



Alone with a book, an elderly man relaxes near palm tree in a Miami, Fla., park. Time and how to fill it is a problem for the aged. From working 40 hours a week one suddenly finds himself with nothing but leisure time. Golden age clubs, which provide opportunities for recreation, education and social action, are one answer to this dilemma, but they tend to segregate people into one age bracket, which many of the elderly dislike. Generally, experts feel that the answer to a successful, non-boring retirement lies in developing hobbies, taking part in volunteer work, even part-time employment.



A woman sitting on a disheveled bed and an unshaven man typify many of the aged who live in poverty in the nation's urban areas. Poverty, however, does not necessarily accompany old age. In the cases of the elderly poor who are living wretched lives in high-crime areas, it is likely that a large number of them were always poor, always lived in ugly ghettos and struggled to make ends meet. It is for this group — some 20 per cent of the 20 million Americans over 65 — that special programs and government welfare funds have been made available. Medicare and medicaid, food stamps and old-age assistance funds are designed to bring the elderly poor up to the poverty threshold.

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Lawn bowling is just one of the many activities for the elderly in Arizona. Residents of Sun City, Ariz., and there are 25,000 of the elderly there. It is not a place for bridge, whittling and loneliness. There are more than 125 clubs, organizations and recreational facilities.

No Stereotype for

By Tammy Tanaka,
Religious News Service

Nobody wants to get old.

Although we no longer search for a legendary fountain of youth or magic potions to beat old age, we still have the yearning for "eternal youth." Most of us fear aging because we tend to associate it with such unpleasant symptoms as senility, poverty and sickness.

But is old age so grim?

Apparently it need not be. There is strong evidence that those who make the effort can remain mentally and physically youthful into the 70s and beyond.

"How people adjust to old age depends on their attitude," says Father Edward Barrett, pastor of St. Brigid's parish in Brooklyn. "Those who survive and grow old gracefully are those who stay active."

"I was flabbergasted to see some bright, energetic men in their 70s getting ready to learn how to play golf," he told us. "Some old people are more vital than most young people."

The Rev. Henry Whiting, a Lutheran pastor and an official at the Lutheran Council, said that "one's attitude toward age is intimately related toward one's attitude toward life in general."

"Life, death, aging — all are in the hands of God and are intimately related."

The most obvious fact that emerges from the available studies is that one cannot generalize about the aged. People when they reach age 65 do not suddenly lose their individual differences and become homogenized into something called "senior citizens."

Sociologist Bernice L. Neugarten of the University of Chicago says that within broad limits "the pattern of aging is predictable for the individual if we know his personality in middle age and how

he has dealt with earlier life events."

Miss Neugarten says the current stereotypes of the aged — which are based primarily on pictures of the aged needy rather than the more typical older person — are especially dangerous. She says the stereotypes of the aged are creating a nation of people who have an irrational fear of aging and dislike for the aged.

Many researchers point out that the negative attitude toward aging is magnified by the tendency in America today to glorify youth, and to stress "generation gaps."

Old people today are called "senior citizens" or "the aged." We picture these oldsters with drab, sunken faces, hobbling about with canes, depressed, lonely, probably sick. Or we see rich reactionary tyrants.

Are the elderly today really in such bad shape? What are some of the myths and facts about the aged?

Recent studies show that while Americans over 65 do have problems, as a group they are definitely not as pitiful and lonely as widely believed. Despite popular opinion, the majority of the aged see themselves as relatively happy and are integrated with friends, family and neighbors.

The plight of the elderly who are in severe need has overwhelmed the public in recent years. But it also appears that the Norman Rockwell image of older people, while romanticized, does not belong solely to the past.

Although not overjoyed at getting older, a great many of the elderly apparently are able to "take it in their stride" and would agree with the philosophical view of the late Father John LaFarge, who wrote at age 84:

"Old age is not just a casual calamity. On the contrary, it is a natural phase of our human life that stands in its own right, just as does every other