

"When are you really going to retire? You have a pension and Social Security, why are you still working at your age?" As often as I get asked this question, I'm always a little surprised by it? Why?

First, a lot of people are still working at my age!

Second, working does not have to be solely about earning money!

Third, Christians are called to offer their gifts and talents to the world! That call does not end as one ages. It simply requires a careful look at our situations - what can we still do to live out our call? Do we have limitations that often come with age? Do we have less energy than we used to have?

In ministering with and to older adults I am saddened by how many of them are depressed, feeling useless, undervalued, and bored. Those of us involved in such ministry would do our older adults a real service if we challenged them to get off their couches and be of service. Volunteers are needed in every church, every hospital, every nursing home, and in every community. Even those with physical limitations and a dwindling supply of energy can do much volunteer work. Hours can be made to fit the person. Even bedridden people can often be challenged to make calls or write notes to shut-ins. Everyone can be challenged to become part of a prayer ministry.

A life of "Bingo," devoid of caring about and serving others at best fills the time. It, however, misses the call to offer gifts and talents to the world, which gives so much meaning to our lives! We show a mistaken kind of understanding when we excuse people from the challenge to serve because their age. Doing so says implicitly what so many older adults already feel - "Your days of usefulness are over. We really want younger, more energetic people!"

In addition to the 'regular' activities scheduled at our United Methodist Homes, we have an active Volunteer program in which residents are offered various opportunities to be of service to the community. How enriching our ministry with older adults would be if we knew that calling them to be of service is a gift to them as well as to the communities they serve.

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