

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

April 5, 2020

Spiritual Ponderings

Growing Old Gracefully

Greg Barker our Director of Evangelization and Adult Faith Formation suggested that I should read a book written by Richard P. Johnson titled: *A New Vision of Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: How to Construct, Organize, and Sustain a Vibrant Faith Formation Program for the Second Half of Life*. In this book, Richard Johnson lays out 12 principals for developing a parish ministry geared towards older adults. As I read the book, I began to see some areas of my own faith life that I need to think about as I grow older. I therefore think it would be beneficial for everyone to reflect with me on what it means to growing old within the context of our Catholic Faith no matter what your age is now. Quotes from this book will be in bold. My reflections will be in the normal font.

**We live in a culture that suffers from age prejudice. It's not that we don't like old people; on an individual level we may have deep respect and great admiration for a particular older person. On a societal level, however, we tend to fear aging, mistrust it, and think of it as a "thief in the night." This is unfortunate because aging is one of the few things that every living person does every single day. Even the Church suffers from ageism.**

Watching my grandmother grow old was a very scary life experience. It was hard to watch a woman who was one of the most independent persons that I had ever know, become first homebound and then bedbound. It was intimidating to be in her presence when she was going through an episode of mental confusion because I did not know what to do to help her. Spending time with my grandmother in her last years are some of my most treasured memories of her. It was a chance for me to give back to her some of the love that she had showered me with over the years. It was a way for me to be the Good Samaritan and help the wounded traveler who had been beaten up through no fault of her own. It was my chance to be Jesus curing the lepers by relieving her of the pains of loneliness. When I hear people talk about euthanasia today, I want to stop and tell the person to get over their fears and simply love the person.

**Much too often, spiritually maturing adults see the aging process simply as the secular world sees it: as something that happens to our bodies only. Aging is an extension of the God-ordained lifelong development process of life, and it is a physical and a mental process. In order to personally, "own" this expanded view of aging, spiritually maturing adults need to transform any regressive attitudes about aging and replace them with life-giving attitudes of light.**

Conversion is a part of life as a Catholic. Our faith tells us that a lot of times the values of the world are much different than the values of God and therefore we need to take time to make sure our thoughts and values align with God's and not that of the world. We should see old age as a gift from God – the giver of all good gifts.

**Principal #1: Parish ministry for maturing adults pays attention to three dimensions of growth: spiritual, psychological, and physical.**

Personal Goal #1: As I grow older, I will make sure I pay attention to maturing spiritually, psychologically, and physically. In the seminary we talked about the four pillars of formation: human, spiritual, psychological, and pastoral. In other words, the seminary wanted us to be well-rounded individuals. In the same way the Church wants all of us to be well-rounded individuals. Saint Irenaeus of Lyon said that the "Glory of God was a person fully alive." Growing old therefore does not mean we should diminish but rather we should flourish in all areas of our lives. I should plan on going on a yearly retreat as well as a yearly physical. I should make sure I take time to pray every day and I should take time to make sure I take my medication on time.

**Principal #2: Parish ministry for maturing adults should be a part of the parish plan, well organized, and consistent in offering services that people will come to count on.**

Personal Goal #2: I will find ways to face my senior years as prepared as possible.

One of the hardest things to do in leading a parish is to make sure every area of parish life is being address. I like using the phrase of "zone defense". This is part of the reason; I like the fact that we at St. Joseph have a director of Adult Faith Formation. I think it is also important though for older people to seek out opportunities within the parish to help them grow for example, as a PSR catechist or Children's Liturgy of the Word leader. One learns and develops a sense of community as one teaches the next generation.

**Principal #3 Parish ministry for maturing adults employs styles of teaching and learning unique to the people being served.**

Personal Goal #3: I will focus on being the best version of myself as possible and try not to be someone else. I will appreciate my experience of growing up without comparing myself with others.

We need to make sure that we do not have a one program fits all type mentality. I love parishes that have a senior group that older adults can participate in but I also like the fact that many parishes have a Knights of Columbus and a retreat program like ACTS or Christ Renews His Parish.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**April 12, 2020**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Growing Old Gracefully**

Let us continue our reflections on “growing old gracefully” using Richard Johnson’s book: *A New Vision of Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: How to Construct, Organize, and Sustain a Vibrant Faith Formation Program for the Second Half of Life*. Richard Johnson lays out 12 principals for developing a parish ministry geared towards older adults. Quotes from this book will be in bold. My reflections will be in the normal font.

**Principal #4 Parish ministry for maturing adults is based on the idea that God is calling each maturing adult in the parish to a profound vocation.**

Personal Goal #4: I will realize that I will always play an important part of God’s plan and I have an obligation to God, others, and myself that to always be the best version of myself as possible.

**Specialized vocations give new meaning to life. Many maturing adults feel a sense of meaninglessness because they’ve lost sight of their purpose. At every age and every stage, we are continuously in the throes of deconstructing previous meaning systems and constructing new meaning systems in our innermost personality functions. Spiritually maturing adults need guidance, instruction, and dialogue with others on deeper spiritual levels so they can construct the most authentic and enriching life meaning possible. A fully vibrant ministry to maturing adults can remind them of who they really are and hold up their inherent value in a new light.**

As I was reading this section of the book, my mind began to reflect to my child and teen years where so many older adults in my home parish help me grow closer to Christ. My grandmother’s fishing buddies (a group of fellow parishioners who were friends of my grandmother and went fishing together quite often) inspired me in many ways. They became people, I looked up to and wanted to be like and I could see faith was important to them. I therefore made an effort to make faith important to me. They were people who devoted a lot of their time to helping others and so I wanted to be someone who helped others. In my mother’s life, I have seen a woman who has found new life from moving from parent to grandparent. If we are alive then we are still a part of God’s plan and He still wants us to play an active role in the world today. As we grow older, we should realize that we are role models for future generations. Do they find us to be good role models? We should also ask ourselves who could I be a mentor to?

**Principal #5 Parish ministry for maturing adults shifts the focus of parish activity to a broad understanding of ministry at every level of mature adulthood: shared activities as well as shared growth in faith and life.**

Personal Goal #5: I will make sure that I remain an active member of my faith community.

**Faith formation is the process of passing the leadership of the total psycho-spiritual personality from our worldly self to our true and holy self. The faith formation process is not age or time-limited, rather it is driven by our very life course, our manifold life experience. It is the events, the full measure of our lives that offers us the spiritual curriculum we need to gradually let go of what is non-essential, and steadily turn toward the truth that sets us free. This is as true for older people as for everyone else in the parish.**

I love the image in the above quote about transferring our personality from our worldly self to our true and holy self. This is a task that I do not imagine completing on this side of the grave and so it is something I pray for the grace from God to keep working on each and every day of life.

Sometimes in life we have to make a choice to allow others to help us so that we can remain active members of the parish. Letting someone give you a ride to Church or carry something for you is not the end of the world. I hate

hearing people say “I don’t want to be a burden to anyone” because this is a clear sign that someone is letting their ego get in the way. It is alright to ask for help.

**Principal #6 Parish ministry for maturing adults explicitly welcomes maturing adults into mainstream ministries of the parish.**

Personal Goal #6: I will strive to be a welcoming person who points out the positive things going on in the parish and the wider Church.

**Parish ministry is marked by hospitality, which means that we must be welcoming in all aspects of parish life and experience which means that we must be welcoming in all aspects of parish life and experience: social, physical, psychological, and spiritual. Our ministry to maturing adults is also marked by hospitality, which means that we must have social events where spiritual maturing adults are encourage to mingle, mix, and have fun.**

It is important for us to never forget the power of personal invitation so as we grow older, let us never forget that we should always be inviting people to join us at Church especially Mass but also other Church social activities.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**April 19, 2020**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

**Growing Old Gracefully**

Using Richard Johnson’s book: *A New Vision of Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: How to Construct, Organize, and Sustain a Vibrant Faith Formation Program for the Second Half of Life*, we have been reflecting on what it means to grow old gracefully. Richard Johnson lays out 12 principals for developing a parish ministry geared towards older adults. Quotes from this book will be in bold. My reflections will be in the normal font.

**Principal #7 The goal of parish ministry for maturing adults is spiritual transformation.**

Personal Goal #7: I will look at aging as an opportunity to grow closer to God and not a curse. I should not be surprise that God wants to make me into something better.

**So often we become blinded by our worldly attitudes that over-value personal achievement, production, and vocational performance above all other values. Too easily we equate young with heightened performance and older with diminish performance. While such beliefs may dimly reflect reality on the form level, they clearly do not approach reality on a spiritual level.**

Catholicism always sees each person as a person and that each person has innate God given dignity that can never be tarnished by what we do. All human beings are equally loved and treasured by God. The sad part is that we often devalue people in our mind. God did not hold “age” against Abraham, Sarah, Hannah, or Elizabeth.

**Transformative learning allows us to realign our true selves with God.**

The more positive one is with his or her self-esteem the more he or she will live a more fulfilling life. The Gospel as St. John tells us is that God did not send the Son into the world to condemn us but to save us and give life eternal (John 3:16). The voices of self-condemnation are not the voice of God.

**Principal #8 The content of programs offered in a parish ministry for maturing adults rises out of the real situations in which such people live, including moments of transitions and daily life.**

Personal Goal #8: I will apply my spiritual life to my real life. I will act the same way Saturday afternoon as I am on Sunday morning. There will be no duplicity within me.

**Developing a new perspective on sickness makes all the difference in how spiritually maturing adults see themselves... Wellness is an all-encompassing notion that includes finding fulfilment on three levels of mature human living. The first level of wellness is on the physical level we simply call the “well”. The second aspect of wellness is wellness of the mind which we call “Wisdom.” The third aspect of wellness resides on the spiritual level of the soul, which we call “whole”. At every life step and stage, we seek to become well, wise, and whole. This is particularly important in the**

**maturing years for its here that one has developed an adequate level of maturation necessary to really get a grip on these three aspects of wellness in a comprehensive way.**

I want to be a person of authenticity and integrity and this can only happen if I allow God to give me my identity. If I focus too much on what others think of me, I will find myself acting differently with different groups of people. This is not always easy because we often desire affirmation.

**Principal #9 Parish ministry for maturing adults focuses on both interior and exterior growth.**

Personal Goal #9: I will try to keep myself physically fit and spiritually on fire for God.

**The changes that later life bring can be received as opportunities or as threats. The purpose of later life is to usher in a renewal of spirit where a new forum for growth and happiness can emerge... Growth and happiness flow from the quest to discover new purpose, new meaning, and new life.**

As we live our lives change will enter our lives and we will be forced to change. We cannot all stay at home with our parents forever, we can keep our children from growing up, we cannot stop the aging process, etc. This means that we can either embrace these changes as opportunities or we can see them as curses. If we see them as opportunities and trust that God is with us in them, we can grow through these experiences. I think a prime example of this is seeing how many older adults have found joy in becoming grandparents.

Growing older means that I have to take care of myself physically because I get to be alive or it becomes a chore that I can neglect. I know that I take care of myself better the more grateful I am for all that God has done for me.

**Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius**

**April 26, 2020**

**Spiritual Ponderings**

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Using Richard Johnson's book: *A New Vision of Parish Ministry for Maturing Adults: How to Construct, Organize, and Sustain a Vibrant Faith Formation Program for the Second Half of Life*, we have been reflecting on what it means to grow old gracefully. Richard Johnson lays out 12 principals for developing a parish ministry geared towards older adults. Quotes from this book will be in bold. My reflections will be in the normal font.

**Principal #10 Parish ministry for maturing adults is Christ-centered.**

Personal Goal #10: Is to keep myself and my attention focused on Christ and heaven.

**Successful parish ministry, for maturing adults is an extension of this mission of love. Learning as personal transformation is at the heart of this ministry. True learning, learning from the Lord that is genuinely life changing, involves some measure of re-shaping of self.**

The following passage from Scripture tells the story of Simon's mother-in-law: "Jesus left the synagogue and went to the home of Simon. Now Simon's mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Jesus to help her. So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them. (Luke 4:38-39) It is also a brief description of how every disciple's life should be. Before Christ we are sick, Christ heals us, and then we serve others out of gratitude for what God has done for us. We are to keep in mind all that God does for us.

Every day we suffer from temptations will come our way. We may be tempted by fame, fortune, etc. It is important to keep Christ at the center of my life so I do not give into those temptations.

**Principal #11 Successful parish ministry for maturing adult is developmental, ongoing, and lifelong.**

Personal Goal #11: I will finish strong.

**There is never a time in the Christian life when the person can claim, "Well, I guess I've grown spiritually as much as I can." Our lives are divided into stages that are hooked together by transitions.**

Spirituality is definitely a lifelong process: I love this quote from Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketcham book *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Search for Meaning*: "Spirituality is a lot like health. We all have health; we may have good health or poor health, but it's something we can't avoid having. The same is true of spirituality: every human being is a spiritual being. The question is not whether we "have spirituality" but whether the

spirituality we have is a negative one that leads to isolation and self-destruction or one that is more positive and life-giving.” Just as we all desire to remain healthy; we should always want to remain spiritual healthy as well.

**Principal #12 successful parish ministry for maturing adults’ honors diversity of age, stage, personality, ethnicity, and spirituality.**

Personal Goal #12: I will keep exploring new ways to grow in my faith.

**The Church is most healthy when it offers diversity.**

Theologically and liturgically speaking, I have a more conservative bias therefore I challenge myself to try to have dialogues with people who have a more liberal bias with a goal of walking away with a great appreciation of their point of view.

I like to think of a major league baseball pitcher. If all he can do is throw a fastball, he will not be a very good pitcher. Most really good major league baseball pitchers can throw two to three other pitches (like a curve or a slider).

The following is a prayer written by St. Thomas Aquinas that came to mind as I was thinking how to summarize my personal goals after these reflections.

**Prayer for a Good Life** - Grant O merciful God, that I may ardently desire, carefully examine, truly know and perfectly fulfil those things that are pleasing to You and to the praise and glory of Your holy name. Direct my life, O my God, and grant that I might know what you would have me to do and for me to fulfil it as is necessary and profitable to my soul.

Grant to me, O Lord my God, that I may not be found wanting in prosperity or in adversity and that I may not be lifted up by one nor cast down by the other.

May I find joy in nothing but what leads to You and sorrow in nothing but what leads away from You.

May I seek to please no one or fear to displease anyone, save only You.

Grant to me, O Lord God,

– a vigilant heart that no subtle speculation may ever lead me from You;

– a noble heart that no unworthy affection may draw me from You;

– an upright heart that no evil purpose may turn me from you.

Give me a steadfast heart that no tribulation may shatter and a free heart that no violent affection may claim as its own.

And finally, grant me O Lord my God, a mind to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you. Give me a way of life pleasing to You; perseverance to trust and await You in confidence that I shall embrace You at the last. Amen.