

Reflections on Aging: Growing Toward the Light

The Gift of Vision

By Phyllis Bruce

We finally come to the third quality that enables people to grow toward the light as they age, rather than the darkness of separation and isolation. These reflections are based on the book by Henri Nouwen and Walter Gaffney, *Aging: The Fulfillment of Life*. The last quality Nouwen discusses is **Vision**.

Vision includes having lived in God's divine light for so many years that there is no worry about that light continuing into the future as life surrenders to death. The vision Nouwen refers to is, "being able to look far beyond the boundaries of human existence into a light that seems to embrace the person with gentleness and kindness". (pg 79) I have seen this vision in one parishioner who, although actual sight was diminishing, she was still able to "light" in her close relationship with her God, her son and church friends. She told me how she looks up at her ceiling at night and sees a beautiful show of twinkling colored lights which she considers a gift of God's promise as she awaits His healing. Another woman continues to meet the challenges of diminished sight by creatively finding new ways to accomplish everyday tasks, as she continues to volunteer one day a week at the local coop, and even provides a special rest stop for her mail-carrier, that includes homemade cookies. The mail-carrier in turn helps her read her mail!! I personally saw that Divine Light in the eyes of another parishioner as he was peacefully passing into God's eternal light with a smile on his face.

Sr. O'Brian has said that whatever a person must face in this life, his or her dignity will never be lost when it is "entrusted to someone who cares". (O'Brian, pg. 62) As a caring community, people of the church can embrace those of all ages facing difficult situations and help them not only to maintain dignity, but also recognize the presence of hope, humor, and vision in their lives. In these ways members of faith communities can embrace one another as they "grow toward the light".

References

Nouwen, H.J. and Gaffney, W. J. (1974) *Aging: The fulfillment of Life*, Image Books, Garden City New York.
O'Brian, M.E. (2001) *The Nurses' Calling: A Christian Spirituality of Caring for the Sick*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, New Jersey