

Retirement

Spirituality vital 'after 50'

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

As baby boomers age, more and more articles and books are available to suggest ways for them to prepare physically, financially and even psychologically for retirement.

But psychologist and author Robert Wicks contends that preparation of a different sort can help to ensure a smooth transition into later life.

"We really need also to have spiritual preparation," Wick says.

For a real sense of peace and joy in approaching one's later years, Wicks tells people to concentrate on caring, nurturing, and praying.

His book *After 50: Spiritually Embracing Your Own Wisdom Years*, released by Paulist Press this month, is for people of any age but keys in on baby boomers, he said in an interview from Baltimore.

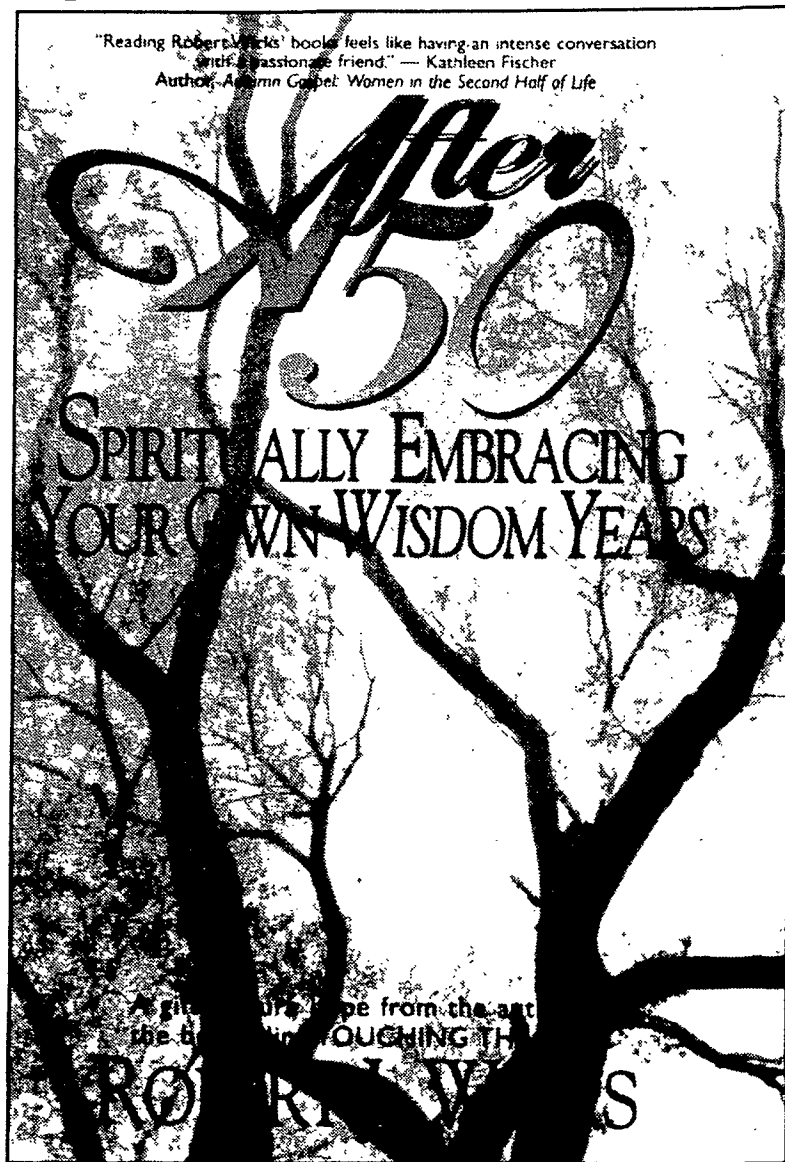
"I'm saying let's stop and reassess," said Wicks, chairman of graduate programs in pastoral counseling at Loyola College.

The 50-year-old has spoken around the world, and in Rochester at St. Bernard's Institute and the Mercy Prayer Center. He plans to speak again at the prayer center Nov. 7.

Wicks, who calls himself "an official layperson" of the Catholic Church, has written more than 30 books and perhaps is best known for his 1992 book *Touching the Holy*, which sold more than 40,000 copies. That book discusses the value of appreciating ordinariness, developing a solid self-esteem based on trust in God and seeing that all people are special in the eyes of God. Wick specializes in integrating psychology and spirituality.

Wicks explained that the after-50 stage of life follows stages of pondering who we are, what we should do and with whom, and firming up our work and family life. In our 50s, he said, "We begin to ask what is it all about, we seek to find and share meaning."

We also often face an *acedia* — a spiritual boredom — and the danger of filling it with hours of



television. The better choices, he said, are "good reading, good movies, good friendships, good exercise and prayer."

Prayer time with God should be honest and regular, he said. "We need to talk about everything — what makes us happy or sad, our sex life."

Wicks whittles his spiritual preparation suggestions down to a few, for starters: Take two minutes of quiet time a day; read five minutes of Scripture every week; and in general, view people through eyes of compassion.

"I want people to see people through the eyes of compassion," Wicks said. "We tend to see people as filling places in our life. Often we see people in particular roles."

The best place to start being present with people is with our

own families, he said, because often we think we're hearing what our family members are saying, but really are assuming we know what they're saying.

"They've grown as we have," he said. Then he suggested looking at others outside the family.

Whether people are active in church or hospital work, a soup kitchen or in volunteering time to Catholic education, he said, "you can see a difference in these people. These people are alive. They are filled with a real sense of spirit."

"Rather than the post 50s being a time of intense competition it should be a time of intense generosity," he said.

And finally, he suggested that people jot down notes at the end of the day, an informal journaling.

Such care, nurturing and prayer is vital, he said, "so we don't rush headlong toward death or a so-called retirement future without recognizing who we are and where we are."

Nun offers rituals, services for elders

By Julie Asher
Catholic News Service

Until Sister Sandra DeGidio was elected president of her order, the Servants of Mary, she never paid too much attention to the nursing home run by the sisters.

But during her six-year tenure, she said, she fell in love with the elderly.

"There is such a beauty and a wisdom in them," said Sister DeGidio, author of a new book on prayer aimed at residents of nursing homes and retirement facilities.

While she was president, the Servants of Mary expanded their nursing home, adding beds and including areas for assisted living and for independent living.

But the inspiration for her book, *Giving Comfort and Joy: Prayer Services for the Elderly* published by Twenty-Third Publications, came from chaplains and pastoral ministers who work with the elderly. They challenged her to put together a book that would address the spiritual well-being of older adults.

"Spiritual well-being is crucial to successful aging. When all else goes, spirituality remains a strength that can endure to the end," Sister DeGidio wrote in the book's introduction.

The "continued spiritual development" of older adults is directly related to their participation in worship and group prayer, she said. "Prayer and rituals help them respond to their inner needs and their faith."

Allowing older adults to participate in the rituals they have known all their lives can keep them from becoming anxious or depressed.

An active spiritual life also helps the elderly "in accepting death," she said in a telephone interview from her home in the Milwaukee suburb of Oak Creek. "I think we are able to accept death when we have lived well."

The author of seven books,

Sister DeGidio has previously written about family catechesis, sacraments, liturgy and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. She writes a monthly column for a health-care newsletter and has worked as a consultant for independent-living residences and assisted-living facilities.

Her new 104-page volume is organized in a workbook-style format in three sections. The first, "Liturgical Seasons," includes an Advent ritual, Hanukkah, blessing of the Christmas tree and creche, Epiphany and psalms for Lent.

The next section, "Minor Church Feasts," covers New Year's Day, St. Valentine's Day, Mardi Gras, feasts of Mary and others.

The largest section is "Celebratory Days and Special Occasions." In it, Sister DeGidio presents a ritual for birthdays and anniversaries, a service that can be adapted for various civic holidays, celebrations for the four seasons, and services to use when a fellow resident dies, when the adult child or spouse of a resident dies or even just for times of "sadness, anxiety, frustration, doubt." This section also has rituals for welcoming new residents or celebrating the work of the caregivers or simply to give thanks for good news.

For each ritual in her book, Sister DeGidio makes suggestions on how to prepare the room that will be used and the materials to use. In addition, she provides opening prayers, responses, citations for the appropriate readings, closing prayers and a suggested closing hymn. She also urges advance preparation for those leading the service.


She provides tips on how to use the book, encouraging those who do to be creative in adapting what she has outlined to their particular circumstances. Among the recommendations she offers includes developing familiarity with the particular needs of the group to which one is ministering.

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