

Gift of Years Project—A ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in West Virginia

The NBA and Disciples in the West Virginia region are partnering together for The Gift of Years Project, which focuses on ministering with, to, and for older adults in local Disciples churches and the wider community. Following is a resource for local churches—bible study groups, affinity groups, ongoing education programs, worship planning committees—that seek to learn more about and raise awareness around aging, and strengthening our worshipping communities.

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A RESOURCE: BENEDICTIONS

Just as a good word is offered on the people at the close of worship, so too do our lives have the power and promise to offer a good word as we come to the end of our time here on earth. Our final acts, words, and legacy can be gifts to those we leave behind. May we end well and let our lives bless those we love, and be a blessing held high at the end of our service.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: WRITE YOUR OWN OBITUARY

By crafting your obituary, you alleviate the work of your family members to write an obituary in the midst of their grief, which is sometimes done with funeral directors or under the duress of meeting a particular deadline. The practice of writing your obituary allows you to be creative, consider stories and experiences in your life, or also allows you to give recognition to loved ones, friends, and mentors. This is a meaningful practice for many so that you help to share a story of your life that is not limited to a list of relatives, jobs, affinity groups, and awards. You can honor and highlight the celebrations and accomplishments in your life as you chose to live it. You also may find it important and choose that a chronological list of achievements is in fact how you would like your life's story to be shared. In short, writing your own obituary is about choosing how to share you life, values, and legacy. And, you are not left being a boring copy of last week's obituaries.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: WRITE A LETTER(S) OF WISDOM AND WONDER

There may come a time when speech fails, but much has been left unsaid. There may be things you wish to say but can not share face to face. There may be things to say that are too complicated for casual conversation, or that need the language of the poet or seer. A special set of letters written when your mind is clear and words still come to pen may be a wonderful gift from you to family and friends. You may want to write to individuals or to groups or both.

Such letters are a great place to share the things you hope for, to declare your love and delight in the lives of others, to offer words of wisdom and wonder, to seek peace and live by grace with all who matter in your life, and to highlight and celebrate special moments with those whom you love and who love you. These letters may also prove to be a gift of great grace to you as well.

A RESOURCE: DOXOLOGIES

One of the hallmarks of The Gift of Years is that this ministry praises God! There is joy to be shared as we live life to the fullest. Joy breaks forth in doxology. Our life is an offering for the entire world to know, hear, and see.

During our gifted years (older adult years), we can raise up our voices in praise for the wonders we have witnessed in this life God has given us and given to us abundantly.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: CRAFTING A COMMONPLACE BOOK

For those of us who shy from things electronic, an old-fashioned “Commonplace Book” might be in order. That’s a 19th century phrase for modern scrap-booking. In your “Commonplace Book” you can place photos, poems, words of wisdoms, song lyrics, pressed flowers, fingerprints, lip-blots, Bible verses, valuable stuff from the rag-bag, mustard seeds . . . you get the idea. Raise your voice in praise! Such a book will bring great joy to those who love you. Your “Commonplace Book” provides others with a path to knowing and seeing the joy, joy, joy deep in your heart. Creating your “Commonplace Book” can be done as a solitary practice or as a special group activity. There can be special moments and exchanges when sharing this activity with loved ones. How wonderful if the practice can also be intergenerational!

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: CREATING AN ELECTRONIC COMMONPLACE BOOK

For those comfortable with new technology, you can make your own PowerPoint presentation as your form of your “Commonplace Book.” With this practice, you help craft and design your life’s story for sharing with others in joyful ways. In addition to photos, you can include home movies, clips from films, audio messages, pieces of music, and you can attach documents, and provide links to your favorite websites. Like the paper version of the “Commonplace Book,” this electronic story of your life will give insight into what you loved in life, what brought joy, and what were major celebrations to remember providing a path and insight to the joy, joy, joy deep in your heart. Creating your electronic “Commonplace Book” can be done as a solitary practice or as a special group activity. There can be special moments and exchanges when sharing this activity with loved ones. Some might suggest having a young person assist you in this practice helps you navigate the many potential electronic mazes!



**National
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Association**
of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

CONTACT
(314) 993-9000 | nbacares.org

MISSION

Following God’s call, the National Benevolent Association exists to inspire and connect the people and ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), to accompany one another in the creation of communities of compassion and care, and to advocate for the well-being of humanity.

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A RESOURCE: LIFE TOGETHER

As Christians, we do not live alone. We are a people of faith in community with one another. Together, we form the beloved community God has created. We learn, we grow, we influence, and we shape our shared knowledge of life. We are part of the body of Christ. As people of faith, we are called to contribute to our worshipping community and to the wholeness of the Church. Life together is a beautiful sign of God's grace in the world.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: MY LIFE/OUR STORY

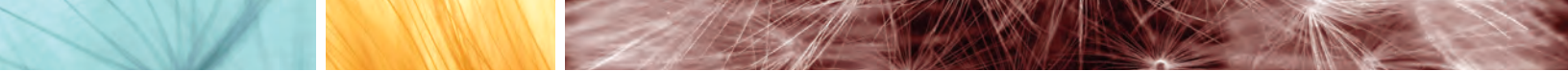
Gather a group around you and invite them help you identify and write down your life (the good, the joyous, the bad, the ugly)—all the experiences, moments, accomplishments, or unexpected surprises that have given value and meaning to your life and your life with others. This might take the form of a letter, an obituary, or a group autobiography. This shared story might also make a wonderful family film. Utilize the opportunity for meaningful dialogue between generations. This is a wonderful project to do in a small group of family and/or friends.

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: THE COMMUNITY OF SIMEON AND ANNA—CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN WEST VIRGINIA

“They were righteous and devout...and gave thanks...and spoke of him to all.”

LUKE 2:25, 38

“The Community of Simeon and Anna” is a ministry project happening in the West Virginia Disciples region. With this project, we seek to honor and acknowledge the older adult members of our congregations, who have spent years in the church providing patient presence, faithful prayer, and humble proclamation in word and deed. We recognize these leaders as sages and saints who have embodied Jesus to us and humbly served our communities of faith.



This ministry of recognition and honor is known by name as “The Community of Simeon and Anna” with intentional reference and witness to the story in Luke 2:25 – 28. In the scripture, two aging and older adult people of faith—Simeon and Anna—become filled with the Holy Spirit. They spend hours in the temple of the Lord demonstrating **patient presence, powerful prayer, prophetic presentation**. Simeon and Anna were among the first witnesses to speak about the salvation of God for all people in Jesus Christ.

Whether still living among us or in the great communion of the saints now departed, we honor the witness and faithful example of Simeon and Anna. Their “good news” resonates with us as people of faith. Through the story of Simeon and Anna, we hear and know the message, meaning, and ministry of Jesus.

AN INVITATION: THE COMMUNITY OF SIMEON AND ANNA

Identify the sages and saints in your local congregation. Invite each one into a “Community of Simeon of Anna.” Prepare and plan for meaningful ways of honoring and recognizing the “Simeons” and “Annas” in your church. Your church and pastor may choose to recognize these sages and saints during a special worship service or at a special event in the liturgical year (example: The first Sunday after Christmas Day often has a lectionary focus on Simeon and Anna in the scriptures). Be creative and inspired to think of unique ways of showing your church’s gratitude and love for the service, leadership, and ministry that has been given by your “Community of Simeon and Anna.”



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A RESOURCE: WAYS OF WISDOM

We believe God speaks in and through wisdom. We recognize that there are many “Simeons” and “Annas” (Luke 2:25 - 28) in our local churches and throughout our Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). As we identify and name the servant leadership exemplified by our older adult Disciples, we do so in the spirit of a living Christ. Our sages, saints, and gifted older adults bear witness to the gospel in our world. We give thanks for the wisdom and life of our older adults!

RECOMMENDED READINGS AND RESOURCES FOR MINISTRY WITH, TO, AND FOR OLDER ADULTS

Bibliography and resources provided by The Rev. Dr. Larry Grimes, retired professor and current Dean of Buffalo Seminary and the Director of Church Relations at Bethany College.

BOOKS

- Bianchi, Eugene C., *Aging as a Spiritual Journey*
Brackney, Jolene, *Creating Moments of Joy: A Journal for Caregivers*
Chittister, Joan, *The Gift of Years: Growing Old Gracefully*
Fischer, Kathleen, *Winter Grace: Spirituality and Aging*
Gentzler, Richard H. Jr., *Aging and Ministry in the 21st Century: An Inquiry Approach*
Hauerwas, Stanley et. al., *Growing Old in Christ*
Hill, Robert D., *Positive Aging: A Guide for Mental Health Professionals and Consumers*
Keck, David, *Forgetting Whose We Are: Alzheimer's Disease and the Love of God*
Kidder, Tracy, *Old Friends*
Kimble, Melvin A. et. al., *Aging, Spirituality, and Religion: A Handbook*
Melton, Joy Thonrburg, *Safe Sanctuaries: The Church Responds to Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of Older Adults*
Nouwen, Henri, *Aging: The Fulfillment of Life*
Rohr, Richard, *Falling Upward*
Shuman, Joel and Volck, *Reclaiming the Body: Christians and the Faithful Use of Modern Medicine*
Shuman, Joel James and Meador, Keith G., *Heal Thyself: Spirituality, Medicine and the Distortion of Theology*
Weil, Andrew, *Healthy Aging: A Lifelong Guide to Your Well-Being*

SCRIPTURES ON AGING

For a full list, visit www.giftofyears.org.

Exodus 20:12
Deuteronomy 5:16
Leviticus 19:32
2 Samuel 19: 31
2 Chronicles 16: 11
Psalm 71:17-18
Ecclesiastes 12: 1
John 11:25-26
Romans 8: 11
Romans 8: 35
2 Corinthians 5:1-4, 16-19
Titus 2:2-5

REFLECTION: WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH US ABOUT AGING?

BY THE REV. DR. LARRY GRIMES

1. That we all age!
2. That we can age well by so numbering our days that we gain a wise heart—a heart that does not forget all the benefits of God; that even in the midst of life's events, we can be mindful that God's steadfast love is from everlasting to everlasting. (Psalm 90:10, 103:1-5, 15-18)
3. That in old age we still produce fruit; we are always green and full of sap, showing in our ripeness that God is upright. (Psalm 92:12-14)
4. That what ever befalls us in our baptism we are born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (2 Corinthians 5-1-4, 16-19)
5. That in Christ there is a new creation everything old has passed away; everything has become new. We need to take time in our gifted years to rejoice and be glad in this. (Isaiah 40:18-19, 2 Cor. 5:17, Rev. 21:5a)
6. That we should use our gifted years to put off our old self, which belonged to our former manner of life and be renewed in the spirit of our minds and put on the new self. (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Special Note: Additional articles, essays, PowerPoint presentations, and a resource database can be found at www.giftofyears.org. Resources include biblical images of aging and biblical images of death.



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