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SINGAPORE PASTORAL INSTITUTE

Dear Friends,

Every now and then I take a moment to daydream about what my life will be like when I am old. In these occasional reflections, I wonder with some anxiety how gracefully I will age, and how I will feel when the time comes to surrender my independence over to the care of someone else.

I find little comfort surrounded by a society that places disproportionate value in appearing youthful. Matters do not improve when I realize that Jesus died young. Our Incarnate Lord did not share with us the human experience of growing old.

This month's eNews focuses on the theme of aging and the elderly. As the church grapples with the issue of a graying population, the Pastoral Institute continues to support Catholics who care for the

elderly. Be alert for an upcoming workshop on Understanding Dementia, as well as a pastoral manual on care for the elderly to be published by the end of this year.

With this theme in mind we stir the tea leaves and watch as life-questions emerge: Who are our role-models in aging? What can the elderly teach us? What religious meaning can we find in the human experience of growing old? Who are caregivers to the old? Who cares for those caregivers? Where in the vision of God's Kingdom is the place of the elderly?

Sip slowly, and happy reading!

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A MAN TALKING TO HIS HOUSE

*By Jalal Ad-Din Rumi
(d.1273, Persian Sufi mystic)*

Here is how a man once talked with his house,

"Please, if you're ever about to collapse, let me know."

One night without a word the house fell.

"What happened to our agreement?"

The house answered, "Day and night I've been telling you with cracks and broken boards

and holes appearing like mouths opening.

But you kept patching and filling those with mud, so proud of your stopgap masonry.

You didn't listen."

This house is your body always saying, I'm leaving; I'm going soon.

Don't hide from one who knows the secret.

Have a break... for the busy pastoral workers

Pastoral workers from various parishes of our Archdiocese gathered for a little Easter celebration. It was a time to relax a little and get to know one another better.

Here is what some of them have to say about working in the parishes...

"Working full time in the parish for the past nine months has been life giving and a time of grace and growth. It's been a blessing to be able to serve in the parish full time and it doesn't feel like work at all." - **Jarvis Tan, Church of Holy Spirit.**

"Serving the Lord and the Church full-time for almost two years has been a great learning experience of self development and personal spiritual growth." - **Kenny Chan, Church of St Anthony.**

"It is a blessing indeed; to serve God in the parish, working together with the Parish Priest, PPC, church organisations and parishioners." - **Peter Thien, Church of St Stephen.**



Standing: Kenny Chan (St Anthony), Andrew Neo (Blessed Sacrament), Jarvis Tan (Holy Spirit), Arthur Goh (SPI). Sitting: Ellen Tan (St Ignatius), Gerard Neo (Andrew's son), Peter Thien (St Stephen), Wendy Louis (SPI), & Daphne Leong (SPI).

Grey Hair and the anti-aging industry - by Wendy Louis

For the past ten years or more we have been informed, bombarded and threatened by the fact that our society will have more people over 50 than under in a very short space of time. We did not get our sums right when we said earlier "boy or girl, one is enough". In China they are still saying that in spite of looming difficulties. It is no problem to have a diminishing population of locals if the situation can be alleviated by immigration but the real problem that won't go away is all these elderly folk who will live longer than ever before and may need to be cared for in very small families or on public assistance.

Just imagine for a moment that the importing and use of hair dyes are banned from our shops and supermarkets. Imagine the gradual change in the congregation as more and more heads turn white. Why do we want to cover up our old age? Why are we afraid to be thought of as old?

We all have stories of other people or our own stories of caring for elderly persons and some are stories of neglect, abuse and isolation. The negative language and images of old age leads us also to emphasize the negative.

1999 was International Year of Older People and since that time 1st October has been designated by the United Nations as World Day for Older Persons. The United Nations declared the year together with the Holy See (Pope John Paul II) as a way of raising awareness of the need to cater well to the needs of the elderly but also, to encourage people to change their minds about what is "useful" and "useless" in our society. Someone who is too old to work is sometimes perceived as a "burden" on his or her family, the social services and so on. We have a way of speaking about aging and older persons that makes it very difficult for us to treasure and

enjoy our elderly people.

There are the third and fourth stage elderly. Among the most active in parish ministry would be those in the third stage of life or "young elderly". These are people from 55 to 75. The fourth stage elderly or frail elderly are people from 75 and above.

What the Church tells us about these stages in life is that:

- # No matter how young or old, we are never off the hook when it comes to mission. The frailest elderly person confined to wheel chair or bed is still a full time disciple and is able to pray for the growth of the kingdom.
- # The Church sees old age as a wonderful grace-filled time where wisdom and experience can be shared with a younger generation.
- # The Church wishes that older persons be seen as agents of the mission of Christ and his Church rather than only passive recipients of services.
- # That elderly persons do much better when surrounded by family and friends and should be cared for without discrimination.

In our pastoral ministry workshops we want to nurture a large pool of concerned, compassionate persons who can reach out to families who care for an elderly person or to isolated elderly living without any family. The Small Christian Communities are best placed to discover these families and elderly persons and reach out in very simple and practical ways. Just imagine being a house bound older person. What a world of difference it would make to your quality of life if someone helped you weekly with your shopping and house work. It would mean better nutrition and better health in the short and long term too.

When we speak about 'ministry' in our Small Christian Communities we

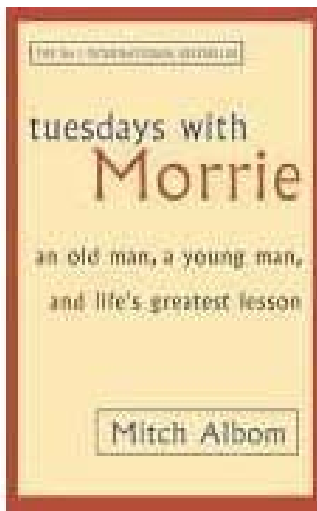


could imagine many new ministries sprouting out of the needs of our neighbours. One such ministry would be Ministry of respite care. This means that the SCC members take over once a week or once a month to give the resident carer a full day off or at least a few hours to see to personal needs. There are many foreign domestic workers caring for older persons who never get a day off. Why not offer to take over for a few hours to relieve her. However taking over from a carer requires a whole range of skills which are not everyone's strength. The SPI looks forward to preparing people for ministry and will design workshops to provide the necessary skills and attitudes.

In a book* that I read a very long time ago, there was a beautiful old person who was wheel chair bound but she very often had visitors. They always left feeling better than when they arrived as this woman had so much love and grace to offer and a listening heart. The love and respect we give our elders can help them age more successfully and gracefully. The active, useful lives they lived externally is now expressed in a more intense and lively inner life of the Spirit. The intensity remains only the arena is now the life within.

**The Dean's Watch by Elizabeth Goudge.*

“Tuesdays with Morrie” By Mitch Albom



Published by Doubleday, New York, 1997

“Tuesdays with Morrie” is a delightful book about aging and relationships. It’s not a book about how to die, but how to live.

Morrie Schwartz was a college professor, teaching sociology at Brandeis University in the city of Waltham, Massachusetts. Morrie contacted amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig’s disease, on a humid day in August 1994. It’s a brutal, unforgiving illness of the neurological system. It’s a wasting away of the muscles from the feet up and it’s terminal.

Mitch Albom, a former student and one of Morrie’s favourites, according to Morrie’s wife, Charlotte, was working as a sports reporter in Detroit. Juggling his time between, his work, his girlfriend, who was a part-time singer and his other commitments, Albom was a self-centred workaholic.

Until one day an event changed his life forever. In a hotel room after covering a sports event, and as usual trying to do many things at the same time, talking to his girlfriend on the phone and flipping through the channels of the TV, he suddenly came across an interview with a familiar face. It was the face of his old professor Morrie Schwartz. Morrie was sharing about his illness.

Albom decided to visit his old friend. One Tuesday he flies to Boston and finally meets his “coach”. And every

Tuesday hence, Albom’s visits with Morrie eventually become lessons for him about relationships, forgiveness, love, unselfishness and life.

Read this book, if it does not change your life it will surely provoke it. As Amy Tan writes at the back cover of the book, “I love this book. I’ve been telling all my friends ‘You have to read this.’This is a true story that shines and leaves you forever warmed by its afterglow”.

Fr. Glenn de Cruz, C.Ss.R.

“Read this book, if it does not change your life it will surely provoke it.”



My Reflections of a Grand Old Lady in Whampoa

- Jennifer Noronha of Jalan Bahagia SCC, St Michael Church

My work has for a long time now been with children. The only ministry to the elderly that I was exposed to was to my two aged parents, particularly with my late dad who I had to see to for his hospital visits and his illness which saw him deteriorating until his death in 2007.

But I believe in my heart that I can minister to the elderly too. One such happening where I was given the opportunity to do just that came recently when I accompanied the two communion ministers on their Sunday rounds to give Holy Communion to the home bound in the neighbourhood. Why did I tag along?? Well the curious me wanted to know who were the home bound in the neighbourhood and to see how they can be ministered to by us in the Catholic neighbourhood group of the area.

That fateful Sunday proved to be an eye opener for me as each home bound elderly had just that sparkle in their eye to see us. For me I was able to see the face of Jesus in each of them, just their smile made it worth the while.

They were all ready, cleaned and dressed up to receive the Lord. What preparedness and readiness to receive Him. Some had their helpers, others their relatives around to see to them. But what struck me is that it was not I giving them the presence of my visit but rather they giving me an experience of being with Jesus. I did not need to do anything. I was just able to be with them and they be with me. That sense of being one with them.

One grand old lady who struck me a lot was this lady called Aunty Rose. I remember her happy smile and cheerful disposition and so welcoming as she was more mobile and I must say quite a talker too.

She saw us to the door after receiving the Lord and asked us to come again. The next visit to her home was before Easter Sunday when we brought little gift of an Easter candle and some chocolates to brighten their Easter at home. She lives with her non-Catholic husband and they truly make a wonderful example of true married love. Again she was most welcoming and even remembered me well. She offered us a seat and lo and behold she began to chat endlessly with us on who she was, what she did, her enriching shared lived experiences, her wisdom and wit and her great sense of

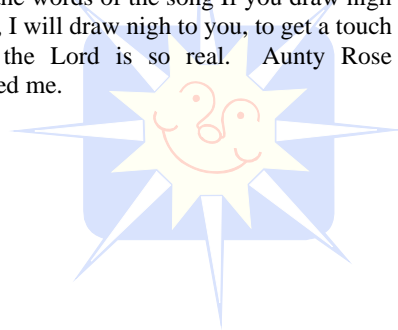
humour made our visit truly uplifting. She has a big heart, a sound mind and a vivacious spirit and to think she was going to turn 90 in June!!! She was just so willing to share herself and that spirit of giving made her sparkle.

Can we be that empowering and energizing if we ever reach her age?? What made her this way?? I believe it is because she is a cheerful giver. She is able to believe that she can grow old gracefully and she has!!

From all her sharings, she is indeed a generous, compassionate and a person of integrity. As I walked away from that visit, I couldn't help but thank God in my heart for giving me the opportunity to be with this grand old lady and taste a little of that wealth of goodness and one filled with the fire of living life to the fullest in whatever way possible.

She renewed my own spirit and whenever I am feeling low and lost in my own challenges of life I will bring this visit to Aunty Rose to mind and recapture the abundant life in her through that experience.

Now who says old people cannot be life giving?? I just encountered one who is and let us allow ourselves to be drawn to them as in the words of the song If you draw nigh to me, I will draw nigh to you, to get a touch from the Lord is so real. Aunty Rose touched me.



Pastoral Care of the Elderly

Understanding Dementia *by Dr Philip Yap*



Is dementia an inevitable part of aging or is it a medical disease? How can we recognise the early signs of dementia and can we effectively prevent it? These and other issues will be explored in this session.

5 July (Sat)

9.30am – 12.30pm

CSCC, 55 Waterloo Street (take lift to 8th flr)

**Contribution:
Love Offering**

Dr Philip Yap trained in internal medicine and specialises in geriatric medicine. He is a consultant geriatrician with the Department of Geriatric Medicine in Alexandra Hospital. He is also an adjunct Clinical Lecturer with the Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore. Dr Philip has a keen interest in both the

biomedical and social aspects of aging, especially in the areas of dementia, end of life care, support of caregivers of elderly patients and the use of information technology in geriatric care. He presently sits on the committees of the Alzheimer's Association of Singapore and the National Dementia Network at the Ministry of Health. Dr Philip is a parishioner of St Ignatius Church.

To register: call 6858 3011 or email: spi@catholic.org.sg