



BABY BOOMERS

From the Older Adult Ministry of the Kentucky Conference

RETIREMENT: A PROACTIVE EXPERIENCE

People retire for a variety of reasons. One person might retire because he can afford to retire; another, because she experiences a lack of job satisfaction. One person's job might be eliminated, forcing him into retirement. Another person simply wants more personal and leisure time, or perhaps her health is declining. For me, honestly, I was just tired: tired of boarding another airplane. Tired of traveling across the country and leading another seminar. Tired of writing another article. Tired of developing new resources and providing training and support for church leaders. I felt I had used up all my creative energy and my passion for ministry after nearly 40 years. I needed to take a break, to rest, and to get ready for a new phase of life.

I believe the word "retirement" itself led me to rethink my future. After all, the word "retirement" has such negative connotations. It sounds so diminishing and final. As if in retirement, one disengages from life. Retire to what? Unfortunately, in our society, most employers provide little opportunity for older employees to take a "sabbatical" to reclaim renewed energy and creativity or to take on a more flexible and less demanding work schedule.

Carroll Saussy advises in her book, The Art of Growing Old: A Guide to Faithful Aging, that "successful retirement requires a conversion – a turning away from the familiar in order to embrace a new life with a different future." But what is this new future? An opportunity to dream new dreams? To paint a new picture? To envision a new scenario? To re-create a new me and a new future? Perhaps "yes," and even more.

The Psalmist wrote, "In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap." (Psalm 92:14 NRSV). The writer was very much aware that even in later life, people are still growing, learning, and giving. Old age is not an end, but a time for renewal. Dreams are still in the making and yet to be fulfilled. For me, retirement has become a proactive experience.

I have been fortunate to be able to keep my dreams alive. Immediately following retirement from the church and Disciple Ministries, Lipscomb University invited me to teach courses in aging on a part-time basis. After that, I was invited to develop a new ministry in the Tennessee

Conference called ENCORE Ministry. I provided training and support, resources, and networking opportunities for church leaders in the Tennessee Conference for their ministry with midlife and older adults.

Now after two years of “retirement,” I have a new sense of purpose with renewed energy, joy, and enthusiasm. I still have something to say, to write, to teach, to learn. I don’t believe that God has taken away God’s blessing because I have reached the age of 67. My mind and body are still active. I am engaged in my encore years, my second wind, with a new sense of urgency, enthusiasm, and commitment. My retirement is a proactive experience. I plan to keep on keeping on for as long as I can.

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What about you? Have you already retired? Have you found that place where you are excited about getting up each morning because your life has purpose? Do you go through each day with renewed energy, joy, and enthusiasm? If the answer to these questions is “Yes!!!,” than Praise the Lord!!! If the answer is “No,” then begin asking God where you should go from here, where he wants you to serve Him and build His Kingdom. Ask your pastor what you can do to help; Look at missions/organizations in your community that feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and volunteer. Visit people in the hospital or get involved in a prison/jail ministry. There is a place for you in serving God. God still has things for you to do.

If you haven’t retired yet but are thinking about it, you don’t have to wait until actually retire to begin making plans. Begin now to look for opportunities by first praying, seeking God’s guidance. Keep your ears and eyes open to possibilities and try some things like Habitat for Humanity or a mission trip here in the US or abroad. Look for ways God can use your skills and gifts for ministry.

Sue Eaton