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INTRODUCTION

Retirement. It's a word that may evoke a number of images, some of them clichéd: a gold watch, a rocking chair, an older couple walking hand in hand on a beach toward a setting sun. These days, it is harder to select one image that speaks to retirement because the lifestyles of those who are retired are so diverse and many faceted. It was probably never a one-size-fits-all phenomenon. Yet, today, it may be more customized than we have acknowledged.

Retirement is most strongly associated with employment or work. When we think about retiring, we may think first about leaving a full-time job, selling a business, or wrapping up a career. Yet, people who self-identify as retired engage in many activities, some of which are entrepreneurial or provide income through employment. As we emerge from a pandemic that severely reconfigured our activities, there seems to be a profound cultural rethinking of our relationship to work—

even if the pandemic's economic ravages require us to work later into life than we anticipated. The result is a reprioritizing of goals, of how we use our time, of how we cultivate our relationships. This pivot has an impact on how we think about ourselves.

Historically, retirement has often been associated with a certain age. Was that 65? 70? Yet, mandatory retirement is outlawed in most types of employment in the United States. Today, there are folks in their 80s working full-time and folks much younger who claim the "retired" descriptor. Sometimes the motivation to continue to work is financial need. Some people are motivated by the enjoyment it brings them.

What, then, is retirement if we cannot grasp it by approaching a certain age, by our status of full-time work, by certain leisure activities we embrace? Maybe it is best called a stage of life.

The financial dimension is often the dominant concern when retirement is mentioned. Just google the word and see how many websites linked to money and financial institutions pop up in the search. Yet, the financial dimension is just one of many to consider when you're thinking about whether to retire. People contemplating retirement take inventory of the relationships they have, the place they call home, and the possessions they have accrued. They also reflect on the meaning of life and their purpose or goals. Taking such an inventory may evoke a range of feelings. The anticipation of a

new stage of life may also be fraught with fear about its challenges and changes and the need to recreate one's identity. How do we reclaim the ownership of our time and find a new rhythm in living? All these themes may come to light as you consider whether to retire or shortly after you have begun down this new path.

Anticipation of retirement becomes a process of discernment when retiring is imminent. That process often includes consulting those who support us—family members, especially a spouse, or key members of our vowed religious community; friends; mentors; and well-chosen colleagues. It can also include our spiritual guides and companions.

This booklet explores the spiritual thread that runs through our decision-making process leading up to retirement. It touches upon how God is present in our lives and working in our process of discernment. We will have a chance to reflect on some of the many spiritual gifts that the Spirit offers us as we travel this path of decision making: gifts such as wisdom and prudence. We will also consider practices such as listening or praying an examen that might be helpful to cultivate. Hopefully, we will become attentive to the gifts we have been given and to God's presence in the process—from anticipation to realization.

The account of Jesus's first miracle takes place at the marriage feast at Cana (John 2:1-11). There, at the request of his mother, Jesus turns water into wine so the newly married couple and their families will not be embarrassed. Water

not only becomes wine: it is also the best wine served at the event. We know this because the headwaiter says to the bridegroom, “You have kept the good wine until now.”

The expectation, he explains, is that the good wine would be served first “and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one.” Perhaps our cultural expectation has been that the best of living comes first, that youth holds the best of life. Could it be possible, even with the limitations of aging, that the wisdom we have gained from living our lives makes retiring like the wine at Cana? Has the best been saved for last?

TAKING INVENTORY

Money, Place, and Possessions

Considering Money

My friend and his wife had three social engagements on three successive weekends. Each weekend, they met with a different married couple around their age and with a similar lifestyle. In casually discussing the funding of their retirement to a level where they felt comfortable, all three couples had different monetary goals. One couple doubled the amount cited by the first couple. The couple on the last week tripled it!

Commentators on personal finances in the U.S. put a great deal of emphasis on financial planning as a preparation for retirement. The era of the company pension has yielded to a complex array of options with individual responsibilities and decisions. This shift has created a specialized industry with a specific vocabulary about financing retirement. Having options and choices to make over the years may have been

satisfying for some. For others, it may have been confusing, off-putting, or overwhelming. These feelings peak as retirement draws near. We wonder if we have made the correct decisions along the way and are choosing the best options for us and our families now. Even those with confidence may experience their self-assurance faltering momentarily because the decisions ahead seem irrevocable or momentous.

This insecurity is an acknowledged component to retirement planning. The Internet abounds in quizzes to assess our risk tolerance for investing before and during retirement. Behind that risk tolerance is a network of factors that shape our personal psychology of money. Are we more savers or spenders? How much do we think the brands we own or the address we have speaks to our identity? What are our feelings about scarcity and abundance? How were they shaped by our life experiences?

Anxiety may also contribute to shaping our attitudes. Some feel anxious because they have not saved or cannot save. Their income may have been consumed by justifiable needs of daily living. Others may chastise themselves because they are not doing enough to meet some imagined threshold dictated by the cost of living and their lifestyle.

The central question is: How much is enough? It may be my middle-class social location, but I have never heard anyone say they have saved enough. The man who told the story above about the three dinner engagements, who was himself in the throes of making such a determination, con-

cluded that one can never have certainty about financial security in retirement. He remembered that he and his wife never had such certainty throughout their married lives. Their journey included many unknown twists and turns. No one can know the hidden costs lurking in future needs. They modified the question of “How much is enough?” to “How much is enough for what?” They began to think about how they measured comfort, contentment, happiness, a lifestyle they thought was their due, the legacy they would like to leave their children. Planning for retirement needed to be more than financial planning, although financial planning was essential.

The closer I got to retirement, I learned to envision it as a series of chapters in my book of life. A number of financial planners identify three retirement stages—amusingly tagged “go-go,” “go-slow,” and “no-go.” Even without considering the fluidity of global economies and their impact on our personal finances, these stages illustrate how expenses shift over the span of retirement: from fulfilling the dreams on our bucket list to meeting the costs of living comfortably and independently later in life.