

WORD IN ACTION

Retirement and beyond



A woman from Indiana USA, shares how she felt urged to use her retirement to care for the marginalized.

Last year a friend who had been volunteering at the Indianapolis Women's Prison told me about an elderly offender nicknamed 'Granny' who, in 29 years, had never had a visitor. Her family and friends had totally abandoned her, and my friend asked if I would consider going to see her.

It was at a time when I was already doing other volunteer work, and I wanted to start slowing down and enjoy retirement with my husband. While I really empathized for this lady, I still felt I needed to decline.

God, however, wasn't about to let me rest! Wasn't it the year designated by Pope Francis as the Year of Mercy? Wasn't he encouraging us to go out to the peripheries, outside of our comfort zone? Perhaps God was asking this step from me?

Everyone needs a friend

Weeks later I was asked again to reconsider visiting Granny by another person who knew of her. I began to fill out all the forms needed, but soon I thought there were just too many regulations and that maybe I should step back and reconsider.

Again I felt God telling me that this lady really needed me. After filling out everything and writing Granny a personal note, which was also required, to ask her if she would like to have me come and visit her, she wrote back thanking me for wanting to be her friend.

'Everyone needs a friend,' she wrote. I was now cleared to visit her.

On my first visit I knew I was totally out of my comfort zone – just entering the doors of the prison was intimidating. When I mentioned to the guard at the desk that I was visiting Granny, he looked up and said, 'What? Granny has a visitor?' In a louder voice he called out, 'Granny has a visitor!' He called over another guard and said with a big smile, 'Granny has a visitor.'



I was really taken aback by all this. The guards' smiles and comments were totally unexpected. I could tell they cared for this woman. It was a small confirmation that this was one of the ways God wanted me to use this new 'retirement and beyond' stage of my life.

Lonely and scared

When Granny came into the visitor's room, I felt as if I was seeing 'the suffering Jesus' walking in. She looked confused and bewildered as to who her visitor would be. Our eyes met and she gave me a huge grin. She warmed my heart and soul.

She told me it was true that she had never had a visitor in over 29 years. She had been lonely and scared, and it seemed that no one cared.

I've since returned and visit often, and Granny knows that I'm her friend and won't let her down. Each time she talks more. I've now arranged for two others who have also offered to become her friend and visit.

Granny has brought an unexpected joy into my life. By going outside of myself to include others, who have felt left out by society; I have found Jesus in Granny waiting for me. 

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