

# Finding the next chapter 70 years into life

Recently I went to Lebh Shomea (Listening Heart) House of Prayer, in South Texas, for my annual Thanksgiving retreat. I took with me noted author Sister Joan Chittister as my spiritual guide. To be more precise, I carried with me her book, "The Gift of Years: Growing Old Gracefully." Because I would be turning 70 the following week, it seemed to be a needed companion. At the very beginning of her book she speaks of three stages of "old" in our society. The first one being the young old (65-74). I was so thrilled to find myself in the "young" old because now I have four years to live with that before I become the old old.

On retreat I was planning to visit with one of the Oblate priests there, The Rev. Paul, a friend of many years, to share about what my 70 years of life have been like. I was going to express to him my gratitude for my first vocation – 30 years



Roger Temme

of my life as a member of Father Paul's religious order, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate. I had the experience of varied and exciting ministries – parish priest, police and fire chaplain, radio host, retreat house director and campus minister (St. Edward's University) among others. My ordination motto was "I have come that I might serve God and that together we serve the community."

I was going to share my feeling blessed about my second vocation here in

Austin serving the HIV/AIDS and cancer community for 18 years as volunteer recruiter and trainer for The Care Communities. I would train caring and compassionate persons to be a Care Team for someone who is seriously ill. I took as my mission statement a quote from my favorite author, Henri Nouwen, "Every human being has a great, yet often unknown gift: to care, to be compassionate, to become present to the other, to listen, to hear and receive – if that gift would be set free and made available, miracles could take place."

I was going to then share with Father Paul about my hopes to discover a third vocation – one that I would find as meaningful as the first

two. Sister Joan quotes Robert Browning, "the best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made." I don't fully understand that, but I really like hearing that the best is yet to be.

I had many things to talk with Father Paul about and I know he was very much looking forward to our evening chats. And then several days before I would be arriving at Lebh Shomea, I was called by a dear friend of mine to tell me that Father Paul died of a massive heart attack. It was heartbreaking news.

My retreat became not only thinking about growing old gracefully, but now also about the grief at the loss of a dear

friend and the ultimate reality of death. As I reflect on Father Paul's death and the unexpected death of another dear friend in the last year or so, Janet Patterson, I hear some of the last words of Sister Joan's book, "The veil between us and eternity will begin to tear, and we will begin to slowly walk through it, ready, open, thrown upon the heart of God."

But, as we enter 2018, I am still in the young old stage, and I have miraculously found my third vocation. The incredible news I would love to share with you, Paul and

Janet, is that I am starting to work at Interfaith Action of Central Texas as volunteer coordinator. God is good, God is love. Thanks be to God!


Roger Temme is a former Catholic priest and until recently Outreach Coordinator for The Care Communities. He is the new volunteer coordinator for Interfaith Action of Central Texas.

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