Cardinal Programs

Jane W. Barton, MTS, MASM, CSA
Author of *Called to Companion (2026)*

CardinaLife@msn.com
www.CardinaLife.com

2027 Programs

Called to Companion - A High Calling
Called to Companion—something we've all experienced or will experience at some point in time. As the journey of life unfolds, family and friends will need our assistance and compassionate care to deal with the challenges posed by aging, injury, and/or medical concerns. And we will all require care somewhere down the road. This is the human condition. We care about and care for each other. Although I truly believe it's a sacred honor to care for another person, I'm realistic as well. Answering the call to care is one of the hardest things we'll ever do. In fact, it often requires everything we have to give—and then some! Therefore, we are wise to plan for this inevitable call to care.

Elderhood - Frightened or Excited?
How do you feel about getting older? Frightened and/or excited? Your attitude toward aging is likely informed by a mixed bag of emotions predicated on your experience, family history, faith, and knowledge of the aging process. Like it or not, we will continue to age with every breath. Such is the nature of life. Consequently, if we are afforded the opportunity to be an elder, how can we make the most of the experience of elderhood?

Family Estrangement
Family estrangement — the loss of a family relationship due to physical or emotional distancing — is sadly a common occurrence. It's estimated that 27% of Americans are currently estranged from a family member. Additionally, research indicates that 40% of Americans have experienced estrangement. Although any member of your family could be affected by the dissolution of a relationship, the most common situation involves a distancing between parents and an adult child. Since the backbone of care in our country is the family caregiver, what are the implications for aging and caring when estrangement is part of the family scenario? Is reconciliation possible when care is required? Is there the potential to address and to heal old wounds before it's too late? Why might it be worth our time and effort to reconnect and recommit to being

family once again? We'll explore these questions and many more related to the issue of family estrangement.

Aging - Attitude is Everything

We have all heard the adage, "Attitude is everything." Well, this is certainly true in regard to the aging process. Our attitude informs our perceived experience of aging. Additionally, attitudes about aging influence societal norms, expectations, policies, and interactions. Consequently, it is important to recognize and understand our view of aging - our own aging process and that of others. Do our attitudes serve to support and sustain the aging population? Or instead, do our attitudes serve to inhibit and marginalize the elders in our community? Please join us for an interactive discussion that will hopefully expand and enhance your view of the aging process.

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

As we age, the majority of us will be confronted by ethically complex and emotionally difficult medical decisions. Quite often, there is no one "right" answer. Instead, we are dealing with competing goods. Thus, what informs the decisions made along the way? Well, it's a combination of many factors. There are the contextual factors that influence the choices made - the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the situation. Then our comprehension of the situation, support system, religious/spiritual beliefs, values, priorities, hopes, fears, and goals shape our response. Understanding the "why" of our decisions affirms the choices made along the way.

Live NOW! What are You Waiting For?

It's time for us to realize that with age comes an incredible opportunity to experience an EXTRAordinary life! In the first half of life, our focus is often on family and career — giving priority to the needs and desires of others. As our families mature and our careers plateau, questions arise which tickle the imagination and prompt serious reflection. Who am I? What ignites my passion? What do I choose to do with my life? Who do I choose to become? This is the gift of aging — utilizing the wisdom derived from the first half of life to engage and to explore the challenging questions prompted by significant life changes. Granted, many of the transformations prompted by aging are uninvited and disconcerting. However, with every ending, there's the possibility of a new beginning, a new way of being in the world. So, let's choose to live an EXTRAordinary life — right NOW! What are we waiting for?

No Mulligans on the 18th Hole

On March 15, 2016, I recalled the words I had uttered countless times over the past decade regarding the end of life. "Companioning our loved ones to the end of the road is one of THE hardest things we are called to do in this life - as well as one of THE most sacred. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Death doesn't offer a 'do-over.' We either embrace the journey or we don't!" So on that morning, as I read the text message informing me of the imminent death of my brother, I knew exactly where I needed to be, where I wanted to be - with my brother. There would be no mulligans on Richard's 18th hole. No do-over's. This is the story of how companioning my brother

at the end of life transformed how I choose to live. A final blessing from my big brother.

What is Required to Flourish?
Regardless of age, human beings long for a fulfilling, life-giving existence. This is achieved by having an overall sense of well-being evidenced by flourishing. According to experts in the field of positive psychology, recognizing and sharing our gifts with the world enhances the lived experience for one and all. We flourish! In order to live in full bloom, a bit of ground work is required. It doesn't just happen. So, let's consider how the various aspects of well-being (mind, body, and spirit) serve to enhance our ability to live in full bloom!

Be Well to Care Well Series

A. Well-Being: What's It All About?
Well-being has been and continues to be a hot topic of conversation in many corners of academia and corporate America. It's also an issue of great concern for individuals - particularly caregivers. So, what's it all about? Quite simply, well-being is a self-reported state of being well which entails more than physical health. It's a sense of foundational wholeness that includes the mind, the body, and the spirit. If we have a sense of overall wellness, we feel good and function well. Therefore, being well is essential if we are to care well - for others and ourselves. Please join me to explore the path to an enhanced sense of well-being.

B. Physical Well-Being
Although every dimension of our being is vitally important, how we feel physically dramatically impacts every other facet of our being - for better or for worse. This is why a significant change in health proves to be a turning point for individuals and their families. The diagnosis of a serious disease or a disabling injury changes the trajectory of life for all concerned. Hence, improving and maintaining our overall physical well-being should be a ***TOP*** priority in life. How can we achieve and then maintain peak physical wellness? Please join the discussion to discover your path to physical wellness so you can be well and care well.

C. Emotional/Behavioral Well-Being
When emotionally well, we have the ability to recognize, to understand, and to manage the various emotions experienced as a result of signals received from the world around us. As caregivers, this is vitally important since we feel a myriad of emotions over the course of the caregiving journey. Furthermore, our emotional well-being profoundly impacts our mental and behavioral health. Please join us to examine the goals and the benefits of emotional wellness. Once done, we'll discuss effective ways to nurture emotional health.

D. Social Well-Being

By our very nature, human beings are social creatures. We long to belong. We hunger for social connectedness. Furthermore, attachment to each other is not only desirable, it's necessary if we are to be well, age well, and work well. Social well-being is essential if WE are to flourish! Since caregiving can be an all-consuming and isolating experience, we are wise to initiate and to reinforce connections with family, friends, professionals, and community members. Connected, we can care well and be well for the duration of the journey.

E. Intellectual Well-Being

As with other dimensions of well-being, intellectual wellness contributes to our ability to lean into life, to savor the moment, and to flourish. When intellectually well, we are intensely curious about life, engaged in creative activities, and experience a sense of purpose and passion. Because caregiving can at times seem rote and life-draining, we must seek ways to stimulate our intellect, to spark creative ideas, and to nurture personal growth.

F. Spiritual Well-Being

Spiritual wellness is described as possessing a sense of meaning and purpose - living a life of significance predicated on foundational beliefs. When spiritually well, how we live aligns with what we believe. Hence, we live in an authentic, congruent manner. When dealing with an arduous, prolonged call to care, many people find it difficult to make sense of the situation. Doubts bubble up prompting us to question many things we have previously believed to be true. If the pillars of our faith start to shake, perhaps even shatter, well-being is non-existent. Thus, what can we do to shore up the foundations of faith? How do we reconcile our current situation with our basic tenets of life?

G. Occupational Well-Being

Occupational well-being refers to our level of satisfaction related to what we do in the world. If occupationally well, a job becomes a vocation - an activity/contribution that taps into our gifts and abilities. Furthermore, a vocation gives us a "reason to be" - whether paid or not. So, within the context of caregiving, how do we perceive our role as caregiver? Is caregiving merely a job or could it be perceived as a calling/vocation? How could that distinction change our experience of caregiving and perhaps enhance our occupational well-being?

H. Environmental Well-Being

Environmental well-being refers to our response to the space in which we reside and work. Since we are focused on the well-being of caregivers, we'll consider how the environment within which we provide care affects our sense of well-being. Additionally, we'll explore how we can improve the environment of caring for both the caregiver and care receiver.

I. Financial Well-Being
Financial well-being - the ability to meet current and future financial responsibilities - is a goal and a daunting challenge for many caregivers and care receivers. Due to the ever increasing costs of care, caring for each other has become increasingly difficult for all concerned. So, instead of waiting for the financial crisis to land in our lap, let's examine the costs of care and plan appropriately.

J. Brain Health
When discussing the process of aging, the focus is often on the physical aspects of aging - internal and external changes. Granted, to age well, we must be proactive in sustaining and maintaining physical wellness. In like fashion, cognitive health is equally as important. However, fewer people are proactive about their cognitive health. This is due in part to a lack of understanding as to what is required to stay cognitively sharp. So, let's take some time to ponder the naturally occurring cognitive changes associated with the aging process. Then, we'll explore the various ways we can maintain (if not enhance) our cognitive well-being.

K. Caregivers - After the Journey Ends
There are currently 40-60 million people serving as family caregivers in the United States. The average duration of care is over 4.5 years, entailing all aspects of care. Basically, family caregivers are the backbone of care in the country. Consequently, serving as a family caregiver can be all-consuming. Our identity and the rhythm of our days are predicated on our role as caregiver. So, who are we when the journey of caregiving ends? What's next? How do we envision and initiate a new way of being?

What's Your Exit Strategy? Series

A. The Journey of Aging
Aging - quite the adventure, eh? There are so many factors that shape the experience - some within our control, others not. Since we live in an age denying society, many people delay planning for the inevitable until forced to do so. Instead of waiting for a crisis, we are much better served to be proactive related to our aging process. So, let's chat about the variables that impact our lived experience - health, wealth, location, support system, access to health care, and much more. Doing everything we can to be well, age well, and live well is a worthwhile endeavor.

B. Death - The Final Exit
How do you deal with death - the death of others and the reality of your own mortality? Since we live in a death averse culture, this is a disconcerting question for most of us. Our inherent avoidance of the topic makes it very difficult to articulate our perceptions of what death means and our emotional response to death. However, it is the finitude of life that makes every moment incredibly sacred. We have no guarantee of life beyond THIS moment. Thus, death - the final exit - can actually enhance and enrich the lived experience. Acknowledging that this journey will end,

we become more intentional and attentive as to how we choose to live and how we choose to exit. A very good thing indeed!

C. What's Your Exit Strategy?

When contemplating your ultimate demise, it's obvious that many things are beyond your control. There's no way to know what will ultimately pave the way to your final exit. However, that doesn't mean you should abdicate all responsibilities related to your ultimate ending. To do so could likely lead to a very distressing situation for you, your family, and your medical team. Thus, you and yours are much better served by considering the future "what ifs" and your medical preferences. Furthermore, reflect on what truly makes life worth living. What constitutes an acceptable quality of life? Upon answering the question, share your reflections with those responsible for your care. Your preferences will lay the groundwork for an exit strategy that serves all concerned quite well.

D. Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

As we age, the majority of us will be confronted by ethically complex and emotionally difficult medical decisions. Quite often, there is no one "right" answer. Instead, we are dealing with competing goods. Thus, what informs the decisions made along the way? Well, it's a combination of many factors. There are the contextual factors that influence the choices made - the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the situation. Then our comprehension of the situation, support system, religious/spiritual beliefs, values, priorities, hopes, fears, and goals shape our response. Understanding the "why" of our decisions affirms the choices made along the way.

E. What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

Having companioned many people at the end of life - family members, friends, and clients - I know that endings matter. I also realize that without thoughtful consideration and planning, a good death may not be experienced. There are countless things that could - and often do - go wrong. Sadly, some decisions made months if not years prior to death negate the possibility of a preferred ending. Hence, understanding the implications of each medical decision is vitally important. What are the potential benefits and burdens of every option? What are the realistic odds that an intervention or therapy will be effective - leading to a higher quality of life? Possessing the needed information, perhaps we can mitigate the risk of a tragic ending.

F. Hospice and Palliative Care Today

Having worked in the field of hospice and palliative care as a chaplain and community educator, I am a staunch advocate for hospice and palliative care. Palliative care is a philosophy and model of care that can potentially transform the lived experience when dealing with a serious, life-changing disease process. Hospice, a specific form of palliative care reserved for those with a terminal diagnosis, offers specialized end-of-life care designed to maximize the quality of life until death occurs. With that said, I am dismayed by the increasing instances of dismal care provided by some hospice organizations in our country. Thus, if we are to receive the best care possible at the

end of life, we must be well-informed, diligent advocates for ourselves and for those we love.

G. Medical Aid in Dying

Medical aid in dying (MAID) is an end-of-life option available to 22% of the American population. This option is available to residents of states that have passed legislation allowing patients with terminal conditions to ingest a lethal dose of medication prescribed by a physician. The various state statutes describe a lengthy process to enroll in the program - designed to ensure the appropriate use of the option. In 1997, Oregon was the first state to legalize this end-of-life option. Since then, we have learned how difficult it is for most patients and their families to access this option. Hence, how can we anticipate and overcome the many challenges encountered when seeking MAID?

H. What's Next?

Although we live in a death-averse society, most of us are curious about what happens after we die. What's next? Religious traditions offer insights as to what life after death affords believers of a particular faith. Some depictions of the afterlife are quite favorable and thus inviting whereas others are somewhat concerning and fear provoking. Historically, human beings have been fascinated by accounts of near-death experiences—stories that give us a glimpse of what the afterlife might entail. We will briefly review the historical documentation of near-death experiences and then focus our attention on current research and writings in the field. It's doubtful we'll answer the question of What's Next? to everyone's satisfaction—but we'll have fun trying!

I. No Mulligans on the 18th Hole—The End of Life is a Once-in-a-Lifetime Opportunity

On March 15, 2016, I recalled the words I had uttered countless times over the past decade regarding the end of life. "Companioning our loved ones to the end of the road is one of THE hardest things we are called to do in this life - as well as one of THE most sacred. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Death doesn't offer a 'do-over.' We either embrace the journey or we don't!" So on that morning, as I read the text message informing me of the imminent death of my brother, I knew exactly where I needed to be, where I wanted to be - with my brother. There would be no mulligans on Richard's 18th hole. No do-over's. This is the story of how companioning my brother at the end of life transformed how I choose to live. A final blessing from my big brother.

J. Exit Stage Left

Much of our discussion related to your exit strategy focuses on paving the way to your preferred ending. However, don't forget to consider your needs and wants related to the dying process and memorialization of your life. The who, what, when, where, why, and how of your death and the subsequent ritual requires significant contemplation. Today's end-of-life rituals often look quite different from the rituals of previous generations. There are numerous options available related to the disposition of the body worthy of serious consideration. Although contemplating and planning for

your ultimate demise is somewhat daunting, it's important to realize that ritual just doesn't happen! Creation of meaningful end-of-life rituals is a collaborative process requiring knowledge of available options, time, attention, and intention. Discussing your preferences with those responsible for enacting your plan facilitates your “exit stage left.”

Cardinal Caring

After the Diagnosis - Going the Distance

After the diagnosis of a chronic and/or degenerative disease, we — patients and family members — often feel dazed, confused, and afraid. A natural reaction to devastating—and often unexpected—news. As the reality sinks in, we must deal with the day-to-day challenges while contemplating future complications and losses. It's a daunting journey for caregivers and care receivers alike. So, what's required to go the distance? First, recognize that caregiving is a continuous process of change and uncertainty. Second, realize THE diagnosis is a family challenge. Third, appreciate the need and the benefit of becoming emotionally agile. And consider the 4R’s that will facilitate living with change and uncertainty. If you're wondering how to do all of this, please join us for a thought-provoking discussion.

Called to Care - Are You Ready?

Caregiving is a universal concern. We will all serve as caregivers numerous times over the course of a lifetime. And, we will all need care at some point in time. So, there are some questions worthy of consideration. When, not if, you are called to companion a friend, family member, or client challenged by aging and/or illness, how will you respond? Will you (must you) assume full responsibility of care? Or, are you able and/or willing to share the responsibilities of care with other family members, friends, or caregiving professionals? Our approach to caregiving determines our ultimate experience. So, when we are called to companion, it’s important to know that there are alternatives to flying solo - collaborative approaches to care that are beneficial for the caregiver and care receiver.

The Potential Consequences of Caring

The call to care for a family member or friend is often a life-changing event for all concerned. Since the average duration of care in the U.S. is now over 4 years, the role of family caregiver demands a commitment to care. All aspects of life are turned upside down when a chronic, life-limiting disease process arrives on scene. Family caregivers strive to meet the daily demands of care — sometimes struggling to cover all of the bases. Because this is such a significant turning point in life, have you ever wondered about the long-term consequences of caring? In order to care well and to be well (now and in the future), reflecting on this question is prudent.

Living With a Serious Disease

In the aftermath of the diagnosis of a serious disease, we often feel dazed, confused, and afraid. A natural reaction to devastating—and often unexpected—news. Based

upon the specifics of our diagnosis and situation, we will confront the challenge, consider the options, and make the necessary decisions. Fundamental to how we move through the process includes: realizing that the diagnosis is a family challenge, recognizing that our attitude shapes our expectations, and understanding that different stages of the disease present unique challenges and opportunities.

Caregivers and Care Receivers - Plan with the End in Mind

Having companioned many people at the end of life - family members, friends, and clients - I know that endings matter. I also realize that without thoughtful consideration and planning, a good death may not be experienced. There are countless things that could - and often do - go wrong. Sadly, some decisions made months if not years prior to death negate the possibility of a preferred ending. Hence, understanding the implications of each medical decision is vitally important. What are the potential benefits and burdens of every option? What are the realistic odds that an intervention or therapy will be effective - leading to a higher quality of life? Possessing the needed information, perhaps we can mitigate the risk of a tragic ending.

Family Estrangement - The Implications for Aging and Caring

Family estrangement — the loss of a family relationship due to physical or emotional distancing — is sadly a common occurrence. It's estimated that 27% of Americans are currently estranged from a family member. Additionally, research indicates that 40% of Americans have experienced estrangement. Although any member of your family could be affected by the dissolution of a relationship, the most common situation involves a distancing between parents and an adult child. Since the backbone of care in our country is the family caregiver, what are the implications for aging and caring when estrangement is part of the family scenario? Is reconciliation possible when care is required? Is there the potential to address and to heal old wounds before it's too late? Why might it be worth our time and effort to reconnect and recommit to being family once again? We'll explore these questions and many more related to the issue of family estrangement.

Caregiving in the Twenty-First Century

Caregiving in the twenty-first century is an interesting journey to say the very least! We'll examine the demographic trends and societal changes in the United States fueling the growing concerns related to aging, illness, and caregiving. The back nine of life today poses different challenges and opportunities than those encountered by previous generations. We'll consider how the changing nature of families, family legacies of caregiving and illness, and the geographic dispersal of families inform our experience of the back nine. We can't anticipate everything that will happen. However, we can proactively plan for the certainties of life. We will age. We will probably experience a serious illness or disability. We will need more help than we ever imagined. And, we will die. Hence, we need to prepare to care for ourselves and our loved ones. Proactive beats reactive every time!

Age-Friendly Health Care

Age-friendly health care is an approach to care designed to support and to serve persons in age-appropriate ways, resulting in beneficial outcomes. Needless to say, such an approach is needed and wanted by older adults. The medical concerns of an infant are dramatically different than those of an elder. Likewise, the age of a person is an essential factor when designing an effective plan of care. Today, the realization that far too few medical professionals are specifically trained to care for the aging population is coming home to roost. Consequently, it is encouraging to note the advances being made in age-friendly care and age-friendly health care systems.

Caregivers—After the Journey Ends

There are currently over 53 million people serving as family caregivers in the United States. The average duration of care is over 4.5 years, entailing all aspects of care. Basically, family caregivers are the backbone of care in the country. Serving as a family caregiver can be all-consuming. Our identity and the rhythm of our days are predicated on our role as caregiver. So, who are we when the journey of caregiving ends? What's next? How do we envision and initiate a new way of being?

Navigating the Journey of Caregiving

Caregiving is a complicated journey to say the very least. Navigating the constantly changing conditions requires not only your time, attention, and energy but also knowledge and a competent caregiving team. Please join us to learn about beneficial caregiving resources as well as tools to "map out" your caregiving journey. "Smooth sailing" is merely a pipe dream without navigational skills. By taking time to adequately prepare for the journey, you increase the likelihood that your dreams will become your reality.

Change and Uncertainty - That's Caregiving!

Our current experience of COVID-19 highlights the fact that change is an inherent part of life. In fact, the only constant in life is change - a reality that family caregivers know all too well. When dealing with a serious, chronic, and/or terminal disease, caregivers and care receivers can be overwhelmed by a never-ending series of changes. As a result, many people experience change fatigue rooted in fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. So, what can we do to effectively deal with the changes encountered throughout the caregiving journey? First, recognize why we are typically resistant to change. Second, understand the process of change, loss, transition, grief, and mourning. Third, leverage the 3 Rs to effectively deal with change: resilience, response, and ritual.

High Tech Aging and Caregiving

Today, technological advances within the realm of health care, aging, and caregiving are mind boggling. Although the human touch and the need for human relationships will never be replaced by gadgets, apps, or social media (merely my humble opinion!), technology can be utilized to reduce many of the daily tasks that exhaust family caregivers and/or prove problematic as we age. Let's explore the technological

options that can potentially enhance communication and connection, safety and security, health and wellness, and learning and sharing.

Caregiving: How Can We Be Proactive?
Caregiving. A journey we will all experience at some point in time over the course of a lifetime. For some, a journey to be repeated but never replicated. Each journey is unique. However, every journey of caregiving - whether as the caregiver or the care receiver - is greatly improved by being proactive. Being proactive about our health, our housing, our community, our support system, and our plans for EOL care. Furthermore, it is never too early to start planning for this inevitable trip. Consider the possible "what ifs" along the way and proactively plan a journey based on your needs, wants, and available resources. Care for yourself and others by design, not by default.

After the Diagnosis—Learning to Live With a Serious Disease
In the aftermath of the diagnosis of a serious disease, we often feel dazed, confused, and afraid. A natural reaction to devastating—and often unexpected—news. Based upon the specifics of our diagnosis and situation, we will confront the challenge, consider the options, and make the necessary decisions. Fundamental to how we move through the process includes: realizing that the diagnosis is a family challenge, recognizing that our attitude shapes our expectations, and understanding that different stages of the disease present unique challenges and opportunities.

The Final Chapter - Possible Endings
Although we live in a death averse society, you have probably thought about how you want your journey to end. If you are like the majority of people in our country, you want to die at home — surrounded by your family and friends. But the sad reality is this — most people don't get what they want at the end of life. The conclusion of the final chapter far too often unfolds in unwanted and unimagined ways. Due to circumstances and the domino effect of acute, aggressive care, far too many people die in the sterile, unfamiliar, dehumanizing environment of an ICU. So, the question is this — How can we reclaim authorship of our ending?

Caregivers @ Work
It's estimated that 60% of family caregivers in the United States work full or part time in addition to providing 24 hours of care/week to a family member. The average duration of care is over 4 years. No wonder family caregivers are stressed! The good news is that businesses now realize the implications of caregiving on their employees and business. Now is the time for employers and employees to collaboratively create beneficial benefits for Caregivers @ Work.

Witness to Loss
As we companion those who are aging, ill, or dying, we witness a tremendous amount of loss. No matter how well prepared or well trained we are, witnessing the losses of others affects us in profound ways. Sometimes the experience changes how we see the world, how we understand ourselves, and/or how we choose to believe. We are

well served to consider what is to be gained from each experience of loss. Otherwise, we risk becoming either insensitive or overwhelmed as personal or professional companions.

See and Serve Caregivers in the Workplace
At any point in time, 17% of the workforce is serving as a family caregiver. These caregivers work full or part time in addition to providing 24 hours of care/week for a family member. The dual role ultimately proves to be detrimental to the employee and the employer. However, there are innovative and promising programs designed to support caregivers in the workplace that result in mutually beneficial outcomes. Please join the conversation to learn how to see and serve caregivers in your organization.

The Big Squeeze - Caught in the Middle of Caring
One of the greatest challenges we face in the United States today is effectively and compassionately caring for one another. Whether challenged by illness, disability, or the natural process of aging, we will all require the help and assistance of others—professional health care providers as well as family and friends. Whether a Boomer, GenXer, or a Millennial, we often find ourselves caught between a rock and a hard place. We are called to care for our aging parents while raising a family, working, and maintaining our own health. When caught in the squeeze, we need information, resources, resilience, and a caring community.

Called to Serve: The Wounded Healer
As human beings, we are called to serve in unique and needed ways over the course of a lifetime. In fact, one of the greatest challenges for each individual is to discern his/her calling in life - a way of being in the world that provides a sense of meaning and purpose. It is not a simple task to determine how we are called to serve. Quite the contrary. To discern our calling in life requires attention, intention, and self-reflection. Through this process of internal exploration, we discover our impetus to serve others often resides in our own sense of wounded-ness. The people we choose to serve are those in whom we see ourselves. We recognize their suffering as our own, and we are therefore compelled to companion them. Every person's journey is unique; however, we can learn so much from people who have walked a similar path. Those who share common losses and wounds often find a common ground of healing. As we serve others in need of healing, we too are healed.

Collaborative Care - Working and Caring Together
For most people rooted in Western culture, it is difficult to ask for and receive help from other people. However, the reality is that we will all need help due to the challenges posed by aging and/or illness. So, how are we to overcome our resistance to assistance? Well, our friend the goose has much to teach us about giving and receiving care. Look to the skies. As geese fly in formation, they embody the essential ingredients of collaborative care: shared leadership, interdependence, self care, encouragement, and trusted relationships. This is not a "fly by night" approach to

care! If we choose to emulate the collaborative flight of geese, all involved in the caregiving journey will be well served.

All Creatures Great and Small

I love critters - all creatures great and small. Always have. Always will. My family of choice includes cats and dogs, but I have also enjoyed a deep connection with several horses. I am not alone in my love of critters. According to American Pet Products Association, over 60 percent of all households in the United States have a pet. Our love and connection with other creatures is more than a mere physical connection. The human-animal bond is known to be therapeutic in a myriad of ways. Please join us as we explore the physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits of the human-animal bond. Although a blessing over the course of a lifetime, sharing the journey of aging with another creature can improve your health, reduce the risk of loneliness, and enhance the overall quality of life.

Called to Companion

Caregiving is a universal concern. We will all serve as caregivers numerous times over the course of a lifetime. And, we will all need care at some point in time. So, there are some questions worthy of consideration. When, not if, you are called to companion a friend, family member, or client challenged by aging and/or illness, how will you respond? Will you (must you) assume full responsibility of care? Or, are you able and/or willing to share the responsibilities of care with other family members, friends, or caregiving professionals? Our approach to caregiving determines our ultimate experience. So, when we are called to companion, it's important to know that there are alternatives to flying solo - collaborative approaches to care that are beneficial for the caregiver and care receiver.

Resistance to Assistance

For most of us, it's not easy to ask for help. But if we understand the "why" beneath our reluctance, perhaps we can overcome our resistance to assistance. Ultimately, it's a choice. I'm not saying you should, must, have to, ought to, or need to ask others for help. But if you choose to ask for or to receive help from others, you will probably encounter a sharp point of resistance somewhere along the way. Better to know the location of that sharp point than to step on it unexpectedly. As always, knowledge is power.

Living in Harmony

As a caregiver, living in harmony may be an unfamiliar melody. Can you name that tune? If not, please make note of the idea and importance of harmony—defined as agreement, accord, a pleasing arrangement. Sounds fabulous, right? Within the context of caregiving, living in harmony is the consequence of a thoughtful, compassionate, realistic approach to caring for family and friends—and YOU!!! So, as you care for others, remember to hum the life-giving chorus of self care, self care, self care. It will serve you well.

Cardinal Concerns

Longing to Belong
According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, human beings long to belong - to feel like an integral part of a community (family, friends, society). Fundamentally, we are relational beings. We need and want each other! But as we age, situational changes often threaten our sense of belonging as the nature and composition of our respective communities change. For example - if widowed, we becomes me. After moving, we feel like strangers in a foreign land. And if family and friends predecease us, we struggle with social isolation. So, where and with whom do you belong? Please join us to explore this question and many more. Coming together is the essential first step toward satisfying our longing to belong.

The Afterglow of Adversity
When have you learned the most about yourself and about life? More than likely, it's the times of trial and tribulation that informed and influenced your journey the most. Adversity pushes us beyond our previously perceived limits—our comfort zone. The death of loved one. The diagnosis of a serious illness. Grieving significant losses. Termination of employment. Imprisonment. Challenged by life, we can choose to be diminished by life OR emboldened. When considering the choices made by Sheryl Sandberg, Viktor Frankl, and Nelson Mandela, we realize that adversity often serves as a segue to positive transformation. Please join us to explore the afterglow of adversity—the opportunity to rise strong (a la Brene Brown)!

Spirituality and Health
When considering how to age well, we often focus on our physical health. We are advised to eat well, exercise daily, embrace preventative health care, rest well, and develop a supportive community. All good things, right? But, there are other dimensions of our being that affect our overall sense of good health — such as our religious and/or spiritual beliefs. Our foundational tenets of life inform and influence how we cope with the various changes and challenges posed by aging. So, let's explore the relationship between spirituality and physical health. Understanding how and why our spiritual perception of life affects our health may increase the odds of aging well. A good thing indeed.

What the World Needs Now
At the conclusion of every year, we have the opportunity to intentionally reflect on the happenings of the recent past. Obviously, we have more than a few things to consider when contemplating the various twists and turns of the past few years. We have been challenged by a global pandemic, social unrest, and political upheaval. Consequently, the atmosphere is charged with anxiety, uncertainty, and disbelief. Although we may be tempted to disconnect from these chaotic times, now more than ever, we need to lean into Life and discern how we can be a powerful and positive force in the world. Think about it. What does the world need now in order to heal wounds, bridge gaps, and encourage life-giving interactions and conversations? How about a little faith, hope, and love?

Bridge Time - Dealing With the Consequences of Change
Most human beings are not fond of change, invited or not. Change disrupts our daily routines, life expectations, and our sense of certainty. Change reminds us that we are not in control! But change is a given in life: the seasons change, society changes, financial markets change, relationships change, and we change. So instead of resisting change, how can we engage it? First, we need to understand the process of change, loss, transition, grief, and mourning. Then, we must choose to move through the transition to live beyond it - to embrace a new way of being. Although we cannot control everything that happens in our lives, we always retain the freedom to choose an attitude in response to the change(s). Our choice directly impacts our lived experience and quality of life. Recognition of this choice in the midst of change transforms the victimizing question of "Why me?" into the empowering inquiry of "What now?"

LIFE - A Continuous Process of Change and Transition
Most human beings are not fond of change, invited or not. Change disrupts our daily routines, life expectations, and our sense of certainty. Change reminds us that we are not in control! But change is a given in life: the seasons change, society changes, financial markets change, relationships change, and we change. So instead of resisting change, how can we engage it? First, we need to understand the process of change, loss, transition, grief, and mourning. Then, we must choose to move through the transition to live beyond it - to embrace a new way of being. Although we cannot control everything that happens in our lives, we always retain the freedom to choose an attitude in response to the change(s). Our choice directly impacts our lived experience and quality of life. Recognition of this choice in the midst of change transforms the victimizing question of "Why me?" into the empowering inquiry of "What now?"

Tripped Up by Life - When the Unexpected Becomes Your Reality
How do we respond when unexpected events terminate our current way of being? Obliterate our sense of normalcy? Change the daily rhythm of life? What are the immediate and future challenges related to the unexpected death of a loved one? The diagnosis of a serious illness? A tragic accident? These are important questions to consider since life as we know it can change in an instant. Yes, we are all at risk of being tripped up by life unexpectedly. WHEN - not if - this happens, how will you respond? Perhaps by sharing the fallout of a recent tragic event in my life, you can be better prepared for the unexpected happenings in your life. I certainly hope so!

Got Bounce? Exploring the Process of Resilience
At birth, I think we should all be issued a set of heavy duty shock absorbers with detailed instructions on how and when to use. I know of no one who has been able to avoid the bumps and resultant bruises of life. As human beings, we will experience the highs and lows of life - and the transitions between the peaks and valleys are rough. It is during the stressful, difficult times that we realize the importance of resilience - the ability to "bounce back" from adversity. Resilience is not a trait. Rather, it is a process of adaptation. Please join us to explore this important process

and identify the various factors contributing to resilience. Life can be shocking to say the very least! Instead of being shattered by the unexpected and the unwanted, we have the ability to choose a response to change. To meet the most daunting challenges of life, we gotta have bounce!

Compassion Fatigue: When It Hurts to Care

As professional or personal caregivers, we witness the suffering of others – physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering. To witness the pain and suffering of others is to be forever changed. Compassionate people bear the suffering of others and often times compromise their own health and well being when they assume too much of the burden. We must always be aware of where we end and the other person begins – the importance of boundaries. We can companion others in life, but we cannot assume the responsibility for another's life. To do so puts us at risk of experiencing compassion fatigue, a risk for all who care.

Moral Distress: Searching for True North

Amazingly enough, human beings are born with an internal compass designed to keep us aligned in life – a moral compass. Our personal values and beliefs serve to calibrate our compass such that each person has a unique sense of True North. When encountering a situation that requires us to deviate from our aligned position, it is our moral compass that sounds the alarm that something is amiss. Due to the increasingly complex ethical situations in healthcare, moral distress is frequently experienced by healthcare providers as well as patients and family members. The challenge is to first recognize this type of distress and then to proactively seek a common understanding of the relevant issues. Moral distress can be effectively addressed if not mitigated when all perspectives are welcomed, communication encouraged, and a safe space provided for interaction.

Generational Competence

Each generation has a unique personality comprised of attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and expectations. Consequently, when serving people during times of loss and transition (serious or terminal illness, death of a loved one, etc.), it is important for us to understand and to appreciate the attitudes of people in our care. What do you know about the Boomers? Gen Xers? Gen Yers? Millennials? What is distinctive about each generation? What is common to all generations? Generational competence is mandatory if we are to serve others in beneficial and respectful ways.

Connection is Required for Effective Communication

Communication—effective communication—is fundamental for personal and professional success throughout life. In order to effectively communicate, we must first know and appreciate our audience—family, friends, colleagues, and clients. Secondly, we need to overcome the limitations of telecommunications while leveraging the opportunities. And finally, when communicating eye to eye, we benefit greatly by the addition of nonverbal communication.

Cultural Competence: Seeking to Know the Other

Cultural competence is an issue receiving much attention of late, particularly within the field of healthcare. This focus is due to many reasons including the ever increasing diversity of our population. Whether considering age, gender, spirituality, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic status, there are countless factors that distinguish one person from any other. We cannot adequately and compassionately meet the needs of others if we fail to understand the person before us. We risk offending others if we make assumptions based on labels or categories. It is only by being respectfully curious that we begin to understand one another - taking the time to ask, to listen, and to learn. This is the first step toward cultural competence.

Effective Communication - Stop, Look, and Listen

Communication is defined as the exchange of information—something we do routinely day in and day out. However, routine is not synonymous with artful or effective! Miscommunications happen in our personal and professional roles—creating confusion, conflict, and contention. So, what is the secret to communicating effectively? Stop. Look. And Listen. By so doing, we have the opportunity to move beyond mundane, superficial communication in order to engage in heart-to-heart, life-giving, relationship-building conversations.

Professional Boundaries: Walking the Line

Boundaries are necessary behavioral constructs if we are to have healthy relationships with other people, personally and professionally. We need to be aware of where we end and the other person begins. Boundaries serve to protect both persons, honoring and respecting each individual. Some boundaries are defined by legal mandates while others are defined by mutual consent, assumptions, or cultural norms. Often within organizations the discussion of professional boundaries occurs after a boundary violation that prompts a corrective action. Organizations and individuals are much better served if proactive education is offered to raise the awareness around the need and purpose of boundaries.

The Blessings of Boundaries

Throughout the journey of caregiving, well-defined and well-managed personal boundaries are a blessing to caregivers and care receivers. Boundaries are necessary behavioral constructs if we are to have healthy relationships with other people. We need to be aware of where we end and the other person begins. Boundaries serve to protect both persons, honoring and respecting each individual. Well-conceived and well-managed boundaries are ultimately a blessing to all involved in the journey of caregiving. Please join us to learn how to establish, to manage, and to maintain mutually-beneficial boundaries within your family and with service providers.

Cardinal Aging

Age Well to End Well

Aging - quite the adventure, eh? There are so many factors that shape the experience - some within our control, others not. Since we live in an age denying society, many people delay planning for the inevitable until forced to do so. Instead of waiting for a crisis, we are much better served to be proactive related to our aging process. So, let's chat about the variables that impact our lived experience - health, wealth, location, support system, access to health care, and much more. Doing everything we can to be well, age well, and live well is a worthwhile endeavor.

Aging is ALL About Changing

Most human beings are not fond of change, invited or not. Change disrupts our daily routines, life expectations, and our sense of certainty. Change reminds us that we are not in control! But change is a given in life: the seasons change, society changes, financial markets change, relationships change, and we change. We change as a natural consequence of the aging process - physically, emotionally, psychosocially, and spirituality. So instead of resisting change, how can we engage it? First, we need to understand the process of change, loss, transition, grief, and mourning. Then, we must choose to move through the transition to live beyond it - to embrace a new way of being. Although we cannot control everything that happens in our lives, we always retain the freedom to choose an attitude in response to the change(s). Our choice directly impacts our lived experience and quality of life. Recognition of this choice in the midst of change transforms the victimizing question of "Why me?" into the empowering inquiry of "What now?"

What are You Waiting For? Live NOW!

It's time for us to realize that with age comes an incredible opportunity to experience an EXTRAordinary life! In the first half of life, our focus is often on family and career — giving priority to the needs and desires of others. As our families mature and our careers plateau, questions arise which tickle the imagination and prompt serious reflection. Who am I? What ignites my passion? What do I choose to do with my life? Who do I choose to become? This is the gift of aging — utilizing the wisdom derived from the first half of life to engage and to explore the challenging questions prompted by significant life changes. Granted, many of the transformations prompted by aging are uninvited and disconcerting. However, with every ending, there's the possibility of a new beginning, a new way of being in the world. So, let's choose to live an EXTRAordinary life — right NOW! What are we waiting for?

What's Your Thing?

Many people struggle to understand the "Why?" of Life when dealing with the challenges of aging, serious disease, and the reality of mortality. In the book, *Iona Iverson's Rules for Commuting* written by Clare Pooley, a purpose or passion in life is referred to as "your thing." Lacking an awareness of "your thing," the journey of Life

is merely an endurance test. However, if we believe that every moment is an opportunity to contribute to Life in meaning-FULL ways, the journey of Life becomes an experience to be embraced and enjoyed. Therefore, it is imperative to remember that the world awaits what only we have to offer as unique individuals. In return, our lives are enriched beyond measure whether we have 20 years or 20 minutes remaining.

What is Required to Flourish?

Regardless of age, human beings long for a fulfilling, life-giving existence. This is achieved by having an overall sense of well-being evidenced by flourishing. According to experts in the field of positive psychology, recognizing and sharing our gifts with the world enhances the lived experience for one and all. We flourish! In order to live in full bloom, a bit of ground work is required. It doesn't just happen. So, let's consider how the various aspects of well-being (mind, body, and spirit) serve to enhance our ability to flourish.

Brain Health

When discussing the process of aging, the focus is often on the physical aspects of aging - internal and external changes. Granted, to age well, we must be proactive in sustaining and maintaining physical wellness. In like fashion, cognitive health is equally as important. However, fewer people are proactive about their cognitive health. This is due in part to a lack of understanding as to what is required to stay cognitively sharp. So, let's take some time to ponder the naturally occurring cognitive changes associated with the aging process. Then, we'll explore the various ways we can maintain (if not enhance) our cognitive well-being.

The Challenges of Aging Solo

A key factor in aging well is having a reliable social support system (family and friends). Due to the changing demographics in the United States, it is estimated that 20-30% of the population over the age of 65 live alone and will age alone. The strict definition of a solo ager or elder orphan is someone who lives alone, has no children, and does not have a life partner. But a broader definition of solo aging highlights the reality that we are ALL at risk of "going solo" due to circumstances—the death of a spouse or partner, a divorce, or geographic isolation from family and friends. The consequences of aging alone are numerous and extensive: a lower quality of life, a shorter life expectancy, complications in the caregiving journey, and physical isolation leading to an enhanced sense of loneliness. So, how can we proactively reinforce and expand our social support systems to avoid the negative consequences of aging solo?

Sailing Through Life - What is Required?

Contemplating the New Year, how will we choose to navigate the choppy waters resulting from these tumultuous times? The past 3 years have been challenging beyond anything we could have imagined - a global pandemic, social unrest, and political upheaval. Consequently, the atmosphere is charged with anxiety, uncertainty, and disbelief. Although we may be tempted to disconnect from these chaotic times, now more than ever, we need to lean into the stiff breezes and figure out how to sail

through 2023. Think about it. What is required to right the ship? What does the world need now in order to heal wounds, bridge gaps, and encourage life-giving interactions and conversations? Let's consider the available navigational tools that will lead to calmer seas in the near future — things such as faith, hope, and love.

What's Your Expiration Date?

An expiration date is defined as the "date after which something should no longer be used." Reflecting on the journey of aging and the prevalence of ageist attitudes in the United States, I imagine most people over the age of 65 (the age at which Medicare deems a person to be a senior citizen) can relate to the term - feeling useless at times. Too often the expectations of others predicated merely on chronological age limit the lived experience of older adults. Consequently, many older adults feel demeaned, diminished, and discounted. What can we do to transform this limited and limiting understanding and appreciation of older adults?

Aging from the Inside Out

As a society, we typically focus on the outward manifestations of aging—gray hair, wrinkles, and physical changes. Our desire to retain a youthful appearance fuels the multi-billion dollar anti-aging industry. I often wonder if we would be better served to focus on the intangible, internal manifestations of aging—the evolution of our understanding of life, the enhanced appreciation of the moment, and the acquisition of wisdom that we can then offer to the world. Care to wonder with me?

Elderhood—Frightened and/or Excited?

How do you feel about getting older? Frightened and/or excited? Your attitude toward aging is likely informed by a mixed bag of emotions predicated on your experience, family history, faith, and knowledge of the aging process. Like it or not, we will continue to age with every breath. Such is the nature of life. Consequently, if we are afforded the opportunity to be an elder, how can we make the most of the experience of elderhood?

Women Walking With Women

Recently, a dear woman introduced me to an amazing book, ***A Walk on the Beach*** (2004), by Joan Anderson. It is the story of two women whose paths crossed one day on the beach and how that chance encounter changed their lives. Their story is a testament to the sacred nature of female friendships. In John O'Donohue's book, ***Anam Cara (1996)***, he discusses the Celtic concept of *anam cara*—soul friend. From my experience over the past 6 decades, I believe "soul friend" to be an accurate depiction of my female friends—spiritual friendships. I can't imagine life without my soul friends! Consequently, I think it's time to celebrate the blessings of walking with women—to give thanks for our life-giving friendships.

The Loneliness Epidemic

Loneliness is a subjective feeling related to isolation. Granted, it's possible to be alone without feeling lonely. Desired solitude can be life giving—an aloneness that many of us need and desire periodically. However, the consequences of unwanted

isolation result in physiological, cognitive, emotional, and psychosocial decline. Research reveals that loneliness is being reported in epidemic proportions throughout our country today, with serious consequence. Loneliness leads to a shorter life expectancy, lower quality of life, and complications with caregiving. Therefore, how can we as individuals and as a society proactively address the issue of loneliness?

Longing to Belong

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, human beings long to belong - to feel like an integral part of a community (family, friends, society). Fundamentally, we are relational beings. We need and want each other! But as we age, situational changes often threaten our sense of belonging as the nature and composition of our respective communities change. For example - if widowed, we becomes me. After moving, we feel like strangers in a foreign land. And if family and friends predecease us, we struggle with social isolation. So, where and with whom do you belong? Please join us to explore this question and many more. Coming together is the essential first step toward satisfying our longing to belong.

See and Be Seen

Human beings are relational creatures. We need and want each other as the journey of life unfolds. In fact, our inherent preference to travel together ensured our survival as a species. But how do we come together and stay together? What is required to connect with other people in meaningful ways thereby creating supportive and sustaining communities. Quite simply, we must take the time to see other people and then allow them to see us. By seeing and being seen, we can then identify potential points of connection that reinforce our sense of knowing and belonging. A good thing indeed!

LISTEN! Life is Calling

Many people struggle to understand the "Why?" of Life when dealing with the challenges of aging, serious disease, and the reality of mortality. Lacking a sense of meaning and purpose, the journey of Life is merely an endurance test. However, if we believe that every moment is an opportunity to contribute to Life in meaning-FULL ways, the journey of Life becomes an experience to be embraced and enjoyed. Therefore, it is imperative to remember that the world awaits what only we have to offer as unique individuals. In return, our lives are enriched beyond measure whether we have 20 years or 20 minutes remaining.

Age By Design

How do you ***choose*** to age? By default or by design? Because we live in an age-denying society, most of us are not inclined to anticipate the future challenges ***and*** opportunities encountered as we age. Life happens. We react. A common scenario resulting in a less than desirable journey. So, how can you increase the odds that you will experience an EXTRAordinary life—a life that you love? First, understand the aging process (all facets). Second, identify traveling companions. Third, evaluate the environment. And finally, discern what fills you up, brings you joy, and gets you out of bed every day! Don't let life happen ***to*** you. Instead, ***Age By Design—YOUR Design!***

a. Age By Design—The Process and the Players

No doubt, the journey of aging will present a myriad of challenges for one and all—physical, cognitive, emotional, psychosocial, financial, and spiritual. Hence, by understanding the process of aging, you can then anticipate the inevitable changes and design a preferred plan for aging. Such foresight is a blessing for you and for your family and friends. Although aging is a very personal experience, it is a shared journey. If we are to age well, we need and want caring, compassionate traveling companions. Please join us for a thought-provoking chat. ***Age By Design***—a creative exercise worthy of your time and attention.

b*. Age By Design—The Setting*

Location, location, location. A critical aspect when assessing the financial value of real estate. Location—the environment—is also a critical factor in the aging process. It is not only a question of want, it is also a question of need. We may want to live independently, but we need a higher level of care. When circumstances dictate a reassessment of the home, the discussion tends to be emotional, frightening, and somewhat confrontational. But if we choose to ***Age By Design***, we can evaluate senior housing options and identify viable, desirable alternatives. Please join us to learn about innovative housing options and to dream about your ideal location, location, location. ***Age By Design***—a creative exercise worthy of your time and attention.

c. Age by Design—The Reason

What is the "why" of life? A curious question that becomes profoundly important as we age. Granted, we need a sense of meaning and purpose throughout life. But with advanced age, the "why" becomes profoundly important. The "why" serves to sustain us and to motivate us through many of the changes posed by aging. It's also important to realize that the "why" of life evolves as we evolve. Thus, we have the opportunity to seek and to discover a new "why" of life in the latter years. Please join us to chat about what gets you out of bed every morning. What puts a bounce in your step? What gets your heart racing and ignites your imagination? Imagine—then create— a life you love. ***Age By Design***—a creative exercise worthy of your time and attention.

Aging—The Shared Journey

Due to increased life expectancies over the past century, we live in a multi-generational society unlike any before. Generational diversity affords us the opportunity to learn from each other and to serve each other. We all have something to offer. And, we all have something to learn. It is this lovely, mutually beneficial, multi-generational exchange that enhances the ultimate meaning of the aging process. Aging is a shared journey for all ages.

LIFE—The Ultimate Gift Exchange

Recent research bears out what most of us realize as we age—in order to age well, we need a sense of meaning and purpose in life. Quite often, meaning is derived from contributing to the greater good—sharing our time, treasures, and talents with other people. Without exception, when we give of ourselves, we always get something in

return. Personal satisfaction. A sense of joy. A feeling of accomplishment. By giving, we receive—***an exchange of gifts***. So, how does this gift exchange work?

The Afterglow of Adversity

When have you learned the most about yourself and about life? More than likely, it's the times of trial and tribulation that informed and influenced your journey the most. Adversity pushes us beyond our previously perceived limits—our comfort zone. The death of loved one. The diagnosis of a serious illness. Grieving significant losses. Termination of employment. Imprisonment. Challenged by life, we can choose to be diminished by life OR emboldened. When considering the choices made by Sheryl Sandberg, Viktor Frankl, and Nelson Mandela, we realize that adversity often serves as a segue to positive transformation. Please join us to explore the afterglow of adversity—the opportunity to rise strong (a la Brene Brown)!

Attitude is Everything

As the journey of life unfolds, we experience the bittersweet nature of the adventure. The process of aging entails twists and turns leading to unexpected (and sometimes unwanted) potholes, detours, and vistas. No one is guaranteed "smooth sailing." However, our ability to successfully navigate the rough waters posed by aging depends on our attitude. So, let's first accept the reality of aging. Then we'll consider how historical attitudes impact our contemporary perception of aging. We'll review what recent research reveals about the relationship between attitude and aging. And finally, we'll discuss ways to truly flourish as we age.

Positively Gray

As companions (personal and/or professional) to those challenged by aging and illness, we are at risk of developing a rather negative view of the aging process. It's difficult to be optimistic about getting older due to our over exposure to the physical and cognitive challenges of aging combined with the despairing anti-aging rhetoric of the media. However, do not despair! There is actually a tremendous amount of upside to aging. Over the past century, life expectancies for men and women increased by thirty years! We are healthier, better educated, and more affluent than previous generations. Yes, aging poses many challenges for individuals, families, and society. But, getting older offers tremendous opportunities for those who are "positively gray." With a more realistic, balanced perspective of aging, our limiting fears can be replaced by life-expanding hope. A good thing indeed.

Advocates for Aging

Aging well requires intention, attention, and planning. The process is also facilitated by passionate advocates. As companions to aging individuals, we can serve to encourage beneficial lifestyles, offer needed resources and community connections, create a positive atmosphere, and recognize the value of the aging person. In Western society, elders are too often invisible - unseen and unheard. As companions to the aging population, we have the responsibility and the opportunity to enhance the visibility of elders and to ensure their voices are heard. If we are to serve the aging population well, we must work to transform societal attitudes about aging. We must

be advocates for aging - people who recognize the gifts, talents, experience, and wisdom that elders possess and that our society so desperately needs. Rather than being a burden to society, elders are a multifaceted blessing.

Act II (or Act III?)
Retirement today is quite different from what our parents envisioned or experienced. This is due in part to the fact that we are living longer. It also has to do with the fact that we are healthier and wealthier. How do we choose to invest our time, talents, and treasures throughout Act II (or III)? What constitutes a purposeful life? What gets you revved up and eager to jump out of bed every morning? These questions are worthy of serious consideration. If we are to age well, we must be intentional in how we choose to engage the journey.

Intergenerational Collaboration
Due to the increased life expectancy over the last century, we live in a multigenerational society unlike any before. For the first time in history, four generations commonly work together in a variety of settings. The interaction between generations presents a variety of challenges. Communication styles, interpersonal skills, leadership styles, and life priorities vary between generations which often serve to segregate and isolate different age groups. However, this is not about being right or wrong. Each generation has skills and abilities that can be leveraged for the greater good. It is when the skills and abilities of all generations are integrated and honored that we reap the fruits of the collaborative effort. There need not be intergenerational competition for resources or jobs. Collectively, we EXPAND and develop new resources. Together, our respective journeys are enriched. So, the opportunity is to collaborate in order to live well, work well, and age well together!

Life - What's It All About?
Viktor Frankl, a twentieth-century psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, believed strongly that humanity is driven by the will to meaning. We have a basic need to find and fulfill our meaning and purpose in life. The itch to understand intensifies as we age. We long to make sense of our experiences - particularly the times of suffering and heartache. However, meaning isn't something we stumble upon happenstance. Rather, meaning is derived from what we contribute, what we experience, and how we choose to suffer. Discernment of meaning requires commitment, courage, and curiosity. So, roll up your sleeves and get to work! If you are willing to invest your heart and soul in the search for meaning, your life will be enriched beyond measure. Meaning-FULL...don't settle for anything less!

Making Tracks
Linear is not a term I associate with the journey of life! Twist and turns. Yes. Ups and downs. Absolutely. Trails of tears. For sure. Jaunts of joy. Amen. It is the bittersweet nature of life that challenges, blesses, and enriches the journey. One of the great gifts of aging is the opportunity to glance back and assess the tracks we left behind. Possessing a perspective honed by time and hard-earned wisdom, we acknowledge and own the "on track" and "off track" times in life. Our adventures serve to guide, to

sustain, and to inspire those who follow in our “tracks.” However, if we fail to share our stories with family and friends, some tracks will go undiscovered. So, don’t miss the opportunity to make tracks! Tell your story!

Left Behind: Your Story, Your Legacy

How will you be remembered? When your journey ends, what will you leave behind? If you are like most people, the assessment of your legacy will focus on an inventory of your accumulated wealth. Although important, your legacy encompasses so much more! We leave behind the essence of how we chose to walk through this life. Who did we love? How did we love? What did we value? What were our priorities in life? How did we choose to serve others? What gifts did we offer to the world? These questions should be considered well before the end of life, before death precludes the possibility of generating a meaningful legacy. NOW is the time to share our experiences and acquired wisdom with subsequent generations to enhance and to promote the greater good. NOW is the time to share our stories — the greatest legacy we leave behind. By doing so, our life becomes more significant than our death — a good thing indeed.

Aging: The Opportunity of a Lifetime!

Getting old...a process that frightens, angers, and challenges many (if not MOST) people. Granted, aging is not for the faint of heart. However, the journey consists of more than grey hair, wrinkles, illness, and loss. So, instead of believing the negative headline news about aging, I invite you to seriously consider "getting" old. By that I mean, recognizing and appreciating the burdens and the benefits of aging. Get it? All is NOT lost! Possibilities and opportunities come with age as well. Getting old is a gift – an opportunity of a lifetime! Don't miss it!

Aging in the Twenty-First Century

Aging in the twenty-first century is an interesting journey to say the very least! We’ll examine the demographic trends and societal changes in the United States fueling the growing concerns related to aging, illness, and caregiving. Aging today poses different challenges and opportunities than those encountered by previous generations. We’ll consider how the changing nature of families, family legacies of aging and illness, and the geographic dispersal of families inform our caved experience. We can’t anticipate everything that will happen. However, we can proactively plan for the certainties of life. We will age. We will probably experience a serious illness or disability. We will need more help than we ever imagined. And, we will die. Hence, we need to prepare to care for ourselves and our loved ones.

Plan Well to Live (Age) Well

I have always been a planner. I LOVE a good plan! I’m sure that is rooted in my desire to be in control of my life. Yep! I’m a control queen! And, I’m not alone. No doubt, you have planned vacations, parties, and holidays. Furthermore, we’re encourage to plan for things such as the educational needs of our children, our retirement, and final arrangements. But, how many of us have planned to age well? Quite often, due to our aversion of death and the aging process, we disregard the need to plan for our

physical and cognitive demise. In order to live well, we must plan well. In order to plan well, we must realistically assess our situation, our wants, our needs, and the available resources. Please join us to explore an effective and beneficial assessment and planning process.

Plotting and Planning - Advance Directives, Ethical Wills, and Final Arrangements
As a society, we are age denying and death averse. Hence, the majority of people in the United States have not planned for their ultimate demise. Consequently, family and friends have no instructions related to health care and end-of-life preferences when needed and wanted. A very stressful situation indeed. So, let's be countercultural. Let's chat about the planning process - the forms, resources, and options that will serve you and yours well. By plotting and planning, you and your family can face the future with fewer fears about the "what ifs" of life.

Attitudes About Aging
We have all heard the adage, "Attitude is everything." Well, this is certainly true in regard to the aging process. Our attitude informs our perceived experience of aging. Additionally, attitudes about aging influence societal norms, expectations, policies, and interactions. Consequently, it is important to recognize and understand our view of aging - our own aging process and that of others. Do our attitudes serve to support and sustaining the aging population? Or instead, do our attitudes serve to inhibit and marginalize the elders in our community? Please joins us for an interactive discussion that will hopefully expand and enhance your view of the aging process.

Longevity: Pros and Cons
Currently in the United States, both men and women are expected to live into their eighties. This represents an increase in life expectancy of thirty years over the past century. The increased longevity is due in part to advances in medical technology, improved hygiene, and development and availability of effective medications. Fabulous news, right? Perhaps. The blessing of a longer life often depends on how we age. Longer is not always better. Please join us to discuss the process of aging and to learn how we can enhance the quality of the lived experience.

The Costs of Aging
What are the costs associated with aging? If you are like most people in the United States, your thoughts immediate turned to healthcare costs. No doubt, a significant and often frightening cost of aging. As such, we will explore the current and anticipated financial costs associated with aging and illness. Additionally, we'll explore "other costs" associated with aging such as personal, emotional, spiritual, and relational losses. Hopefully, by recognizing the likely costs of aging, we'll be better prepared for the journey.

A Humorous Look at Aging
Today, as in years past, Bette Davis' comment rings true. "Old age ain't no place for sissies." Aging is a daunting prospect for most of us. Confronted by the challenges of illness, the reality of our mortality, and the myriad of losses prompted by aging, we

obviously need courage, commitment, and conviction to complete the journey. Doesn't hurt if we have a good sense of humor as well! Humor and laughter are known to be beneficial methods of coping with stress. So, how can we use humor to relieve some of the stress associated with aging? To find out, please join us for a laugh or two as we look at the humorous aspects of aging!

Calling All Women - Rise 'n Shine!
It is time for women to realize that with age comes an incredible opportunity to SHINE! It is more than an opportunity, it is our responsibility. In the first half of life, our focus is often on family and career - giving priority to the needs and desires of others. As our families mature and our careers plateau, questions arise which tickle the imagination and prompt serious reflection. Who am I? What ignites my passion? What do I choose to do with my life? Who do I choose to become? This is the gift of aging - utilizing the wisdom derived from the first half of life to engage and explore the challenging questions prompted by significant life changes. Granted, many of the transformations women experience are uninvited and disconcerting. However, with every ending, there is the possibility of a new beginning - a new way of being in the world. If we are to light the way for subsequent generations of women - we must RISE to the occasion.

Cardinal End-of-Life Issues

End-of-Life Care Options - What's Your Exit Strategy?
When contemplating your ultimate demise, it's obvious that many things are beyond your control. There's no way to know what will ultimately pave the way to your final exit. However, that doesn't mean you should abdicate all responsibilities related to your ultimate ending. To do so could likely lead to a very distressing situation for you, your family, and your medical team. Thus, you and yours are much better served by considering the future "what ifs" and your medical preferences. Furthermore, reflect on what truly makes life worth living. What constitutes an acceptable quality of life? Upon answering the question, share your reflections with those responsible for your care. Your preferences will lay the groundwork for an exit strategy that serves all concerned quite well.

Medical Aid in Dying
Medical aid in dying (MAID) is an end-of-life option available to 22% of the American population. This option is available to residents of states that have passed legislation allowing patients with terminal conditions to ingest a lethal dose of medication prescribed by a physician. The various state statutes describe a lengthy process to enroll in the program - designed to ensure the appropriate use of the option. In 1997, Oregon was the first state to legalize this end-of-life option. Since then, we have learned how difficult it is for most patients and their families to access this option. Hence, how can we anticipate and overcome the many challenges encountered when seeking MAID?

Your Final Act

Today's end-of-life rituals often look quite different from the rituals of previous generations. Not everyone resonates with a traditional funeral or memorial service. So, people are choosing to put a personal spin on ritual. Furthermore, there are numerous options available related to the disposition of the body worthy of serious consideration. Although contemplating and planning for our ultimate demise is somewhat daunting, it's important to realize that ritual just doesn't happen! Creation of meaningful end-of-life rituals is a collaborative process requiring knowledge of available options, time, attention, and intention. Articulating your preferences for ***Your Final Act*** is a gift for all concerned.

THE Conversation

Have you had ***THE Conversation*** with your family regarding your preferences related to end-of-life care? If you are like the majority of people in the U.S., the answer is a resounding NO! Although many people express the desire to have THE conversation, they are at a loss as to how to initiation the conversation. Some are hesitant to broach the subject. Others report that their children “don’t want to go there.” The subject is not pressed because there is a lack of urgency. What’s the rush? Well, if you want some pointers on how to kick-start THE conversation, you’ll be delighted to know that there are some phenomenal resources available to facilitate the needed discussion.

Get Organized!

As a society, we are age denying and death averse. Hence, the majority of people in the United States have not planned for their ultimate demise. Consequently, family and friends have no instructions related to health care and end-of-life preferences when needed and wanted. A very stressful situation indeed. So, let’s be countercultural. Let’s chat about the planning process - advance directives, estate planning, funeral plans, and disbursement of “stuff.” By plotting and planning, you and your family can face the future with fewer fears about the “what ifs” of life.

No Mulligans on the 18th Hole—The End of Life is a Once-in-a-Lifetime Opportunity

On March 15, 2016, I recalled the words I had uttered countless times over the past decade regarding the end of life. "Companioning our loved ones to the end of the road is one of THE hardest things we are called to do in this life - as well as one of THE most sacred. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Death doesn't offer a 'do-over.' We either embrace the journey or we don't!" So on that morning, as I read the text message informing me of the imminent death of my brother, I knew exactly where I needed to be, where I wanted to be - with my brother. There would be no mulligans on Richard's 18th hole. No do-over's. This is the story of how companioning my brother at the end of life transformed how I choose to live. A final blessing from my big brother.

Global Grief - A Different Kind of Pandemic

How an individual integrates loss into life is certainly a personal challenge. However, when the world experiences a pandemic of loss as a consequence of COVID-19, the integration of loss becomes a communal experience. How can we courageously companion each other as we collectively grieve and mourn all that has been lost? First, let's consider the basics of loss and grief. Then, we'll examine the complicating factors of our current situation. And finally, we'll highlight beneficial approaches and resources for a grieving community.

Dying to Know: How Death Informs the Lived Experience

Death is a question of ultimate concern for every human being. How we choose to engage the question is dependent on our attitudes and beliefs regarding death and dying. Our attitudes about death inform our behaviors, and our behaviors influence our experiences. By reviewing historical attitudes and approaches to death, we recognize the importance of overcoming our fears related to death in order to live fully present to the moment.

Grief Savvy

Human beings are inherently relational creatures. Among other things, we attach to people, things, ideas, titles, money, and dreams. Hence, we are consequently at risk of experiencing loss and grief as attachments change or end. Mourning our losses requires courage – courage to feel the pain, courage to address the void, courage to integrate the loss, and courage to re-engage with life. Far too often in our society, the time needed to mourn is not recognized or honored as we rush to return to work and get "back to normal." We, instead, need to recognize the need to mourn our losses if we are to move through and beyond our grief. Becoming grief savvy will serve you and your loved ones well.

Holiday Blues

Although the holidays are portrayed in the media as the most joyous season of the year, the holidays are anything but joyous for those grieving the death of a loved one or another significant loss. Instead the holidays highlight the losses and intensify the subsequent grief. Is it any wonder that so many people dread the holiday season - wishing merely to survive or endure the festivities? Please join us to explore ways to effectively navigate the holidays. Perhaps the best advice is to have realistic expectations of the holidays, yourself, and others.

The End of the Road

Every journey has an end. Thus, the journey of caregiving will conclude at some point for the caregiver(s) and care receiver. Quite possibly, the ending is cause for celebration due to the full recovery of the care receiver. But, not all endings are cause for celebration. With advanced age and terminal illness, the caregiving journey ultimately ends in the death of the care receiver. How we approach the end of the road as caregivers and care receivers is worthy of examination and consideration. We need to prepare well for this part of the journey if we are to be engaged instead of afraid. Yes, there are many changes and losses to be endured along the way. However,

have you ever considered what is to be gained as we courageously walk to the end of the road? Sometimes, it is in losing that we gain the most.

The Stories of Life—Listen and Learn

When approaching the end of life, most people desire to reflect on the road traveled. This is referred to as a life review. You may have been honored—or will be honored—to listen to the stories of life as people try to make sense of their lived experience—to understand "the why" of life. Hence, it's important to know how to connect with your "audience," how to create a safe space to share, how to elicit stories, and how to listen. And don't be surprised that by listening to the stories of others you are compelled to reflect on the story of your life. There is much to be discovered by wondering why. And there is much to be learned by telling the stories of our lives. Listen and learn.

Witness to Loss - What is to be Learned?

As we companion those who are aging, ill, or dying, we witness a tremendous amount of loss. No matter how well prepared or well trained we are, witnessing the losses of others affects us in profound ways. Sometimes the experience changes how we see the world, how we understand ourselves, and/or how we choose to believe. We are well served to consider what is to be gained from each experience of loss. Otherwise, we risk becoming either insensitive or overwhelmed as personal or professional companions.

Laughing in the Face of Loss - You Need a Sense of Humor to Survive!

Over the course of a lifetime, we are confronted by a variety of challenges, a myriad of losses. Based upon our experience, our family of origin, and our personality, we develop a unique style of dealing with life. Our ability (or inability) to cope with the most daunting situations impacts the quality of our lives. So, it is important to remember that humor is one of THE best methods of coping when faced with a situation that is "no laughing matter." Granted, we must be respectful of others and use humor judiciously. Utilized appropriately, humor serves as the relief valve for stress, fear, and anxiety. Consequently, laughter helps patients, family members, and professionals deal with life losses.

Working with Grief

Grief enters the workplace in a variety of ways: death of client or patient, death of a colleague, corporate layoffs, or a bereaved co-worker - just to name a few. Loss in whatever form generates a sense of grief which must be recognized and addressed if an organization is to remain healthy and whole. We must proactively respond to loss by creating meaningful rituals which facilitate the integration of loss into the lives of individuals and the fabric of the organization.

Beyond Belief: The Challenge of Undeserved Suffering and Loss

As human beings, we learn early in life that to live is to suffer. Although the experience of suffering is never pleasant or welcomed, this is not the greatest threat in life. Rather, the most daunting challenge for human beings is meaningless suffering,

suffering that exceeds our ability to comprehend. Inexplicable suffering and undeserved loss test our foundational beliefs, literally bringing us to our knees and prompting us to question all that we believe to be true. It is during the times that try our souls that we rely on our spiritual beliefs. What happens if our foundational beliefs fail to support or sustain us during the times of trial? Where do we turn when life circumstances are beyond belief? Explore these questions and more as we examine the timeless story of Job.

What's Next?
Although we live in a death-averse society, most of us are curious about what happens after we die. What's next? Religious traditions offer insights as to what life after death affords believers of a particular faith. Some depictions of the afterlife are quite favorable and thus inviting whereas others are somewhat concerning and fear provoking. Historically, human beings have been fascinated by accounts of near-death experiences—stories that give us a glimpse of what the afterlife might entail. We will briefly review the historical documentation of near-death experiences and then focus our attention on current research and writings in the field. It's doubtful we'll answer the question of What's Next? to everyone's satisfaction—but we'll have fun trying!

Cardinal Health Care Options

The Vital Signs of Palliative Care
Palliative care is an approach to healthcare whose time has come due to the complexity of healthcare services required to serve our aging population. Technological advances in healthcare have resulted in an increased life expectancy in the United States. However, longevity does not always equate to a high quality of life. A palliative approach to healthcare focuses on the patient's and family's goals of care, advance care planning, psychosocial and spiritual aspects of care, and pain and symptom management. This type of care is offered by an interdisciplinary team of healthcare providers committed to addressing and mitigating suffering at all levels – physical, emotional, and spiritual. This all sounds fabulous, right? Yes, however the current challenge is financial feasibility of this type of care. Until reimbursement rates are modified, palliative care will only be available to a very small percentage of our population.

Demystifying Hospice and Palliative Care
Palliative care is a philosophy and model of care that can potentially transform our experience of health care today. However, due to a lack of awareness combined with a lack of information, most people fail to reap the benefits of this type of care. So, let's review the fundamental tenets of palliative and hospice care (a specific type of palliative care), the history of this form of care, and how/when this approach to care could be a tremendous benefit to you and your family. You need not fear palliative and hospice care. Instead, learn to leverage these resources to enhance your quality of life.

In Search of the "Right" Answer
Over the past fifty years, advances in medical care have outpaced our ability to comprehend the ethical implications of our health care decisions. Consequently, knowing the basics of bioethics is beneficial to you and your family when confronted with medical dilemmas. Bioethics is the study of controversial, ethically complex, medical situations that arise due to biological and medical advances. Bioethics doesn't serve as a crystal ball—no magical answers! However, by understanding the basics of bioethical discourse, we can more competently assess the available options and the subsequent ethical implications of our actions. There is no one "right" answer, but we can work to discern the "right" answer for ourselves and our families. We will specifically address the issues of physician-aided death, palliative sedation, and artificial nutrition and hydration at the end of life.

Cardinal Rituals

Ritual ROCKS! The Whys and Hows of Conducting Ritual
Is ritual relevant in the 21st century? Is ritual really worth the bother? In order to answer these questions, we need a basic understanding of the Whys and Hows of conducting ritual—particularly end-of-life ritual. The purpose of ritual is timeless—the integration of the mind, body, and spirit during times that defy explication. Through the process of composing, conducting, and experiencing meaningful rites, we gradually integrate loss into the fabric of our being. By so doing, we confront the reality of our mortality and gain an enhanced appreciation of LIFE! So yes, ritual IS relevant. Ritual IS worth the bother. In fact, ***Ritual ROCKS!***

Share Your Story - Creating a Priceless Legacy
Have you ever wondered how you will be remembered? Or, IF you'll be remembered? If so, it's time to consider the various options available today to record and to share your stories with family and friends. Stories serve to inform, amaze, enlighten, and enrich the lives of those left behind. Your story is worth sharing. In fact, it's priceless!

Milestones of Mourning
When someone we love dies, how do we move on with life? A daunting question that most of us will confront numerous times over the course of a lifetime. And with every loss, each one of us will choose a unique way of walking through grief in order to live beyond it. Wouldn't it be lovely—even motivating—if we could measure our progress as we mourn? To literally ***see*** how far we have come and thereby reinforce the belief that there is hope on the horizon—hope of healing. Well, the good news is that we can all create Milestones of Mourning. Please join us to experience this simple—yet sacred — ritual.