



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - Home

Ministry with People in the Second Half of Life

Part Two

Click on the table of contents at left for articles.
Or, download a PDF of all articles for offline reading.



The second of a two-part series covering everything from substance abuse, dementia, and Alzheimer's Disease to forgiveness, legacy, narrative theology, and the invaluable role congregations play in older adult ministry.

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - Editorial

EDITORIAL

Chuck Weinrich

With this issue of *Caring Connections*, we are delighted to bring you the second in our two-part series on “Ministry in the Second Half of Life”.

Some of the years in which I worked as a chaplain and supervisor of CPE were hard and challenging: 17 years in a general hospital and 5 at Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin—the latter being the most difficult, as anyone who has worked in or had occasion to utilize a Children’s Hospital can attest. Then I moved to a Geriatric Long Term Care facility: the Village at Manor Park, on the southwest side of Milwaukee, WI. This was a completely different form of ministry—with those in the second half of life (I went from ‘short stories’ to ‘novels’—from being called “Gramps” to being called “Sonny Boy”).

Initially, I enjoyed developing my own ministry “With God’s Oldest Friends.”¹ At the same time, however, I also developed a CPE program focused primarily on geriatric ministry. There was a distinctly different feel to this CPE program. While the students developed their pastoral identities against a backdrop of long-term care and geriatric issues (rather than the backdrop of crisis and tragedy found in a pediatric setting), they also discovered the particular privilege of listening to and learning from “the elders.” They also learned to set aside the urgency and intensity of crisis ministry in order to “hear into voice” (Nelle Morton) the faith of people who had developed, over the years, their understanding about God, grace, commitment and care for fellow humans and all of God’s creation.

This issue of *Caring Connections*—like the previous issue—affords the reader the opportunity to learn from those engaged in a variety of geriatric ministries about other



dimensions of such holy work. Don and I, once again with the assistance of Brian McCaffrey, are pleased to share with you an impressive diversity of articles from a number of colleagues, all of whom are seasoned in the art of spiritual care with/for older adults. We express our deepest gratitude to Darryl Anderson, Nancy Gordon, Donald Koepke, Brian McCaffrey, Jane Thibault, William Randall, William Russell, and Lee and Walt Schoedel for their rich contributions.

Fond Farewells

With this issue of *Caring Connections*, we bid a grateful “Fare well” to Jeanean Merkel. Jeanean has been the designer for our e-magazine since the 2013, Vol. 1. She has utilized her skills in putting together the material we editors sent her, and finding pictures that reflected not only the content, but also the spirit of the articles in each issue. In addition, Jeanean was responsible for designing and implementing a new structure for *Caring Connections*, moving away from a cumbersome 2-column design, meant for hard copies, to the current design, which is easier to utilize in an electronic format. Don and Chuck, along with the Editorial Board, extend our deep gratitude to Jeanean and wish her God’s blessings in her future endeavors.

We also bid farewell and express our profound gratitude to Bruce Pederson. Bruce has served as a faithful member of the *Caring Connections* editorial board since its inception. When, in 2002, a group of representatives from the Chaplains Network (LSA), LCMS, and ELCA met to begin envisioning the possibility of creating an Inter-Lutheran journal by/for those in specialized ministries of pastoral care, counseling and education, Bruce and his wife hosted the group at their home in Minneapolis. Indeed, for over ten years, Bruce has faithfully served as one of the true ‘hosts’ of this shared endeavor, giving it a special home in both his personal and professional life. Many thanks and Godspeed, Bruce.

¹ With God’s Oldest Friends, Simmons, Henry C. and Peters, Mark A. Resource Publications, 2003.

As always, if you haven’t already done so, we hope you will subscribe online to *Caring Connections*. Remember, subscription is free! By subscribing, you assure that you will receive prompt notification when each issue of the journal appears on the *Caring Connections* website. This also helps the editors and the editorial board to get a sense of how much interest is being generated by each issue. We are delighted that the numbers of those who check in is increasing with each new issue. Please visit www.caringconnectionsonline.org ^[1] and click on “Click here for free subscription” to receive automatic notification of new issues..

Finally, when the Inter-Lutheran Coordinating Committee disbanded a few years ago, the money from the “Give Something Back” Scholarship Fund was divided between the ELCA and the LCMS. This endowment makes a limited number of financial awards available to individuals seeking ecclesiastical endorsement and certification/credentialing in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education. Applicants must:

- Have completed one [1] unit of CPE.
- Be rostered or eligible for active roster status in the ELCA or the LCMS.
- Not already be receiving funds from either the ELCA or LCMS national offices.

- Submit an application, along with a financial data form, for committee review.

Applicants must complete the Scholarship Application forms that are available from Judy Simonson [ELCA] or John Fale [LCMS]. Consideration is given to scholarship requests after each application deadline, August 15 and February 15. Email forms to Judith Simonson at jsimonson@pennswoods.net ^[2] and to John Fale at John.Fale@lcms.org ^[3].

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4_editorial

Links:

[1] <http://www.caringconnectionsonline.org/>

[2] <mailto:jsimonson@pennswoods.net>

[3] <mailto:John.Fale@lcms.org>



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - Anderson

Seniors Desire the 3 R's

Darryl Anderson

Throughout several years of ministry in a geriatric setting, I have found that seniors desire some general sensitivity. They want security, peace and respect.

Security of body can embrace having anything from a decent house (shelter) or walking securely (with or without a walker or cane) to having good health care. They want to feel protected – that their physical wellbeing is going to be cared for by those around them. Peace for seniors includes harmony within the family and their living conditions, as well as with friends and organizations. They may not expect to have a perfect world, but they do want to have a sense of calmness and some control. But there are 3 R's they all want to experience.



To one degree or another, nearly all seniors desire respect, regard and reverence. They want to know that they are “somebody,” because they have earned that right by living so many years. They may not be looking for great honor for accomplishments or contributions they have made to this world. They certainly don't want to be put on some isolated pinnacle away from the rest of the world. They do want to still be in the flow of life, involved in daily living. They have achieved one thing for sure: “age.” When you are eighty or ninety, you have “been there; done that” enough times to have earned the right to say “I count – my opinions and thoughts are worth something.”

When you are eighty or ninety, you have “been there; done that”

enough times to have earned the right to say “I count – my opinions and thoughts are worth something.”

The three “R’s” we in our ministries can show to seniors are respect, regard and reverence. Webster notes that respect is “to hold in high regard or show courtesy; further, it is to show consideration for.” Regard is “to look at attentively; to hold in affection and with esteem.” Reverence is “to treat with love and deep caring.”

In the realm of Pastoral Care, I see respecting seniors as initially acknowledging them with respect for their personhood -- they are not just Sam, Peter, Mary, or Mathilda. They are Mr., Mrs., Miss (and many of these women hold their “singleness” with very deep honor), Rev., Dr. or any other title they have. We request seminary students to use such titles when visiting in a nursing home, until the individual gives them permission to do otherwise. If a person asks to be called by their first name, then do so. Otherwise recognize them as someone to be respected. This is a simple, but important way in which we can show our respect.

To regard someone as being of importance, it is necessary to “attend” to them. We often call it “active listening.” Who hasn’t heard that term a few million times? But if we only take the time to really pay attention to seniors, they often have a great deal to share with us. By looking at the person, beyond just the physical being, we are showing affection and a caring attitude. No one wants to be stared at, but they do want to be seen for the individual that they are. They want to be accepted with a sense of caring that goes beyond a “How are you today?” or “What’s new my friend?” They want to be engaged, and to have the opportunity to be involved with another person. We do this when we regard them as we encounter them.

Seniors generally don’t want someone to “bow or curtsy” to them. That’s an oversell, to say the least. It will probably be seen as phony, because it most likely is! However, this doesn’t mean that they don’t want to be held with deep respect, love and esteem. They may even want others to be in awe of the number of years they have “survived.” My father-in-law often remarked, “It’s not hard getting old, it’s hard being old.” Once someone is in their later years of life, they like to be recognized for having gotten that far. To acknowledge their years with courtesy and dignity is to say you believe they are worthy of reverence.

No one wants to be stared at, but they do want to be seen for the individual that they are.

I learned a very important lesson one time, when I thought I was showing great respect, regard and reverence: upon meeting a lady who I understood to be 101 years old, walking down the hall in an independent living apartment building. I stopped to talk. My remark was something like, "You must have seen unbelievable changes in your 101 years. Could you tell me about them?" Her response set me back, "Oh, no, young man. I'm not 101. I'm 101 and a half!" Then with a smile on her face she said, "Remember when you were 5 or so and it was important to say you were 5 and a half or so? Well, when you are this age every little bit really counts!"

Respect, regard, and reverence: seniors desire to get them...and they ought to get them!

After graduating from Concordia College, Seward, NE ('65) and Concordia Theological Seminary, Springfield, IL ('72), Darryl began his ministry as a chaplain for institutions caring for the developmentally disabled. For the last 26 years, then he has served in the area of Older Adult Ministries. Presently he serves through Lutheran Senior Services (their Home Office is in St. Louis, Mo.) as the Director of Pastoral Care. This RSO serves some 8,000 residents and clients in Missouri and Illinois. The intent is to assist "Older Adults to Live Life to the Fullest." (John 10:10).

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4_anderson



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - Gordon

Creating a Story of Hope in the Face of Dementia

Nancy Gordon

If asked to name what disease they fear the most, one in five Americans names Alzheimer's. Only cancer is named more often.

Just note the momentary panic that we feel when a word or a name is on the “tip of the tongue,” when we can’t find our keys or our glasses, when we realize we’ve forgotten to pay a bill or make an important phone call. We joke about these “senior moments” and fervently hope that it’s just a temporary lapse, not the beginning of something more serious. So what is it that we are so afraid of? Dementia is an umbrella term describing a variety of diseases and conditions that develop when nerve cells in the brain die or no longer function normally. Alzheimer’s disease accounts for 60 to 80 percent of dementia cases. Other types of dementia are vascular dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies, mixed dementia, and Parkinson’s disease.



Alzheimer’s disease and dementias with other causes rob those afflicted of short-term memory and the ability to think logically and coherently. While memory loss is often the most worrisome first sign, it is the lack of cognitive function and ability to problem-solve and find one’s way that become most difficult for the persons afflicted, their family, and their friends. Loss of cognition is also often accompanied by personality changes and life as it’s been known changes incrementally both for the persons afflicted and for all who care for them. It is a difficult and often heart-breaking journey as persons we have known and loved no longer recognize us and can’t remember where they are or even who they are.

We live in a society that some have labeled as “hyper-cognitive” – a society that values the ability to think and remember as the highest good and defines our worth as persons based on our cognitive abilities. Churches too value being smart and, like our wider culture, we don’t like to think about growing older and tend to deny that we are all aging. But the fact remains, we are an aging population and as a result, the number of people afflicted by Alzheimer’s disease and other age-related dementias is growing. In 1900 only 5 percent of the population was older than sixty-five; by 2008 about 13 percent was over sixty-five, and by 2030 that number will be almost 20 percent of our population. Today around one in eight persons over sixty-five has Alzheimer’s, with the total number estimated to be 5.2 million. An additional 200,000 individuals are afflicted with an early onset form of the disease. These numbers will continue to grow as more baby boomers join their parents in the over sixty-five category.

We can ... create a new story of hope by remembering as God remembers and loving as Jesus loved.

In this context churches have a unique opportunity to tell a new story and expand understandings about Alzheimer’s disease and other age-related dementias. While much money is being spent on research, there is no cure in sight. We can either succumb to the dread and fear that is rampant around us, or we can embark on the journey of understanding these dementias and create a new story of hope by remembering as God remembers and loving as Jesus loved.

When I was first working in a large retirement community, a co-worker lamented the changes she was seeing in residents and expressed fear about Alzheimer’s disease. I said to her, “We are more than our minds.” I don’t know where that idea came from exactly, but it was something I became more and more convinced of as I worked with the cognitively impaired.

Every chaplain who has worked in long-term care can tell stories of residents who seem not to be present during a worship service and then who come alive, usually while singing an old hymn. Everything about their affect changes – they are present, singing with the group and giving praise to God. Such experiences have convinced me that it does make a difference to bring spiritual and pastoral care to persons with cognitive impairments, and that it doesn’t really matter whether they remember the experience ten minutes later. What matters is that in that moment we are all connecting with one another and with God.

Early in my work with older adults I participated in a program on gerontological pastoral care and the major assignment was to write a theology of aging. My theology started with: “We are created in the image of God and we bear that image for our whole lives.”

... we are persons of value because we bear God's image, and that's enough.

I'm still unpacking the meaning of that, but it helped frame my work by reminding me that the functioning of our minds doesn't determine the status of our personhood – we are persons of value because we bear God's image, and that's enough. While our minds have often been the focus of learning about and knowing God, the mystical tradition within the church reminds us that the soul is the focus of God's activity in our lives. We don't lose our souls when our mind declines. Bearing the image of God speaks to our capacity for relationship with God and with others. Even when we are suffering from severe cognitive impairment we are still able to love and be loved. We are still capable of relationship. And while we tend to equate losing cognitive functions with losing everything, even when our minds aren't working we still have spirit and body and emotions – all of which are pathways for relating to God and to each other.

Our own fear and dread often hamper our ability to be present with those who are no longer cognitively intact. And since there is no medical cure, we can feel hopeless and helpless in facing the reality of this disease. How can we make any difference? And we wonder if there is any value in providing care and presence for someone who will not know us or remember that we've been there.

A colleague I worked with told a great story of going to the Brookfield Zoo with a group of persons from a memory care unit at the nursing home where he worked as chaplain. He told how they got on the bus on a perfect August day in Chicago – it wasn't humid, it wasn't too hot, and the sun was shining. They rode a tram around the zoo seeing all the animals, enjoying the sights, sounds, and smells. They stopped on their tram ride and got off in a picnic area and had lunch. They got back on the tram, finished their journey through the zoo, and took the bus back to the memory care unit. As they walked through the doors they were greeted by staff who said, "How was it?" "Did you have a good time?" My colleague realized by the puzzlement on the residents' faces that they had no memory of all the fun, laughter, and sights they had experienced that day. He wondered, "Does it really make a difference that we do things like this?"

One of the gifts of Alzheimer's is that it reminds us that we all have only this present moment.

He voiced that question to the daughter of one of the residents who had been on the trip with them. She said, "It does make a difference and I'll tell you how I know. I come every Sunday morning and take my mom to church and out to lunch. Later that day or the next day she won't remember that we've done it. But if I have to miss a Sunday, the staff tells me that by the following Tuesday she's climbing the walls. Even though she doesn't

remember, what we do together on Sunday affects her spirit and makes a difference in the quality of her life.”

Could it be that some of us are called to remember those who only have the present moment, and be there with them in that moment? One of the gifts of Alzheimer’s is that it reminds us that we all have only this present moment. In responding to those with this disease we are invited to leave behind our own priorities and distractedness and be fully present with them in that moment in their world. Making that effort is easier if we assume a radical equality between us – if we go into the encounter expecting to receive as well as to give, expecting to learn as well as to teach.

In the Hebrew Scriptures we have story after story of the ways God remembers the people of Israel. For them to be forgotten by God was to die, and to be remembered by God was to live and to thrive. They experienced God’s remembering as actions on their behalf. When “God remembered Noah...God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided” (Genesis 8:1). This is just one example of God’s remembering that involved action, not an intellectual retrieval of a memory. God remembered God’s people in ways that were lifesaving, life giving, and that came at the time they were needed.

I think that we are called to remember others, particularly those who can no longer remember for themselves, the way that God remembers us. We are called to respond to the needs of those with varying levels of cognitive impairment in ways that are lifesaving, life giving, and come at the moment of need. We can only do this when we put aside our fears and are willing to listen to those with the disease and to their closest caregivers. We can only do this when we realize that whether our conversations, deeds, and activities are remembered by recipients or not, in the end it’s not about us – it’s about them and how our presence enriches their lives and touches their spirits. It means trusting that even when we don’t see “results,” the Spirit is at work in ways that are beyond our understanding. It’s being willing to be uncomfortable when our primary method of communication—lots of words—doesn’t work anymore, and finding new, more creative ways of communicating our love and God’s love and care. It’s being committed to finding ways to affirm our cognitively impaired friends and to include them in the life of the community of faith.

So what can congregations do? Here are some suggestions.

- Learn about Alzheimer’s disease and other dementias. Be intentional in learning how to respond to those affected in ways that meet them where they are. Volunteer at a memory care unit or an adult day services program to learn ways of interacting with and providing meaningful activities for those with advanced forgetfulness.
- Maintain social and spiritual contact with persons diagnosed. Be creative and find supportive ways to enable those with cognitive impairment to continue to serve in ways that they have served. Include them and their family in as many of the events they’ve attended for as long as possible.
- Offer regular respite care to families in the congregation who are caring for someone with Alzheimer’s disease.
- Provide support groups for those with the disease and support groups for caregivers. Training to lead such support groups is offered by the Alzheimer’s Association.

- Bring worship to persons who can no longer come to church in their home or in the care center where they live. See such worship ministry as a way to do outreach and take it to care centers and nursing homes in your area.
- Advocate for funding for programs for persons with Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. Community-based adult day services programs are often hit by budget cuts.

As we intentionally remember those with advanced forgetfulness we will begin to create a new story around Alzheimer's disease and other dementias. It's a story where relationships change but don't end because one person is afflicted. It's a story that has room for hope, for humor, for comfort. I have a social worker friend who recently offered a series of classes to her congregation around these issues. One of the participants was a man who had recently been diagnosed as being in the beginning stages of the disease. After one session, she asked him what it was like for him to be there. "It makes me feel comforted," he said.

His church was learning about his disease and ways they could minister to him and to his primary caregivers. It gave him hope that as the disease progresses they will not be abandoned, but they will be remembered in concrete, life-giving ways. His church is on the way of creating and telling a new hopeful and loving story about aging and cognitive impairment – and it's my hope that many more will join them.

To Learn More about Alzheimer's and Other Dementias

The *New York Times* has a web-based collection of information and videos about the disease here that includes a comprehensive overview of the disease, tips for caregivers, and information about research. One of the most helpful sections for those seeking to minister to those affected is the video Patient Voices: Alzheimer's Disease.

The Alzheimer's Association enhances care and support, advances research, and advocates on behalf of those with the disease. Their website provides educational materials, access to local chapters, and support groups. They publish a yearly statistical summary about the prevalence and impact of the disease. The "2014 Alzheimer's Disease Facts and Figures" can be found here.

Resources for Congregations

No Act of Love Is Ever Wasted: The Spirituality of Caring for Persons with Dementia, by Jane Marie Thibault and Richard L. Morgan (Upper Room Books, 2009). This book provides an accessible overview of the disease and creative ways that individuals and congregations can minister to those affected.

Aging Together: Dementia, Friendship and Flourishing Communities, by Susan H. McFadden and John T. McFadden (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). Written by a psychologist (Susan) and a pastor (John), this book invites congregations to be communities of friendship that intentionally include those with dementia. They speak to the dread and the fear that surround the diseases of dementia and how congregations can become places of hope and support by building communities of friendship. The key concepts of this book are summarized by John for congregations in a pamphlet, *Aging*,

Dementia, and the Faith Community: Continuing the Journey of Friendship that can be found in a downloadable PDF [here](#).

California Lutheran Homes Center for Spirituality and Aging has information on “Sensing the Sacred,” an award winning worship program for persons with Alzheimer’s disease that could be used by congregations in a worship ministry. Kits for worship modules and training videos are available. Read about it [here](#). The Center website also has other articles and resources for congregations on ministry to older adults and to those with Alzheimer’s specifically. And you can subscribe to the Spirit e-newsletter which includes resources for congregational older adult ministry in each issue.

A version of this article originally appeared in the Oct. 2012 issue of The Covenant Companion.

Nancy Gordon is the director of the California Lutheran Homes Center for Spirituality and Aging. Previously she worked in libraries and historical agencies until attending seminary in mid-life. She is ordained in the Evangelical Covenant Church and has served as associate pastor of Winnetka Covenant Church in Wilmette, IL and as director of Growth Opportunities at Friendship Village of Schaumburg, IL, a large continuing care retirement community. The Growth Opportunities program she developed contained spiritual life, activity/recreation, arts, fitness, and life-long learning components. It was her charge to put a spiritual foundation under all the programs, believing that each of them had the potential to touch residents’ spirits in positive ways. While at Friendship Village she developed “Sensing the Sacred” a worship program for those with Alzheimer’s and other dementias. She lives in San Dimas, CA with her cat, Emerald, and is joyfully awaiting the birth of her first grandchild in April 2015..

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4_gordon



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - Koepke

Why Older Adult Ministry?

Donald R. Koepke

The boomers are coming. The boomers are coming. The boomers are here!

There are so many older adults

Census data tells the story. From 2000 to 2010, those people age 45 to 64 (the boomers) increased 31.5%. The next highest increase was those 65+, who increased over the same period by 15.1% (source: US Census at www.census.gov/2010census/) It is projected that by 2025 there will be more persons 85 years old (the boomers again) than 5 year olds.

Those who work in and study gerontology have heard for the last ten years that the boomers are coming. The boomers are that huge demographic bubble of people that has affected every portion of our society as they have marched through the life cycle. When they were young, churches discovered youth ministry. When I was a kid I remember my home church debating over hiring a youth minister. "Why a youth minister?" was the cry. "Our youth already have a pastor, our pastor." But the other side of the argument stated: "It may be true that our youth already have a pastor, but there are so many of them. Our pastor is overloaded already." A third argument went this way, "The youth are the future of the church. But this bunch are asking different questions and getting into things that I don't really understand. We need to hire someone who can relate to youth so that we can keep the youth in our church."



When the boomers reached marriage and childbearing years, the church discovered family ministry. Gone were the times when the family just 'naturally' stayed together. At this point, the questions that the boomers had when they were young spilled over into relational life. Again, churches had a large group within the ranks that needed help in a way that was new. Now those issues were front and center.

No longer is life's question: "What can I do in life?", but it has expanded to the questions, "Has my life been worth it? Have I lived my life doing what I want? Have I lived with personal integrity?"

Then the boomers discovered a new freedom as children left the nest and they had more expendable income. At the same time, there was a hunger within the generation that would not go away. So the church discovered reading self help books, organizing adult retreats, and adult education. So, why have an older adult ministry? The boomers are getting older. They are now between 50 and 70 years old. And as the noted developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson, has written about the eight stages of human development, the final stage begins between age 50 and 60. No longer is life's question: "What can I do in life?", but it has expanded to the questions, "Has my life been worth it? Have I lived my life doing what I want? Have I lived with personal integrity?" This transition has often been called mid-life crisis and has evoked many a stereotype of older men suddenly buying a red Jaguar convertible, or running off with a beautiful and much younger woman.

Well, the boomers are not just coming, they are here; and, when added to earlier generations that are living longer, the number of older adults becomes huge and growing.

So why older adult ministry? Perhaps it is because, since WWII, the church has historically followed the footsteps of this generation and has learned lessons that were at first new, untried, and uncomfortable; but, the church learned and grew spiritually as well in the ability to effectively serve others.

Because Older Adults are Asking the Right Questions

When a person reaches older adulthood, they naturally begin to ask the questions that the church has encouraged them to ask their entire life. As noted above, Erik Erikson's work identifies the eighth expression of the human person is the question of integrity vs. despair. From my experience, engaging older adults both in the parish and within retirement communities, this inquiry begins as a small voice proverbially "in the back of the head." At first, it is a nagging question; but, as aging continues and chronic physical and mental conditions arise, along with the loss of loved ones due to death and/or resettlement, it becomes louder and louder. To be sure, the nagging-self can be ignored or even denied. People have done this for years, refusing to go through the anguish that is

required for reflecting on the meaning of one's life. The question of integrity is often drowned out by issues of education, employment and the development of a fulfilling family structure. This big question can also be overwhelmed by the challenge of caring for a loved one.

When a person reaches older adulthood, they naturally begin to ask the questions that the church has encouraged them to ask their entire life.

But the church has always challenged participants, from adolescence through adulthood and into maturity, with these very issues.

"If any would wish to follow me they must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me." (Mark 8:34 RSV)

"The first commandment is you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is like the first: you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37 RSV)

"Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness and all this things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:33 RSV)

"And when the Lord your God brings you into the land which he swore to your fathers, to Aabraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you with great and goodly cities, which you did not build, and houses full of all good things, which you did not fill, and cisterns hewn out, which you did not hew, and vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and when you eat and are full, then take heed lest you forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Deuteronomy 6:10 – 12 RSV)

And while that challenge is heard and interpreted internally by all people - no matter what their age - it is in adulthood that this question becomes paramount. As eyesight wanes, hearing becomes less acute, and strength is reduced, the questions of "Who am I?" and "What am I?" take center stage. Many older adults are still captured by the way that they have felt accomplished and valuable when they were younger. Our society still values youth, because it takes the strength of youth to continue to be a productive part of our society, and productivity can often seem the only thing that counts in the eyes of our culture. I wish I had a dime for every time I have heard older adults lament: "Why doesn't God take me home? I can't DO anything anymore." Their emphasis, their search for worth, remains centered on 'doing' (Erikson's seventh stage), rather than 'being' (eighth stage). No wonder that there are so many despairing older adults today. They are looking for worth in the wrong place. They need to hear, want to hear, what God has always said to

them: "I love you not because of what you can do or what you don't do. I love you because you are. I love you just because you are alive, just as I will love you when you are dead."

The challenges of aging drive people to ask the question of integrity, a fact that is like gold to the church.

This message from God is the essential teaching of the church. It is the question that older adults inherently ask, and there are many whose spirituality (trust in God) allows them to ask the big question, "Have I lived my life with integrity?" without fear of what they might discover, because they are grounded in God's love, guidance and forgiveness, and because of their experience with God, not just their thoughts about God. The challenges of aging drive people to ask the question of integrity, a fact that is like gold to the church.

Strategies for Addressing Integrity

Life Review

Older adults like to talk about the old days. I believe that it is because they are trying to put the pieces of their life together so that they might see the whole picture. Viktor Frankl, the noted Jewish Psychiatrist who survived the Nazi death camps, said, "We do not have memories, we are our memories." Since, according to Frankl, we remember only those happenings that are meaningful, then our memory records how and why God has sculpted us to be the persons that we are today. Thus, intentionally digging into memory is to give voice to our person, who we are, who we have become.

There are many life review resources available to assist in this process. A simple one is Richard Morgan's *Remembering Your Story*, which gives twelve strategies that can be used at luncheons or small groups because of their accessibility and depth. One of Morgan's strategies, for example, suggests the development of a life-line from birth to the present, noting above the line important events in one's life while below the line provides opportunity for identifying how our view of God and self has developed over the years. Once completed, it is important for participants to share their story with at least one other person whom they trust. The real power of the exercise is found in sharing and not only in writing it out. In the sharing new thoughts and insight often arise naturally.

Book Studies

Older adults might have more time to read. Why not offer a study of a book that explores being an older adult? Books that I would recommend are:

Winter Grace, by Kathleen Fisher, the best Christian theology of aging I have read.

What are Older People For? How Elders will Save the World, by William Thomas MD. The author is serious about the tag line: How Elders will save the world, making this accessible

book particularly interesting reading. Autumn Wisdom, by James Miller, a book providing in-depth insights for group conversation in segments of two pages each.

Bible Study

This strategy is obviously something into which any church can sink its teeth. Many older adults have been part of such studies their entire life. But older adult Bible Study can be different. Instead of a focus upon gathering information, why not offer a Bible study that explores personal beliefs and perspectives? This form of study is based upon a belief that, while content is important, older adults, because of their inherent need to explore personal integrity, can productively respond to the Scriptures as they experience the passage. A simple but profound method of leading such a study begins with participants being given the Scripture text printed in one column on a two-column page (To accomplish this, download the text from your favorite Bible website, then in your tool bar “click page layout,” followed by “columns.” Finally, click “2” and you’ve done it) Give participants time to read the text silently (usually about 10 minutes). Invite them to simply observe the text, looking for words or phrases they believe to be important to the text. Note also any change in the persons in the text. What are thoughts or words they wish to know more about (This first step allows even a shy person to be able to participate).

The next step is to ask for their observations. There can be a tendency to slip into the next step, which is interpretation, but the leader must help the group remain focused on simply sharing observations [This step, usually taking 20 minutes or so (depending on the size and the insights of the group), allows persons who have not participated in Bible study much to be on a par with those who are veterans].

The third step is interpretation. What is the text telling us about God and/or the human condition? What insights for life are shared? This portion can take up to another 20 minutes.

Finally, for about 10 minutes, the group explores meanings and applications. What does each person glean out of this text, its content and interpretations? How do they respond to the character of God, as demonstrated in the text? Do they see themselves in the text? How and why? Conclude the study in a prayer circle, offering a heartfelt expression of gratitude for the presence of God’s Spirit in their midst.

An Invaluable Resource: The American Society on Aging (ASA)

The people within ASA taught me just about everything that I know about aging, save for my own encounters with older adults themselves.

After 27 years I left parish ministry. TMI! I ended up in a year of chaplaincy training at the UCLA Medical Center. Following training, I worked for a few months with the VA in West Los Angeles and then as Harbor Chaplain for Lutheran Maritime Ministry in LA and Long Beach. Then I was hired by California Lutheran Homes as a chaplain.

I was totally ignorant of ministry with older adults, even though the parishes I served had many such people in them. However, to my surprise I found the retirement community to be the most theologically alive place I have ever experienced. There the issues of God’s love, presence, hope and fear, were constant companions to the residents as they sought

to make sense of what was happening to them. I longed for a wider view that could become a guide to what I was watching all around me. Enter ASA.

ASA, more specifically the constituent group within ASA called the Forum on Religion, Spirituality and Aging (FORSA), became primary in my journey into gerontology. I met long time leaders such as Stephen Sapp, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Miami, Marty Richards, a Master of Social Work from Washington State and a Lutheran, and also James Ellor, now Professor of Social Work at Baylor University. FORSA is a focal point for persons of all disciplines related to aging who are interested in exploring the value of spirituality in the lives of their residents/patients/clients. Marty Richards encouraged me to develop a workshop for the ASA Annual Conference. Jim Ellor asked me to review articles for the Journal for Religion, Spirituality and Aging. Stephen Sapp, also a Presbyterian pastor, helped me apply my religious perspectives to people who might not be religious. ASA and FORSA have been critical for me becoming who I am today. So, what are some of the perks I have discovered in becoming a member of ASA/FORSA?

- The annual conference. You are surrounded by 3000 of your peers from every form of service provision with older adults. There are hundreds of workshops from which to choose and several 'plenary' events featuring formative presenters in the field of aging. One of the conference tracks is Spirituality and Religion, designed by the Forum on Religion, Spirituality and Aging (FORSA). Each year FORSA sponsors an all-day themed conference within the ASA conference. Examples of themes are: "Dementia Care" (2013) and "Suffering" (2014).
- Free webinars are sponsored by various constituent groups. In 2014-2015 FORSA is sponsoring two on The Affordable Care Act and spirituality. But there are also mental health, aging in community (the parish?) and Senior Center offerings, all of which are helpful in stimulating thoughts and ideas for parish ministry with the elderly.
- ASA publications: Aging Today is a monthly 'newspaper' that contains information and ideas from many disciplines of service, whereby you can keep up with the cutting edge of aging services around the country. Generations is a themed quarterly journal. Many issues are appropriate for parish ministry. The ASA website contains articles from a variety of persons, some of which are organized by a constituent group such as FORSA. Finally, there are the ASA Blogs, containing discussions about specific issues or needs. The ASA website is www.asaging.org.

One last time: Why an older adult ministry? Because there are so many older adults, and they are living into the very same yearning for meaning as that which lies at the heart of the church's mission.

Donald Koepke is an ordained Pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and is Director Emeritus of the California Lutheran Home Center for Spirituality and Aging. A nationally known presenter on spirituality and its effects on aging he is also editor of Ministering to Older Adults: The Building Blocks and also The Essential Spirit: Providing Wholistic Services To and With Older Adults as well as articles and chapters in several periodicals and books.

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4_koepke



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - McCaffrey

Who Will I Be When I Die?^{*1}

Nurturing a Second Half of Life Spirituality

Brian McCaffrey

Our negative feelings about encountering limits, loss and death affect our feelings about aging.

The messages regarding aging that we receive from society involve being over the hill and the loss of worth. Often, the spiritual distress that may bring an individual to talk to their pastor, or the circumstance that may bring a pastor to talk to a parishioner, is a “loss of self”, which manifests in loss of hope, purpose / meaning, connection, and/or ability. While there are triggers to these feelings throughout life, they are ever present in later life:



- The last child leaving home, or retirement, may have a profound impact on our sense of worth, purpose, status, and role.
- The kids came and TOLD me they were taking my keys and driver's license. Who do they think they are? I've driven since I was 14 years old.
- We have been married for 54 years. We can't do this alone. The kids are busy with their own lives and live too far away, and we can't afford the needed nursing care.

An encounter with our own mortality prompts at least three common responses: an attempt to recapture the security of the known past (what often gets called a midlife crisis), an attempt at freezing our identity in the present (the “lalalala” of denial), or a willingness

to break out of the established assumptions and expectations. It is this breaking open that often marks the transformation of second half of life spirituality. In *Falling Upwards: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*², Richard Rohr, following the work of Carl Jung, describes life as divided into two halves. Many people become stuck their whole lives in the first half in which their identity is formed from the outside-in - gathering pieces from their communities as the outer shell of identity. Second half of life spirituality becomes the empowerment of the inner life; one fashions their own identity from the inside-out.

I've always been attracted to a quote by Kluckhohn & Murray (1948) which stated that, "Every human being is:

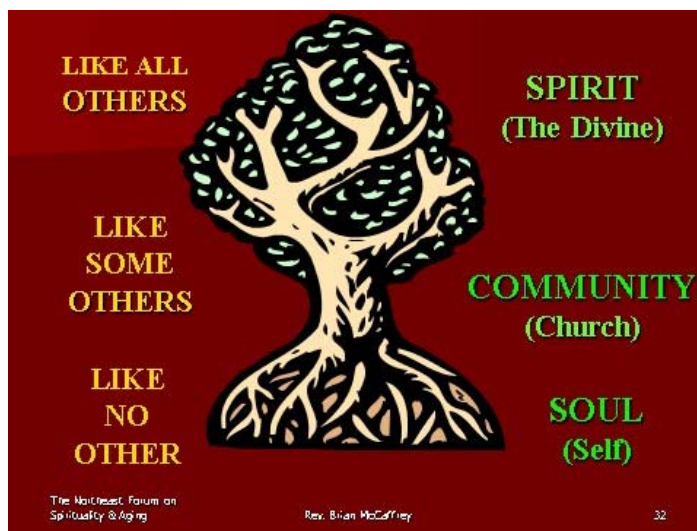
1. Like all others (the human nature level)
2. Like some others (individual and group differences)
3. Like no others (individual uniqueness)"³

I'd like to overlay Kluckhohn and Murray with some thoughts from James Hillman and Thomas Moore⁴. Although the words soul and spirit are often viewed as synonyms, psychologist James Hillman argues that "they can refer to antagonistic components of a person." Summarizing Hillman's views, author and psychotherapist Thomas Moore associates spirit with afterlife, cosmic issues, idealistic values and hopes, universal truths, while placing soul in the thick of things: in the repressed, in the shadow, in the messes of life, in illness, in the pain and confusion of love.

The image that I have created as an illustration is a tree; the things of the Spirit are represented by the upper strata of the leaves stretched out to receive the sun and the rain transforming the Light into its lifeblood, while the hidden underground roots represent the Soul with its ability to take every up, down, twist, and turn; transforming the manure of life into fertilizer, which stimulates growth.

Who we are is often defined in the first half of life by our exterior relationships—the trunk of the tree.

From the time we are born we are bombarded with stimuli; so much so, that we can't take it all in. We develop filters that are shaped by our families (and later our peers) as to what we will consider important and what we ignore. Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman described this phenomena in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*⁵. This includes our sense of identity, and our faith values. As this knowledge base is relational, it should also be seen as fluid. However, in every culture there are established traditions as to roles within society. These roles help to construct the script of our life; the expectations placed upon children, men, and women. These roles have included student, worker, professional, spouse, father, mother, and retiree. I believe that these pieces align with what The spirituality for the first half of life stresses our learning to live together; well illustrated by the Ten Commandments. In the first half of life



there is an assumed clarity of a concrete answer that fits the question: a yes or no, a right or wrong.

Second half of life spirituality becomes the empowerment of the inner life; one fashions their own identity from the inside-out.

The other huge component of our story is time.

Our cultural time is linear, in the Greek Chronos. It is the time line shared by everyone of a certain age.

THE GI GENERATION 1905-1925

29 million (The most affluent generation we'll see for a long time.) Great Depression & WWII

THE SILENT GENERATION 1926-45

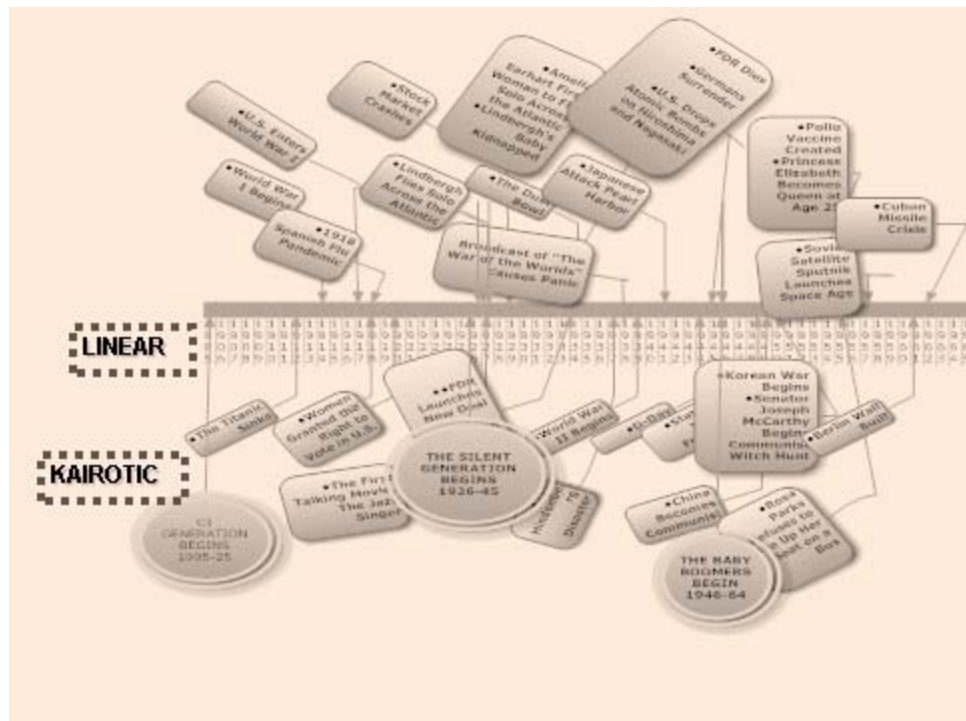
30 million They too are shaped by the Great Depression and WWII

THE BABY BOOMERS 1946-1964

78 million Cold War, Korean Police Action, & Viet Nam War, Most highly educated generation ever – massive influence on American culture, economics, & politics. “best described as the complete opposite of everything valued by the GI Generation.”

Along that time line there will be events which become milestones in the life of an individual. They may be shared (such as a graduation, or a death within the community), but the meaning given by the individual makes it into an event experienced in terms of before and after; whose Greek term is Kairos—these are the unique moments.

The church calendar is cyclical – repeating the same



TIME = CHANGE

season and themes every twelve months. But every twelve months we are in a different place along our timeline and we may be in a different place regarding milestone events, so while the same themes may come around, we are in a totally different place as to our perspective; thus, we may be experiencing them with new ears and eyes.

□ **The combination of time**
 □ **And experience moves us along**
 □ **When we add reflection we may gain a new**
 □ **Perspective**

- **Change (Growth?)**
- **(Wisdom?)**

The Rev. Brian McCaffrey
 Spirituality & Aging

The Northeast Forum on
 Rev. Spirituality & Aging

42

I identify the three types of time with the three aspects of our being human.

- The Cyclical Time of the Church (and Agricultural) calendar I associate with the Spirit, the Universal Presence of God – I am like all others.
- The Chronos or Linear Time of the various cohorts is the cultural time of Community / Church – I am like some others.
- The Kairotic Time of personal experience and meaning is the Unique Creation of the Soul – I am like no other.

At each of these levels we are able to develop a narrative that offers us a place to meet the struggles of life.^{6 7} Twenty to thirty years have been added to our life expectancy in the last century; that increased time is, generally unscripted; a transition from the establishment of the outer shell to the development of an inner life. If we can integrate the various pieces into a whole we achieve the wisdom that Erik and Joan Erikson attribute to the 8th stage of growth, Integrity vs Despair and Disgust.

As pastoral care providers, I believe we can tip the scale toward integration by encouraging a narrative perspective of Pilgrimage rather than simply journey. While I have often been known to say “Life Is A Journey” or even “Faith Is A Journey” I have lately been attempting to change my use of language. Journey can simply be a movement from point A (birth) to point B (death) but a Pilgrimage is understood as having an intentional purpose of spiritual growth. Do I invite God into the conversation concerning “Now what?” Can I allow myself to playfully imagine that God may have a bucket list for me? If I am encouraged to see the second half of life as one that involves spiritual growth, I am given an alternative to the frail obsolescence of our cultural narrative.

However, we need to develop a broader palate to work with and a greater nuanced understanding of integration. Below are two diagrams regarding our movement toward ultimate meaning, developed by Dr. Rev. Elizabeth MacKinlay at the Center for Aging & Pastoral Studies at <http://www.centreforageing.org.au/html/resources.htm> [1].

Viktor Frankl would say that in all of us is a Will to Meaning.⁸ We take the many fragments and put them together to create a storyline. When we change perspective, the many pieces rearrange themselves, so that some experiences which had been forgotten are moved to the forefront. So, shifting from a cultural story of loss and shame might - from a perspective of Spirit - become a story of grace and acceptance or from the perspective of Soul become a story of persistence and creativity. While retelling my story through reminiscence may allow me to choose a different attitude as to how I will approach an unknown future. In the process, we have perhaps wrestled with an angel refusing to let go until we are blessed.

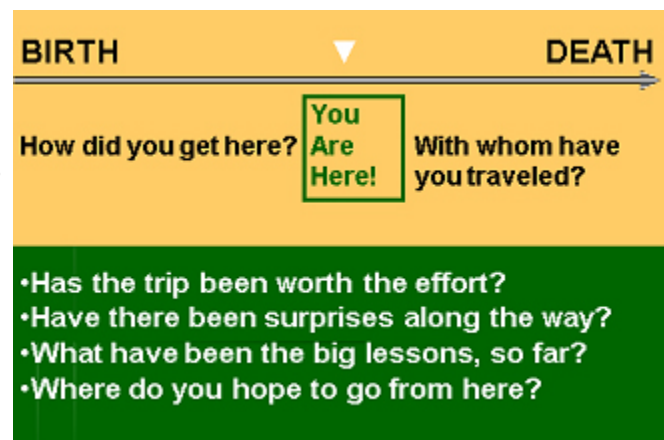


Here are some exercises That can be used with parishioners, patients, clients, or yourself:

One exercise I enjoy using is to REVIEWING YOUR LIFE: Looking at our past with what we know NOW!⁹ Create a sheet with four columns:

Here are some more helpful questions:

1. Is there any unfinished business that I need to address?
2. Are there any broken relationships that need mending? (See Janet Ramsey's article on forgiveness in this issue)
3. What have been some of my various roles in life?
4. What are some of the roles I no longer live?
5. What roles have I kept?
6. Looking honestly, which would I call healthy and unhealthy? (The shadow is the part of ourselves we often don't want to look at because we wish it was not there. We need to name it to integrate it.)
7. As an older person my role in life has changed from _____ to _____.



If we see our new role as negative...then "We need to re-frame our view of aging so we honor later life as a pilgrimage."

Using cognitive re-structuring, I choose to view my current and future life, that is my aging, through the framework or metaphor of pilgrimage, interpreting everything that happens to me as part of my pilgrimage into the Mystery of the consciousness of God.¹⁰

Create an Inner Life Survey.



Another worthwhile resource is [Seasons of Caring](#) [2].

What kind of “bucket list” would God create for me?

Footnotes

¹ This article title is taken from a book by Carol Boden referenced in Elizabeth MacKinlay & Corinne Trevitt's *Finding Meaning in the Experience of Dementia: The Place of Spiritual Reminiscence Work*

² Rohr does an excellent job of describing the differences between the spiritual needs of the first and second half of life with implications for ministry.

³ Clyde Kluckhohn & Henry Alexander Murray; *Personality in nature, society, and culture* (1948)

⁴ James Hillman, *A Blue Fire* (1989), *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling* (1997), *The Force of Character: And the Lasting Life* (1999), and *Thomas Moore Care of the Soul: Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness* (1992)

* The title is from a book by Carol Boden (1998 Harper Collins) referenced in Elizabeth MacKinlay & Corinne Trevitt's *Finding Meaning in the Experience of Dementia: The Place of Spiritual Reminiscence Work* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers)2012

⁵ Berger directly addresses the implications for religious training in *The Sacred Canopy*.

⁶ There is a rather new field of “personology” within developmental psychology that argues that our identity and reality is shaped by the way we tell our internal story: Dan McAdams, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, and several volumes

by Gary Kenyon and William Randolph (see this volume). This has given rise to Narrative Therapy and Narrative Gerontology.

⁷ The Centre for Ageing and Pastoral Studies (CAPS)
(<http://www.centreforageing.org.au/html/resources.htm> ^[1])

⁸ Frankl is best known for his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. But his theory regarding a Will to Meaning is contained in all of his books including *The Doctor and The Soul*, *The Will To Meaning*, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, and *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*.

⁹ Developed from Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's *From Aging To Sage-ing*.

¹⁰ Jane Thibault and Richard Morgan, *Pilgrimage Into The Last Third of Life*.

Brian McCaffrey is a chaplain at LutheranCare in Clinton, NY. He is the chair of the Northeast Forum on Spirituality and Aging, the Second Half of Life Ministry Team of the Upstate NY Synod of the ELCA, serves on the coordinating council of Sage-ing International, LSA's Chaplains' Network, and the editorial board of Caring Connections.

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4_mccaffrey

Links:

[1] <http://www.centreforageing.org.au/html/resources.htm>

[2] <http://lutheranservices.org/sites/default/files/SeasonsOfCaring.pdf>



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - Thibault

Gospel Promises for Later Life

Jane M. Thibault

“May you live to be 120!”

I often use this age-old Jewish birthday blessing as a provocative beginning for the workshops and retreats I offer older adults. The response is usually a loud groan. I follow with a question – “If, on your next birthday someone wished you 120 years, would you consider it to be a birthday blessing or a curse?”

Usually three-fourths of the participants state it would be a curse; rarely more than a fourth claim they would love to be 120. Since research has found that the natural lifespan actually is 120 years, I proceed to explore with them both their fears (curses) and their hopes (blessings) involved in experiencing such a long life. The hopes are relatively few and almost always

include: “I want to see what the future world will be like.” “I want to see my great-great-grandchildren.” “I want to read the books and do all the things I never had time to do.” “I want to be of service to God for as long as I can.” The fears are most often expressed as “I am afraid of...



1. being sick, frail and in pain
2. being a burden to my family – or anyone else
3. having to ask for help and being dependent on others, especially strangers
4. being alone, dying alone
5. having to give up all my possessions to live in a nursing home
6. uselessness, purposelessness -- being a taker rather than a giver
7. not being able to serve God the way Jesus requires us in Matthew 25 – feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, etc.”

When I am doing spiritual direction with elders I also hear such darker fears as:

- I am afraid of God and God's punishment.
- I am afraid of being abandoned by my church -- the church likes children better than elders.
- I fear that I won't be forgiven for the things I have done – and have not done.
- I am afraid there is no life after death – maybe there is no God after all.

... there are few models that show elders how to become “re-fired” when they have to give up their favorite way of serving God.

Each one of the fears of long life requires its own type of pastoral care and I have addressed them in a book for older adults entitled *Ten Gospel Promises for Later Life* (Upper Room, 2004). However, when I have only ninety minutes to provide a talk or workshop, the fear I most often attend to is #7 – the dread of no longer being able to actively serve God in the way they are accustomed or enjoy. This dread encompasses many of the other fears, especially that of uselessness, purposelessness, sickness, and dependency. The question I then ask the group is: “Do Christians retire?” Most say a vehement “No!” but when asked, can't come up with ministries a frail person could adopt (except prayer). The fact is that we see many models of active ‘re-tire-ment’ but there are few models that show elders how to become “re-fired” when they have to give up their favorite way of serving God. So the next question becomes, “How would you serve God if you found yourself flat on your back in bed in a nursing home, dependent on the staff for your every physical need?” Usually the only response is a relatively unenthusiastic “I guess I could pray.” I agree and say that prayer should be the basis of all ministries and it can certainly be a ministry in its own right. But I add, “Given that we are called to pray always, how else could you serve?” When we've reached a stalemate, I tell the following true story of Rita:

Rita was an 86 year old retired woman who had owned a highly successful real estate business. She took great pride in being a self-made, self-sufficient woman – “a giver, not a taker,” as she used to like to say. In addition to her lucrative business, she was a sought-after member of many community boards. Widowed at an early age, she had neither family nor many close friends, as she had spent most of her life working. She had such a businesslike, almost- demanding attitude that many people feared her. Rita had had her own large, 4-level home built to her specifications and it was full of stairs! All was well while Rita was healthy, but at the age of 83 she developed a progressively debilitating illness that eventually required the care of home-health nurses. She also needed household help but she would allow only one neighbor in her home to help her. She told the visiting nurses that she planned to stay in her home “Until the bitter end!” Eventually she became bed-ridden and the home health agency decided that they could not longer ethically or safely support the illusion of her ‘independence.’ They reported to her physician that they were recommending nursing home care and would be leaving her care. She would hear none of it and became furious. When her physician made a home

visit and threatened to call Adult Protective Services to evaluate her competency to make her own decisions, she gave in. However, she requested to stay in her home alone for one more night before having to move to the nursing home.

That night, Rita came to the edge of despair. She thought of suicide, but was not able to get out of bed to do any harm to herself. She demanded that God take her, but there was no reaction on God's part to her fury. Finally, running out of options, she yelled out loud in exasperation, not expecting to hear an answer, "Jesus, if you won't take me then PLEASE tell me what you want of me!" Later she told me that she didn't really hear anything with her outer ears, but that she understood a command in her heart – a command that came with a hint of affectionate amusement, "Rita, shut your mouth and be my ears!" Shocked, she pondered this message for the rest of the night and decided to interpret the words as Jesus' response and command for her to be his presence to others in the nursing home. She took a private vow to never talk about herself or complain, but always to ask whoever came into her room how they were, and then to listen with her ears and heart to their concerns. She also decided to be encouraging to the staff who were there to help her and others.

“How would you serve God if you found yourself flat on your back in bed in a nursing home, dependent on the staff for your every physical need?”

Once she was moved to her new, private room, she requested that a rocking chair be bought for her and placed near her bed. She had a large sign made and placed on her door that said, "Welcome! Come on in and take a load off your feet!" And her attitude was so inviting that people – staff, other residents, friends – did just that. Those who visited with her found that because she was such a good listener, they shared with her their worries and problems, releasing more than a load off their feet!

All who entered felt rested, calmer and peaceful when they left her room.

When I interviewed her (at the request of one of the staff members) despite being 'total care' Rita was full of joy. She confided that while she had had a successful life as a wife and businesswoman, she was happier now than she had ever been prior to moving to the nursing home. She believed that Jesus had answered her desperate prayer that last night in her home. She said that God had given her a way to re-fire' and that she believed she was serving God more completely now than she had ever done in her past life, when she was 'busy about many things.'

After telling this story, I break it apart, asking participants if they can relate to any of the aspects of this woman's story. I direct them to write down their deepest fear, their 'worst case scenario' – the event or situation that would keep them from wanting to accept the gift of 120 years. Then I request that they spend 15 minutes of quiet time asking God what

they might do to re-fire into God's service, then writing the response. After the 15 minutes, they spend another 15 minutes in dyads, sharing that response.

Finally, likening their 'worst case scenario' to Jesus' prediction of Peter's aging, with Jesus' promise that even in and with his disability, Peter would continue to glorify God in John 21:18-19, I close the session with a meditative reading of that portion of scripture:

"Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go," (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) (NRSV)

Jane Thibault is an emerita clinical professor of geriatrics and gerontology in the Department of Family and Geriatric Medicine, School of Medicine, University of Louisville, KY, where she taught for 32 years. She also has served as an adjunct faculty member for the UofL School of Social Work and the Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. She is currently a consultant for aging issues, specializing in the spiritual dimensions of aging. She received her PhD in clinical gerontology from the University of Chicago. A trained spiritual director, she provides spiritual mentoring, workshops, and retreats for adults and their caregivers. She shares a website with Harvard professor Robert Weber entitled 'ContemplAgeing.com' Jane is the author of several journal articles and books, including Understanding Religious and Spiritual Aspects of Human Service Practice; A Deepening Love Affair: The Gift of God in Later Life; 10 Gospel Promises for Later Life. No Act of Love is Ever Wasted: the Spirituality of Caring for Persons with Dementia, and Pilgrimage into the Last Third of Life: 7 Gateways to Spiritual Growth are co-authored with Richard Morgan, published by The Upper Room. A native of Massachusetts, Jane has lived in Louisville for 35 years. She is married to Ronald Fryrear; they have two granddaughters living in Greenville, SC.

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4_thibault



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - Randall

Lives as Sacred Texts: Toward a Narrative Theology of Aging

William L. Randall

From 1979 to 1990, I served the United Church of Canada, ministering to parishes in Saskatchewan, Ontario, and New Brunswick. During those loaded, hectic years, I listened to far more people's stories than I can possibly recall.

Ministry and Story

It's what we pastors do. In doing so, however, we hope that we are helping them re-imagine their lives in healthier, more hopeful directions. Or, borrowing from the perspective that I've been developing in the quarter-century since, we hope that we're helping them appreciate the power that's inherent in their own life-narratives - the parabolic power, we could say - to break them open to The Kingdom.



I needn't have been surprised, of course, to find that story-listening would be so central to my work, for in seminary I'd been introduced to "narrative theology" (see, e.g., Hauerwas & Jones, 1989), a central tenet of which is that "faith" invariably possesses a narrative dimension. In other words, it has to do with stories: not just the grand, meandering narrative that's laid out in the Bible, including that of Jesus, but the stories of the traditions through which the Gospel about Him has been proclaimed and the congregations and individuals who receive it, not to mention those of us who proclaim it, since our own internalized narratives - of faith and life alike - clearly color what we proclaim. In short, on whichever side of the pulpit we may be, it is always through - and not despite - our own unique narratives that we preach and pray and believe.

Eventually, I shifted from full-time ministry and returned to university - though, toward what end, I was not quite sure. The dissertation that eventually resulted, which I gave the title "The Stories We Are," took my interest in narrative from seminary days and extended it to how we construct our identity as individuals. As things turned out, getting it published (Randall, 1995) opened up what felt at the time like the next main chapter of my life. For in 1995 it got me invited to St. Thomas University as a visiting professor of gerontology - a field in which I had no prior training (except for what one gets "on the job" in the average congregation!) yet in which, whether I've wanted to or not, I've grown all the more invested the older I've become.

Narrative Gerontology and Narrative Care

Coming to St. Thomas meant meeting Gary Kenyon, a pioneer in the field of "narrative gerontology" and a colleague with whom I've come to share a rich collaboration (see Kenyon & Randall, 1997; Kenyon, Bohlmeijer, & Randall, 2011). Central to narrative gerontology is the conviction that human beings are, at bottom, hermeneutical beings. We are inveterate makers of meaning. More to the point, our main means of making it - whether of particular events or our lives as a whole - is by fashioning stories around them. It is by developing complex, quasi-literary compositions that hover somewhere between fiction and fact, that are continually thickening within us, and that are indistinguishable from what we think of as "our life"—lived texts or embodied novels, so to speak, of which we are the author, character, narrator, and reader more or less at once (Randall, 1999; 2007).

... we age biographically as much as we do biologically.

Put another way, we age biographically as much as we do biologically - the biological being one of those dimensions of aging to which, I fear, too much of gerontology's attention continues to be paid. By focusing on the biographical dimension, however, a conceptual space is opened up in which more positive potentials of the aging process can be entertained - the potential for wisdom, for starters (Randall & Kenyon, 2001), not to mention for spiritual maturity and for truly growing old and not just getting old. In this way, narrative gerontology offers a much-needed "counter-story" (Nelson, 2001) to the dominant "narrative of decline" (Gullette, 2004) through which aging is too often construed.

This interest in biographical aging has led in turn to my offering various workshops (with both Gary and others) that introduce older adults to strategies for expanding and examining - for writing and "reading" - the stories of their lives (Randall & McKim, 2008). Participants are invited to engage in "conscious aging" (Randall & Kenyon, 2001), to embrace their own "narrative development" (Bamberg, 1997), and to nurture "good strong stories" for meeting the challenges of later life with resilience and hope (Randall, 2013; see also Ramsey & Bleizner, 2013). In addition, I've offered workshops for social workers, nurses, and chaplains who work with older adults in healthcare settings (acute care, long-term care, palliative care), as well as for pastors and parishioners who would celebrate the

wisdom of the elders in their midst: workshops that enhance such people's skills at honoring elders' stories and at practicing the soulful art of "narrative care" (Randall, 2012).

A Narrative Theology of Aging

Fueling my passion for narrative care with older adults is my wish to weave the three broad themes that have run through my life to date - narrative, theology, and aging - into what I call "a narrative theology of aging" (Randall, 2014). The further I delve into this whole project, though, the more that three core notions keep standing out: (1) aging itself as implicitly a spiritual experience, (2) spirituality as intrinsically a narrative endeavor, and (3) our personal narratives as inherently sacred (see Atkinson, 1995).

**... we're faced like never before
with the limits of our lives, the
boundaries of our being, and the
Mystery that awaits us both inside
and out.**

Aging as Spiritual Experience

To quote gerontologist, Harry Moody (1995), later life is "a natural monastery" (p. 96). Like it or not, it's that stage in our development when we're faced like never before with the limits of our lives, the boundaries of our being, and the Mystery that awaits us both inside and out. In the special contemplative space that aging nudges us to inhabit, we find ourselves assigned the "philosophic homework" (Schacter-Shalomi & Miller, 1995, pp. 124-126) of reviewing the past and incorporating into the present those episodes or chapters that have been difficult to assimilate into the stories we are - not just reframing them, that is, but redeeming them as well (see Coleman, 1999). We redeem them by finding meaning in them, by seeing them as, in their own way, integral to the unfolding of our life, just as each event in a novel contributes uniquely to the meaning and shape of the work as a whole.

Coincidentally, changes in our aging brains themselves - better coordination between left and right hemispheres, for one - make us more capable of tackling this homework through a heightening of the "autobiographical impulse" (Cohen, 2005), thus rendering later life in general "the narrative phase par excellence" (Freeman, 1997, p. 394). They also heighten our capacity for so-called post-formal thought, hallmarks of which are enhanced tolerance for paradox and contradiction and a greater openness to the truth that speaks to us through the metaphors and symbols in which religion routinely abounds.

Spirituality as Narrative Endeavor

Whatever else it entails, spirituality has to do with making meaning. And insofar as stories are vehicles for articulating meaning, then the traditions through which spirituality tends to be expressed are the conveyors of marvelous narrative resources (scriptures, doctrines, testimonies, hymns, and creeds) for "storying" our world from beginning to end. They offer

master narratives inside which to situate ourselves and to derive our sense of who we are and where we are bound. They give us “sacred masterplots,” (Brooks, 1985) for structuring our personal narratives: past, present, and future.

Naturally, different traditions mediate different master narratives. The Buddhist tradition tells a markedly different story of our place in space and time than Hinduism does, or than Judaism or Islam. Also, Lutheran versions of “The Christian Story” invariably vary from those to which Methodists subscribe, or Episcopalians or Pentecostals - even if these versions forever overlap in believers’ daily lives.

As well, spirituality is a narrative endeavor in that, to reiterate, our experiences of praying and believing and making sense of sermons scarcely happen in an interpretive vacuum. Rather, they are filtered through the ever-thickening fabric of our own unique stories and of our peculiar collection of achievements, hurts, and hopes. The same holds true with scripture. Not only is the Bible itself a complex quilt of narrative material - from biography to history and chronicle to myth - but also, in the same way that we do when reading any literary text, we inevitably intuit the significance of specific passages through and not despite the intricate texts of our own unique lives.

**Few concepts are more common
than “the story of my life,” yet few
are more complicated either.**

Lives as Sacred Texts

Few concepts are more common than “the story of my life,” yet few are more complicated either. We all tend to believe that we have such a story and that it is key somehow to who we are. Indeed, as the expanding field of narrative psychology is making us aware, the narratives we internalize about experiences in our lives (or the comparatively few experiences that our memory holds onto!) are the heart of our “identity” (McAdams, 2006). And they are key to our emotions and decisions as well, central to our ways of being in relationship, to our “personality” and our “self.” Put simply, “the story of my life” IS my life. And insofar as it is through our stories that we filter everything we experience or see, then, to adapt Wittgenstein’s well-known dictum, “the limits of my story are the limits of my world.”

Having said this, the sad reality is that many people - many older adults, to be sure - can have rather limited personal worlds. Imprisoned in impoverished narratives, frozen in a tragic genre, they stick to stories of themselves (and of God) that are needlessly “foreclosed” (Bohlmeijer et al, 2011; Freeman, 2010). As such, our task as pastors (my chats with students also frequently take a pastoral tone) is to assist those souls we serve to keep their stories open, to entertain more positive versions of pivotal events, and overall to nurture richer, thicker narratives by which to live their lives. Encouraging them to engage in narrative reflection (through memoir-writing, journaling, and the like), our task is to provide them with narrative care. It is to assist them in journeying more deeply into their own unique life stories and experiencing those stories as meaning-filled and, ultimately, as

sacred ground. It is to act as agents of re-storying—as they discover the transformative potential that is inherent in their own internal texts, like the “emancipatory power” (Greene, 1990) which literature itself so often has. It is to invite them to appreciate that their stories are not at all obstacles to Grace and God, but entry-points instead.

Viewing older adults’ stories as sacred texts is something of a stretch, no doubt, for many gerontologists, committed as gerontology has so often been to a biomedical model of what aging entails. But for someone who got into gerontology through the back door of parish ministry, already infected with a narrative perspective on human experience, it is, I believe, a logical step. And it is a necessary step as well, unless as a society we wish to stay mired in a story of aging as little more than a downward drift to disease, decrepitude, and death. That said, there is of course the reality of dementia, which would seem to render any talk of the parabolic potential of personal narrative as cruelly ironic, to say the least. As, reputedly, the ultimate “de-storying” of personal identity, dementia is a topic which narrative gerontologists should thus be tackling head on. Here, I applaud the work of scholars like Clive Baldwin (2006; 2008) for proposing, for one thing, that persons with dementia are all too frequently “dispossessed” of their personal narratives by the rest of us due to our limiting conceptions of what “personal narrative” involves - in terms of criteria, for instance, like agency, consistency, and coherence (see also Randall, 2009). Such lines of thinking, as well as those of dementia scholar, Anne Basting (2009), in her book *Forget Memory*, encourage me to conclude these preliminary musings on the narrative theology of aging ever so cautiously, therefore, by calling for a “re-storying” of dementia from the unmitigated tragedy it is otherwise seen as being, to a chapter of the human journey (for some) that possesses its own positive potential, its own (as yet unappreciated) versions of meaning, coherence, integrity, and truth.

References

- Atkinson, R. (1995). *The Gift of Stories: Practical and Spiritual Applications of Autobiography, Life Stories, and Personal Mythmaking*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.
- Baldwin, C. (2006). The Narrative Dispossession of People with Dementia: Thinking About the Theory and Method of Narrative. In K. Milnes, C. Horrocks, & N. Kelly (eds.), *Narrative, Memory, and Knowledge: Representations, Aesthetics, and Contexts* (pp. 101-109). Huddersfield, UK: University of Huddersfield Press.
- Baldwin, C. (2008). Narrative (,) Citizenship and Dementia: The Personal and the Political. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 22(3). 222-228.
- Bamberg, M. (Ed.). (1997). *Narrative Development: Six Approaches*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Basting, A. (2009). *Forget Memory: Creating Better Lives for People with Dementia*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bohlmeijer, E., Westerhof, G., Randall, W., Tromp, T., & Kenyon, G. (2011). Narrative Foreclosure in Later Life: Preliminary Considerations for a New Sensitizing Concept. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 25(4). 364-370.

Brooks, P. (1985). *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. New York: Vintage.

Cohen, G. (2005). *The Mature Mind: The Positive Power of the Aging Brain*. New York: Basic Books.

Coleman, P. (1999). *Creating a Life Story: The Task of Reconciliation*. *The Gerontologist*, 39(2), 133-139.

Freeman, M. (1997). *Death, Narrative Integrity, and the Radical Challenge of Self-Understanding: A Reading of Tolstoy's Death of Ivan Ilych*. *Ageing and Society*, 17, 373-398.

Freeman, M. (2010). *Hindsight: The Promise and Peril of Looking Backward*. New York: Oxford.

Greene, M. (1990). The Emancipatory Power of Literature. In J. Mezirow (Ed.), *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood* (pp. 251-68). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Gullette, M. (2004). *Aged by Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hauerwas, S., & Jones, L. (Eds.) (1989). *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Gerontology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

Kenyon, G., Bohlmeijer, E., & Randall, W. (2011). *Storying Later Life: Issues, Investigations, and Interventions in Narrative Gerontology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kenyon, G., & Randall, W. (1997). *Restorying Our Lives: Personal Growth through Autobiographical Reflection*. New York: Praeger.

McAdams, D. (2006). *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Nelson, H. L. (2001). *Damaged Identities, Narrative Repair*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Ramsey, J., & Blieszner, R. (2013). *Spiritual Resiliency and Aging: Hope, Relationality, and the Creative Self*. Baywood Publishing.

Randall, W. (2014). Open Stories, Open Lives: Toward a Narrative Theology of Aging. In W. Randall, *The Stories We Are: An Essay on Self-Creation* (2nd edition), pp. 355-371. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Randall, W. (2013). The Importance of Being Ironic: Narrative Openness and Personal Resilience in Later Life. *The Gerontologist*, 53(1), 9-16.

Randall, W. (2012). Beyond Healthy Aging: The Practice of Narrative Care in Gerontology. In L. English (Ed.), *Adult education and health* (pp. 178-192). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Randall, W. (2009). The Anthropology of Dementia: A Narrative Perspective. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 24(3). 322-4.

Randall, W. (2007). Narrative and Chaos: Acknowledging the Novelty of Lives-In-Time. *Interchange*, 38(4). 367-389.

Randall, W. (1999). Narrative Intelligence and the Novelty of Our Lives. *Journal of Aging Studies*. 13(1). 11-28.

Randall, W. (1995). *The Stories We Are: An Essay on Self-Creation*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Randall, W., & Kenyon, G. (2001). *Ordinary Wisdom: Biographical Aging and the Journey of Life*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Randall, W., & McKim, E. (2008). *Reading Our Lives: The Poetics of Growing Old*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Schachter-Shalomi, Z. & Miller, R. (1995). *From Age-ing to Sage-ing: A Profound New Vision of Growing Older*. New York: Warner.

William L. (Bill) Randall is Professor of Gerontology at St. Thomas University, in Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada. Prior to entering academe, he served for 11 years as a parish minister with the United Church of Canada. Author or co-author of various publications on what has become known as "narrative gerontology," he is especially interested in the potential of "narrative care" to encourage people's spiritual development in later life.

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4_randall



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - Russell

A Lutheran View of Vocation in the "Second Half of Life"ⁱ

William R. Russell

By the time Luther (1483-1546) reached his “second half of life,”ⁱⁱ he had concluded that every Christian has a calling, a God-given vocation.

In Christ, said Luther, God calls each believer through the same vocational dynamic in each stage of life:

“Faith Active in Love.”ⁱⁱⁱ Luther believed that God continues to call folks in the second half of life just as much as God calls folks in their first half: to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and, at the same time, to serve their neighbors. For Luther, then, vocation takes on a cruciform shape—faith directed toward God (the vertical dimension) is active in deeds of loving service toward one’s neighbor (the horizontal dimension).

Old age, with its opportunities and limitations, provides a context in which to ask the vocational question of the faithful: “How is God, revealed in Jesus Christ, calling me to use my gifts to love and serve my neighbors?” This sort of question does not simply equate vocation with a job. God’s call is too profound for that. Vocation encompasses our whole lives—our occupations, yes—as well as all other roles and responsibilities in human life: wife or husband, employee or retiree, parent or child, lay or clergy, nurse or patient, teacher or student, etc., are all vocational opportunities faithfully to serve our neighbors.



Luther's Reform of "Vocation"

The church into which Luther was born distinguished between the so-called spiritual and temporal “estates.”^{iv} Priests and monks and nuns were considered part of the spiritual estate. They had higher status in God’s eyes. They fully engaged the service of God. Therefore, only these “religious” people were chosen by God for sanctified lives of celibate Christian service.

One’s call begins with that outpouring of divine love.

Lay people filled important roles in government/military, business, family life, etc. These roles, however, were neither as important nor as pleasing to God as spiritual vocations. The church taught that lay folks did not have vocations from God.

Luther rejected this two-tiered view and proposed a reform of vocation. He began with the sacrament of baptism and the identity we receive through it. One’s call begins with that outpouring of divine love. From that flows the recognition of who we are—saved ones and beloved children who have received God’s grace and the gift of faith.

As forgiven sinners, then, we live in grateful response to what God has done for us in Christ. So Luther writes in the Small Catechism, “...[Baptism] signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”^v God calls all the baptized—to believe in Christ and to serve the neighbor, whether they are ordained or not. Luther put it this way in 1520:

...A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops. Further, everyone must benefit and serve every other by means of his own work or office so that in this way many kinds of work may be done for the bodily and spiritual welfare of the community, just as all the members of the body serve one another [I Cor. 12:14- 26].^{vi}

All callings available to Christians are gracious gifts and blessed opportunities to serve God and the neighbor.

When believers act in faith and for the benefit of others, they embrace their vocations as children of God. All callings available to Christians are gracious gifts and blessed opportunities to serve God and the neighbor. Luther illustrates:

A wife too should regard her duties in the same light, as she suckles the child, rocks and bathes it, and cares for it in other ways; and as she busies herself with other duties and renders help and obedience to her husband. These are truly golden and noble works.

...Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for the child, and...that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith...God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling—not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith.^{vii}

When Christians faithfully and dutifully fulfill the obligations of their various vocations, they please God: “If you are a student, mind your studies; if you are a maid, sweep the house; if you are a servant, care for the horses, etc. A monk may live a harder life, wear poorer clothes, but he will never be truly able to say that he serves God in this manner. But they who serve society, the state, and the church can say it.”^{viii}

So, believers strive to follow the teachings of Christ in their everyday lives. In a Christmas sermon written at the Wartburg Castle in the early 1520s, Luther notes the shepherds’ vocation as a means of service:

...All works are the same to a Christian, no matter what they are. For these shepherds do not run away into the desert, they do not don monk’s garb, they do not shave their heads, neither do they change their clothing, schedule, food, drink, nor any external work. They return to their place in the fields to serve God there!^{ix}

When faithful people in the second half of life serve others in such ways, they may be assured that God works through them.

In the end, all Christians are called to imitate Christ and to focus on the needs of the other as they fulfill the various callings of life. And when faithful people in the second half of life serve others in such ways, they may be assured that God works through them:

This, therefore, is the tremendous glory with which the divine majesty adorns us, that God acts in such manner through us that our word is God’s word and our actions are God’s actions. So that you can actually say that the mouth of the godly teacher is the mouth of God and the hand which you stretch out to ease the need of the brother or sister is the hand of God.^x

The Second Half of Life

With this doctrine of vocation, Luther reminds us that all of the callings of our lives are opportunities to serve our neighbor. As believing people, we can use these opportunities to express our faith in loving actions. Such actions are truly good works that please God and benefit those whose lives they touch. Luther’s vocational revolution affirmed activities

as diverse as shoe-repair and diaper- changing as Christian callings. In the second half of life and even to point of death itself, Luther could very well affirm a calling to express one's faith through tasks such as thanking caregivers, praying for family, saying goodbye to dear ones, dying well, forgiving others, confessing sins, and on and on...

If the vocation begun already at baptism continues into the Christian second half of life, then believing elders are continually called to faith in God and service to the neighbor. The specific shape of that life of service would take on the character of the gifts and possibilities inherent in the believers' situation. Throughout life, faithful elders still look to serve, to ease the burdens of their neighbors, near and far.

In the end, if a Christian is called to live a "second half of life," the vocational question remains: "Now that I am in the "Second Half" of my life, how is God calling me to serve?"

References

ⁱ What follows depends heavily on "Vocation: a Lutheran Understanding," by Kurt Hendel: <http://www.lstc.edu/media/pdf/epistle/2010-fall/Vocation-3-part-study-K-Hendel.pdf> ^[1]

ⁱⁱ "The second half of life" refers to the phenomenon of aging in the industrialized world and the phenomenon that people live longer and healthier lives than previous generations. This rise in both quality and quantity of life poses the question, "What are we to do with these years?" A spate of materials has arisen in recent years. E.g., Bob Buford, *Halftime: Moving From Success to Significance*, Revised (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2009); Angeles Arrien, *The Second Half of Life: Opening the Eight Gates of Wisdom* (Sounds True: Boulder, CO, 1998 [revised, 2006]); Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2011); "Ignite Your Life," (<http://www.igniteyourlife.info/#sthash.0V78U2LL.dpbs> ^[2]); Ammerman Center for Creative Aging (<http://ammermancenter.org/> ^[3]); Sarah Asp Olson, "Redefining the Second Half of Life," *Thrivent Magazine*, August, 2014; <http://www.igniteyourlife.info/#sthash.0V78U2LL.dpbs> ^[2].

ⁱⁱⁱ George Forell, *Faith Active in Love* (Augsburg Publishing House: Minneapolis), 1954, et passim.

^{iv} "Estate" here means a group or groups of people who pursue a particular vocation, calling or profession.

^v Kolb, R. and Wengert, T., general eds. *The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

^{vi} LW 44:130 (To the Christian Nobility, 1520)

^{vii} LW 45:40 (The Estate of Marriage, 1522)

^{viii} WA 43: 30, 27 (Lectures on Genesis 1535-1545). Quoted in George W. Forell, *Faith Active in Love* (Augsburg Publishing House, 1964), p. 148. Hereafter referred to as Forell.

^{ix} Sermon on Luke 2: 15-20, LW 52:37. Cf., also, Karlfried Froehlich, "Luther on Vocation," in *Harvesting Martin Luther's Reflections*, ed. by Timothy Wengert (Lutheran Quarterly Books/Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2004), 126.

^x WA 43: 70, 5 (Lectures on Genesis 1535-1545). Quoted in Forell, p. 131, footnote 50, translation altered.

Bill Russell is pastor of Augustana Lutheran Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota--an urban congregation serving an economically challenged and ethnically diverse neighborhood. Augustana offers "food for the soul and food for the body" at Community Emergency Service (a food-shelf ministry founded by the congregation in 1970). Russell holds a PhD. in Religion from the University of Iowa and has authored or edited 9 books and dozens of articles and reviews on the Lutheran Reformation. He is married to Ann Svennungsen, bishop of the Minneapolis Area Synod.

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4_russell

Links:

[1] <http://www.lstc.edu/media/pdf/epistle/2010-fall/Vocation-3-part-study-K-Hendel.pdf>

[2] <http://www.igniteyourlife.info/#sthash.0V78U2LL.dpbs>

[3] <http://ammermancenter.org/>



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - Schoedel

Passing On Our Faith Legacy

Lee and Walt Schoedel

One generation shall commend your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts. Psalm 145:4

With our blended family – 11 children and their spouses, 27 grandchildren, and 9 great-grandchildren – we increasingly find ourselves pondering two important questions. “How do we, as octogenarians, go about influencing the faith of our family?” “How do we practice our faith in their presence?” In our travels across the country, addressing gatherings of older adults, we have found that many seniors share these concerns. Many are looking for ways to pass on a faith legacy to their families. Studies, research, and our own experiences reveal to us how our lives can serve as a beacon for our family. That’s why we have developed the following life style in our later years:



- We pray for each member of our family. We set aside time every day to pray for family members.
- We spend time talking to family members about our faith journey as well as theirs.
- We mark important moments in their lives--sending computer-made birthday /anniversary cards, telephone calls, emails, Facebook, and other social media.
- We host family gatherings from time to time. We pray together, celebrate the Lord’s Supper together, play cards and games, and converse.
- We travel to participate in grandchildren’s school events, confirmations, graduations, and weddings.
- We send devotional booklets, magazines, and other reading material.
- We come together to celebrate four important celebrations – Christmas, Easter, the Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving. Family members make an effort to be with us.

- We wrote our autobiographies as a Christmas gift one year with an emphasis on our faith journey.
- We set a good example for our family members by reaching out in service to others.
- This year we are sending emails every Sunday morning with a short spiritual message and then asking them to pray for a family member who is celebrating a baptismal birthday in the following week.

We share this witness for two reasons. First, we look for ways to help others, especially the younger generation, understand the viewpoints and concerns of older adults. Second, we desire to encourage families to enrich and enhance their faith journey.

Lee and Walt Schoedel are still involved with older adult ministry. He is Pastor Emeritus of Concordia Lutheran Church in Kirkwood, Missouri, and serves as Director of Church Relations for Lutheran Senior Services of Missouri and Illinois. They live in Lutheran Senior Services' Laclede Groves Retirement Community in Webster Groves, Missouri. They spend their summers at Lake James in northern Indiana in a home built by Lee's grandfather.

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4_schoedel



Published on *Lutheran Services in America* (<http://lutheranservices.org>)

[Home](#) > Printer-friendly

Caring Connections - Vol.11 No.4 - About

About Caring Connections

Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling is written by and for Lutheran practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling, and education. Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable; solidly grounded in the practice of ministry; and theologically probing.

Caring Connections seeks to reach a broad readership, including chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, others in specialized ministries and — not least — concerned congregational pastors and laity. *Caring Connections* also provides news and information about activities, events and opportunities of interest to diverse constituencies in specialized ministries.

Editorial Office: Editor, *Caring Connections*, c/o Lutheran Services in America, 100 Maryland Ave., Suite 500, Washington, DC, 20002, email: cweinrich@cfl.rr.com ^[1] or DStiger@lmcmc.com ^[2].

Permissions: Requests for permission to copy or reprint should be directed to the editors at cweinrich@cfl.rr.com ^[1] or DStiger@lmcmc.com ^[2].

Electronic Subscriptions: Please visit www.caringconnectionsonline.org ^[3] and click on "Click here for free subscription" to receive automatic notification of new issues.

News, Announcements, Events: E-mail items to [Judith Simonson](#) ^[4] or [John Fale](#) ^[5].

Caring Connections Copyright © 2014

Lutheran Services in America. ISSN 1559-8195. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A.

Outside resources referenced in these issues of *Caring Connections* do not necessarily reflect the position of the editors, the Editorial Board of *Caring Connections*, or its agencies.

Editors

Don Stiger
Charles Weinrich

Editorial Board

Heather Bumstead
Bryn Carlson
John Fale
Joel Hempel
Lee Joesten
Brian McCaffrey
David McCurdy
Jim McDaniels
Jeff McPike
Bruce Pederson
Judith Simonson

Designer

Jeanean Merkel

footer-menu

- [Site Map](#)

Source URL: http://lutheranservices.org/caringconnections_vol11no4_about

Links:

- [1] <mailto:cweinrich@cfl.rr.com>
- [2] <mailto:DStiger@lmcmc.com>
- [3] <http://www.caringconnectionsonline.org>
- [4] <mailto:jsimonson@pennswoods.net>
- [5] <mailto:John.Fale@lcms.org>