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Spirituality & Practice Launches New Project on Elder Spirituality

- Jeanne, an 83-year-old housebound woman, can no longer get to Mass every day. Now her spiritual community is an online Practice Circle where people taking an e-course post comments on how they are incorporating the lessons into their daily lives. This activity, she says, "keeps me in touch with God."
- James, a 60-year-old man, began taking online retreats for the opportunity to interact with people of different cultures and religions from around the world. "The day has arrived when many elders desire diversity as an indispensable way to live and thrive with passion."
- Cynthia, a 65-year-old woman, was drawn to online courses because of the lack of openness and a sense of exclusion by the organized religions in her area. In contrast, she's been moved to tears and also laughter by the generous sharing in the online communities.
- Betsy, a 75-year-old retired schoolteacher, describes herself as "searching more for wisdom, not simply for more and more knowledge." She believes today's elders are yearning to know God more deeply, but "what we need is not offered where we find ourselves far too much of the time." She reports that discovering spiritual practices of many traditions has "enriched my walk with God."

Positive responses like these to their e-courses and online retreats have led Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, Co-Directors of the website SpiritualityandPractice.com, to launch a new project on Elder Spirituality.

"It is not surprising that elders are a growing and important group using the resources for spiritual journeys we offer through the website," explain the Brussats. "Traditionally in the world's religions, the last stage of life is seen as a time for intensified spiritual work as well as a time for passing on wisdom to future generations." Considering demographic trends in the general population (a baby boomer turning 65 every 7 seconds) and the older memberships of many religious congregations, Elder Spirituality is a focus whose time has come.

Spirituality & Practice is launching the Elder Spirituality Project with a series of interactive e-courses. These one-month to six-week programs will be created in partnership with spiritual

teachers. To keep them affordable and easily accessible, the lessons will be delivered by email. Participants will then be invited to come to an online "Practice Circle" to share their responses with a worldwide community.

The first offering is "[Becoming a Wise Elder](#)," a six-week retreat running from February 25 through April 5. Angeles Arrien, a cultural anthropologist and award-winning author and educator, will take participants through an exploration of eight frontiers of the elder experience that have been identified in world tales and perennial wisdoms. Each frontier's gift, task, and challenge will be discussed by the Practice Circle community.

In May, William Martin will lead a study of *The Sage's Tao Te Ching*, his translation of the classic text that highlights its themes for elders. Then in the fall, Sr. Joan Chittister will lead an e-course on the gifts of years, and Christina Baldwin will lead a retreat on harvesting your memories and telling the story of your life.

Throughout the year, the Elder Spirituality Project will collect and curate a wide variety of resources for elders, those who work with them, and those who care for them. In addition to the e-courses, a special section of the website will host:

- a blog on everyday spirituality for elders;
- collections of prayers, proverbs, and inspirational quotes;
- program plans for small groups of elders in different settings;
- reviews of recommended books, DVDs, and audios for and about elders;
- a database of spiritual practices from all religious and spiritual traditions providing practical tools for navigating both the challenges and the opportunities of elderhood.

The Elder Spirituality Project aims to reframe the limiting and negative ideas about the experiences of the last stage of life. "We accept the reality that there is no 'one size fits all' for elders," note the Brussats, "but we also believe that now is the right time to proclaim that getting older can be an exciting and rewarding spiritual adventure."

Lili, who is retired and splits her year between two hemispheres, agrees. With no time to join local groups and go to face-to-face classes, she regularly takes Spirituality & Practice e-courses. She writes: "As we approach the last third of our lives, we can get stuck in our old ways or we can adapt to the brave new world. Many of us elders are choosing the path of growth. We are learning about and embracing different faith disciplines, accepting the rapid changes in the world of technology and social media, traveling, and trying to offer wise counsel to our younger friends and family. Spirituality & Practice has provided me with a home where I can not only study no matter where I am, but also a place to meet like-minded individuals, mostly of my generation, who literally hold my hand on this road of growth and learning."

[SpiritualityandPractice.com](#) is a multifaith website providing resources for spiritual journeys. It is the leading source of online spirituality e-courses, with nearly 100 programs available on-demand and new courses offered regularly. The website's unique Wisdom Archive includes articles on the practices of the world religions; 6,000 book reviews; 4,700 film reviews; 400 audio reviews; 3,700 book excerpts; profiles and examples of the work of more than 130 spiritual teachers; blogs; curriculums for small groups, and more.

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