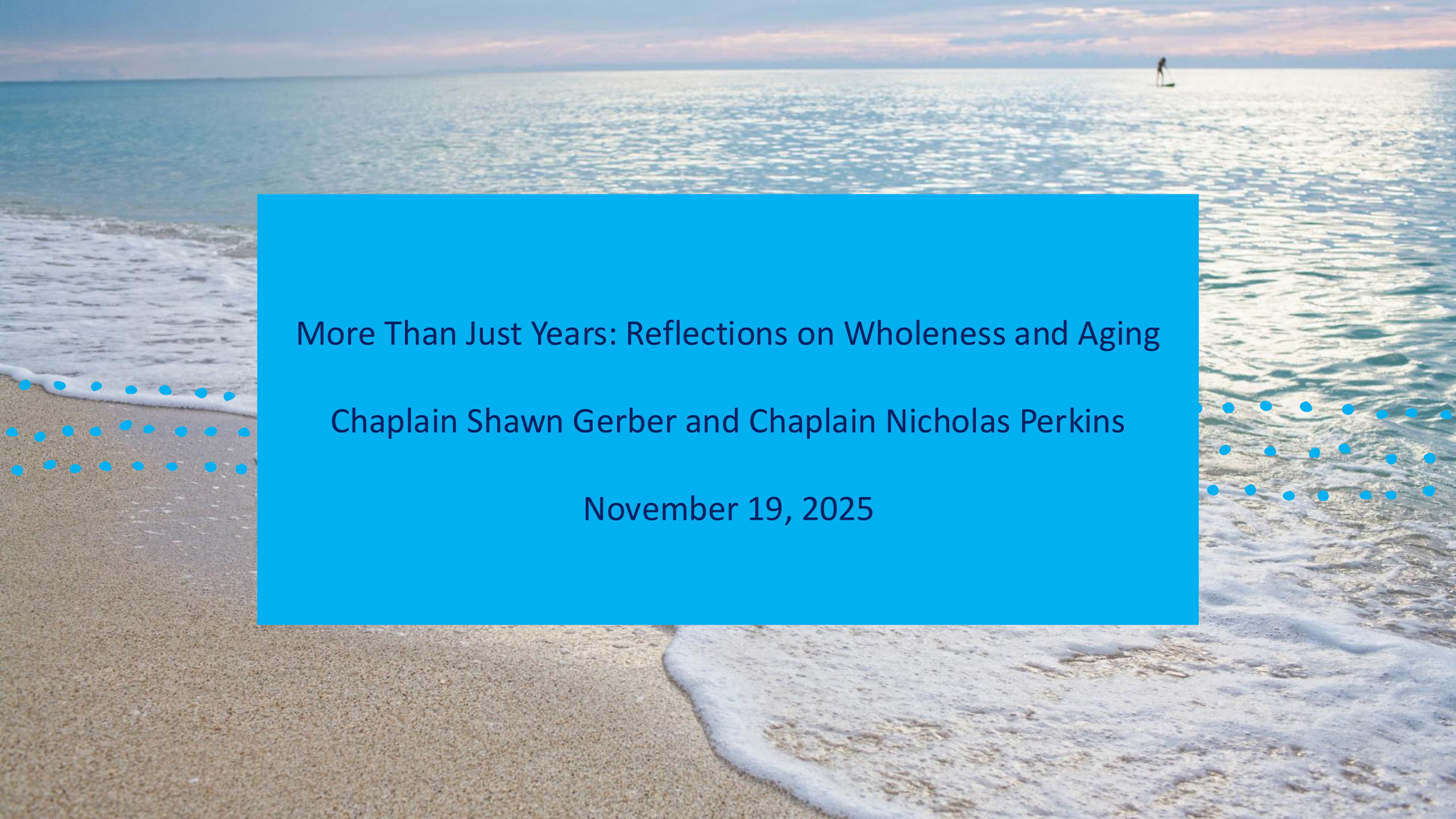




More Than Just Years: Reflections on Wholeness and Aging

Chaplain Shawn Gerber and Chaplain Nicholas Perkins

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Basic Components of Aging Well

- Prioritizing physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.
- The desire to live a meaningful, positive, and high-quality life.
- Key aspects include making proactive choices:
 - Staying physically active
 - Eating a balanced diet
 - Getting enough rest
 - Managing stress
 - Social engagement

Defining Spirituality

Spirituality- *"the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express **meaning and purpose** and the way they experience their **connectedness** to the moment, to self, to others, to nature and to the significant or sacred".*

National Consensus Project on Quality Palliative Care. 2009



Wisdom from “Blue Zones”

- Blue Zones are regions where people live to an exceptionally old age, often over 100, with a high quality of life and a low incidence of age-related diseases. The five original Blue Zones are Okinawa (Japan), Sardinia (Italy), Nicoya Peninsula (Costa Rica), Ikaria (Greece), and the Seventh-day Adventist community in Loma Linda, California. These communities are characterized by shared lifestyle habits such as **daily physical activity, a strong sense of purpose, a plant-based diet, close social connections, and rest.**



Blue Zones Power 9 Lifestyle Habits

- **Move naturally:** Incorporate physical activity into daily routines instead of dedicated workouts. Activities like gardening, walking, and daily chores provide natural movement.
- **Have a purpose:** Knowing one's "ikigai"/"calling"/"plan de vida" or reason for being, contributes to a longer, healthier life. Why do you wake up in the morning?
- **Know when to slow down:** Routines that include time for rest and unwinding are common.
- **"Hara hachi bu":** A Japanese concept that encourages eating until you are 80% full.
- **Plant-based diet:** The diet in these regions is predominantly plant-based, rich in whole foods.
- **Wine in moderation:** Many Blue Zone inhabitants regularly drink the local wine in moderation.
- **Family first:** Prioritizing family and spending time with them is a key aspect of their culture.
- **Belong:** People in Blue Zones often belong to a faith-based community or have a spiritual connection.
- **Social connection:** Strong social networks and a sense of belonging are crucial to their well-being.



Preconceived Ideas About Growing Old

- When we're teenagers, we're expected to be moody.
- When we're in our 20's, we're expected to be adults and work for a living.
- When we're in our 60's, we're expected to retire, travel, and enjoy life.
- In many respects, these expectations and ideas are nonsense because many individuals may feel like they have never been any specific age.
- It's important to challenge preconceived ideas about aging that often include negative stereotypes like being technologically inept, slow, frail, or mentally and physically declining.

What Does it Mean to Age Well?

- We begin to explore our lives and we read the pages of them.
- We become introspective and reflective.
- As we get older, we explore any regrets for the things we've done or the things we haven't done at all.
- We wouldn't be human if we didn't have these experiences, which we include in the histories and landscapes of our lives.
- The ability to look back as we age offers a unique opportunity to gain wisdom, find meaning, and improve well-being by reframing past choices.

Grief

- *If you love greatly, you will experience pain greatly.*

CS Lewis



- *Grief is the intense emotional response to the pain of loss...most important, grief is an emotional, spiritual, and psychological journey to healing.*

Elisabeth Kubler Ross

- *It's only when we truly know and understand that we have a limited time on earth-and that we have no way of knowing when our time is up-that we will begin to live each day to the fullest, as if it was the only one we had.*

Elisabeth Kubler Ross

Grief work and the six needs of mourning (Alan Wolfelt)

- Acknowledge the reality of loss
- Embrace the pain of the loss
- If the loss was a person, remember the person who died.
- Develop a new self identity
- Search for meaning
- Receive ongoing support from others.



Reframing Retirement

- I invite you to consider reframing your understanding of retirement.
- The invitation is to imagine retirement as the beginning of life, the start and not the end.
- It is the moment to move forward, be proactive, and to discover newness.
- It is the chance to explore in new ways who you want to be.
- Retirement isn't restriction; it can be about freedom and liberation.
- The spiritual component of retirement addresses reflection, renewal, and re-engaging with a deeper sense of meaning beyond career obligations.

Generativity

- Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson used this term to describe the stage in life where individuals focus on creating or nurturing things that will outlast them. This is in contrast to *stagnation* which is characterized by feeling unproductive and disconnected, self-absorbed, and lacking purpose.
- Key characteristics:
 - Mentoring others
 - Raising children
 - Meaningful work or community involvement
 - Creating things that will outlast one's life (legacy)
- This season of life leads to *integrity versus despair* which is characterized by seeking fulfillment in reflecting on wisdom gleaned and meaning, versus bitterness and regret.



Experiences with Older Adults

- As a hospital chaplain, I've met many patients who feel lonely and socially isolated; they attribute these realities to the following circumstances:
Chronic health conditions, lack of transportation, poor mobility, economic hardship, mental illness, food insecurity, fractured relationships, compromised support systems, effects of past traumas, hearing or vision loss, and major life transitions.
- Loneliness isn't just about the quantity of social contact or the number of people around us (social isolation), but rather the subjective feeling that your need for satisfying connection and emotional intimacy isn't met.

Wisdom from our companions in Congregational Care Network

- The importance of a listening ear.
- *"When Someone Deeply Listens To You"* by John Fox
- Reflecting on purpose and seeking purpose today.
- Exploring community, connection, and mutuality.
- Accessing resources in the health system and community.
- Exploring meaning and vocation: the place we are called is *"where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet"*. Frederick Buechner

“For Belonging” by John Odonohue

May you listen to your longing to be free

May the frames of your belonging be generous enough for your dreams

May you arise each day with a voice of blessing whispering in your heart

May you find a harmony between your soul and your life.

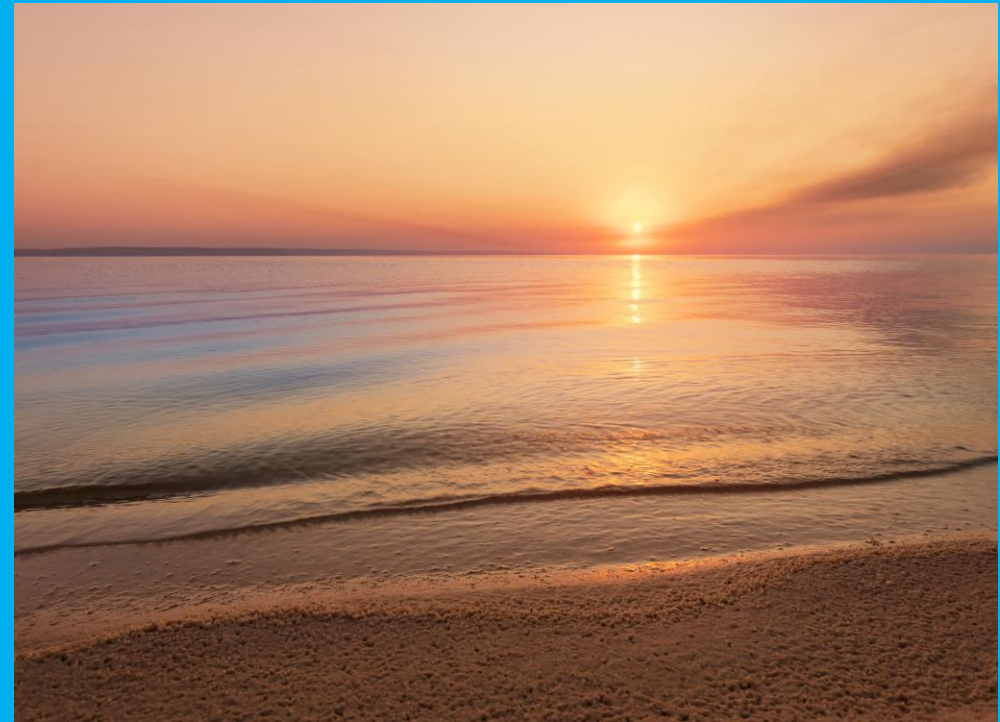
May the sanctuary of your soul never become haunted.

May you know the eternal longing that lives at the heart of time.

May there be kindness in your gaze when you look within.

May you never place walls between the light and yourself.

May you allow the wild beauty of the invisible world to gather you, mind you, and embrace you in belonging.



Resources on Aging

- *Embrace Age with a Longevity Mindset*, Helen Hirsch Spence, You Tube
- *Spirituality and Healthy Aging* – Research on Aging, University of California at San Diego, You Tube
- ***www.Bluezones.com***- *learning from regions in the world with long life expectancy and high quality of life. National Geographic and the National Institutes of Health have also covered blue zones and written about their characteristics.*
- *Blue Zone Kitchen: Delicious Meals Crafted for Longevity*, **bluezoneskitchen.com**
- *10 Soothing Poems on Aging and Getting Older*, **www.thegoodtrade.com**
- *Shadow Work: The Grace of Aging*, The Center for Action and Contemplation, **cac.org**
- ***“Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life”*** by Richard Rohr
- ***“Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing in Your Heart”*** by Alan Wolfelt