Columns
Spirituality



"Blue Ridge Mountains at Holy Cross Abbey," an acrylic painting by Sr. Dorothy Giloley. Painting is one of the activities to which Giloley looks forward to in retirement. (Courtesy photo)



by Dorothy Giloley

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When I thought about retiring from my scheduled full-time ministry, I was feeling anxious and apprehensive about what that would mean for me at this time in my life. Having been involved in several different ministries over the 60 years of my religious life, I knew this would be quite a big change for me. I felt that I still had the energy and motivation to continue to make a difference with my life, even though I was growing older.

I had to take some time to reflect, to discern and to pray before making this decision which would impact my life in so many ways. It was also important that I talk this over with my Sisters of St. Joseph community, my family and friends, and the wisdom figures in my life.

Retirement isn't about asking the question, "What will I do?" But more importantly rather, "Who will I be?"

So, having made the decision to retire, I had to decide on what my priorities and my goals would be, and how I would spend my time now. This would take time and I would need quiet time to pray and contemplate about what God was asking me to do with my life.

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I made a retreat at the monastery and spent the week there looking over my past life and seeing where God had been directing my life. Then I thought about what God would be asking of me now, since I would have the time to deepen my spiritual life and my relationship with God. And I know that what I am and do in the future flows from that relationship.

Here are the priorities that I decided on, about how I will live my life in retirement. I will:

1. Deepen my spiritual life by spending more time in prayer and listening to God directing my life. Take the time to "be" and recognize the presence of God in my life each day.
2. Deepen my relationships with my family, friends, and sisters in community. Find the time to keep in touch and spend time with them.
3. Decide on some volunteer ministries that would be life-giving for me and which I would enjoy doing, and which would still afford me the time to just "be."
4. Take care of my health — including putting exercise in my schedule.
5. Being creative and spending more time doing the things I love to do. For me this includes photography, painting, music, writing, reading and enjoying nature.

As I grow older and enter the last quarter of my life, I realize that I want my remaining days on this earth to be meaningful and joy-filled. I am reminded of the quote by Morgan Freeman in the movie "The Bucket List" about the two questions the ancient Egyptians believed they would be asked on their entrance to heaven: "Have you found joy in your life? Has your life brought joy to others?"

So for me, that is what my life and my vocation is all about: having joy in my life and bringing that joy to all I encounter. Since we are all called to holiness, I really believe that the person I am is the Christ I bring to others. That has been my "north star" and the center around which my life revolves. I need to be the best person I can be — and in doing that, I can be the hands and the heart of Christ for others.

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I think our lives come down to relationships, and how we develop these relationships will give our lives meaning. So my first goal is to deepen my relationship with God. However, as a friend reminded me, not so long ago, keeping in touch with the people in your life and spending time with them and being in relationship with others is a ministry as well — a way of being in discipleship. So now I need to take the time and make the time to do that.

Traditionally, the older you get, you grow in wisdom through the experiences of your life. Maybe it is time to plug into the gift of wisdom and all the gifts of the Spirit that I received in confirmation many, many years ago.

I need to take the time to pray and reflect on how I should use these gifts in my life now. I need to take inventory and identify my gifts, my talents, my special way of being with and for others, and use these gifts in a more intentional way in my life. In doing this, I will be able to live out my retirement years in joy, peace and fulfillment.

So my retirement is going to be an adventure, a new beginning, a new way of "being" in relationship with my God and with all the people in my life. It is truly a challenge and a blessing!