

# Aging Gracefully during the Pandemic

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## Session 2: Legacy

### Opening Prayer

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*Pray the following words aloud together:*

Ageless God,  
God of the Ages,

We struggle now in an environment  
that seems more fragile than ever.

Give us a breadth of vision that will enable us  
to move out of this narrow space

and into greater awareness  
of your presence and power.

We ask this in Christ's name.

Amen.

### The Gift of Time

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*Read the talking points throughout this process aloud. Simply have each participant read one paragraph at a time to the whole group, continuing around the circle.*

- When we made out our wills, we designated some of our treasures to different family members. But soon we discovered that the younger generation did not want our china, or silver, or mementos gathered from travel to foreign countries. So we pondered what our legacy might be to those who survived us. We reflected about gifts of time, acts of service, and wisdom passed on to the next generation.
- Then the pandemic hit.
- Some of us live alone and have been forced to “shelter in place” by ourselves. Authorities implore us to stay at home and allow adult children, friends, or caregivers to bring in food, medicine, and other necessities. We are ordering things online and encouraged to buy gift cards to help local companies and restaurants stay in business.
- Some of us are in nursing homes where each staff person is gowned and masked and subjected to a temperature check at the start of each shift.

Food is brought to our rooms and we don't enjoy the camaraderie of meals together, community games, or entertainment. We cannot receive visitors now. So what can be our contribution at this time?

- Many churches and community organizations are checking in to see how members are coping and what might be needed. We might offer to make calls, write letters, or handle small tasks. “Checking in” has become a prominent ministry, and now we may have the opportunity to be on the front lines. How many people do we know who would appreciate a call?
- Many people are re-connecting with neighbors and relatives they have not talked to in years. Others are writing notes, playing online bingo or card games with grandchildren who are bored, or reading a book and then discussing it by way of a Zoom connection on the Internet.

- **The gift of technology.** One woman lamented that her walks with her troubled granddaughter had been canceled due to the COVID-19 threat. Previously she had disliked social media, but she discovered that FaceTime began to work very well so long as it occurred after ten at night. She made the sacrifice, because she knew her affirmation and appreciation for this wayward teen were vitally important, especially now. Computers, iPhones and tablets are offering us new opportunities to connect. We just may have to endure a bit of tutoring if operating these new-fangled inventions appears daunting. Every day we can find

creative ways to communicate assurance of love and prayers to those in need of comfort, feedback, or direction.

- And let us not forget our prayer. Loneliness can be channeled into solitude if we let our friends know that we are mentioning them by name as we ask God for healing and hope for so many suffering people. Prayer is so powerful and as we draw closer to a loving God, we can be traveling along the road with those who have special needs and rely on our care and concern.

## Reflection Questions

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- ① What gifts of service, companionship, or prayer are you able to offer to others as you shelter in place?

- ② What has prayer been like for you during this time of sheltering in place?

## New Opportunities

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- Many elders are frustrated that their multiple volunteer activities have been halted or they have been implored to stay at home because of their age or more vulnerable health. Time spent making weekly St. Vincent de Paul visits, delivering Meals-on-Wheels, caring for grandchildren, or performing numerous functions at schools, nursing homes, or symphony halls has all been curtailed or canceled. We have time on our hands and yet we still have the energy and capability to do so much.
- Once the initial grieving and restlessness passes, seniors are finding ways to staff parish hot lines for neighbors seeking assistance, organize volunteers who are ready and willing to do some of the tasks they had recently performed, etc. So many people at home are cleaning closets, shredding old files, and simplifying their households so that needs and wants can be held in clearer relief. Some are journaling, and many are sharing messages of hope and humor with friends and relatives.

- These are our wisdom years when we have distilled the hard knocks and learnings of countless life experiences. Successes, failures, relationships, disappointments, and deaths can be seen now with the eagle's view of insight and meaning.
- This is a time to invite deeper listening, to gather memories, and mine the wisdom from life lessons. We can do that through thoughtful questions that encourage others to share their stories. As we deepen connections with loved ones, we can also practice being vulnerable and courageous in sharing what is most important to us.
- Perhaps there is an invitation in this time to read the writings or biographies of heroes like Gandhi, Dorothy Stang, Martin Luther King, Jr., St. Mother Theresa, or Archbishop Romero. Many novels offer wisdom as well, and poets can connect us to nature and human insight in a manner that is uplifting. We have so much time on our hands now. Will we waste it, or will we use it for further growth? Mary Oliver, in her poem "The Summer Day" asks: "What will you do with your

one wild and precious life?” What do you want to do with this time?

- Self-pity and ruminating over worst case scenarios can be replaced by calm reflection; judgment replaced by re-framing to notice more sides to the situation. We are not so ready to criticize a teen’s outlandish piercings or styles, but see the young person struggling to emerge into a coherent self. We observe the horrors of world events from a history that has seen wars and mayhem pass into new eras of change.

- In our younger years, many of us were aware that some “old people” possessed a joy and peacefulness, but that others seemed bitter and grouchy most of the time. Sweet and sour. When this pandemic period is over, our children, grandchildren, neighbors, and friends will remember how we spent our senior years. Perhaps most of all they may recall how we weathered the time we were forced to shelter in our homes, at a distance from those we loved.

## Reflection Questions

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① In what ways are you being invited to grow, deepen, and learn during this time?

② How do you think family and friends who must stay at a distance now perceive you—as sweet or sour?

## Closing Prayer

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*Pray the following words aloud together:*

Jesus, your legacy to us grows clearer  
as we grow older  
and understand the wisdom you shared.

Help us to reflect your compassionate and listening  
presence to others,  
even when we can’t be with them physically.

Inspire us for ways we can continue to serve you  
during this time of social distancing.

Amen.

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