

## Practical and Pastoral Responses to Retirement

Retirement is a time of significant change. There are many ways to journey towards and then into retirement and many issues to think through. For those who are 'after-work' and who have an active Christian faith, there's a dimension to life that is distinct and special.



On a personal level, retirement can be either a time of decline or a time of 're-fire-ment' (when someone is 'fired up' for something new). The choice is very personal and the transition is all about change. It is about the impact their beliefs have on how they behave: their priorities, aspirations and actions.

On a bigger level, it concerns how well their corps/church understands the responsibilities they have towards those active and retired, and the opportunities involved. Retirement today is different from earlier times – physically, socially, practically and spiritually – and this has huge implications for corps and programme leaders as they provide pastoral care and help people live out their faith at every stage of life.

Our pastoral response must take into account that retired people:

- Do not necessarily want to consider themselves as 'old' nor want to be treated as such. They are generally 'young' in mind, body and outlook – with many thinking about how best to invest this next stage of their lives.
- May well be open to fresh opportunities and experiences – not wanting to settle down but to get things done.

But what does this all mean? In pastoral care we need to remember that this new generation of retirees don't see themselves as 'old' – they don't act old and won't buy products marketed at the old either. The challenge for local leaders and those coming up to retirement are that the stereotypes simply don't fit any more. What we see far more is an active divergence between biological age and chronological age. More of us are living longer than at any time in history, and the trends of longevity tell us that for many it is possible that we will live well over a quarter or even up to a third of our life-span in retirement.

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The previous points give the positive view of retirement. However, our pastoral care must note the difficulties that many people experience when moving from active employment into 'free time':

- Lack of rhythm to the day/routine and change in sleeping patterns
- Learning to spend more time at home (with a partner or alone)
- Lack of social interaction
- Reduction in income
- Increasing health concerns
- Isolation and loneliness
- Lack of identity due to loss of employment status/role/responsibility

In Psalm 39:4 the writer asks of the Lord, '*Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.*' This idea of measuring our days is not only about the length of our lives; it also speaks to the meaning of our lives. 'Will I still have purpose when I am no longer meaningfully employed, raising children or focused on a career?' These are questions that relate to our identities, and as such they are deeply spiritual. Ignoring the reality of ageing is not surprising. We try to mask signs of growing older and put off important conversations about slowing down and getting old.

Therefore, a pastoral response must bring a responsibility to help people talk about and prepare for retirement, ageing well and living fully (John 10:10). We need to create safe communities to help address what it means to age in a healthy, grace-filled manner, acknowledging the potential positives and negatives of retirement.

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### Five Practical Ideas for Corps/Churches and Programme Leaders and the Newly Retired

1. **Pre-Retirement Ministry:** Recognise and remember who is heading towards retirement in your corps/centre. The aim of your time with them might be to make sure they know you are there for them, to pray with, acknowledge and talk through this big transition. Consider their aspirations and fears in relation to retirement. Remember people may feel disorientated.
1. **A Distinctive Congregation:** Many corps have programmes for all ages. In the same way, is it time to regard those 'retired and active' as another defined segment with distinct pastoral and programme requirements? Take time to research, ask questions, listen to what this generation would want to be part of.



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- 1. Managing Expectations:** You may imagine that someone no longer in full-time work has lots of free time. But the reality can be quite different. There may well be three generations of their family having expectations and demands on their time – their children/grandchildren and possibly older parents. At the same time, they have their own plans for all those things that were impossible until now and that they have worked so hard for.
- 1. Salt and Light:** The empowered active ‘younger old with Jesus’ are called to be salt and light in our communities as much as anybody else. There are ample creative opportunities and this must be in the context of your corps/church, but there are also opportunities in the wider community. This might include the obvious places, eg night shelters or food banks, but it may be helping children to read in local schools, providing transport for victims of human trafficking or being befrienders to the lonely, for example. A much-needed step further would be to support and pray for them in their ‘salt and light’ role.
- 1. Developing, Not Using:** Historically, corps/churches have tended to see those who enter retirement as ideal volunteers for existing programme needs. Yet they still need opportunities to grow and develop spiritually and practically. Look for ways to tap into their experience, wisdom and gifts. This could involve creating a list of the workplace skills of your retirees that could be drawn on. It also means approaching things differently – instead of first defining a role and then looking for someone to fill it, start by discovering their individual gifts and abilities, and then find the role that fits them.



The possibilities are endless and the benefits could be rich for all concerned. However, don't assume everyone wants more of their workplace role in their retirement, and don't ask for a commitment that is from now until for ever. They are more likely to give it a go if there is an agreed sunset – say, for the next 12 months. Some may welcome the opportunity to do something very different from their previous work life.