



## JEWISH CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM

of the GREATER MIAMI JEWISH FEDERATION

### **Meaningful Moments: Holding on while Letting Go**

#### **Circumspection of Topic**

According to U.S. statistics, as of January 1, 2001, one person is becoming sixty five every eight seconds. With the promises of longer life, thanks to better medical care and environment, the United States is graying at an unprecedented rate. The impact of these changes on society, medical care, and government spending will continue to be discussed by policy makers.

However, there is also a more subtle shift occurring as well. The boomer generation more than any other generation helped to shape America as we know it. Strongly independent, confident, upwardly mobile, valuing accomplishment and seeking self-actualization, this generation will not experience the 'golden years' as that of playing golf or other leisurely pursuits. According to US labor statistics, in the next decade boomers will leave the work place at a rate of 8,000 per day, 300 per hour. Highly trained and often in leadership positions, many will be looking to embrace the next stage of their life actively. In a sense, we might even say these older adults are, in the words of our keynote speaker, Rabbi Richard Address, 'seekers'.

Many having reached the pinnacle of professional or economic success, having fulfilled their goals of building families, will ask the question, "Now what? Is that all there is?" This territory is as yet uncharted. It consists of opportunities but also the unknown. There will be new gifts but also losses. However, while the path is uncertain, the destination is clear: the shared 'one place' (Ecclesiastes 6:6). Indeed, the knowledge of death can be a gift, as it frees a person to grow toward authenticity and self-actualization in new and unexpected ways.

What do *religions and religious traditions* have to say about these transitions? One would think that religious traditions would now, more than ever, provide a guide or a path through the next frontier. What resources in religious traditions are available to help boomers navigate the next passage of their lives?

In truth, the answer to this question often depends upon the religious community itself. In some religious communities, the language of God and spirituality, or religious calling and accompaniment, is an integral part of being. In others, the language has been formal, but never personally motivating or supportive. However, the questions religions ask

ultimately are intended to help guide us in our lives as we transition from one period to another, marking these changes in a larger cosmic framework. In the words of Address, “Rituals reinforce that we exist within a certain context and history, and that by formally celebrating or recognizing an event in our life, we and the event take on additional meaning.”<sup>1</sup> Have we created the language and rituals for this new population?

This conference will look at religious tradition and other rituals, and challenge us to think about how narrative, metaphor, and ritual can help us navigate and bring meaning to transitions all face. We will focus upon the myriad challenges that face boomers such as caring for older parents, exit from the work force, the change of living situation, and celebrating new friendships, including relationships with those suffering from dementia.. How can we creatively and collectively affirm and even celebrate moments of change in our lives? How do we begin to create and honor the meaningful moments for this next frontier of life?

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<sup>1</sup> Richard F. Address, Seekers of Meaning: Baby Boomers, Judaism and the Pursuit of Healthy Aging, (URJ Press: New York, 2012), p. 65