



Spirituality of Aging

by

Kevin J. Karl, LCSW

Purpose

The Spirituality of Aging program was created to provide a spiritual approach to the issues and tasks of later adulthood particularly in a discussion group with other seniors. It is intended to be used by church groups, Sunday school classes, or other senior groups who are interested in approaching the topic of aging from a faith perspective. There is no charge for this presentation. The Program can last from 1 to 3 hours or it can be broken up into several smaller sessions. It is designed to supply information about issues of aging and to provide opportunities for discussion with other seniors in a group setting.

Methodology

The program is based on the principle that seniors themselves are the best teachers of what later adulthood is all about. If given the chance to think about and explore their experiences, seniors will teach each other and the presenter what needs to be learned in each session.

Adults learn best when they can apply knowledge to their own experience and when they can formulate and share their insights. For this reason, the format of a group setting enables educational input but allows for meaningful group discussion. Large print handouts are available that give the basic ideas of the program so that those hard of hearing will not be left out. The facilitator makes sure that all participants can hear each other and will often repeat what others have said for the hard of hearing.

The sections of the program were designed to begin with topics that are purposely non-threatening. This enables participants to risk sharing stories, feelings, and thoughts about the topics in a less fearful mode. Later topics are increasingly more personal, and are more easily expressed, when a level of trust has been created within the group.

The Program

The first section explains the rationale of the program starting with later adult life tasks. Ground rules are set about respect and privacy. This section, entitled Engaging at Home, deals with immediate changes in the home environment. It covers issues of retirement, being at home more since work life has changed, and finding satisfactory living situations that meet the changing needs of aging. This session introduces the concepts of grief and grace as a natural part of life changes.

The second section, Engaging with Others, deals with the need to stay connected to the world beyond ourselves. Topics include the need to reach out to family and friends, the possibility of volunteering and ministering, making oneself available to others, and learning to be in a community where the majority of persons are older and often, mostly women. The session encourages participants to cultivate generosity and to reach out in new ways, seeing new persons and situations as gifts.

Section Three is called Engaging with Ourselves. In this section participants are asked to look at illness, bodily changes that come with aging, and the death of spouse and friends. Here again the concept of grief is re-introduced as well as the concept of giftedness, seeing all life, good and bad, as gift.

The fourth piece is concerned with issues of our past: Engaging with the Past. Participants are urged to look at past mistakes, divisions, and hurts that may keep individuals from going peacefully into their future. The need to reappraise personal values, self-concepts, and self-worth are encouraged. A method of prayer/meditation for healing and forgiveness is introduced.

The fifth and final section of the program is Engaging with the Future. It is concerned with preparing for death and making the most of the life that is yet ahead. In this session, participants are encouraged to deal with their beliefs and feelings about death. The session concerns preparation for death by being fully engaged in life.

Creator and Facilitator

Kevin Karl is a practicing Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a spiritual director. He has served as the Director of Franciscan Health Care Center Assisted Living in Louisville, Kentucky. He has a Masters in Divinity from St. Meinrad School of Theology, a Masters in Applied Spirituality from the University of San Francisco, and a Masters in Social Work from the University of Louisville.

For information about scheduling the **Spirituality of Aging** program, please contact Kevin Karl at 502-384-7550. More information about Kevin is available at www.kevinjkarl.com.