers who are nearing or past sixty-five. I learned that these boomers find spiritual resources within and in the space and people around them, as well as in their faith, for those who profess it. They all grew up going to church and Sunday school weekly. But their relationship to traditional spiritual resources, such as Scripture, prayer, music, and their church community, has evolved in different ways for each of them. They continue to be open to exploration and learning, anticipating that their spirituality will continue to grow and change as they age. Which makes sense, since aging is all about change.

If we live long enough, we inevitably experience change in health and independence, roles and identity, energy and activity, relationships, community, and home, to say nothing of all the changes we experience in society, technology, and the world. Many elders report change in perspective, a shift in values with a different stage of life, and change in where they find meaning. It would not be surprising for elders to find new spiritual life as well.

Meaning, memory, and mystery

I like to think about our spirituality as we age as being about meaning, memory, and mystery.

If we are to aspire to live long lives, it is vital that these lives have *meaning*. Do we understand ourselves to be part of a bigger picture or a bigger story? When life is difficult, what meaning do we make of it? What has been, and is now, our purpose or calling in life? What do we imagine when we envision dying and death?

For elders, another important aspect of spirituality is *memory*. Throughout life, memories of sacred moments accumulate, and familiar practices, including prayers and rituals, come to hold deeply rooted meaning. Memories interrupted by dementia can often be accessed through these familiar practices, especially those involving music.

Mystery is another increasingly friendly aspect of spirituality for elders. Many attest to a greater level of comfort with the unknown as they grow older and the freedom to let go of the need for control.

Our spirituality sustains vitality and enables people to cope with crisis, transition, and circumstance.

We live out our spirituality through our connections to self, others, nature, and the divine. We express our spirituality in relationships, traditions, and practices and through stories, beliefs, and values. Our spirituality sustains vitality and enables people to cope with crisis, transition, and circumstance. As we understand better what contributes to meaningful aging, we will be better able to support one another in our families, churches, and communities.

What seniors offer congregations and need from them

Congregations can gain a lot from the gifts of seniors. Older members carry the story of the church's past along with a lifetime of experience. They are likely to have insight that younger members do not and contribute to the next generation as mentors in faith and life.

But seniors are not just at church for the benefit of younger members. The church is a community of profound meaning for seniors because it has the capacity to speak to their deep spiritual needs, offering belonging, care, and inspiration. Hope is fueled watching the children parade with palm branches or participating in an engaging Christian education discussion. Love is nurtured through smiles and hugs and opportunities to support others near and far away through faithful prayer and giving. Peace comes in quiet music during worship or healing prayer at the close of a visit from the care team. Joy erupts in the hallelujahs of an Easter morning gathering with friends.

New questions emerge with this new life stage. What is the purpose of life after working years are done? How do I connect with the world when most of those with whom I shared life and memories have died? Where is God in suffering and illness? What is my role as a grandparent? How do I

faithfully manage my finances and legacy? How do I support and sustain friendship with my peers who are experiencing dementia? Who am I now in the eyes of God? There is much to learn in the process of growing old. These are spiritual questions, and our church communities are good places to ask them together.

Growing spirituality in today's seniors

When something is growing, we can't know what it will look like tomorrow.

A research participant explained her growing spirituality: "I learned when Mom was sick [with dementia] that life is okay if my ducks aren't all in a row sometimes. God walks with us no matter what. I learned that in new ways. . . . I know there's lots more that's going to happen that I wouldn't choose, and times I will say life's not fair, but I have incredible peace. I know God will be with me."

Another reflected on how important his questions have been:

> *I think my faith today is stronger than it would have been any time throughout my life, but . . . I question more things than I would ever have questioned. I doubt more. I've changed my mind. When I was twenty-five years old, my faith would have been very black and white. Today I'm not as sure about many things. Most people would look at that as saying my faith is weakened, but I think my faith is stronger because I know who I am, I know what I believe. Those things aren't shaken. Yet my world has become much more inclusive than it was forty years ago. . . . The most inspiring and important things in my faith journey have been hearing other peoples' opinions and perspectives, and not being afraid of those. . . . My faith has grown because I've had those conversations, and keep having them.*

Sometimes challenges present opportunities, and growth comes through difficulties. A spouse whose partner recently died shared how much she had changed through the experience of loving and caring for him, saying, "I'm a better person now because of it all."

The losses of age can strip away many of the blessings of life: cherished relationships, health and strength, meaningful work. While we experience God through these blessings in our youth, for some the empty spaces they leave make room for a deeper relationship with God and for growing spiritual maturity, intimacy, and freedom.

Words like generativity, integrity, universalizing faith, and gerotranscendence (a theory that explains aging from a psychosocial perspective) have been used to describe spiritual development in later life. The spiritual transformation only possible in the "second half of life" is of increasing interest among contemplative writers.

Ron Schlegel, founder of Schlegel Villages long-term care and retirement communities, is fond of saying, "There is much we lose as we get older, but our spirituality can continue to grow and thrive."

As my older friends living long lives say, "It might be that God just isn't finished with me yet."

About the author

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We don't age out

Faithfulness in retirement

Wes Goertzen

I was twenty-five years old when Quaker peace activist Tom Fox was killed in Iraq while serving with Christian Peacemakers Teams (CPT).[1] At the time I was doing Christian service in El Alto, Bolivia. We raised our own and our field's support and lived on little among people who lived on much less. We also served, a bit sporadically, at the El Alto Missionaries of Charity home, a home for people with high needs—the impoverished elderly and people living with disabilities. At some point, our US office started encouraging us US staff to save for retirement. It was the first time I had thought about retirement. To be honest, it sounded inconsistent with following Jesus in our setting. So the joke became that we had two options for retirement: living at Missionaries of Charity or joining CPT.

As someone seeking to live faithfully to the witness and teaching of Jesus Christ, I saw retirement as either serving until I was indistinguishable from those I served or martyrdom.

It was a grim joke, but hard work in hard places takes humor in grim directions.

As someone seeking to live faithfully to the witness and teaching of Jesus Christ, I saw retirement as either serving until I was indistinguishable from those I served (Missionaries of Charity) or martyrdom. There would be no expensive assisted-living or nursing home for me. Such was my thinking as a twenty-five-year-old serving the population of the Calle Carasco red light district.

1 See "Tom Fox: Moving towards the Light," CPT, https://cpt.org/tom-fox-moving-towards-light; "Body of Abducted U.S. Peace Activist Identified," NPR, March 11, 2006, https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5257932. Tom Fox was only fifty-four when he died. From my vantage point, he lived a very normal life, and at an older age he had made a scary and courageous career change when he could have been enjoying himself.

The point of this reflection is simple: we don't age out of God's kingdom or the ongoing transformation that a life with Jesus entails. I fear that what is often heard both inside and outside the Christian community is that there comes a point when we choose (or our society chooses for us) that we have done enough and can coast (or must make way). I have heard this message and succumbed to its fantasy personally on occasion. But neither entitlement nor obsolescence characterize faithful retirement.

We don't age out of God's kingdom or the ongoing transformation that a life with Jesus entails.

My grandpa retired early, in his fifties, when interest rates were sky high in the late 1970s. Bank CDs were paying double digits. (My emergency fund CD pays 1 percent today.) It was a rough time for farmers just starting out. Many lost their farms. As the story goes, pretty much out of the blue, my grandpa laid the proposition to my dad and his brother: "Buy me out [or I'll sell the farm to someone else]. You have the weekend to decide." My uncle quit school and came home to make it work.

My grandparents wintered in McAllen, Texas. I didn't have the definitive (and judgmental) word for it at the time, but it seemed selfish. It was inconvenient for a child who likes the indulgence of grandparents: playing with grandpa's wood carvings, devouring grandma's baking, and making noise on their fancy electric organ. We still sampled the candy dish and admired his woodworking when we checked in on the cold house through the winter. Nothing of my grandparents' retirement made any reference to the faith they professed in Jesus—not to me as a kid.

Contemporary practices and means for retirement are barely a century old in the West. The median length of retirement must be higher than it has ever been in human history, yet the concept is not new. Roman soldiers who survived their campaigns could look forward to decent retirement pensions and sometimes land and villas. The Old Testament idea of sitting under one's own vine and fig tree (Micah 4:4; 1 Kings 4:25; Zech. 3:10) offers a vision in which retirement sounds reasonable, though the context in these passages has more to do with freedom from oppression. Resting contentedly in the shade of one's own planting is both just reward and faithful hope.

The word *retirement* comes from Old French, meaning "act of retreating, act of falling back," or "act of withdrawing into seclusion."[2] I find the movement at the heart of the word useful. It causes us to ask questions like these: What do we retire *from*? What do we retire *to*? How might faithfulness to Jesus and his way bear on our choices in retirement? What pitfalls and tweaks in our thinking or practice are necessary to follow Jesus through retirement? I ask these questions not only for my congregants—who, admittedly, mostly do not consult me about their retirement plans—but also for myself. How do I prepare? Should I be preparing?

In the congregation where I pastor, almost 80 percent of our members—and about 50 percent of regular attendees—are people over sixty. That is enough that we probably need a more clearly articulated set of assumptions or expectations for and from this life stage. The last third of life seems to me to be one where we need help renewing or pursuing a new vocation. Knowing Jesus, recognizing and submitting to his lordship, and living in his kingdom and his way is still the meaning of life for retirees. The life of faith and one's responsibilities as a kingdom citizen may look differently at sixty-five or eighty-five than it did at seven or thirty-seven, but one simply does not age out of the kingdom of heaven as one does from an occupation.

How might faithfulness to Jesus and his way bear on our choices in retirement? What pitfalls and tweaks in our thinking or practice are necessary to follow Jesus through retirement?

Now at forty, I save monthly from my paycheck for retirement. Missionaries of Charity is not my nursing home of choice; they have more deserving people to care for. But I miss the beautiful, smelly chaos of that place. And their fresh buns would win the approval of the pickiest Mennonite bun connoisseur. My children are many years from graduation, but our house is about paid off, and so at times I again wonder about retirement and the freedom it offers—both my retirement and that of my congregants. Sometimes in conversation with elders, Jesus seems less human, though not necessarily less close. This makes me wonder: Does Jesus become someone different to us later in life? Does it get

2 See "retirement" at the Online Etymology Dictionary, https://www.etymonline.com/word/retirement.

harder to relate to Jesus when one has lived two or three times as long as he did while on the earth? I certainly hope not.

The cherry tree my daughters and I planted seems to have chosen a bush habit, so I probably won't be lounging under my own shade trees in my old age. But, again, I wonder: Will I be content spoon carving or chair making in silence and solitude under the trees or retreating to the bush? Does retirement simply mean *me time* after so much *them time*? Or will the meantime shift my wants beyond myself? Will that be faithful? Practically, does climate change and community that counts on our presence preclude my *ability* to travel south to skip Manitoba winters? When is it my turn to step back and let others lead and when will it be my responsibility as elder to come alongside, affirm, warn, or tell a good tale of success or failure in the face of adversity? How do I pursue a living relationship with Jesus when the world becomes strange, and he asks me to be transformed and renewed? Will I befriend the bewilderingly strange youth? Can I find a way to enjoy gathered worship when the noise of children makes it impossible for me to hear? When my spiritual siblings suggest that significant pieces of my life's work have worked against the grain of God's script, how will I respond? Will I still have a seat at the table? These are my questions because they are questions not yet answered definitively by my elders.

Even at twenty-five, my CPT retirement plan wasn't just flippant or youthful exuberance. It was an immature attempt to square capitalism's retirement promises with the life and calling of Jesus, to take Jesus's teachings about cross bearing seriously, to see even in the face of great evil the radical witness to God's in-breaking light and life as a real, faithful, and practical option in the smorgasbord of retirement choices. Maybe it is. Maybe I will. God willing.

About the author

Wes Goertzen is pastor in rural Manitoba, husband, and father to daughters. They just finished the last of the Lord of the Rings series, and between harvest and camping, he hopes to build a decent stick chair while on sabbatical.

Music and the older adult

Stories and resources

Beverly Suderman-Gladwell

Abner was a resident in the nursing home where I was the chaplain. He lived with deep forgetfulness due to dementia. He had little visible response to anyone other than his wife. As I led my weekly hymn sing, I expected him to sit there quietly, as he did whenever I spoke to him. As I began to sing a familiar hymn along with a few of the regulars, a most beautiful high tenor voice began to harmonize with us. It was Abner. He sang and sang. His wife later told me that he had sung in male quartets for decades. Abner still barely responded verbally to anyone but his wife, but music became the connection between the two of us.

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Jahkusha was mentally alert and physically strong, but a serious stroke had taken away her ability to move one side of her body along with her ability to speak. She could say only a phrase or two: "Yes, lady" was usually all she could manage. But, when we sang together in worship, Jahkusha's voice rang out loud and clear. The part of her brain that housed music was unaffected by the stroke. When we sang, we were in perfect harmony.

David was dying. It was Christmas Day, and his daughter had been keeping vigil for days. His breathing was irregular, with long pauses between each breath. That Christmas morning I slipped into his room after our worship service. We sat together in silence at his bed. Then I offered to sing. I'm no soloist, but my years in the nursing home had taught me that it was no use being embarrassed about singing alone. So I sang "Amazing Grace." Halfway through the first verse, David stopped breathing again, as he had so many times. I kept singing through the second verse and then the third. No new breath. I paused and looked across the bed at his daughter. She motioned to keep singing. Fourth verse, no

breath. David had finally been able to die. His daughter and I wept—and rejoiced—together.

Below I offer resources for music and the older person. These are largely based on my experiences as a nursing home and retirement home chaplain. Some of these resources are websites or books; others are ideas that worked for me; others are things I have seen other congregations try—or think they should try. My goal is to provide ideas and resources to spark creative thinking about how to use music in various settings. Let's begin at the end—the end of life.

Using music in palliative care

Singing to people in their last days and hours can make a meaningful connection. Sometimes I knew which songs were favorites and sang those; other times, as in David's story, I sang hymns that were generally well known. Don't be afraid to sing. Don't be afraid to sing alone. Don't worry about the quality of your voice. Sing out if the person is hard of hearing. Sing even if the person is not responding in any way that you can see. My training in palliative care taught me that the sense of hearing is generally the last sense to disappear, so even in one's dying moments, it can be meaningful to have someone there to sing or speak gently or recite well-known Scripture.

The sense of hearing is generally the last sense to disappear, so even in one's dying moments, it can be meaningful to have someone there to sing or speak gently or recite well-known Scripture.

Involve the people gathered around the bedside to sing with you. If you know that family will be there, consider bringing a few hymn books with you. Alternately, sing only the first verse of the hymn and repeat it several times; many people will know the first verse of many hymns by heart. Have a list of hymns suitable for the bedside taped to the inside cover of your Bible; it is astonishing what one cannot remember when faced with the need to find a hymn and equally astonishing how many hymns one can sing by memory with just a simple list of titles on hand. Because you likely know the people you are visiting, you have the advantage of knowing what kind of music they enjoy. Use that knowledge as you prepare for a visit.

If you are visiting a person who is hard of hearing, consider using a voice amplifier of some sort. These are excellent devices for a congrega-

tion to purchase for a pastor or the elders or deacons. Two options I have used are the Pocket Talker, which consists of a headset for the hard of hearing person and a microphone for the speaker, and a personal amplifier.[1] The former is most useful in one-on-one conversations. The latter can be used in one-on-one settings or in groups of up to thirty people. I used a personal amplifier extensively in my work at the nursing home; it saved my voice and made it so much easier for those with hearing loss to be a part of the conversation. It takes a little getting used to having one's voice amplified out the door and down the hall; reminding oneself that this is not about the caregiver but instead for the benefit of those being visited helps to get past the discomfort.

Consider investing in musical resources such as CDs or other formats that are specifically designed for use at the end of life. An amazing resource is MusicCare by Room 217.[2] These CDs are recorded at a tempo to match the rhythm of a heartbeat at rest and promote calmness. They cover a wide range of musical styles and can be purchased in sets or individually. People love this music. I cannot recommend them highly enough.

You can also look for CDs of well-known hymns. MennoMedia has CDs or digital files of music from *Voices Together*, *Sing the Story*, and *Sing the Journey* hymn books.[3] The heart songs of previous English-speaking generations can also be found in collections like those of the Mennonite Hour Singers.[4] If your congregation sings in other languages, you'll want to look for musical resources in those languages as well.

Using music in the nursing home setting

If you've been asked to lead a service in a nursing home or retirement setting, here are some considerations:

1. Speak slowly and with amplification whenever possible. Do be careful about singing through the microphone though—that can overwhelm your congregation. Check to see if you can turn down or mute your microphone during a hymn.

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1 See, for example, the Williams Sound Pocket Talker Ultra with Single Minibud and Headset and WinBridge portable voice amplifiers.

2 See https://shop.musiccare.org/.

3 See https://www.mennomedia.org/search-list/?category=MUS.

4 See http://sacredchoralmusic.net/mennonitehoursingers.html.

2. Use familiar hymns, but don't be afraid to introduce a new song if it suits your theme. So much wonderful music exists online, and with a simple speaker attached to your device, you'll be able to share it with your group.
3. Be open to using songs your audience might have learned as children, including action songs. A song like "He's got the whole world in his hands" can get many people involved, whether or not they can sing. It's energizing!
4. Hymn books can be a help but can also be a huge hindrance—people can't find the page, or they drop the book, or the print is too small. There are other options: singing just the first verse of a hymn and repeating that several times, projecting the words on a screen if that technology is available, or creating a one page handout with the hymns and a Scripture reading in large font that people can take home.[5]
5. Ask the program or recreation staff if they have simple rhythm instruments like shakers or tambourines you could use. Using rhythm instruments allows people to participate who otherwise can't. You will need to work with the staff of the home regarding any safety concerns.

If you're visiting in a retirement or nursing home, here are some suggestions around music:

1. Create playlists of music to leave with the resident. You could involve some tech-savvy younger adults in creating these or purchase CDs like those listed above to leave with your congregant.
2. If your congregation records its worship services, watch part of a service with the resident and then sing together during the congregational singing.
3. As Jahkusha's story above illustrates, illnesses that affect speech might not affect the ability to sing. When in doubt, sing!

5 You must either use hymns in the public domain or secure copyright permission for this last option.

Using music in ministry to people with memory loss

Dementia can take away people's abilities to communicate through speech, but as Abner's story illustrates, the ability to sing or tap a rhythm often remains. Music can be an important tools in working with people with dementia or to older people with developmental delays. Here are some ideas:

1. If the person you're visiting is agitated and doesn't want to sit still, go for a walk with them and sing as you walk! Sing an up-tempo hymn ("Come, we that love the Lord" has a good pace for walking) or an upbeat song from their youth. You may look silly, but you will be ministering deeply to the person with dementia.
2. Come prepared with music on your device. Work with the family to create a playlist. Bring CDs or find music on YouTube, including videos of favorite hymns or songs.
3. Sing anything—it doesn't have to be religious. "If you're happy and you know it" is a song that brings a smile to many faces. Or try nursery rhymes, poetry, reciting Scripture, or singing Scripture songs they likely learned as children; many of these memorized pieces stick with a person regardless of their level of dementia.

Using music in pastoral care of older adults

Much of what is written above applies also in the use of music generally for pastoral care. Here are some additional thoughts:

1. Find out what music the older adults of your congregation like; this can be a fruitful theme for a pastoral care visit. You might even consider making this the theme of your visits for all your older adults for a season. Keep this information on file for later use, as knowing what music people appreciate will help you serve them when they're ill or dying.
2. Music for funerals is a fruitful topic. Ask your elders what they would like to have sung at their funeral. Ask why these songs matter to them. You will learn a lot from these conversations. Keep good notes and make them accessible to the pastors, deacons, or elders who follow you.

3. If your children are open to it, consider taking them along on pastoral visits to older people and then sing together as a group. You might even invite an entire Sunday school class along if there is space for a larger group.

Using music in intergenerational worship

Balancing musical interests and different styles in congregational worship is a topic that could occupy several articles. Here are some ideas to consider to minister to the older adults in the congregation during intergenerational worship:

1. Look for training sessions for your worship and music leaders on teaching new music and balancing it with familiar songs. MennoMedia has done an amazing job with the resources for the new *Voices Together* hymnal.[6] Your area church or local Christian college might offer courses too.
2. Someone—the worship committee, pastor, or music committee chair—should keep track of what is sung each week and regularly take a look at what is missing and what is overrepresented or underrepresented. This could be a fruitful annual discussion item for the worship committee.
3. In order for the "heart songs" of all generations to be represented in worship, consider these ideas:
    - On the occasion of a congregant's milestone birthday or other special occasion, have that person choose a favorite hymn for Sunday worship and accompany it with a prayer of blessing. The congregation I attend, Waterloo North Mennonite Church, celebrates its "Esteemed Elders" in morning worship as part of its rites of passage; those being celebrated choose the hymns for that service.
    - Include one heart song or a song more familiar to the older adults in each worship service.
    - Implement a regular hymn sing—either on Sunday mornings (perhaps on every fifth Sunday of the month) or as an evening event. Plan them on a

6 See http://voicestogetherhymnal.org/resources/.

theme. You can mix new and old, include music from past hymnals, provide background to hymns, and so on. People enjoy learning the story behind a hymn; it provides depth and meaning to the singing experience. In my experience, hymn sings work best when the leader has chosen the majority of the hymns; don't have it just be a "call out your favorite" event, though you might include an open call at the end of the service or have people submit favorite hymns several weeks in advance and create the hymn sing based on those suggestions. Holding a hymn sing using only the old hymnals stashed away in your storage or just older heart songs will be a walk down memory lane for the older folks and a peek into history for the younger ones.

4. Create an intergenerational choir for a specific event (Easter, Good Friday, Christmas Eve, Pentecost, etc.). Choose music that appeals to different groups and allow people to learn to appreciate other styles.
5. With the recent introduction of *Voices Together*, the question of what to do with old hymnals is once again relevant. Hymnals hold a special place in people's hearts, and it feels wrong to just throw them out or put them in storage. Here are a few suggestions:
    - Keep a few of each of your former hymn books in your church library.
    - Give old hymnals away to people in the church.
    - It turns out that the internet has lots of ideas for old books—everything from using individual pages to make origami figures to artwork that covers a whole wall.[7] Consider hosting an art-making event using your old hymnals. Have a time of singing during the event.

7 See, for example, https://bookriot.com/diy-crafts-with-old-books.

Conclusion

Music speaks to us at every age and across ages. It is a gift that can help heal, enliven, soothe, comfort, entertain, and so much more. It is a gift that allows us to communicate with each other and with God. Our lives do indeed flow on in endless song. How can we keep from singing?

About the author

Rev. Beverly Suderman-Gladwell is semi-retired after twenty-four years of ministry, including sixteen years as a chaplain in a nursing home and retirement home setting. She lives in Waterloo, Ontario, and her musical roots were nurtured in her hometown of Winker, Manitoba. She enjoys singing in a community choir and nurturing native plants in her garden, and she is looking forward to traveling with her husband after the pandemic subsides.

Kindling conversations on aging and spirituality

Moses Falco

I have a clear memory of the day my grade eight teacher turned thirty. My group of friends, who had just recently made it past puberty, poked fun at him, calling him "old man" while pointing out his graying hair. Thirty seemed so old to my thirteen-year-old self. I never imagined how fast it would come for me, but in 2020, I too reached the thirty-year milestone.

Only five years before that, I began my pastoring journey at the age of twenty-five. My home church called me from within, knowing that I would still have a lot of growing to do as a solo pastor. They assured me that we would grow together. I was thrown into the deep end, and I was terrified. My lack of life and ministry experience was a huge obstacle, and so the wealth of experience within our church became one of my greatest assets.

Our most senior members, who are the most reserved when sitting in the pews, are so full of life and hope that I left every visit feeling encouraged.

It took no time before I sat in the living rooms of church members, sharing stories about faith and praying together. By the time I started pastoring, I knew most of the people in our church already, but this opened me up to a side of them that I never knew from Sunday morning interactions. Our most senior members, who are the most reserved when sitting in the pews, are so full of life and hope that I left every visit feeling encouraged.

I still remember one of the first visits I had to do for someone who had been recently diagnosed with cancer. I wasn't sure what to say to a dying man. I went to his bedside, and to my surprise, he took my hand and said, "We need to talk. This is what's happening in my body." He went on to explain what the doctors told him and then shared his final wishes with me. A true mentor, he took the reins to start a conversation on aging and death. He knew what we both needed and graciously led the way. I am immensely grateful for experiences like this where I am welcomed into the joy-filled and sorrowful moments of people's lives.

I wish other young people could have the same opportunities to sit beside people who have lived two or three times longer than them and be able to ask what spirituality looks like at different stages of life. Unfortunately, these kinds of conversation spaces are hard to come by in our churches. Although I increasingly hear about fostering intergenerational relationships, we tend to gravitate to our own demographics when we want to delve deeper than foyer talk.

Although I increasingly hear about fostering intergenerational relationships, we tend to gravitate to our own demographics when we want to delve deeper than foyer talk.

What would happen, though, if we simply kindled conversations? What if the older ones in our churches invited the younger ones to ask whatever questions they would like to ask? What if, on a regular basis, people in our churches knew there was a space where they could be comfortable sharing what their generation is going through because there would be people of other generations who are willing to listen? Yes, it may seem forced, but if our intentions are truly to learn from one another, rather than seeming staged, our conversations might even become a spiritual practice for our community.

There is no better way to test this idea than to try it, which is exactly what I did in December 2021. I wanted to see what would happen if three very different people gathered around a table for tea with targeted questions in hand: What is it like in your stage of life? What are some of the challenges and blessings of this stage? What spiritual practices have been important for you as you age? What words of wisdom would you have for your younger self?

Susan, who is in her mid-nineties, hosted us for this conversation. Although she is limited by mobility issues, she continues to live independently in an apartment close to the church. A widow for over thirty years, Susan values the relationships with her three adopted children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. She has a deep love for the church community and even learned how to use Zoom on her phone so she can stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic. She participates in most of our church events, but her years in leadership and committee work are already behind her.

Betty is in her mid-sixties and works as a counselor for a social services agency in Winnipeg. Although she enjoys her work, she is nearing the

time of retirement and looks forward to the opportunities that may open up at that time. She has three adult children together with her husband and is learning what it means to support them in their stages of life, as two of the three are living outside of the family home. Betty has been an integral part of our church leadership for as long as I have been there and continues to be active in many ways.

Lastly was myself, a pastor in my early thirties. With a two-year-old child and another one on the way, my wife and I are at the beginning of the building phase of life. Our schedules are packed from morning until night with work, church, and family obligations. Although life sometimes seems unstable and unpredictable, we have settled in with a great community of caring people who we want to journey with long term. We are thankful for the chaotic stage of life that fills our house with both mess and the sounds of joy.

With warm mugs, plates full of treats, and an audio recorder rolling, Susan, Betty, and I began the conversation. We started by sharing about our families and how life has been going lately. We immediately realized that we have many things in common. Although our work and recreational activities look different, life is always busy. Betty shared her concern that she might become bored in retirement, but Susan assured her that she herself never is.

We all share a common faith in a God who created all things, loves the world, and calls us into relationship and community.

We noticed other similarities as well that crossed over generational lines. We all share a common faith in a God who created all things, loves the world, and calls us into relationship and community. We all believe that God has been present with us in life until this point and that God would continue to be with us regardless of how life changes. We also shared concerns about the state of our world and what the future will look like.

The main part of our conversation focused on spiritual practices in our varied stages of life. We raised the questions of what has changed over the years and what spiritual practices have become most important. We talked about prayer, Bible reading, singing, going to church, stillness, meditation, and more. What follows is a snippet of our conversation, focusing specifically on the practice of prayer.

Susan: *Right now, I am more thankful in my stage of life than I've ever been before, because I have so much to be thankful for. I have learned to know the Savior, and he walks with me every day. Sometimes, yes, I do get tired, because I'm ninety-five years old. So then I sit down, and I read, and some of the books are so exciting. Especially the one I'm reading now from Peter Dyck, describing his life. And then I felt, I haven't done enough for the Lord.*

Betty: *I absolutely feel that way too. Oh my goodness, I'm retiring. Am I bailing? Is retiring just taking care of me? What about the families I work with? Not that somebody else isn't going to look after them or take my place, but why am I retiring when there's so much need? I definitely feel that my work was a calling from God, and it's going to be done, and what does that mean about his calling on my life? I am looking and praying: What are you calling me to next? As I retire, how can I still be a servant?*

Susan: *When I wake up in the morning, I talk to the Lord and say, "Help me to be kind and loving to these workers that come here and also to the neighbors through the day." And God has been so good to me. He has helped me. I have wonderful workers from Home Care. There are some Christians, but they're not all Christians. But they are all wonderful.*

Betty: *It seems like you're saying that God continues to provide a ministry for you even if you are more in your own apartment during the day. He sends people to you that you can minister to.*

Susan: *Yes.*

Betty: *I guess it's about trusting God to continue to use me.*

Moses: *I'm trying to think about my prayer, and most often I'm praying things like, "Help me. Just help me get through this. Give me the strength, wisdom, and guidance for whatever it is that life throws at us at that time." At this stage of life, there's just so much unknown. Who knows what could happen or where it could go? There are so many stories of people and families where a spouse passes away or loses a job or they have*

to move. Anything could happen at any time. And if there are times that are too stressful, then that's usually what I'm praying for: "God, please help me."

Susan: *Even when you pray and sometimes things come into your mind, I often have to say, "Satan, get away from me, I'm talking to the Lord." Often that happens, and you have to really pray that he will not interfere in our Christian lives.*

Betty: *Yeah, you talk about spiritual struggles, spiritual warfare. I've been aware of that as well. I think, perhaps, that's one thing I've gotten better at in prayer is the spiritual warfare, calling on the strength, presence, and power of God to remove or manage those things that I think are ungodly or spiritual attacks from Satan. That's probably something that's gotten better.*

Moses: *I think for me it's often difficult to be disciplined about spiritual practices because life seems so busy. I always feel like I should be doing more. I should be reading my Bible more, praying more, all these things. Those things are very important for me, but there doesn't seem to be a rhythm. It's sporadic. Sometimes things get in the way.*

Susan: *No matter how old you get though, I read this one book that said that when you get older, Satan tries to get you more and more because he'll lose you because you're older.*

Moses: *So you're saying those struggles, temptations don't stop?*

Susan: *No. They don't stop. You have to really trust in the Lord and say, "God, just help me through this. Help me to overcome." Satan will try till the end of your life. But so far I'm thankful. I'm thankful for the Lord, how much he has done for me.*

Betty: *It sounds like being thankful is a spiritual practice that you exercise a lot, and I hear a lot from you. I think no matter how old you get or what age you're at, or how much time you spend in prayer, Bible reading, or devotions, there's a sense that it'll always feel like it's not enough because there's a true longing in us to be with God all the time.*

Our conversation lasted for about an hour, and I left feeling encouraged and supported. Two people, who have lived much more life than I have, share some of the same struggles when it comes to our desire to live out our faith. I appreciated their wisdom, care, and vulnerability. I felt thankful to share in their stories through our time together. This kind of sharing, however, does not happen in our church foyer, or even in our Adult Sunday School sessions. I am one of the few people who has the privilege of hearing about people's spiritual journeys in depth because of my role. Most young people grow up not knowing what questions they can ask, to whom, and in what setting.

We need to create spaces within our churches where people feel free to ask these questions in an attempt to support each other as we age.

If there is one thing I have learned from my few years of pastoral ministry, as well as the visit with Susan and Betty, it is that we need to have more intergenerational conversations. We need to create spaces within our churches where people feel free to ask these questions in an attempt to support each other as we age. Even if it seems forced or staged, one can never be sure how great of an impact a simple conversation can have in someone's own journey of faith. There is too much wisdom and shared experience in our communities that goes unshared when we do not try. My hope is that our kindled conversations will help us to live well, age well, and in the Lord's timing, die well.

About the author

Moses Falco lives in Treaty 1 territory with his family. He pastors at Sterling Mennonite Fellowship in Winnipeg, Manitoba, blogs regularly at mosesfalco.com, and co-hosts a podcast at themennocast.com.

A view from my pew as a pastor-turned-parishioner

Reflections on Philippians

Elsie M. Epp

Row 6, seat 2, just off the center aisle is where you will find me on most Sunday mornings. It's more or less in the middle of the gathered community. I am surrounded by numerous others, mostly seniors. In some ways it has become my spiritual home base. I got here, not because it was my first choice, but because three different individuals invited my spouse and me to come. By now I can readily say that it is a good place.

I have made the transition from sitting in my office chair or standing behind the pulpit to being seated in this "comfortable pew."

I have made the transition from sitting in my office chair or standing behind the pulpit to being seated in this "comfortable pew." Perhaps "familiar pew" would be a more accurate description. The pew hasn't changed over the years, but in subtle ways I am realizing that I am changing as the years go by. By the time you read this, I will have passed another milestone, my eightieth birthday. It is from that perspective that I now sing and pray and hear the words of Scripture read and preached. Allow me to illustrate by inviting you to read through Philippians with me. This book is such a treasure with many wonderful themes, but I have chosen only a few that particularly resonate or speak to me at this stage of my life.

Love for the church

Philippi was a metropolitan city out on the far-flung frontier of the Roman Empire and in our day might well be considered a desirable tourist destination. What intrigues me is not its location or its economy or even its citizens, like the entrepreneur Lydia or the distraught jailor. Rather, it is the intervention of the Spirit of Jesus Christ that led to such a deep and abiding relationship between this church and the apostle Paul.

Paul reflects on this relationship as he finds himself restrained in prison with a lot of time to think. I suspect that among other things he must have reviewed the circumstances that led him to being in Philippi in the first place. It's not hard for me to identify with Paul in his experience of discerning God's leading. According to Acts 16, he muddled around much of Asia Minor trying to find that open door before finally a vision came with a loud and clear call from Macedonia. The perspective of hindsight becomes such a gift to seniors like me in helping to recognize where God was leading in the past.

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I recognize that Paul was not elderly, but by the time of writing he was certainly aware that the end of his earthly life could come at any time. I think I hear the tone of an elder as he writes to and about the church at Philippi. Perhaps absence had made the heart grow fonder? In any event, this is a love letter to a significant group of people—a church with whom he feels a deep connection. Rarely do I think of Paul as a feeling person, but it is a character trait I'm drawn to more and more as I age. I note particularly in chapter 1 how he longs to be with them in person, how he affectionately refers to them as "my beloved" (2:12) and "my joy and crown" (4:1).

He sees their relationship as being a partnership. He relies on their prayers and even their financial support, but they need his encouragement and even his exhortations to grow in joyful faith. He addresses his words to "all the saints" along with the leaders—the bishops and deacons. He describes this mutuality by repeatedly referring to "all of you" (1:4, 8, 25, 26). I find here a church with a kind of interdependence and collaboration—an inclusive church for all, and I take that to be for all ages as well.

Growing in faith and faithfulness together

Today I appreciate the ministries and caring provided for my age group, but I am not ready yet to just receive and not have an opportunity to also give. In the past year, I had the opportunity to mentor a student intern, to be part of starting a new parish nurse program, and to participate in a circle of blessing at the ordination of one of our pastors. I am no longer able to contribute in long-term assignments, but such one-time opportunities were such an affirmation for me. Perhaps that reflects my well-ingrained Anabaptist/Mennonite heritage that stresses that as a disciple my faith

needs to be expressed through actions. Therein lies a dilemma: Am I still to be a disciple at my age? If so, then what does the Lord require of me?

Elaborating a little more on the theme of "all of you," I wish that in our society—and particularly in the church—that phrase might mean "all of you *together*." I do enjoy my peers, but I would so much like to have more friendships with those from younger generations. Even as Paul needed Timothy and Epaphroditus and Euodia and Syntyche and Clement, I need young people in my life and church. I need them to strengthen my hope for the future of the church. I need them to help me adapt to changing times by teaching me to sing new songs in a strange and foreign era. I need them to teach me other ways of praying and meditating. I would like to laugh and cry with them even as I would like them to receive my stories and struggles and even to consider my counsel. I admit that I do not always understand their thoughts or how they do things in their tech-savvy world or why we should make changes. Yet I firmly believe in and desire the unity Paul promotes, which is not dependent on total agreement on all matters.

Joy in the struggle

As I read Philippians, I am drawn to how Paul so openly shares about some of the hard stuff he is encountering. I am impressed with his transparency and vulnerability. As I age, I find I have little patience for pretense and sentimental clichés. I long to talk about how to come to terms with losses and how to embrace the road before me, which in all likelihood will include physical limitations. I need to find creative ways to remain connected to those most dear to me who are far removed from me while at the same time learning more generally about being alone without being overcome by loneliness. And what about the goal I'm still pressing toward?

As Paul moves toward the end of this letter, he seems ever mindful that he has not yet arrived as a faithful apostle. He describes suffering, dying and death, and letting go of the past while at the same time holding fast to what he has attained and coming to terms with losses. And still there is more to pursue. Yet amid this sense of urgency he claims to have found contentment. Earlier in my spiritual journey as I entered retirement, I would have identified arriving at contentment as a worthy goal and perhaps even as my ultimate goal. Today it still seems good, but I now see there is something else to strive for that is even better—namely, joy.

For Paul that joy comes in being able "to know Christ and the power of his resurrection" (3:10, 11). An overview of this letter highlights that the main theme or goal is to discover joy. Joy as expressed in its various forms appears sixteen times in Philippians. In some ways, to know joy is an inner experience, a feeling that is mysterious yet known with certainty. It is found in relationship to the Lord, and it is something we actively participate in: "rejoice in the Lord" (3:1; 4:4). At the same time, it is closely tied to relationships in community. It is bound up with praying for one another, serving and caring for each other, welcoming others through genuine hospitality, and delighting in the spiritual growth and faithfulness of others. I personally experience joy, for example, when someone takes the step of expressing their commitment to Jesus Christ through the act of baptism or when I become aware of someone emerging as having the gift of caregiving or worship leading or welcoming strangers. For me this is a new insight: that I can find joy through appreciating what God is doing in and through the lives of others. And that joy can even be multiplied when I respond with thanksgiving directly or in prayer.

Conclusion

I thank you for joining me in my reading of Philippians as I have tried to note some themes that seem particularly relevant to me at my stage of life. The first is my growing awareness of how much I love the church and how much I long to remain meaningfully connected. A second theme is my yearning to share deeply in order to grow in faith and faithfulness. And, finally, there is the theme of the goal of discovering joy!

About the author

Elsie M. Epp was one of the first women to be ordained in what is now MC Canada and served in various pastoral roles for twenty-nine years. She is a former nurse and a retired pastor. Elsie served two congregations—one in Saskatchewan and the other in Ontario—and was a Conference Minister for Saskatchewan. She always worked together with her husband, Delmer Epp. She experienced particular joy through initiating two programs, a parish nurse ministry in a congregation and a bereavement care program for an oncology department in a hospital. She is currently a member of Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Resources for spirituality and aging

An annotated bibliography

Jane Kuepfer and Andy Brubacher Kaethler

***Aging: Growing Old in Church.* By Will Willimon. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. 192 pages. $21.99 (US).**

Will Willimon is a highly respected theologian and retired church leader in the United Methodist Church known for his deep and careful integration of Bible, theology, and pastoral ministry. In *Aging*, Willimon draws on biblical wisdom to speak to contemporary realities of aging, such as vocation, economics, and relationships. For Willimon, both individual faith and the church are resources for aging and retiring "successfully." He does not soften the multitude of challenges of aging, but neither does he soften the power of faith, hope, and wisdom for all who are aging. This book would make a great resource for a Sunday School or sermon series.

***Being with God: The Absurdity, Necessity, and Neurology of Contemplative Prayer.* By A. J. Sherrill. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021. 176 pages. $16.99 (US).**

If you find the Enneagram a helpful tool to better understand yourself as a spiritual and relational being, you may find A. J. Sherrill's *Being with God* a fascinating read. Sherrill weaves together biology with theology and experience of life in contemporary culture to advocate for the value of contemplative prayer. The good news is that you do not need a science or theology degree to understand and appreciate this book. Regardless of one's age, stage in life, or spiritual type, Sherrill winsomely shows that we can all benefit from the practices of slowing down, breathing deeply, and encountering God in prayer.

***Dementia-Friendly Communities: Why We Need Them and How We Can Create Them.* By Susan H. McFadden. Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2021. 240 pages. $35.00 (US).**

Grounded in research into dementia-friendly communities around the world, *Dementia-Friendly Communities* rises above stereotypes and assump-

tions and counters stigma related to dementia. McFadden, who is actively involved in dementia-friendly initiatives in her own community, inspires new ways of thinking about possibilities for ongoing mutuality in relationships in church and community and provides practical examples from her experience. This is an inspiring book for anyone wanting to help build a more dementia-friendly community.

Dignity and Grace: Wisdom for Caregivers and Those Living with Dementia. By Janet L. Ramsey. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2018. 178 pages. $18.99 (US).

As a chaplain, pastoral counselor, family caregiver, and researcher of resilience among older adults, Jan Ramsey writes candidly in *Dignity and Grace* about the challenges of dementia. Concluding each chapter with a meditation on a psalm, she grounds the Christian practices of giving and receiving care in the emotions of the psalmists, from lament to gratitude, and so much in between (disappointment, love, forgiveness, and so on). Stories and quotes from interviews with caregivers build the narrative around the importance of both dignity and grace. Caregivers and those who support them, including pastors and therapists, will appreciate this book.

Lighter as We Go: Virtues, Character Strengths, and Aging. By Mindy Greenstein and Jimmie Holland. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. $18.95 (US).

In *Lighter as We Go*, clinical psychologist and author Mindy Greenstein and geriatric psychiatrist Jimmie Holland bring their expertise from the scientific and medical fields together with ancient wisdom and personal experience to discuss the role of virtue and character in the aging process. These women suggest that while aging includes changes and losses, it also includes new freedoms and insights. By intentionally developing virtues such as transcendence, humor, wisdom, social justice, and courage, we are better able to embrace losses and welcome emerging gifts in aging. The book is filled with useful information, presented in accessible language and stories. While it is not dismissive of faith and religion, the book lacks theological reflection that persons of faith may be looking for. Nevertheless, this is a great resource for individuals or small groups of persons in middle-age and older looking to develop healthy psychological, emotional, and relational practices to embrace aging with fortitude and gratitude.

Ministry with the Forgotten: Dementia through a Spiritual Lens. **By Kenneth Carder. Nashville: Abingdon, 2019. 192 pages. $22.99 (US).**

In *Ministry with the Forgotten*, Kenneth Carder, United Methodist pastor and bishop and theological voice for the church, takes a deep dive into his personal experience of his wife's journey with dementia. He explores, from the inside, what dementia means theologically and the insights his reflection on experience have given him into relationship with God. Honest and real, this book is helpful for the church and its pastors and for all Christ-followers seeking to understand faith that privileges cognition in new ways. Masters of Theological Studies students have appreciated this book immensely.

Reclaiming Joy Together: Building a Volunteer Community of Real Hope for Those with Dementia. **By Daphne Johnston. Montgomery, AL: Respite for All, 2020. 238 pages. $14.99 (US).**

Daphne Johnston has a profound love for people, especially those living with dementia, and has led her church, and now many others, to build volunteer-based communities of friendship and belonging. *Reclaiming Joy Together* is a practical book that shares not only inspirational stories but also guidance for creating such a community in your area. This book can help churches use their assets—space and caring people—to meet a burgeoning social need confidently and enthusiastically, with the inclusive love of God.

You're Only Human: How Your Limits Reflect God's Design and Why That's Good News. **By Kelly M. Kapic. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2022. 272 pages. $24.99 (US).**

For those who are struggling with their finitude—mortality, physical decline, unrealized goals—Kelly Kapic's *You're Only Human* provides a robust and insightful theological account of the contemporary and historical attitudes toward human limits and how to develop healthy dependence on God and others. Kapic addresses questions about aging, including intellectual dimensions, with plenty of references to theological reflections throughout the centuries. Kapic ultimately address some pragmatic questions: Have I done enough? Are the limits of my body bad? Do I need to be part of a church? This book will appeal to those who are looking for a cerebral companion to process everyday challenges of aging.

About the authors

Jane Kuepfer is the Schlegel Specialist in Spirituality and Aging with the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging and Conrad Grebel University College. She is a spiritual director, an ordained minister, and a registered psychotherapist, and she serves as a spiritual care provider in a retirement home. Jane coordinates an annual Spirituality and Aging Seminar and is convening the 2023 International Conference on Ageing & Spirituality.

Andy Brubacher Kaethler is associate professor of Christian formation and culture at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Previously he was a pastor in Mennonite Church Eastern Canada. As he progresses through mid-life himself, he is becoming increasingly attentive to spirituality as a key ingredient for healthy aging.