

## FEATURE

## Author: King Lear offers lessons for graceful aging

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Shakespeare's "King Lear" may offer some of the best advice available on aging gracefully, according to the Rev. Robert Raines, author and former retreat center director.

In Scene III of Act V, Lear finds himself and his daughter Cordelia captives of his enemies. At long last, he realizes that she — whom he had once banished — is actually his most loyal child. Contemplating their imprisonment together, Lear speaks of it as almost a blessing.

"... (S)o we'll live / And pray and sing, and tell old tales and laugh / At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too ... And take on the mystery of things / As if we were God's spies."

During a speech in the Dugan Center at St. Mary's Church May 28, as part of St. Mary's Downtown Community Forum program, Rev. Raines, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ, noted the passage illustrates the realizations people experience in old age.

In hoping to take on "the mystery of things," Lear put aside his past ambitions and vanities and contemplated life more deeply than ever, Rev. Raines remarked. Seniors, likewise, are called to put away

their past mistakes and failed dreams and dwell on the present and its many opportunities, he said.

"We're waking up to the fact that life is limited and precious," Rev. Raines, 71, said to his audience of more than 100 people, most of whom were seniors. "We no longer want to kill time — we want to savor it."

Many seniors can learn to live life more fully, he stressed, especially if they're retired because they no longer are constrained by career goals and office politics, nor by the demands of raising children and keeping a household afloat.

"In these years, you and I want to *dine*, rather than eat," he said.

Rev. Raines is the author of a book published this year titled *A Time to Live: Seven Tasks Of Creative Aging*. Based in part on the insights he gained as director of the KirkrIDGE Retreat and Study Center near Stroudsburg, Pa., he outlined in the book and his speech tasks that can help seniors enhance their later years.

1. *Waking Up*: recognizing your own mortality and realizing that now is the time to engage, again, the meaning and direction of your life.

2. *Embracing Sorrow*: acknowledging your own losses and griefs and the pain of others, a process that can deepen your humanity and make you more compassionate.



Cylla von Tiedemann  
King Lear, portrayed by William Hutt in a 1996 production at the Stratford Festival, Ontario, Canada, was forced to reevaluate his life — as a writer visiting Rochester noted many seniors are doing today.

3. *Savoring Blessedness*: remembering and delighting in how you have been blessed by others and have yourself blessed others.

4. *Re-imagining Work*: reviewing and revising the ways in which you want to contribute to society and live out your purpose in the years ahead. Many seniors find fulfillment in taking up volunteer tasks or embracing activism in

their retirement, he explained.

5. *Nurturing Intimacy*: deepening your interconnections with your loved ones, nature, friends and God. As one ages, a person has more time to get closer to a spouse or a child or a grandchild, Rev. Raines noted. He added, that in his own life, he's taken up gardening, something he never did until four years ago, and something that has brought him closer to nature.

6. *Seeking Forgiveness*: doing what you can to "clear the decks" of your relationships, so as to have a heart unburdened by guilt and unease. As an example, Rev. Raines pointed out that he and his daughter from whom he was somewhat distanced have both made efforts recently to reconcile with each other.

"We still have issues, but we've learned to draw back from the edge," he said.

7. *Taking on the Mystery*: accepting life and death, and exploring the ultimate meaning of life.

Rev. Raines spent most of his time speaking on that last task, often quoting directly from his book. He highlighted his belief that one must remain hopeful for great things in one's old age, pointing to recent events to buttress his contention.

"How could we who, in a few short years, have seen the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, the end of apartheid and the election of (Nelson) Mandela in South Africa, the tortured but still alive peace process between Israel and Palestinians, and the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland not keep on hoping in all circumstances, great and small?" he asked rhetorically.

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