

## WORK, RETIREMENT, AND ONE'S LIFE – SELECTED SESSION

- Topic: Retirement and Work  
 Convener: Susan A. Ross, Loyola University Chicago (*Emerita*)  
 Moderator: Stephen Bevans, Catholic Theological Union (*Emeritus*); Susan Ross was scheduled to moderate, but due to an unforeseen event, Stephen Bevans stepped in  
 Presenters: Stephen Bevans, Catholic Theological Union (*Emeritus*)  
 Patricia Beattie Jung, St. Paul School of Theology (*Emerita*)  
 Jill Raitt, University of Missouri (*Emerita*)

The relationship of retirement to work and vocation was the impetus for this session, as members of the Baby Boom generation begin to retire, and as older CTSA members share their experiences of retirement. Stephen Bevans was the first presenter, and he reflected on leaving his faculty appointment after twenty-nine years at Catholic Theological Union. Shortly after retirement, he was appointed by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity to the World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism which has led to many travel opportunities that would not have been possible with a full-time teaching career. Also since retiring, Bevans has come to understand himself as a "wisdom figure"—both for his own religious community, his province, and particularly for the young professed members of his community who are currently studying at CTU. He has had time to review manuscripts for students and colleagues and provide leadership for his religious community. He recently accepted an invitation to write a book with a colleague on the post-COVID world, something he would have declined had he still been teaching full-time. In addition, Bevans has been able to spend time accompanying friends who are ill, offering companionship. He has found his new vocation as a wisdom figure to be a source of grace.

Patricia Beattie Jung began her reflections by observing how aging is experienced very differently in the US, depending on one's circumstances and how, for many, retirement is not a real option. Socio-economic realities and racial inequities play a significant role, and she reminded those present at the session that 14 percent of seniors live in poverty. With that said, she noted that she was fortunate to be able to retire, but that retirement also comes with loss: letting go of one's identity as a faculty member, seeing how one's colleagues who may once have been central to one's professional and social life are no longer present. Our relationships change, and this is sometimes painful. Her own experience was that shortly after retirement, she spent six months teaching abroad, finished a book that had been set aside earlier, and served on the Presidential Cabinet of the Society of Christian Ethics. But now, she spends her time much more thoughtfully: volunteering; teaching in her church; taking time for exercise, relaxation and family.

Jill Raitt's own experience was that she retired "too soon." While she formally retired at age seventy at the urging of administrators at her university eager to hire two new faculty members, she realized after six months that this had been a mistake. Consequently, she continued teaching as an adjunct—at a much lower rate of pay than as a full-time professor (!)—and then accepted a chair at Fontbonne University as the

Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet Endowed Chair in Christian Thought. She then taught at St. Louis University as a Visiting Professor and was also the Principal Investigator of a major Pew grant: "Religion, the Professions, and the Public." It was only at age eighty-six that she felt truly ready to retire! She has found that retirement has offered her the opportunity to further develop her spiritual life and has continued writing, teaching, and speaking, while at the same time, remaining active in Ignatian spirituality, something she first learned when she was a religious sister.

The discussion that followed the three presentations touched on a number of topics: How one negotiates one's retirement, e.g., does one stipulate that one will retire only if one is replaced, particularly with a tenure track line? How does one balance one's own desire to keep active while also considering the need to make room for younger theologians? And, finally, does retirement offer some of us the opportunity for a non-theological vocation, such as service to the community or greater time for contemplation?

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