



CREATING

COMMUNITY



AS WE

AGE



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## FILLING THE GAPS

A Unity booklet this past year called *Spiritual Keys to Aging Well* became one of the most popular in years with thousands of people ordering it. We began to wonder what other needs of seniors our booklets might meet.

We know statistically that seniors are often prone to social isolation and loneliness, especially since the pandemic. Friends and spouses may have died, family moved away, or work ended. National health organizations consider loneliness a serious health risk. Older people who already feel marginalized, such as immigrants or those in LGBTQIA+ communities, are especially vulnerable.

Campaigns to end loneliness have been underway in Britain for a decade, sponsored by governments and charities. In New York, “Dr. Ruth” Westheimer, 95, convinced the governor to appoint her ambassador to loneliness for the state. “The first thing to do is have the courage to admit you’re lonely,” Dr. Ruth said. “Then you can do something about it.”

So how about a booklet on finding and building community as we age? We called together Unity ministers and other New Thought writers from their 50s to 90s and asked them to share how they create community and how that process helps them care for body, mind, and spirit as they age.

We hope this booklet provides you with inspiration and ideas for creating a community where you feel connected, vibrant, and appreciated.

*Your Friends in Unity*

PS: This past year’s *Spiritual Keys to Aging Well* booklet is available at [unity.org/booklets](https://unity.org/booklets).



# THE ART OF AGING



Rev. Kathy Beasley

Throughout our lives, we go through changes, transformations, and evolutions. Some changes are expected and celebrated while others present difficult challenges. Aging is one such change that can be met with resistance, apprehension, and fear. However, as we age, we become something like abstract artists, exploring new dimensions of ourselves, casting aside the conventions of what we ought to be, and truly expressing ourselves authentically.

Both aging and creating abstract art are about transformation. As we age, we change physically, mentally, and emotionally. We might lose some physical abilities but gain new perspectives, values, and insights. Creating abstract art is a similar transformation. I begin with a blank canvas, searching for the colors, shapes, and textures that will bring a new vision to life. As I work, the piece begins to take on a life of its own, shifting and morphing as new ideas and techniques emerge. As we age and as we create, we must let go of preconceptions and allow ourselves to embrace the unexpected.

Aging and abstract art are also similar in the expression of our experience. As we age, we accumulate experiences that shape our identities and perspectives. We might remember the joys of childhood, the trials of adolescence, the struggles of young adulthood, or the fulfillment of our later years. These experiences help us understand the world around us and navigate it more skillfully.

In the same way, an abstract artist draws on experiences to move through the creative process. Whether it is a devastating loss, a transcendent moment, or a profound realization, each artist brings a unique perspective and depth of feeling to the art. Among the greatest lessons I've learned since picking up a paintbrush is how much willingness and trust it takes to experiment and risk, to try something new purely for artistic expression, without the safety net of past successes. The same is true with aging.

At the same time, there are ways in which aging and abstract artistry diverge. Where aging can sometimes be seen as something to avoid or fight against, abstract art is celebrated because it embraces the unexpected, the unconventional, and

the challenging. As an abstract artist, I am still learning not to be afraid to take risks, break the rules, and blaze new trails. I have treated aging, by contrast, as a deficit or flaw, something to be hidden, ignored, or even denied.

*We all have the potential to create something beautiful with our lives ...*

However, just as abstract artistry can challenge our preconceptions and open us up to new possibilities, aging can catalyze us to rethink our assumptions, embrace our strengths and limitations with greater compassion and equanimity, and live more fully in the present moment.

We all have the potential to create something beautiful with our lives—to use the materials of our individual experiences, passions, and being to create a life that draws us closer to deeper understanding and liberation.

As we age, remember that each breath and brushstroke is a step toward discovering more of ourselves and embracing the unknown. Let us not be afraid to make a few mistakes along the way, knowing we can learn from mistakes in ways that can transform our sense of self and alter our views until something new is born—an artistically crafted life. So don't shy away from life's risks; grab your brush, some paint, and a canvas and move boldly into the art of aging.

## ACTION STEP

Today, engage in a creative expression that reflects your journey of life. Call forth the wisdom gained through the years into a tangible form of abstract art. Celebrate the unique masterpiece that is your life, one brushstroke at a time.

## AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER

*I embrace the artistry of wisdom and resilience. Each passing year is a stroke of beauty upon the canvas of life, revealing the masterpiece of a life well-lived. I affirm gratitude for the lessons and embrace the evolving hues of experience. I am a tapestry of strength, creativity, and grace, weaving a legacy of timeless beauty. Amen.*

*Rev. Kathy Beasley is a senior manager for the Unity Prayer Ministry.*

# KEEP FINDING JOY



Rev. Vernelle Nelson

There is a huge difference between getting old and aging gracefully. One of the best ways to guarantee that the aging process does not affect our quality of life is to make sure we do not give up those things that bring us joy.

What are your interests? What hobbies or activities did you enjoy before your body began to slow down? While you may not be able to maintain the same pace, you certainly do not have to give them up altogether.

If you saw the movie *The Bucket List* with Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson, you know that it's possible to create new adventures, even if you have never had a specific experience before.

Being engaged in things that stimulate mental and physical activity, whether new experiences or things that you have enjoyed for a lifetime, is the best way to stave off cognitive and bodily decline. Many local recreation departments offer programs and activities specifically designed for seniors. If you live in a 55+ community, there is a strong likelihood that you will be able to find classes, fun events, and regularly scheduled activities right outside your door.

Chair yoga, water aerobics, game days, card parties, golf, bowling, and pickleball tournaments are just a few things that seniors enjoy. Libraries, museums, and art galleries also offer lots of opportunities for seniors to get out of the house and get involved, as do local performing arts centers—they are always in search of volunteers to help out in numerous ways. Volunteering at a performing arts center is an ideal way to see concerts, plays, and special performances free of charge.

The common thread here is interaction with others. Whether you decide to take an art class at your local library, join an exercise class, or sign up to volunteer at a museum, you will find yourself in an environment where you can meet people, make new friends, and engage in stimulating conversation.

As our bodies change and physical challenges impede our ability to do some of the things we once did easily, we are often tempted to give in to minor aches and pains. But the more we give in to small discomforts, the greater the discomfort will become. The worst thing we can do when our shoulders, wrists, knees, or hips bother us is to stop moving.



# ASKING FOR HELP



Veronica Walker-Douglas, LCSW

Asking for help begins with an understanding that circumstances can improve when we are willing to consider available options. These options can provide a path to enhance or remedy a current situation.

For the aging population, this requires vulnerability. Asking for help will likely mean stepping outside of comfort zones and the sense of safety found in narratives of “this is how it’s always been” and “this is what I’ve always done.”

For many, asking for help goes against messages we have received about being strong, self-reliant, and independent. Those around an aging person may need to provide reassurance and frequent reminders that asking for help is not meant to deny their right to make decisions or diminish their independence but to enhance their continued quality of life. Seniors may verbalize concerns that will require validation and empathy from a genuine place of compassion.

Even when someone realizes that assistance would be helpful, there may be an increased need to exert control and exercise authority regarding decision-making. Self-preservation calls for maintaining dignity and reassurance that one is being truly seen by those who are suggesting assistance.

The aging population is especially sensitive to knowing their needs are being heard and addressed. Anyone, including loved ones, must request permission to assist and respect the senior’s right to self-determination. Once there is an agreement, the older adult and members of their support network should remain receptive to following guidance and adhering to