

A Faith Home for Elders and Caregivers

Without doubt, we are all growing older. Based on demographic data from the U.S. Census Bureau, there will soon be more old people than there are young people. Many people shudder when they hear the word *old*. Growing old is all too often a prospect that evokes fear, scorn, shame, and regret. As we grow old we experience physical and possibly cognitive changes, and we live in an ageist society in which the worth and dignity of old people are often diminished. At times elderhood can be difficult and lonely.

Unitarian Universalism's very first Principle affirms the inherent worth and dignity of *all* people, and thus implicitly affirms that the last years of our lives are every bit as important as the first years. We strive to listen to all who share their stories and experiences with open hearts and open minds. We know that we all age differently and with different expectations.

Unitarian Universalist theology stresses interdependence, meaning we realize each of us will need care and each of us will provide care at various points throughout our lifetimes. We can help you find the spiritual strength to accept help when you need it and give you opportunities to provide help when you are able. We teach that aging well means finding the very delicate balance between self-determination and gratitude for acts of assistance that are acts of love and friendship.

For Unitarian Universalists, faith development is a lifelong process that doesn't end until life is over. We are never too old to find meaning in life and in the things that happen to us. We are here in religious community to be each other's teachers, to offer ideas, ask questions, and offer loving support when the answers are not always clear.

Our society constantly urges children and youth to "grow up" but who teaches us how to be old? From whom do we learn the *art* of aging? How do we prepare to cope with the logistics of aging?

We did not grow up by ourselves; neither should we grow old by ourselves. In a Unitarian Universalist community like this one, although we're not all the same age at the same time, we are growing old together. Unitarian Universalist communities are on a mission to provide loving, caring, and supportive communities for all people dealing with all kinds of life changes and transitions, including the pilgrimage of aging. Congregational life can be one venue for celebrating the benefits and joys of aging and minimizing the fear and perceived helplessness and hopelessness.

We strive to provide many opportunities for people of all ages to learn together, play together, and worship together. Whether it is a lively conversation during a potluck lunch or worship provided by the children and grandparents, the life of this congregation is enriched when elders can learn new skills and perspectives and young people can benefit from hard-won life lessons that should never be forgotten.

We invite you to tell us what is on your mind and in your heart. We will do our best to make this a safe and comfortable place for you and provide you with what you need. We understand the realities of change as people grow old, and how change affects family and congregational life. And we understand that the needs of caregivers are every bit as important as the needs of those who require care.

Please ask us for the help you need. We want you to be with us and will do what we can to make it easier, whether that means providing rides to church, adaptive hearing devices, accessible entrances, or an extra arm for support as you find your seat. We endeavor to make it easier and more comfortable for you to come to church *and* to participate in church activities.

If you cannot come to us, we will come to you. You will be remembered and included. We will visit

you at your home. We will figure out ways to share a meal with you, play with you, listen to you, and advocate with you to ensure that your needs are met.

We do not pretend to have all of the answers about the logistics of aging or all of the resources you might need. But we promise to engage our collective imagination to help you find the answers to questions you may have about legal, financial, and medical dilemmas. We eagerly invite your suggestions and we will share them with others.

We're all growing older. If that experience is to have its full meaning, we must shape it together. We must share with each other the dignity and grace we will all need.

We invite you to explore these resources:

Keith Albans and Malcolm Johnson, eds. *God, Me and Being Very Old: Stories and Spirituality in Later Life*. Scmpress, 2013.

Jade Angelica. *Where Two Worlds Touch: A Spiritual Journey Through Alzheimer's Disease*. Skinner House Books, 2013.

Eliza Blanchard. *The Seasoned Soul: Reflections on Growing Older*. Skinner House Books, 2012.

Atul Gawande. *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*. Metropolitan Books, 2014.

Stephanie Marohn, ed. *Audacious Aging*. Elite Books, 2009.

Kathleen Montgomery, ed. *Landscapes of Aging and Spirituality*. Skinner House Books, 2015.

Marilyn Sewell, ed. *Breaking Free: Women of Spirit at Midline and Beyond*. Beacon Press, 2004.

Robert L. Weber and Carol Orsborn. *The Spirituality of Age: A Seeker's Guide to Growing Older*. Park Street Press, 2015.

Spirituality of Aging: uua.org/re/older-adults

Accessibility: equalaccess.org

Dementia Care: healingmoments.com; alz.org

Caregiver Support: aoa.acl.gov/AoA_Programs/HCLTC/Caregiver

Packs of 25 copies of this pamphlet are available at inSpirit: The UU Book and Gift Shop at uua.org/bookstore