

Each time I moved to a new church, I would spend the first few weeks attending the meeting of every group in the church. I went to the choir, the bell ringers, youth meetings, UMW (including all its circles), etc. One of the delightful surprises was my visit to the sewing circle of a particular church. This was a group of woman who met weekly, to sew, knit, crochet or just visit with one another, and of course, to have a rather sumptuous lunch. The youngest woman in the group was well into her seventies. Most were in their eighties and a few were in the nineties. I went with some trepidation. How would I survive a group of "old ladies," who had been meeting together for almost sixty years? What would I say? What would I do? Would they find my presence intrusive? Despite the questions, I went anyway. The surprise? I enjoyed myself so much that I went to every sewing circle meeting that I could the whole time that I was the pastor.

What happened? For awhile I didn't know what attracted me. But it eventually became apparent. These women had a deep concern for each other. They would phone each other daily to make sure all were well. They gave all their "dues" to mission. They took food every week to someone they thought needed it. But more importantly, these women laughed a lot. Someone would mention an ache or a pain and soon someone would counter with a greater ache or pain and soon they would all be laughing at the "silliness" (as one woman called it) of old age. Intuitively they knew life was about community, about relationships and not about aches and pains. They celebrated life! In the midst of infirmities, they had discovered a deeper truth. They had discovered that joy and laughter and celebration were more powerful than any ache or pain. They celebrated life and they celebrated the God who sustained them. That group has remained, for me, a model of what the church should and can be. That group helped me understand better the observation of Henri Nouwen.

Is it possible for the elderly to refind the wisdom of the child in a second playfulness? To care for the elderly means to play with the elderly in the hope that by playing together we will remind each other that dancing is more human than rushing, singing more human than shouting orders, poetry more human than *The Wall Street Journal*, and prayers more human than tactful conversations. To play with the elderly is to recapture the truth that what we are is more important than what we achieve. It is not a regression to a childish state, but a progression to a second innocence in which the acquired skills and insights of adulthood are fully integrated. This second innocence can lead us to the mature and critical realization that celebration is the most human response to life."  
Henri J. M. Nouwen

Do we maybe spend too much time in our ministry with older adults dealing with "their" issues and not enough time laughing and playing? Would we do better as churches to search for ways to celebrate God's gift of life at every age and stage? Is Nouwen leading us to find a new model for older adult ministries?

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