

**CALLED TO THE 3<sup>RD</sup> CHAPTER OF LIFE**  
**RETREATS HELPING PEOPLE RENEW THEIR CALLINGS FROM GOD,**  
**EMPOWERING THEM TO LIVE LIVES OF MEANING & PURPOSE IN THEIR 3<sup>RD</sup> CHAPTER OF LIFE.**

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**Why ELCA retreat centers and camps should be interested in these retreats.**

Designed for both established ELCA retreat centers and camps with comfortable adult facilities, these retreats will enable your organization to provide a potentially life changing experience, to an underserved segment of the membership of the ELCA, with minimal effort on your part. And, my experience as Executive Director at Spirit in the Desert Retreat Center has taught me that when adults in their 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Life have a meaningful experience on a retreat, they often become donors and ambassadors.

For camps considering developing an adult retreat ministry, this is the logical first step. Focusing on children and youth (1<sup>st</sup> Chapter of Life) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter strategically targets the age groups that tend to have time, and in the case of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter, money. We don't want to forget about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter (busy adults making money to support their children and other causes), but they are much more difficult to engage compared to the kids and grandparents. It's good business and vital ministry.

**What and when is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Life?**

The "chapter" metaphor that I use is loosely tied to age, but not exclusively. We can generally characterize the 1<sup>st</sup> Chapter as those early years when the question in adolescence becomes, "who am I"? An awareness of the people and environment around us begins to build.

Around ages 20 – 55, we are often engaged in defining success for ourselves. We're developing strong relationships, some of which may grow into selecting family life or remaining single. It's also usually a time of building a career and feeding income production into the definition of success. These are the characteristics of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter is when we come to understand that the hills and valleys of life have provided us with the gift of wisdom. We have a treasure trove of experiences and have the insight to ask, "What do those first two chapters mean?" The process of reflecting on this question energizes us to ponder what God is calling us to be and do with the wealth of insight and wisdom that we earned in life. This is a time of discovering a renewed calling from God, empowering us to live a life of meaning and purpose.

Life's hills &  
valleys produce  
wisdom

It is reported that the median age for ELCA members is 58. According to the Pew Research Center, more than half of the people regularly worshipping in our congregations are at least 65 years old. By all accounts, people in their 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Life represent much of the participation in ELCA congregations including worship attendance, leadership and financial resources.

Intentional ministry to this population is not only wise for the ELCA, it is desperately needed. Retirement, empty nesting, aging bodies and minds, and health concerns are all part of a person's new reality. This 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter can trigger feelings of loneliness and depression. Studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that 7 million American adults over the age of 65 experience depression each year. The CDC also reports that adults over the age of 65 make up 16 percent of all suicide deaths. The cause of this distress is a loss of meaning and purpose.

However, this period of transition, as roles and responsibilities shift, offers **significant opportunities** as well as challenges for people in this stage of life. **Life experience has given us wisdom** and it can be a time to broaden our vision and renew our callings from God, identifying the meaning and purpose of our lives apart from careers and family roles.

Elder wisdom can serve all ages and the church

This is where **ELCA Lutheran Outdoor Ministries** can play a vital role.

A retreat setting is the perfect opportunity to pause, ponder and reflect on what the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Life means for those in that demographic. Participants are invited to step away to explore what's next as we seek to do more than just grown old ... we are called to grow whole.

The basic structure often begins with lunch on the first day and ends with lunch on the third day. Meals are important and built into the content of the retreat as significant gathering opportunities as we literally break bread together. The intentional and random fellowship that occurs throughout the retreat is an important component of the experience.

The interactive presentations lead to times for personal reflection and sharing in small groups.

Focus on relationships, not requirements

Worship is woven into the experience to help participants deepen their relationships with God, their neighbor and themselves. This is a time of life when people have reached the mature awareness that relationships are more important in their faith journey than rules and requirements.

#### 4 Retreats (and more in development)

1. Grounded in our 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter faith forbearers, we explore how God calls us throughout our life. God wasn't finished with Abraham & Sarah, Zechariah & Elizabeth and Simeon & Anna simply because they were old. In fact, they were able to live into their new callings because they had experienced a life of wisdom-building. How can their callings from God, late in their lives inform our call to serve God and God's creation? Hint: The answers lie in your 1<sup>st</sup> two chapters.
2. The spirituality of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of life is much more deeply rooted than was possible in our earlier years. The time of retreat and reflection on retreat will help create an awareness and understanding of what the Spirit is up to.
3. Aging as a time of Sage-ing, of growing into an Elder. Using the wisdom from Old Testament, African and Native American traditions, discover how the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter can be a powerful time of intentionally relating to those in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapters in a deep and profound way.

4. Empowering and exercising our brains enables us to reach new levels that aren't possible in the first two chapters of life. This retreat goes well beyond the popular notion of playing crossword puzzles and computer games. Boost motivation, improve memory, increase vitality and sharpen your mind.

My tenure as Executive Director of Spirit in the Desert Retreat Center in Carefree, Arizona, concluded at the end of 2015 when I retired after nearly 12 years of service. During my leadership at Spirit, with the help of many gifted people, I gave birth to, and incubated the 3<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Life ministry which the retreat center continues to embrace.

Forty-four years of professional experience in a variety of settings and career paths: television broadcasting, parish ministry, and the ELCA Region 3 Communications Director, have provided me with a broad view of the church and a passion for entrepreneurial ministry. In this spirit, I also developed and owned a communication company during the infancy of interactive video and worked with several ELCA colleges, seminaries and Spirit in the Desert with their "distance learning" efforts.

**Pickles** by Brian Crane

