

## Reflections on Aging: Growing Toward the Light

### The Gift of Hope

By Phyllis Bruce

As Parish Nurses, we have the opportunity to spend time with the elderly, walking with them through the transitions and losses that come with aging. Some people go through these transitions with grace and dignity, while others struggle and can become angry and bitter.

The aging process starts from the moment we are born and continues to the moment we die. Therefore, the aging process with the various transitions involved, should be what brings us all together, not what separates us. This powerful statement is from a book by Henri Nouwen called, *Aging, The Fulfillment of Life*. Our society too often rejects the elderly by isolating them from the rest of the population resulting in desolation and loss of self. When then happens, aging becomes a way to darkness and despair. However, Nouwen believes the process of aging can become a process of growing toward the light for those who find joy, meaning, and passion through all of life's experiences and transitions, both good and bad. The three qualities that enable people to grow toward the light instead of darkness are **HOPE, HUMOR AND VISION**.

One of the joys of being a parish nurse is getting to know our parishioners who are teaching us and others in the church what it means to "grow toward the light". I'd like to share some reflections over the next few months discussing these three qualities and how parishioners I've known have demonstrated this hope, humor and vision that Henri Nouwen describes in his wonderful little book. It is my hope that you will be able to share your own stories about those whom you have had the privilege of knowing.

We will start with HOPE. According to Nouwen, the power of hope is being able to see ones worth in who we are not in what we have achieved. One of the first couples I visited as a new parish nurse demonstrated this hope. The man had suffered a stroke resulting in expressive aphasia. He had been a singer. His wife was dealing with the daily challenges of caring for him as well as her physical mobility limitations related to severe osteoporosis and arthritis. They faced each day with hope, knowing that their strength came from a great God, who created the heavens and the earth. Another very special woman, living with cancer, continued to share her gifts of cooking and hospitality within her family and the church for many years. As the cancer took over more, she continued to hope in God's promise that he would never leave her or forsake her. Her favorite comment was, "It will be okay".

What a blessing to share with our dear parishioners the hope we have by faith in Christ, and to allow them to minister to us of their own hope as they struggle with those inevitable transitions and losses.

*Dear Lord Jesus, we thank you for the hope you give us, knowing that we are your beloved children, and that your strength and care are eternal.*