

AMERICAN ELDERS: HUMAN DIGNITY AND THE AGING POPULATION

Abstract submitted by:

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America's population is aging. The most senior members of its largest generation are now reaching traditional retirement age, and millions more are on their way. This fast evolving reality will confront America's cultural embrace of youth and youthfulness, and it will carry great significance for human dignity in a nation that does not naturally elevate its elders or easily accept the processes of growing older. The aging population will implicate not only how we think about ourselves and relate to one another as individuals, but also how public policy responds to the economic, employment, public health, and human services challenges presented by these changing demographics.

My remarks will examine some of the central considerations of our aging population from a human dignity perspective, including:

Personal and Interpersonal

- Personal attitudes toward aging;
- Interpersonal dignity, civility, and acceptance as the population ages;
- Avoiding "us vs. them";
- Creating communities of care and caring;
- The roles of faith and spirituality.

Public Policy

- The retirement funding train wreck (it's about much more than Social Security);
- Providing employment for those who work later into life, while creating opportunities for younger people to join the labor force;
- Health care for an aging population;
- The future of elder care;
- Who will pay for all this?

Finding Direction

- Let's look to cultures with healthier attitudes toward aging.