



# Engaging Aging

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## Tickling the Sleeping Giant

by Sister Sherryl White, CSJ, Ph.D. Psychologist, Editor, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania



While planning for this issue of *Engaging Aging*, we struggled to find a single word that captured our focus. It was more specific than “retirement” but did not fit the confines of “ministry.” Finally, while telling stories about religious who were living the concept, we found our word: **volunteerism**.

Volunteerism, the focus of this issue, is defined by sociologist J. Wilson as “engagement in activities that involve commitment and whose benefits extend beyond individual volunteers.” In our vernacular, we sometimes refer to it as “uncompensated ministry.” Untangling semantics as our research progressed, we began to think that we had come upon a sleeping giant in our midst. What we seem to do naturally, even casually in the circles of religious life, is being studied by groups ranging from the White House Conference on Aging, to the neighborhood Meals on Wheels programs, to the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

Consider, for example, resolutions from the 2005 White House Conference on Aging that called for new and expanded *meaningful* volunteer opportunities for seniors. Or read “The Dignity of Older People and their Mission in the Church and in the World,” and you’ll find the Vatican imploring elders to teach a cost-efficient society the blessings of *altruistic* impulses.

If dollar signs and spread sheets are consuming your waking (and sleeping) hours, this may be the most important newsletter you’ll read this week. We want to expand your concept of volunteerism beyond the images of Sisters helping to fill salt shakers or Brothers running errands. You see, these men and women religious who volunteer in any capacity are part of an amazing force for good in our world. Consider this data reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in January, 2007:

- 61.2 million people volunteered in 2005-2006
- 38.8% of volunteers 65 years and older contributed 100-500 hours and more (the highest of any age cohort)
- Volunteers 65 years of age and older spent 104 median annual hours volunteering (more than three times that spent by people 25-34 years of age)
- 43% of volunteers became involved after being **asked** to volunteer (Are we extending an invitation?)
- The Independent Sector estimates the current dollar value of a volunteer hour at \$17.19. We’re going to let you do the math. But it seems worth considering when you prepare your next financial report.

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*“I am only one,  
but still  
I am one;  
I cannot do  
everything,  
but still I can do  
something;  
I will not refuse  
to do  
the something  
I can do.”*

**Helen Keller**

(Continued from page 1) **Tickling the Sleeping Giant**

But don't take the word of just statistics on the importance of volunteerism among the elderly. Inside this issue you will find stories from men and women religious who know first-hand the value of giving their time and talent in volunteer service to others.

You will read of an entire congregation that facilitates and supports volunteer activities for their sisters because they value the inherent grace and dignity of each member and her continual need to "make a difference."

You'll hear Fr. William Dougherty tell you of his ever expanding circle of activities that enrich his sense of vocation.

Also, we are including a photo-spread to share with you some faces behind stories too numerous to name; stories that tell of generosity, care, com-

passion, courage, and creativity. We think you'll see in their faces the living proof of research that lists enhanced health and life satisfaction, improved self-esteem, psychological well-being, and benefits to longevity as being associated with volunteerism.

There is so much to say about this sleeping giant we call volunteerism. We encourage you to visit our "Did You Know" section in *Engaging Aging* where we have listed web sites to help you examine your volunteer programs and possibilities.

Thank you to all those who responded to our invitation to share your stories of volunteering. We are considering including a regular column to share your stories. Let us know if this is of interest to you.

As summer's heat begins to slow our steps and porch swings call to us for an evening of leisure, take a moment to tickle the sleeping giant. What do you really want to do after full-time ministry? How might you volunteer?



## **Living the Mission, Nurturing the Soul**

**by Sister Mary Persico, IHM, President,  
Congregation of the Sisters Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary,  
Scranton, Pennsylvania**

When most of the IHM Sisters are returning home after a day of ministry in schools, parishes, health care settings, or social service agencies, a dedicated band of *retired* women are happily beginning their day's work. These are the Sister-teachers in the Education Enrichment Institute, or EEI as everyone calls it.

Begun nearly twenty years ago by congregation leadership to provide opportunities for Sisters who have left formal ministry, the EEI is a tutorial program primarily for elementary school children, but also for secondary and post-graduate students who are in need of educational support. Anyone who walks down the main corridor of the IHM Center, Scranton, PA, at 4:00 on a weekday afternoon, all seasons of the year, will see and hear the hustle and bustle of parents dropping off children, and little students greeting their "favorite" teachers: the eighty or even ninety-year old Sisters who help them with their reading, math, English, science, and other academic subjects. The additional support given these students provides them with the confidence and academic tools to succeed and even excel in their regular school settings.

For nearly two decades the EEI has provided the opportunity for scores of retired IHM Sisters to continue the ministry of education in comfortable, attractive spaces that have been appropriately converted into personal work carrels carefully and simply decorated by each Sister-tutor. The Sisters who participate in this program spend a part of their days preparing lessons and assignments for their students who begin arriving for their hourly sessions soon after the regular school day is over.

The benefits of this program for the ten to fifteen Sisters who participate in it are many. Perhaps the greatest reward for each Sister is the awareness that she continues to make a difference in the lives of young people. As

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she observes the academic success of her students, she also experiences their joy and appreciation for the personal care and grandmotherly love that comes as part of the lesson. Each Sister-tutor is also happy to be making a financial contribution to the congregation through this ministry.

The Education Enrichment Institute is run by a Sister who interviews the students, schedules the lessons, and organizes all the daily logistics. Her personal encouragement and support of the teachers are key elements to the program's success. All things considered, the EEI is quite a happy place! The saddest moments come when a student has completed his or her work and must say goodbye. Both Sister and student alike find in the success of completion a tinge of bittersweet.

Other *retired* IHM Sisters can be found in many venues, serving people and living the mission of Jesus in ways that they may never have dreamed before now. For example, one Sister visits the county jail on Monday afternoons to pray with the women prisoners who look forward to these quiet moments of peace and reconciliation. Another octogenarian spends two days a week at a soup kitchen where she answers the phone and helps to provide hot meals, clothing, and compassion to the homeless persons who arrive each day. For them, this is home, and for the IHM Sister, this is a place of personal fulfillment as she offers herself in service to others. A third Sister ministers to the sick and elderly members of the congregation by organizing their medical and social transportation needs. This includes scheduling drivers and companions to accompany the Sister. Some retirees have been trained as Hospice visitors who visit the terminally ill in hospitals, homes, and agency facilities, offering assistance, a caring presence, kind words, and prayers.

All these Sisters have identified a ministry that nurtures their spirit at this time of their lives. Congregation leadership supports their choices and keeps a careful watch for other areas of need where retired Sisters can offer companionship or provide a service.

The elders of the congregation live their lives quietly and prayerfully, each aware of her apostolic call to service, each willing to live that call with grace and dignity all the days of her life.



*Sister Elsa (left) and student at IHM's Education Enrichment Institute*



*Sister Jeanne (right) and student at Education Enrichment Institute*

## Sisters of the Most Precious Blood, O'Fallon, Missouri *Volunteers in Action*



Sister Mary Venard LeBeau, CPPS, (left) taught for 40 years at The English School in Helsinki, Finland. For 14 years, she has been volunteering in Estonia to train teachers and assist in developing solid English curricula for Estonian and Russian speaking pupils. Sister feels that the years of volunteering “have been a blessing to me in ways that I never thought of.”



Sister Claire Slama, CPPS, (above) teaches and tutors Spanish to her Sisters, students, and home schooled children.



Sister Elizabeth Weiman, CPPS, (left) “enjoys being a volunteer because it lessens the stress of financial tensions and many structural restrictions and limitations.” Sister volunteers at Assumption Parish in O’Fallon by companionship parents preparing for infant baptisms, teaching in the Returning Catholics Program, and leading faith communities. Sister also plans Christian Focus sessions in the Motherhouse

Sister Esther Keeven, CPPS, (below) has been volunteering as a tutor at the Euclid Montessori School since 1997. “I could work in primary education all my life... a good foundation is important.”



Sr. Josepha Bauer, CPPS, (right) states, “Whoever thinks that life is boring after retirement clearly must be stuck somewhere on the Journey up and not gotten ‘over the hill’ yet.” When not in the Ecclesiastical Art Dept., Sister is either repairing wheelchairs and scooters or teaching Spanish to police.



## Benedictine Sisters, Mt. Angel, Oregon

### *Awakening the Sleeping Giant*



Sister Alberta Dieker, OSB, (left) just finished writing the community's history which will be published to celebrate the 125th anniversary of the community's foundation



Sister Agatha Meissner, OSB, (left) volunteers at St. Joseph Shelter, caring for children of shelter residents.



Sister Blanche Smith, OSB, (right) makes rosaries, shares her faith with others, and helps out in the monastery.

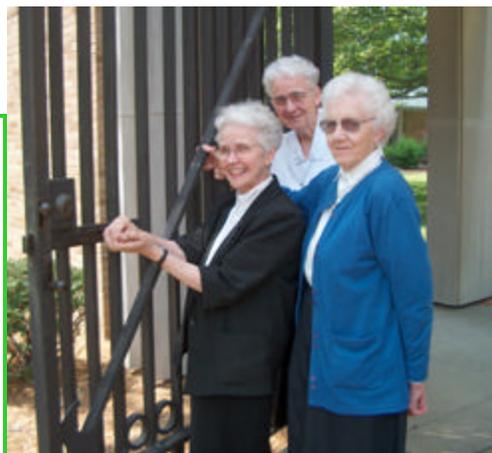
Sister Joeine Darlington, OSB, (right) tutors English and offers hospitality to monastery visitors.



## Dominican Sisters, Springfield, Illinois

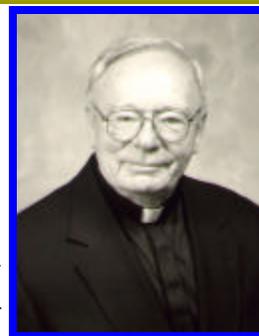
### Volunteer Prison Ministry

Sister Regina Marie Bernet (left), Sister Helen Wolf (middle), and Sister M. Rose Schleeper, (right), are regular volunteers at Jacksonville Correctional Center in Illinois. Sr. Helen attends Mass with the inmates every Saturday, offering a supportive presence. All three sisters facilitate Scripture sharing every other Sunday with the men, listening to the life stories while a guard sits within earshot around the corner. Twice yearly they hold a three day retreat attended by at least 50 men.



## By the Grace of God

by Father William J. Dougherty, OSFS, Wilmington, Delaware



By the grace of God, a yearly medical check-up, and fine, community-supported medical oversight, I enjoy relatively good health as my seventy-seventh birthday draws near.

After many years of high school teaching, a decade of being the “founding father” of a retreat facility and close to a decade as a parish vicar, I look back with wonderful memories and deep gratitude to our Lord. In my first year of student teaching, I met an elderly, cheery faced Christian Brother who said that teaching high school would keep us young. As many readers will agree, he spoke words of wisdom, but I must admit that not a few grey hairs came from high school sophomores. I am sure that many share the experience.

There are eight of us Oblates of St. Francis de Sales in our residence in Wilmington, DE, a large, fine old home that initially ‘needed some work.’ The house was founded as a residence for those in neither secondary school nor parish ministry. Currently, as our congregation ages, four of us now have no mandatory ministry commitments and continue to work in parishes as supply priests, enabling diocesan priests to have recuperation, a day off, a vacation. I prefer to think of myself as semi-retired.

Priesthood has been the joy of my life. Being blessed with good health I am able to travel to different parishes and have come to appreciate “church” in its many forms. More free time enables us to take more time for prayerfully prepared homilies. Gone are the Sunday homilies, hastily assembled by dint of necessity on Saturdays while doing laundry and cleaning our rooms during our years in secondary education.

The RCIA proc-

ess was a beloved assignment during my “parish priest” days. I have fine-tuned some instructional pieces on key topics and made myself available to local parishes to serve.

Some evenings, after consultation with the RCIA team, are spent in tailoring these talks to the particular needs of a parish for presentations.

One thing leads to another. I was asked if I would expand RCIA ministry by working with parents of prospective “first time offenders,” [first reconciliation] and first communicants. This is helpful to parish priests who see the need for an experienced teacher for adults. They are then relieved for other ministry / meetings. This becomes increasingly helpful as the priest shortage becomes more acute.

I came to understand about 25 years ago that Relationship, firmly founded in scripture, not the substance world-view of my seminary days, is the over-arching reality of Christian living. I understood that Jesus made THE relationship the core of his lived life and the greatest of his commandments. Semi-retirement provides the time for being with friends, nurturing friendship, and ministering in the light of relationship. It is a truth that I try to continue to live enthusiastically in the golden years.

During my retreat ministry someone recommended that I read Brother David Steindl-Rast, O.S.B., on Hope. It was a eureka moment. Brother David defined Hope as “Being open to surprise.” Relationship and Hope have motivated me during this season of life. I am convinced that every day is a new adventure in taking past experience and creatively translating it into our present state.

My days are pleasantly filled and my life, fulfilled.

**“Semi-retirement provides the time for being with friends, nurturing friendship, and ministering in the light of relationship.”**



## A Princess, Not a Frog

By Sister Janice Bader, CPPS

Project Director of Retirement Services, NRRO



“Kiss me. Nothing makes me sick.” During my first year of teaching I often overheard these words being said by our 80+ year old Sister Mary Frances as she sat at her post as hall monitor. Usually these words were extended along with a wrinkled cheek to first graders whom she had just reprimanded for running or shrieking in the hallway. With these words the chastised urchin would break into giggles and give Sister Mary Frances a peck on the cheek. Her death several years later, during a school year in which she still was active at her hall monitor post, moved to tears everyone from the tiniest of first-graders to the most hulking of eighth-graders.

Sister Mary Frances was a very unique and special woman, but she was not unusual in her approach to “retirement.” Women and men religious traditionally have remained active in retirement to the extent that health permits. A recent article in the *Washington Post* described the “new retirement” that is expected to flourish in the next few decades. How did the author define this “new retirement?” As a “mix of work and pleasure.” Isn’t this what religious have been doing for years? We stay active in some type of service while enjoying greater time for prayer, reading and other “pleasures” that may have received short shrift in the years of full time ministry.

Sometime ago I read an article (in Newsweek magazine, if memory serves me correctly) in which Billy Graham was quoted as saying that his faith has taught him a lot about dying but little about how to grow old. I believe that for decades our Sisters and Brothers have been learning and teaching one another how to grow old. We are building an accumulated wisdom that is being passed from generation to generation. Perhaps now is the time for us to share what we have learned with a wider segment of the aging population. I am confident that religious could bring to this task the same creativity and passion for service that led to the creation of the Catholic education, health care and social services systems throughout this country. What a gift this could be to our botox-addicted society!



## Did you know. . .

Mindsets of volunteers and roadblocks elders face in becoming volunteers:

<http://www.serviceleader.org/new/documents/articles/2004/06/000233.php#7c>

The value of involving persons with Alzheimer's Disease in volunteer activities:

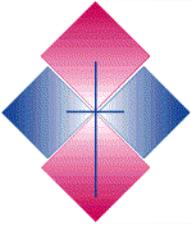
[http://www.asaging.org/publications/dbase/CG/MHAN9\\_2.Arkin.pdf](http://www.asaging.org/publications/dbase/CG/MHAN9_2.Arkin.pdf)

A template form of a volunteer description worksheet, stressing the importance of clearly defining a volunteer’s responsibilities: [http://nationalserviceresources.org/sites/sustain/www.sustainabilityonline.com/HTML/Articles/vol\\_work5.html](http://nationalserviceresources.org/sites/sustain/www.sustainabilityonline.com/HTML/Articles/vol_work5.html)

Volunteer recruitment: What to do and to avoid: [http://nationalserviceresources.org/sites/sustain/www.sustainabilityonline.com/HTML/Articles/vol\\_recruit.html?search\\_term=volunteer%20recruitment](http://nationalserviceresources.org/sites/sustain/www.sustainabilityonline.com/HTML/Articles/vol_recruit.html?search_term=volunteer%20recruitment)

Sample volunteer program: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/07101/776717-114.stm>





National Religious Retirement Office  
3211 Fourth Street, N.E.  
Washington, DC 20017-1194  
Phone: (202) 541-3215  
Fax: (202) 541-3053  
Website: [www.usccb.org/nrro](http://www.usccb.org/nrro)

*The National Religious Retirement Office coordinates the national collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious and distributes these monies in grants to eligible religious institutes for their retirement needs.*

*The National Religious Retirement Office supports, educates and assists religious institutes in the U.S. to embrace their current retirement reality and to plan for the future.*

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