

## Aging—Is There a Fountain of Youth?--UUFVB Covenant Groups—December 2017

### Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,  
but connected, in mystery and miracle,  
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

### Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

### Opening Reading

The name linked most closely to the search for a fountain of youth is 16th-century Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon. In St. Augustine, Florida, there's a tourist attraction that purports—albeit in a tongue-in-cheek way—to be the fountain of youth that Ponce de Leon discovered in 1513. For hundreds of years the existence of such a fountain has enticed our imaginations with the promise of a restored youth to anyone who drinks or bathes in its waters. But in 2017, with the existence of magical fountains now part of folklore, we remain attracted to the possibility of remaining healthy and youthful in body, mind and spirit for as long as possible.

### Topic Exploration

You might think you need good genes to live a long, healthy life. But genes are only part of the equation for most of us, says Dr. Thomas Perls, director of the New England Centenarian Study at the Boston University School of Medicine. “Research shows that genes account for less than one-third of your chances of surviving to age 85. The vast majority of variation in how old we live to be is due to our health behaviors,” Perls says. If you make it to age 65, the likelihood that you’ll make it to 85 is very high. And if you make it to 85, the likelihood that you’ll make it to 92 is very high, with appropriate lifestyle behaviors.<sup>1</sup> “If I had to rank behaviors in terms of priority, I’d say that exercise is the most important thing associated with living longer and healthier,” says Dr. Luigi Ferrucci, an NIH geriatrician. “Exercise is especially important for lengthening active life expectancy, which is life without disease and without physical and mental/thinking disability.”

### Questions / Sharing

1. What is the role of exercise in your life?
2. As you have aged, how have your physical activities increased or decreased?
3. What is the lifespan history of your family, and do you believe that affects your longevity?

### The Mind / Body Connection

Most resources on aging stress that both the body and mind must be nurtured to remain healthy and vital. The fountain of youth lies in tending to physical, mental and emotional well-being. These aspects of existence are so intertwined that allocating a behavior to one category or another is difficult. However, the following behaviors that contribute to each individual’s ability to maintain their own “fountain of youth” may be useful for this discussion.<sup>2</sup>

- Stay physically active
- Challenge your mind, learn new things
- Eat a healthy diet rich in lean proteins, omega 3 fats, fruits and vegetables
- Control blood pressure, maintain normal blood sugar levels, keep cholesterol in check

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1. National Institute on Aging, National Institutes of health; 2. [www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org), [www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org), [www.doctoroz.com](http://www.doctoroz.com), [www.WebMD.com](http://www.WebMD.com)

- Take depression seriously
- Stay connected with friends and family—social isolation is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day
- Have sex: it may help us look and feel four to seven years younger
- Lower stress levels—use relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga, Tai Chi
- Express your feelings in appropriate ways
- Get restorative sleep every night and seek help if that is difficult
- Cultivate resilience—accept change
- Remain positive—accept bad things, put more emphasis on what makes you happy or peaceful
- Seek spiritual connectedness—identify a source of inspiration that is bigger than you.

4. Which of the above behaviors do you pursue, which do you think need more emphasis in your life? Are there any that you would like to adopt, but find particularly challenging?

5. What has been your experience of aging over the past decade? Have there been surprises?

6. Sometimes people seem to do everything right and still die young or are compromised by a mental disease. What control do you think you have over these outcomes?

7. Have you ever caught yourself blaming others for, or withdrawing from, those with aging minds and bodies?

8. Why do you think persons over hundreds of years and in many cultures have been fascinated by stories of a Fountain of Youth? Is the search fueled by fantasy or fear? Is the desire to prolong health and vitality as we age buying into the “youth culture” and ignoring both physical realities and the mental/emotional benefits of maturity?

### **Closing Reading**

Aging is the consequence, for better or worse,  
of not dying younger than you are right now.

Go in peace, go with gratitude

### **Check- out and reflection on today’s session**

#### **Extinguish the Chalice**

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,  
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.  
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

### **Housekeeping**