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GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Welcome. I'm Gail Forsyth-Vail, and I am Adult Programs Director in the Faith Development Office at UUA. And this is the November Faith Development Office webinar on Spirituality and Aging. I am thrilled to have with us the Reverend Karin Peterson and the Reverend Bruce Marshall.

Karin is a spiritual director and she's the author of a Tapestry of Faith curriculum called Hindsight, Humor and Hope. And Bruce is a chaplain at Riderwood Village in Silver Springs, Maryland, and the author of a to-be-published soon book called, tentatively called, Meaning and Spirit in Aging. So I'm going to actually let each of them tell you a little bit more about themselves, and how they came to be doing the work that they're doing with older adults. And then we will proceed into the rest of the webinar. So, Karin, do you want to introduce yourself a little bit?

KARIN PETERSON: Thank you, Gail. I'm Karin Peterson, I'm a spiritual director, and before retiring from active UU ministry, I served as a college chaplain, and a parish minister, and a district administrator. And the experiences with different age groups has helped me create a series of workshops for elders. And also in a similar way, my years as a public school art educator before training for the ministry, led me to encourage elders to express themselves very creatively.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thanks. Bruce, you want to say a little bit more about you?

BRUCE MARSHALL: Sure. It's good to be with you all. It's an important topic that we're addressing, so I'm glad to see the interest that's out there. I was ordained as a UU minister in 1975, a long time ago. Most of my ministry has been to congregations in the parish setting.

But eight years ago, I was called to be the chaplain for a UU committee in Riderwood Village in Silver Springs, Maryland, which has about 2,500 residents total, about 120 of those identify as UU. I was asked to serve them, and also to represent Unitarian Universalism in that community. And it has been a very rich experience and a privilege to be able to share this time in people's lives with them.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. What I'm going to do is invite Bruce to do our opening words, our chalice lighting words.

BRUCE MARSHALL: The words in this chalice lighting are by an 85-year-old man named Richard, who I interviewed about his experience of aging. At the end of our conversation, I asked him, what would you tell younger people who are looking ahead to their own aging? This is what he said. He said, it's vital that you stay in love, whatever that happens to be. Rather than letting the world pass by.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. I love those words. We're going to talk about who the elders are in our faith communities. And really note that there are probably three generations of elders in your faith community. The oldest of those elders are the World War II generation, they're getting quite along in years. And we're going to, in this webinar, actually be focusing on the other two generations-- the baby boom generation, and the silent generation, which is the generation born before 1946. I would like to invite Karin to tell us a little bit more about baby boomers. The characteristics of baby boomers.

KARIN PETERSON: Well, baby boomers are caught up in sort of a surprise time, because if they've been a parent, or have other connections with a child that they followed quite a bit in their development, they are watching them grow up. And then suddenly they're off, these offspring are on to other things in their lives. And their development is still continuing in this way. But when there's an empty nest of any kind there is no longer an intense focus on a child's development, and suddenly you sort of have to take a look at your own.

So what becomes those people's identity? I mean, they still, you're still thinking young. And the focus of our whole world, really, is on young. Being young, looking young, staying young. In other words, nobody particularly thinks it's great to get old. But it's part of our lifespan, and it's a very important part. So it really is that people do resent moving into what's been popularly identified as a less appealing time of life.

Each of those other stages beforehand promised new growth, and they promised development, and adventure. And this doesn't have to cease, it's just that it's going to be different. So there's also awareness of the gradual changes in their bodies. When baby boomers are seen changes, they're gradual. They're not the severe, or life-threatening, or life-ending ones that happen later. So they have a chance to work with their medical profession and keep their health.

If they enjoy leadership, it's a surprise to learn that there are new ways of leading. They don't have to be in charge of everything, they can step aside and help others to lead, or to learn to lead. And become themselves role models, and mentors. Because we're always role models, whether we realize it or not. Role models to those coming after us.

So it's also a time to be learning to see multiple points of view. We've been doing that as we've gotten older, if we're paying attention. And we're maybe more, hopefully, more able to work through disputes and to make compromises. So it's a time to seek experiences that are broadening, and opportunities to learn new things. It's a very special time.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. Bruce would you like to talk a little about the silent generation, and the characteristics of that silent generation?

BRUCE MARSHALL: The people I work with in the retirement community, the average age is about 85. It covers a range of between 75 and 95. And I can identify a series of issues that people at this age have to deal with. The first one is loss. One of my people said to me, summarized it very succinctly, she said aging is about loss. It's about loss of people. You lose your place in the world. Loss of capacity to do things, both physically and mentally. How you deal with diminishment is a key factor in how well live at the stage in life.

Second issue is identity. Who am I? Who am I now at this stage in life? I don't look the same, I can't do the same things, I don't have the same place in the world. So who am I? I think this is particularly difficult for men to deal with the identity issue.

Meaning. Question of meaning, what matters to me. How does that change now I'm older, and how does it stay the same? What's the relationship between those two? Spirit. I define spirit as something what gives you life. So what does give me life at this stage in my existence? How do I stay engaged with other people, with what's going on in the world?

And finally community. Community is a challenge. Relationships with family and relationships with friends. Risking new friendships. By this time in life, I will have lost family members I will have lost friends. Will I chance new relationships, given the awareness that these, too, will end. So I think all those are key issues for people in this stage of life.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you, Bruce. I'd like to spend a few minutes and actually identify the gifts that the older adults bring to the congregation or community. I think it's important to note them, lift them up, and remember them. So I invite either one of you to jump in and then the other can jump as well. What are the gifts that older adults of both of those generations bring to the congregation or to the community?

KARIN PETERSON: They bring much experience and for sure not all of it is pleasant. But again, hopefully they've learned. And these experiences help them have insight into dealing with challenges. And they can be good mediators when there are differences of opinion between people. And they can be valuable mentors to the young people and those learning to be leaders.

And they understand what it is to have a faith development that continues throughout life. And is nourished and strengthened through different challenges and opportunities and curiosities that have been a part of their living.

BRUCE MARSHALL: There are a number of gifts that older adults can bring to our congregations. First one I think is really important, which is to be role models, to show younger generations how to age well. That aging is a natural part of life, is not to be feared. That there are opportunities as well as losses, as there are in all stages of life.

As Karin has mentioned, we are a society that hides from aging. It doesn't need to be that way. I think older generations can [INAUDIBLE] by simply how they live. Secondly, in a congregation, older people offer institutional memory, for those who have been around for a long time. They also offer perspective.

Every congregation I've ever been in, there have been a few respected elders who were able to identify a key point in a discussion, and when they spoke everybody listened. It's a really important role. Somebody who can stand back from the fury of an issue and just offer some leavening to it. Some sense of perspective.

The third gift is to demonstrate to us that elderly people are people first. That their aging is a secondary part of who they are. We are so quick to jump to categorize people. I know I did that myself when I started working at the retirement community. When I first walked in all I saw were wheelchairs, and walkers, and frail people. And I categorize them that way.

That changed for me when I got to know these people as individuals. Then their frailness no longer defined them, their humanness did. I think older people in our congregations can demonstrate that for us. The last gift I want to point out is that older people in our congregation can appreciate and enjoy the other generations in the congregation.

It reminds me that there's an often-noted special link between grandparents and grandchildren. The grandparents are less driven than the parents, they can actually be there for the grandchildren. They can get to know them and appreciate them simply for who they are. Our elders can be grandparents to our congregation. Just step back a little bit from whatever controversies or issues there might be and just appreciate that congregation for the special group of people that it is.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. We're going to talk about six different faith development tasks that are part of the faith development of older adults. And I am going to invite Bruce and Karin to alternate speaking first about these. To say a little bit about the task, and the stories, and sort of reflect a little bit on each of these tasks. And the first one-- I'm going to ask you to speak first, Karin-- is the first older adult faith development task is to re-evaluate life, and to take stock, and to examine long-held beliefs and values. I invite you to reflect a little bit about that.

KARIN PETERSON: Well, this is the part that is exciting, and it can be a real eye-opener to someone. And it can be a time of acceptance of things that had very difficult in their life. If they take the time to do some journaling about it, and some forgiving, and letting go of grudges. It's not something that is easy and it's not automatic, by any means. But it's a time, especially if you have an opportunity to do it-- and in the workshops we do it using the creation of a lifemap, or a lifescape.

And we use color, and we use line, and symbols. And each person develops their own way of doing the expression of their life. And when you see your life played out you understand learnings they come from different things that have happened. Losses, opportunities, what happened because of something particular happened, did it make you stronger? Where did you go from there?

And when you can lay this out look at it, and work with color, however you want to do that, it's pretty exciting to look at. And everyone, again, has their own way of doing this. That's why I don't have an example to show you because it can be as if you were in a hot air balloon looking at 20 miles-- would be out where you are now present, and looking back to your birth. The different milestones, the people we met along the way. It's exciting, but it's really a valuable thing to do about your life because it's satisfying, but it's also healing.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thanks. Bruce, do you want to reflect on that a little bit?

BRUCE MARSHALL: Just want add one-- I think it's really important at this stage in life to offer opportunities to tell our stories, and to reflect on experiences, and try to fit them into patterns. And I just want to mention one program that we offer that's really very simple and probably could be adapted easily for a congregation.

Once a month we get together and it's called a conversation. And in advance I will give a question that they will have to think about, and that we'll all address. The question for the next month is teachers, who have been your teachers, what have you gotten from them. Last month I asked each person to bring a photograph of themselves from a different time in their life, and talk about that time and what was going on then.

We've had conversations about our hometowns, we've had conversations about our parents, and we've had conversations about our children. And we've talked about our names, how we got our names, and what the histories have been with them. We've talked about our most interesting jobs. We've talked about how our generations have shaped us. From month to month, these have been very rich conversations. Obviously we're doing it with an older age group, but I think in a congregation you could probably do that with multi-generations and it could be a really interesting experience.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. The second faith development tasks for older adults is to come to terms with one's own mortality. And I'm going to ask Bruce for you to reflect on that one first.

BRUCE MARSHALL: At this stage of life of the people I'm working with, mortality is partially about anticipating one's dying. But it's mostly about limitation. We realize that we're mortal when we come up against limitations to what we can do and be. And the limitations escalate as we get older. So a challenge of the older years is to accept that limitation gracefully and learn how to adapt. If I can't do this, then I can do that.

I was talking to somebody over the past week who kind of admitted that she couldn't attend professional sports events anymore, because the sports facilities just were not comfortable to get around it. But she said she can go to the opera, she can go to the theater, which are much more easily accessible. So I think that kind of dealing with one's limitations is an important factor.

Fear of death is not as much of a factor as one might expect. What is very common is fear of what happens before death, of physical suffering, loss of capacity, and especially losing memory. If I name one thing that the people I work with are the most concerned about it's losing memory. Because losing memory is loss of self. That's really where I find the mortality issues appearing.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thanks. Karin, do you want to reflect on that a little bit, please?

KARIN PETERSON: Well, I'm going to go back to the workshops, because it is a group of people, and within this age group. When I've led this before the age range is always from the later 50s all the way up into the 90s. And we think of how old we are as how many years of experience we have. How many years of life experience. And in those sharings that happen, it sort of brings people to understanding lifespan a little bit better. And their mortality as part of the overall picture of life.

It's difficult, it certainly is difficult when you're in your 50s. That's why having a group, having a supportive community of trust is a wonderful thing in regard to coming to terms with one's own mortality.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thanks. The next task I'm going to talk about is exploring or coming to terms with changes in schedule and day-to-day activities due to retirement or changes in responsibilities. Karin, you talked a little bit about empty nests, but you want to talk a little bit maybe about retirement and the ways in which it affects people?

KARIN PETERSON: It's hard, certainly hard at the beginning to realize that you have all this open time. And you're not running here and there, and scheduling, and double-scheduling, and having to be every place completely on time. On time is still important, but things begin to take longer to prepare for, just the daily things. And to squeeze in medical appointments, which do increase, but that's a good thing in regard to the care that we get now, and the increase in years that people are living, and living in good health.

So it's a matter of being realistic about changes. I think one of the saddest things to see happen when someone is in this new time of life is to feel that you have to have your time as chocked full as you did before. It's a loss, really, because it's a time when you can develop new interests, and new groups. I think we're going to talk about that a little bit more. But it's an important time, and as part of reevaluating your life you do want to figure out ways that are-- things are a little bit easier to do. And don't sweat the small stuff.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thanks. Bruce?

BRUCE MARSHALL: I think one thing which happens as you get older, in their later years, which has big implications with scheduling is just the lack of energy. People talk about when they hit their mid-to-late 80s they just can't do the number of things that they're used to being able to do. And so that means that you have to change your schedule, to change your day-to-day activities, you have to think more about what your day is going to look like. That takes an adjustment. To accept the diminishment of energy and still try and do the things that are most important to you.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. The next one is facing concerns about health and finances and an appropriate place to live. And I think we're going to begin with you on this one, Bruce.

BRUCE MARSHALL: The people I work with in this community have already made decisions about where they're going to live. There are various types of living situations that are available for older people. There's aging at home, which has become a movement. There's living with family, which is kind of the traditional way. And there's moving into a retirement community. Three options.

It's interesting to me that the people who live in that retirement community are almost always happy with the decision they made to move there, with one exception. The exception is people who feel that they were forced to move there, forced by their children or forced by circumstances to go to this place they're not ready to go to.

For people at this stage of life finances have not been that big an issue. But it's because I'm working at a retirement community where there's an income requirement, so people have been screened, and it's not really a representative sampling. What does demand a lot more attention are health concerns. Karin has mentioned that.

A UU who is in her early 90s, she said it quite succinctly to me, she said everybody's got something going on. That's true. Everybody at that age, everybody's dealing with something. And you can just assume that. Another woman said to me it seems like all I do now, all my husband and I do now is go to our doctor's appointments and each other's doctor's appointments. They use their energy to do the doctor visits. And that can be disheartening. So there's a balancing that's going on here as you reach this stage of life.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Karin, do you want to add some things?

KARIN PETERSON: Well, I am not in a retirement community and I know that finances are a struggle. And that makes me think about how valuable senior citizen centers are, and the information that they have. The assistance you can have in getting things-- say, your income tax, which you still might have to-- you probably have to file. All of those types of things.

If you use senior citizen centers as a resource, and instead of steering away from them for a long time because that's just for old people, they're quite valuable. And they're quite varied in the services that they offer. Including of course, yoga and an exercise, and Reiki, some of them do-- Reiki is a valuable, valuable thing.

So don't be afraid to go ask for help in regard to these difficulties. With help, that one we do pretty easily because we have a doctor that we rely on and then we go to a specialists. But finances are a vital thing for all of us, and Social Security is not-- remember it didn't go up this year, at least I know that. But it's something that you can get help with, and don't be afraid to look.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. The next one is find ways to belong and be part of communities. And I'm going to ask Karin to speak first to that one.

KARIN PETERSON: Now I just said one of them, and that is the senior citizen centers, because I can't say enough good about them. They're amazing places. It also, I have found, is a nice mix of people. We get in our UU communities, which if I call them a rarefied atmosphere, I wonder if you know what I mean. Because they're not the cross-section of all people in our areas. It's a nice way to meet people who are not in the same faith community that we're in, not in the same financial bracket that we're in, it broadens our view. I just can't say enough about them.

But of course our Unitarian Universalist communities are so important. Bring us together in a way that is very nurturing, and there's trust. I'll say more about the workshops later in regard to this.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: OK. Bruce, you want to respond to this?

BRUCE MARSHALL: I just want to one thing about the senior centers. There's an interesting article in the New York Times I think this past Saturday about how senior centers are being re-envisioned. Headline is something to the effect that it's not just bingos and hot meals anymore. That it's yoga, that's it's a whole range of activities that are quite different from what our assumptions might be. So it’s an interesting development.

I just want to mention church communities. Church communities should be and often are sources of support for people as we get older, but often become unavailable, for a variety of reasons. People as they get older, sometimes fall away from participation in a congregation. Churches as multigenerational communities should have an important role. I think a little later, we'll talk more about some of the barriers that get unintentionally created, which make it more difficult for older people to participate.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. And the last one, I'm going to start with you first, Bruce. The last older adult faith development task we're going to talk about is exploring faith and faith questions and spirituality and creating a system of meaning.

BRUCE MARSHALL: I find that the people in the retirement community where I am are really interested in theology and spirituality. They're looking at it from a new perspective, that of providing a framework that helps them make sense of their lives. And that's the case no matter what your faith community. I've talked to Roman Catholics, I've talked to Protestants, I've talked to the Jewish community, it's the same for each. They get drawn back into spiritual concerns.

The UUs in our group, some of them are long-term UUs, some of them have discovered Unitarian Universalism when they were 85 years old in a retirement community. All of them are really excited about being UU, and they seek ways to be part of our tradition. It seems like the yearning is to put our individual lives into the context of a larger tradition. And once we do that, it makes our own lives seem more important, more meaningful. Because it's validation, which I think we need at all stages, but particularly at these later stages in life.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. Karin?

KARIN PETERSON: I was just thinking back to the workshop series, because it's offered at a particular time. It's a noon-to-2 o'clock meeting and they bring their lunch. It gives them an opportunity. Again, there's an age range, which is very special. And it gives them a time to bond together and have enough trust so that they can talk issues and the things in life that are meaningful to them. There are ways of creating new outreach that will be expressing their faith in action.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. I'm just going to do a little bit of theory here. Not a lot, just a little. And talk about-- there is some particular developmental challenges that are in Erik Erikson work on human development. And there are three of them that are particularly pertinent to older adults. And the first is intimacy versus isolation, and the struggles over that in relationships that may be a part of relationships with adult children, and with intimate partners, and with aging parents. Baby boomers may have aging parents of their own.

So the struggle for how much independence, how much support, how much intimacy, and so on is a real struggle. Generativity versus stagnation. If people are generative they're finding a way to make a mark on the world, they are contributing through a mentorship, or through family relationships, or through artistic pursuits. But finding a way to be generative versus being stagnant is an important challenge.

And then integrity versus despair. To reflect on your life and have a sense that it's a fulfilling-- that you have gratitude for what has been and where you are, rather than despair about lost opportunities and so on. So those are some developmental challenges of older adults. There's more information about things like that in a book from the Lifelong Faith Associates. I think Pat had already put it in the chat box earlier. Which is well-worth well worth it, it's written from a Christian perspective but it talks about all of the various stages of older adulthood, beginning with younger adults. It talks about their spiritual development challenges, so I highly recommend that you take a look at that.

So that's the theory moment for tonight. I'm going to just stop here for a minute and invite Bruce and then Karin to speak a little bit about the actual work you're doing. Bruce, talk about the book that you're writing, and the work that's led to that. I've heard you present and I've read some pieces of your manuscript and it's a really important piece that you're putting together, so tell us a little bit more about it.

BRUCE MARSHALL: Briefly, the working title is Meaning and Spirit in Aging. And those three main words-- meaning, spirit, aging, describe what I'm trying to work with. Starting with aging, I'm really focused on the later years of our lives. The years of diminishment. If you look at materials out of retirement, most of those are aimed at younger elders. There's not so much out there which addresses the issues of our final years. This is when you can't go out and travel the world anymore, you can't pursue new interests, or whatever, because you physically aren't up to it. But even at that time, meaning and spirit matter. And that's what I want to explore.

Meaning. Meaning I define simply as what matters. I draw upon Viktor Frankl's book, Man's Search for Meaning, which is a reflection upon his time of imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp. What he observed is that the people who survived, who made it through, were not those are the people who are the strongest physically. Rather, the people that made it through were the ones who had a sense of purpose, sense of meaning and sense of caring about something. That's what got them through. I think it gets us through all manner of stresses that we face, including the stresses of aging.

And then spirit, which I define as what gives us life. How do we stay engaged? Even if we can't do as many of the things that we used to be able to do, how do I stay involved in life? Another spiritual question that comes up often has to do with letting go, letting go the things that I don't need anymore, letting go of the roles in life I used to have.

This stage in life, people usually have to downsize. The house is too big, the yard takes too much work. I'm surrounded by all this stuff that has taken a lifetime to accumulate, so I have to divest. I've seen people go through that, and it's wrenching. It's like losing parts of your life. Then when we get through that, something I've noticed is that when people are finished with downsizing they feel lighter. They have a sense of freedom.

They didn't realize how much the stuff of life weighs you down know. I remember one person saying, I feel like I got myself back, which is a gift that one can receive at this stage in life. The aim of the book is to explore these areas and see what kind of wisdom that we can get from people who are going through it very thoughtfully themselves.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thanks. And Karin, I've had the pleasure of being your editor, but Hindsight, Humor and Hope existed as a workshop series for quite a while before it became a Tapestry of Faith published curriculum. It is published now. You want to talk to us a little bit about the genesis of the workshop series, and just tell us a little bit more about Hindsight, Humor and Hope, which as I said is now published online as part of Tapestry of Faith.

KARIN PETERSON: Thanks. I think I will tell you how I really got started with this. I was in a church office and a congregant came up to me and said, do you have some helpful resources about growing older? And I thought for a minute, and realized I did, and I said, oh yes I'll bring them in. So when I went home I got out the three books that I had. And sat down and looked at them. And I realized I had bought them-- and this again was 10 years ago. I had bought them 10 years before that when I knew that they would be helpful, but that I wasn't going to be old for a long time, so I didn't need them right now.

That was quite a wake up call to me because I realized I am there now, and how on earth did that happen? But then I started looking at what makes things come together for people when they are in the early stages of being an elder, how can they pull their picture together, their tapestry, is what I really love to call it, together. And be able to weave a fabric that shows who they are.

I set out to do that. I took some training under Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi's programs, because he was really the first one who began work in this area. And then worked to have things fit for a Unitarian Universalist. So I always ask people to bring a friend if they'd like, and so we do get people from other faith communities. And we do have an age range. And there's a sharing that happens in it early on. They talk about their fears, and about their fears of getting older. And also their happiness about being in this place, because there are good and bad parts.

And I do remember the age range was the 50s up into the 90s. And there was a wonderful woman that everyone deeply adored, who was our strongest peace activist. And she was living by herself. And she shared that her fear was dying by herself, dying alone. We heard that. And several years later, when she did pass, she certainly did not die alone. And there is a beautiful sharing and trust that happens in these groups. And they tend sometimes to go on as a caring group of its own, a different small-group ministry.

But I like to use creativity because I believe everyone's creative, we just sort of get it knocked out of us. Somewhere along the line, unless we are a, quote, artist. But this is for everyone. And so I have people who use color, and they put together an art kit for themself. Made of the color, things that they like. Whether it's markers or color pencils. And they have a chance to do the lifescape or the life-mapping. And there's also an opportunity to make a mandala, which is really the expression of their deepest self, their spiritual meaning and connection. Again, it's not for artists, per se. It's for everyone. And I do believe everyone has their own creativity.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. And both of you are doing such important work, I'm just so grateful for it. I want to ask you directly, and maybe we'll begin with Bruce to talk about how congregations can support older adults. What are the things that congregations can do to help foster the spiritual growth of older adults?

BRUCE MARSHALL: I remember a conversation I had-- one of the interviews I did for the book was with a lifelong UU, who was age 88. And he doesn't go to church anymore. And I ask him how come, and he said, well, I just don't fit. And that's kind of a heartbreaking comment. You want people to be able to fit in all stages in their lives. So I've thought about what is it that happens that kind of keeps people away, that brings people to stop coming when they get older.

And I think it breaks down into two realms. Accessibility and programming. Accessibility, most of our congregations have dealt with the issues of ramps and railings. Some of them have elevators, so that physically you can get into the building. But then have to go up another level.

One of the biggest complaints that I get from people is hearing. People just can't hear. In our congregations, just about all of us have sound systems of one sort or another. But to get good ones is expensive, and it takes professionals, and often we kind of outsource that to somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody. It's important to spend the money and get good hearing systems, not just for the sanctuary, but also for meeting rooms. So that people can participate in the classes, and the gatherings, and the meetings that we have.

Another issue that comes up a lot is transportation. You reach a certain period in life when you don't drive. Then how do you get to places? That's usually the time when people stop going to church, because they don't want to bother people to ask for rides, and so on. It's hard to put together a system of providing rides for people who need it, but it's really important. In our own retirement community, we maybe 20 minutes from one's previous church, but people stop going because of the transportation issue.

Another issue is meeting accessibility. When do we have meetings? We have meetings in the evenings, weekday evenings. Many older people don't go out, they certainly don't drive in the evenings. So that makes those meetings off-limits to them. Maybe there are groups that can meet in the daytime that would be more open to participation by older people.

On the programming side, I think it's important to be intentional about this. And think about roles that older people may play in the congregation. It used to be that when we mailed out newsletters, there was often a group, it would be on Tuesday morning. Older women, primarily, but sometimes men. And they would prepare the newsletter for mailing, and off it would go. And that became a very strong social group, and support group, and also gives the people a sense of really contributing something that the church needed. Today it's all online. We don't do it anymore. So what are other functions that seniors can play in our communities?

Another part of programming that I think it is important, as Karin and I have both talked about, to provide people with the opportunity to talk through the stories of their lives. I've talked about the series that addresses questions that I announce in advance. Another series that worked really well was a series to write your own spiritual will. A material will is about distribution of your physical resources. Your spiritual will is about sharing your wisdom. What did you learn in your life, what's been important to you?

When I prepare memorial services, when I talk to the families of the person who has died, I ask the question. I say, what was important to this person? What did he or she live for? And there is so often kind of an awkward silence. People don't know what to say. So the purpose of the writing spiritual will is to tell our descendants what we lived for, so they have a better sense of who we were.

And then the third thing in programming that's important is providing opportunities for service. A frustration of the elderly years, particularly for a Unitarian Universalists, is that you can't contribute the way you used do. You can't march, participate in marches. You can't do the things that we do to try to change the world. I think it's important for the congregation to think about how older members can still participate in seeking change. It could be writing letters, a variety of things.

In Maryland a couple of years ago we had marriage equality on the ballot, and the people in our group were going door-to-door, they were getting out to vote for that issue. They were still deeply concerned about it, they were limited by what they could do, but at least we had options for them for participation. So there are ways in which we can address the accessibility and the programming issues, but it takes intentionality. It takes people thinking about it and being creative about it, seeing what we can do.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. Karin, would you like to add something?

KARIN PETERSON: Just a little bit. Bruce, that was wonderful, because it covers our congregations. And there there's one thing that comes to mind. When somebody passes on and we have they're memorial service, I just know that all of you have said, I had no idea that person did this and did this. That's so sad to hear it when we can't talk to them about it.

Having interviews with elders is an incredibly wonderful thing to do, and then to do a write-up. Especially when you find out interests that are so similar to things that younger people will have, or might just be getting interested in. Especially the environment, and you know this person used to be a backpacker, this person walked the Appalachian Trail. You don't know if you don't talk to them. And it has to be done in a focused way. And then shared. That to me, is big. Also ride sharing, that's another one that works.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. I actually think-- we have one question that's come in, and we're going to have time for that one question. From Teresa [INAUDIBLE], she said she'd love to hear more about elders' excitement about being Unitarian Universalists. What do you think allows them to embrace and celebrate that faith identity in a way that younger people sometimes struggle with?

BRUCE MARSHALL: Well, I'll give you one example. We have a woman who is probably in the early 80s, just became Unitarian Universalist. And she asked, one of her requests was could we do a program on UUs 101. So we did a program on UUs 101 to give some background. She really didn't know a whole lot about it. She had been an activist all her life. But finding Unitarian Universalism was really a revelation for her because it showed that there was a tradition that she could fit herself is. She was not just one person alone on the barricades. She was part of an ongoing tradition of people who have fought for human rights. And at this stage in her life, that was really important. That's why she's excited about it. So I think that's something which is an important thing that we have to offer.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thanks. If there are other questions, and there may well be, I think Pat has put my email address into the chat box. And feel free to send me questions, and I will send them off to Karin and Bruce, if you have them. Before we move to closing words, and we do have beautiful closing words, I want to just express again my gratitude to the two of you for being willing to do this. And to do it at 9 o'clock at night on the Eastern Seaboard. And for the wonderful work that you are doing. And don't leave now, if you're here on the webinar, because the closing words are a real treat.

We're going to move to those closing words, but I just did want to make sure that I said thank you to the Reverend Bruce Marshall the Reverend Karin Peterson. And then I'm going to invite Karin to offer the closing words, which are in the Hindsight, Humor and Hope curriculum. So there you go.

KARIN PETERSON: Thank you. It's called Emerging Wisdom, by Jennifer Jinks Hoffman. Create a new room in your home for the knowing beyond knowing. Sweep your cave daily. Place some dirt on your altar. Haul down the birds from the sky in worship. Meditate with flowers in the park. Learn from puppies and babies, as well as from the elderly and mid-lifers. Listen with the ear of a snail, and remember that pearls are born from grit. Be still like a lake at dawn, a kind and truthful mirror of what is.

Alignment is difficult unless you clean your compass often, for each person has his or her own way of cleaning. Know that we all are angels and demons as natural as mud. Our enemies, too. Link hands with your neighbor. Being exceptional is not a requirement for a full life, being awake at the wheel is. Sometimes all that is possible is to witness the impossible, so run, walk, be still as your guide directs. Look for gold in each precious cup of water. Scan the horizon through trees in need. Save apple seeds for planting. And attune your breath to the breadth of the world.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. And I'm going to invite Pat to tell us about what's upcoming.

PAT KHAN: Great. And I just want to add my thanks not only to Bruce and to Karin, but to Gail for putting this together. It's really, really wonderful. So next month, Melanie Davis, UUA's OWL Program Associate, Our Whole Lives sexuality education, will be with Amy Johnson, who does the same thing for the United Church of Christ, talking about faith-sensitive Our Whole Lives for the larger community.

And that'll be a week earlier than usual, the second week of the month. As I said before I want to make sure I thank all of you for attending. The webinar will be posted-- the recording, the transcript, the resources, and the slides will all be at that URL. So thank you once again for joining us tonight.

GAIL FORSYTH-VAIL: Thank you. Goodnight, sleep well everyone.