



# Engaging Aging

***“I believe that elderhood can provide great opportunities... to pray, read, learn, and enjoy leisure. I hang on to that belief. But now, the future of my physical and mental abilities is a sobering reality and question...”***

## On Becoming Sixty-five!

*by Sister Andree Fries, CPPS, Executive Director,  
National Religious Retirement Office, Washington, D.C.*

On a busy day, a few months ago, I received my Medicare card in the mail. It was an unpleasant shock, and reminded me of the other signs that my body is beginning to betray me.

Last fall I asked my ophthalmologist to change my eyeglasses because I could not read the little print on maps and medicine bottles. He kindly responded that this is a normal condition for “mature” people, and there was nothing he could do. I also notice when I walk into a room, I no longer look for the most comfortable chair, but rather the one easiest to get out of. I watch younger people run up stairs two or three at a time and remember when I used to do that – but no more. Now, I am exhausted after a work day. Where is the energy to take advantage of the many enriching opportunities that come my way?

Others, usually younger persons, tell me that sixty-five is the new forty-five and if I dyed my grey hair I wouldn’t look my real age. (I’ve always been protective of my grey hair because I earned it the hard way). Every time I forget something, I wonder if this is the beginning of Alzheimer’s. I don’t jump out of bed in the morning, but rather find it hard to get my limbs going.

Becoming sixty-five raises the questions of “how long can I stay in full time ministry” and even scarier, “what then?” Where will I live? What will I do? I don’t have any hobbies, and I don’t want to spend my time making bird houses out of popsicle sticks. I’ve always envisioned retirement as a time of life to do all the things I didn’t have time to do because of ministry. However, my body has started to betray me and that is already limiting the possibility of doing the things I’ve “always wanted to do.”

I believe that elderhood, can provide great opportunities. Opportunities to pray, read, learn and enjoy the leisure. I hang on to that belief, but now the future of my physical and mental abilities is a sobering reality and question. A song rumbles through my head, “Will you still need me, will you still feed me, when I’m sixty-four?”

So I have begun the journey of young elderhood. I wish I had a mentor. What lies ahead is in God’s hands and I know I am safe there. It is going to be an interesting, surprising journey ahead!



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## From the editor's desk...

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

**Question mark.** Webster defines the term as “something unknown, unknowable, or uncertain.” Well, if ever there was a point of unknowing, a time in which answers seem unknowable, a transition characterized by uncertainty, *retirement* is it.

As we march along the continuum of ongoing formation, retirement is the penultimate “question mark;” an amorphous bog threatening to swallow our confidences and well being, our ministries and the perquisites that accompany our positions. Who among us is pushing to the head of the line so as to be the first to surrender our personal car keys, cell phone, laptop computer, office space, and ministry budget? Who wants to face the question of where to live once retirement removes our reason for being in a city, town, or parish?

This issue of *Engaging Aging* invites us to take a step back from actual “retirement” to consider the experience of *pre-retirement*. We hope you will open the discussion to your entire communities. Take time to examine the wonderings and emotions that rise and fall within as we all grow older. Society’s touting of golden age cruises and gated communities does not speak to our life options. We stumble around with the language of “being instead of doing,” but I wonder if even that is right. There is something too static about “being.” Might not the better word be “becoming?” How are we to continue the vital life processes of “becoming” as we approach and enter into retirement?

Retirement: a question mark: unknown, unknowable, uncertain. But remember this: questions beget mystery, and the soul *thrives* on mystery. Swirl-

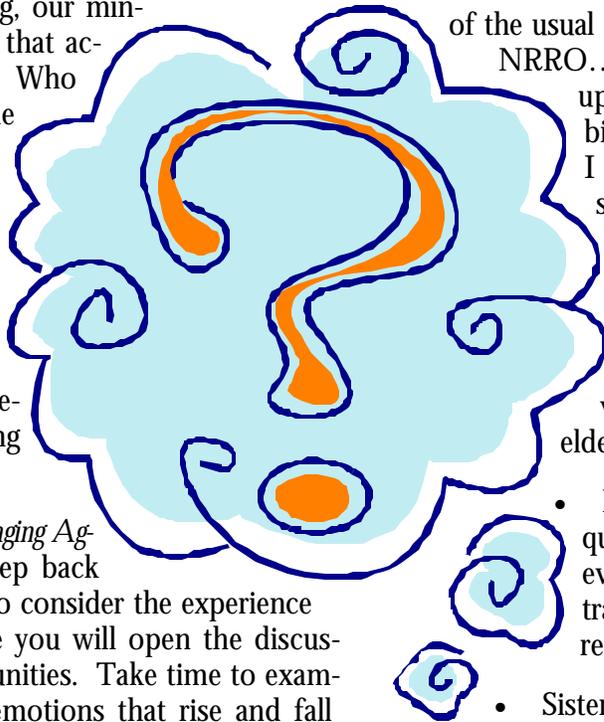
ing, twirling, unanswered questions tantalizing our souls to risk, reach, fall and fly in the mysterious space of life’s sacredness.

In this issue, we invite you to open yourselves to questions; to share the mysterious journeys with our writers as they tiptoe to the unknown edges of retirement.

- Our feature article this month is by Sister Andrée Fries, CPPS, Director of the National Religious Retirement Office. We have asked her to step out of the usual editorial box of “From the Office of NRRO...” to share with you her reflections upon receiving our government’s birthday greeting, the Medicare Card. I believe you will be left breathless, stilled by the depth and honesty she offers in her story.
- Sister Mary Elizabeth Kloss, OSB, shares her new awareness about the ever changing depths of vocation as she graciously serves her elder sisters in a Southern Monastery.
- Dominican Father John Burke’s eloquence as a professor of homiletics is evident as he invites us into his early transitions from fulltime ministry to retirement.
- Sister Margaret Burkle, OSF, offers a reflective exercise, inviting us to embrace questions that will deepen our life’s journey.
- And finally, for your enjoyment, we are delighted to be the first to publish a series of haiku on autumn graces by Ms. Mary Jo Klick.

May *Engaging Aging* lead you gently into the seasonal transition that awaits as summer bids us *adieu*, and fall slides past darkening windows. Let us hear from you! We want *Engaging Aging* to be directed by your needs.

Sherryl White, csj  
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## Who Would Have Guessed?

*by Sister Mary Elizabeth Kloss, OSB, Superior  
Our Lady Queen Monastery, Tickfaw, Louisiana*

I would never have guessed that I would live in a monastery in the South. I made my final vows in a Contemplative Benedictine Priory in the Northeast when I was in my 20's in 1984. Most of my Sisters were close to my own age. I had not yet experienced living with elder Sisters. But in 2003, I was asked to help a small community, the majority of whom were elderly.

As I listened to stories about the origins of my new home, I began to realize that the Sisters I was being asked to help - frail and dependent on wheel chairs, walkers, and oxygen tanks - were not always like this. They were the pioneers who had built the monastery, facing amazing challenges. Now, with a grace that still touches me, they have entrusted their monastery to me. Welcoming me into the heart of their home, they have supported the changes I've had to make, even when I have given things away. Their spirit of detachment speaks to me of a grounding in trust and faith in the Lord. Clearly, their lives of fidelity have brought them to this point of remarkable depth.



Living with my elder Sisters, I am learning that the need for a false sense of "self-importance" drops away as one ages. Recognition for having held authority, expertise, scholarship, skills, and titles becomes unnecessary armor to be abandoned. As someone said to me, "Having authority (or whatever) is only a phase in one's life." What a gift I have been given to see this concept lived as a grace-filled reality. These women know who they are now, and it certainly isn't the hat they wore in the past!

One day, I noticed a Sister as I passed by the door of her room. With only a quick glance, I could see that her heart was heavy. I stepped in to visit, and Sister said, "All I do every day is get myself to the bathroom, then get myself back to this chair." We talked a bit more, and Sister was grateful for my care. But I was the one who went away gifted. With her one sentence, my understanding of our vows was deepened beyond my years. When we profess vows, we envision how we might give our life-blood to whatever kind of hard work the community asks of us. We are ready to follow the Lord and give Him our life. But are any of us thinking about following the Lord as this Sister described? Yet, isn't it true? We say "all" and the Lord takes "all". The years of hard work make sense to us; the shuffling between bathroom and chair makes sense to heaven.

It happens time and again. Bustling about in the halls, I am usually taught by a Sister whose limitations hold her in stillness. One Sister spoke to me of an entire day spent pouring over a single note from a friend. While I tried to imagine her frustration, she told me, instead, of her gratitude for being able to see at all. Her greatest joy is her ability to see the prayers of the Divine Office! The sight I myself now have, being to able to scan a page, to see peripherally - none of this is guaranteed to last all my life. What will it take to give me a "good day"?

These are my Sisters, my teachers, my elders: loving, thoughtful, spiritually strong, deep and vibrant. With light hearts and supple spirits, they exude an oasis of calm and confidence, believing "all will be well, and every matter of thing will be well." They are teaching me to age well. Who would have guessed?

***"It happens time and again. Bustling about... I am usually taught by a Sister whose limitations hold her in stillness..."***

# The Joy of Retirement

by Reverend John Burke, OP, Professor Emeritus, Dominican House of Studies, Washington, D.C.

I retired as Professor of Preaching at the age of seventy seven. I had been in active ministry for forty-five years. Most of that time had been as a Professor of preaching in the Dominican House of Studies. For 20 years, however, I took a break from teaching, and preached parish missions all over the country and beyond. I was one of those very blessed priests who had the best of all possible worlds. I enjoyed my work and my many friends. I filled in my spare time with writing books and articles.

In addition, in 1972 I founded and directed the National Institute for the Word of God. Our website is still active, and I continue to answer questions addressed to "Ask the Preacher."

For most of these long years, I was able to run four or five miles a day, even when traveling on the road. It was an excellent conditioner for heart and lungs, but so much running may have contributed to my neuropathy which forced me to retire.

When I developed neuropathy in my legs, which makes walking difficult, I realized that God was calling me to fulfill my priesthood in another way. So, I retired.

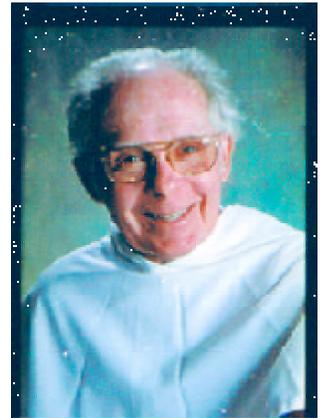
As a retiree, the pressure of meeting deadlines and great responsibilities is over. Other than the debilitating neuropathy, I enjoy excellent health. I live in a Dominican priory that has a number of older friars living here, so the problems of aging are understood, and necessary adjustments are made in community life. I still am able to offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and preach, both within and outside the community. I

also have plenty for time for prayer, both official and private.

Living in a retirement community is not a choice I would have made when I was younger, but now that it is necessary, I find it very enjoyable. The Lord has been very gracious to me throughout my life, and retirement is no different. As the Book of Ecclesiastes says: "There is a season for every thing, a time for every occupation under the sun." By God's grace I have been able to recognize the truth of that Scripture, even for such a major change in life style as retirement.

As in all the events of our life, it is useless and frustrating to "kick against the goad", as St. Paul learned. (Acts 2:14) God has a plan for each of us, and in my case retirement now is part of that plan. I have always enjoyed going with the flow of grace that has come at the different ages of my life—now is no different. I have no regrets over the past, although I recognized that I could have done things differently, perhaps even better. But even my mistakes were part of God's plan for me.

St. Paul has a wonderful line, to which I have frequently had recourse in troubled periods of my life. "Divine power is made perfect in our human weakness." So, although my body is wearing out, "I make my weakness my special boast so that the power of Christ may stay over me. (2 Cor 12:9).



Initiated by Assistant Provincial Patricia Nelson, CSJ, several Carondelet Sisters of St. Joseph, Los Angeles Province, gathered for a **Spirituality of Aging Retreat**. Traveling from as far away as Hawaii, they spent a week together at Holy Spirit Retreat Center in Encino, California. The Center, newly renovated by the Sisters of Social Service, offered a beautiful venue for a week of contemplative prayer.

# Seasons of Transition and Transformation

*By Sister Margaret Burkle, OSF, Director of Pre-Retirement & Retirement, Sisters of St. Francis, Dubuque, Iowa*



Like the seasons of the fields, each of us is God’s story told in the changing colors of winter, spring, summer and fall. When we pray, our hearts cry out the stories of our lives and we share the seasons of our heart. All this is part of moving from one season into the next and the spirituality of transition and transformation. And somehow our feet have always taken us places where our heart had whispered we should go.

- ***What season is unfolding within me?***

- ***What is my body telling me as I grow older?***

- ***What is life-giving for me right now?***

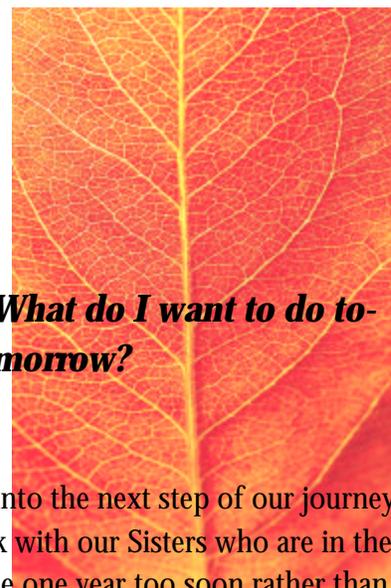


- ***What dreams have I put on hold?***

- ***What really matters to me?***

- ***Where has my life taken me?***

- ***Who is God for me?***



- ***What do I want to do tomorrow?***

...How we prepare for our retirement is key to how we will enter into the next step of our journey. If you do retirement well, you will be ready to retire... When I walk with our Sisters who are in the autumn season of discerning retirement, I always tell them to “come one year too soon rather than one year too late. Come when you still feel good about what you are doing. Come when someone says ‘you can’t leave us.’ Come when you still can enjoy the dreams and the things that you put on hold for so long.”

## Did you know...

- The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services are implementing an action plan so that those who are eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid, called dual eligibles, can get better care through Special Needs Plans (SNPs). For more info see <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/apps/media/press/release.asp?Counter=1912>
- According to a new study, older adults may be more likely to fall if they have low levels of Vitamin D. This finding is particularly true for those age 65 to 75 years. For more info see <http://jcem.endojournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/91/8/2980>
- The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers a booklet that outlines the physical effects of aging, as well as tips on coping with them in order to remain a safe driver as long as possible. Type "Driving Safely While Aging Gracefully" into the "Search" box of their website, [www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov).
- Medicare beneficiaries who wait until November/December to enroll in a Medicare prescription drug plan are subject to a 7 percent per month premium penalty for the rest of their lives. This is much harsher than the late enrollment penalty under the rest of Medicare. **Please e-mail your Senators and Representatives to support waiving the penalty and providing additional funding for outreach and enrollment.** A sample e-mail can be found on the website of the National Council on Aging at <http://capwiz.com/ncoa/issues/alert/?alertid=9011071> or write your own letter.



### **Haiku for Autumn**

**Ms. Mary Jo Klick, Project Coordinator,  
Engaging Impasse, Circles of Contemplation & Dialogue, Clinton, MD**

**quiet country road  
early autumn morning haze  
holy communion**

**leaves upon the lawn  
a vibrancy of color  
autumn nears its time**

**such splendid dying  
no somber hue among them  
autumn taking leave**

## NRRO Happenings...

### September 6-8, 2006: Focus Group Addressing Under-Utilized Buildings & Elder Housing

Nine Religious Institutes were represented at a focus group convened by NRRO in Washington, D.C., September 6-8, 2006. Participants shared their stories and helped the NRRO staff glean common principles and guidelines that might be helpful to other communities as they plan. **Stay tuned as follow-up reports and workshops develop!**



*Participants attending the NRRO Focus Group,*

*(Top right) Brother Joseph Berg, CSC, and Sister Joanne Riesterer, SSSF*

*(Bottom right) Mr. David Kostik, representing Crosier Fathers and Brothers, and Sister Chris Perrier, MSC*

### Oct. 31—Nov. 1, 2006 Person-Centered Care Training

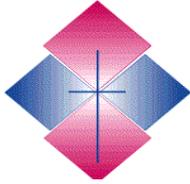
NRRO, in collaboration with Mather LifeWays, will host a “Train the Trainer” conference in Chicago, IL. Made possible by a grant from the Retirement Research Foundation, seventy-five Religious Institutes will be able to participate. The Conference is currently over-subscribed and has a waiting list. **If interested in future programs, please contact Sister Janice Bader ([jbader@uscgb.org](mailto:jbader@uscgb.org) or 202/541-3465).**

## NRRO LISTSERV Conversation Question for Fall...



### ***What is your community doing to prepare members for retirement?***

- If you are not already a member of our listserv, send an email to [mglover@uscgb.org](mailto:mglover@uscgb.org) and request to be added.
- To begin your chat, just send an email to [rfr@felix.uscgb.org](mailto:rfr@felix.uscgb.org).
- Your email will automatically be sent to everyone else on the listserv.
- You will also receive emails sent by others on the listserv.
- It's easy. It's safe. It's free. Grab a cup of coffee and let's share some ideas!



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*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.*

### **National Religious Retirement Office Staff**

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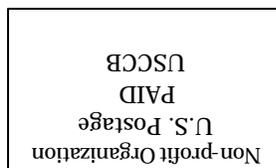
Sister Janice Bader, CPPS, Project Director, Retirement Services

Monica Glover, Database Manager

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Is your institute dealing with under-utilized buildings? Building or renovating for elder care? Let us know if NRRO can help.



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