

Retirement reflections

Anne Neufeld Rupp

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My life has been many faceted as I tried to use my gifts and follow God's leading. Any ideas I have about retirement come out of that experience and may not be relevant to yours.

For one thing, I entered the pastorate nine years after graduating from MBS because there were no openings for female pastors during my post-seminary years. However, in the 1970s, Ken and I felt called to husband-wife, co-pastoral ministry and I was ordained in 1976. We served churches in this unique capacity for 13 years. Thus, my observations about ministry, retirement and transition reflect more than the pastorate alone.

When I think of retirement, I believe that attaining a wide range of experiences and attaining a broader education than only seminary helped me transition into later years. After college I served Mennonites in Mexico under the General Conference Board of Missions. I taught school, engaged in youth work and started a music program, including piano. (I had earlier in addition to a B.A., obtained an ARCT in piano from the Royal Conservatory of Toronto and a Bachelor's in Sacred Music from CMBC). Music, my great love, proved to be a helpful gift in various situations throughout life. During my senior year at MBS, I commuted weekly to and from a Chicago church where I ministered in drama, music and taught piano.

Another thing I've concluded in terms of retirement is to plan for the future but also enjoy the present, lest the future doesn't materialize. It helped us to think about pre-retirement things we'd like to do and we did them, even if it meant pinching pennies or not adopting a class A style. Thus, we traveled extensively in Canada and the U.S. during vacations. Between moves, we tented a summer in Alaska and later experienced Europe for over two months in a camper.

The transition at a later date may be easier if one identifies additional gifts or interests one could use if retiring from a pastorate. It was that way in my case as a female pastor prior to retirement and into retirement years. It helped me deal with change and options. For several years I served as director of education in a Presbyterian church and then ministered as chaplain and program director-curriculum writer in a facility for people with long-term mental illness. Later I chose to be self-employed and ministered by teaching piano, writing and publishing.

Finally, I've realized that transition into retirement, no matter how well planned, may come to a dead halt, due to crisis or illness. It happened to me. More than four years ago, a hemorrhagic stroke changed my life and continues to affect me emotionally, physically and mentally. I faced forced retirement, an identity crisis and no planned transition. Two years later, I was diagnosed with Parkinson's. After a long time of denial, fear, resistance and coping, I've concluded that I can only do the best with what I have. I realize that God still has ministry for me now despite my limitations. I have become more compassionate as I relate to the suffering of others. I have also become more aware that life is short. This has evoked in me a deep caring for those close to me. I am grateful for relationships and a wide range of life experiences. Life is God-graced. So is retirement.

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