Annotated Bibliography
The Role of Spirituality in Aging

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(NOTE: Some of these books are out of print but most can be found on Amazon.com or other websites that sell used and out of print books.)

Bianchi argues that middle aged people are challenged to turn inward to develop spiritually so that in elderhood, they might turn outward to bring their wisdom and strengths to the wider world.

Quotes from famous essayists, poets, playwrights, and novelists about feeling older and experiencing the joys and sorrows of aging.

This is Frankl's well-known story of his concentration camp imprisonment during WWII and what it taught him about finding meaning in the midst of terrible suffering.

Guttmann, a well-known social gerontologist, applied Frankl’s ideas on logotherapy to the challenge of meaningful living in middle age and beyond.

Rabbi Dayle Friedman has worked with aging persons for many years, including serving as chaplain to persons with dementia living in long term care. See her new website: http://growingolder.co/

Contains many excellent essays that can be used in adult discussion groups.


Authors in this book take psychological and theological perspectives on the meaning of spirituality throughout adulthood, particularly in later life. The authors know the literature well and are also involved in practice so they do not get lost in abstractions. The last chapter provocatively addresses “ageist theology.”


These two handbooks together contain over 70 chapters addressing a wide range of issues including pastoral care, congregational ministry, theological perspectives on aging, and late life spiritual growth and development.


Contains many excellent articles about the spiritual care of older persons, including those with dementia.


This book asserts that all aging baby boomers will be living with dementia, whether they have the diagnosis or friends and family members have it. In order to flourish, communities need to find ways to support ongoing, meaningful relationships as people journey into forgetfulness.


This small book contains big ideas about late life meaning, based largely in the work of Carl Jung and Viktor Frankl.


One of Nouwen’s earliest publications, this book (illustrated with lovely photographs) meditates on aging as a way to the Darkness and as a way to the Light. In the second part of the book, the authors meditate on caring as a way to the Self and as a way to the Other.


An in-depth study of groups of older Lutheran women in the US and Germany who were nominated by their pastors as showing spiritual resiliency, this book is grounded in Lutheran theology and through these women’s life stories, tells of the importance of faith communities to aging persons.


Interviews with older men and women in Germany and the US revealed their resiliency was developed through their interpersonal relationships, many of which were centered in their faith communities. Their relational spirituality enabled them to forgive others and to live with the tension of life’s gains and losses.

Written by a Methodist clergywoman, this excellent book offers abundant insights into pastoral care for persons with dementia.


This is the story of the famous Nun Study, in which Snowdon obtained the cooperation of elderly members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame to undergo repeated cognitive tests and to donate their brains for study of dementia. Snowdon tells this story with deep love and respect for these aged nuns.


Thibault, a social worker and experienced spiritual director, believes that people can obtain what she calls a “radical freedom” in later life and that spiritual practices open them to receive many spiritual gifts. She describes herself as part Methodist and part Catholic, but wholly inclined toward the Christian mystical tradition.

The Author

Susan H. McFadden, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychology at University of Wisconsin Oshkosh where she teaches a variety of courses for undergraduate and graduate students. Since 2010, she has been teaching a capstone seminar that examines research on dementia from a biopsychosocial perspective, as well as contemporary work in the arts and humanities on topics like creativity, identity, and social relationships experienced by people living with dementia. Her most recent book (co-authored with her husband, John), *Aging Together: Dementia, Friendship, and Flourishing Communities*, was published by Johns Hopkins University Press in Spring, 2011.