Aging! It’s something we all do effortlessly and without exception. Some do it gracefully, even elegantly, others by whimpering and wailing in protest. You know the sorts who actually answer the question “How are you?” by giving an organ recital—the anatomical, not musical version—when the only polite answer to that query is “Fine,” however great the fib. For all who have a hard time dealing with years that should truly be golden in the best sense, Rich Bimler comes to the rescue in these pages with his trademark blend of wit, wisdom, and worship. A gifted Christian humorist and wordsmith, Bimler examines aging now that he is also a happy victim of the phenomenon, and he delivers delightful therapy for all who try to resist. Read these pages and—improbable to imagine!—you may even enjoy the aging process.

Paul L. Maier, author, educator, LCMS vice-president
Joyfully Aging is not only the title of Richard Bimler’s latest book but is a synopsis of its content as well—plus a delightful description of the author’s own life moment. In forty-six crisply written chapters Richard let’s us in on the joy he has found throughout the aging process and shines his unique light of humorous insight onto a period of life so misunderstood by many. Richard shows us how God means aging to be a joyful, life long process. One way God does this is by reserving the gift of grandchildren until we are old enough to appreciate and enjoy the blessings of youth. Richard helps us get into that frame of mind.

Charles S. Mueller, Sr., pastor emeritus of Trinity Lutheran Church, Roselle, Illinois

Sometimes incisive, sometimes insightful, frequently humorous, but always Gospel centered. Each chapter lets the reader hear the confession of an aging pilgrim who shares his thoughts and reflections about aging gracefully, graciously and gratefully. Here you have a Christian guide for celebrating God’s gift of aging. . . a resource book for personal edification, for discussion groups, for suggestions in mentoring the next generation.

Rev. Walter M. Schoedel, Director of Church Relations for Lutheran Senior Services of Missouri and Illinois and pastor emeritus of Concordia Lutheran Church, Kirkwood, Missouri
We have no choice in growing old, but we can choose how we live our later years. Rich Bimler invites us to experience growing older as a spiritual passage. He engages the reader with spiritual insights and a positive, hopeful attitude. He is a master storyteller, showing us how to make sense of the aging experience and how to live with courage and meaning. This gem of a book will delight, encourage, and inspire all readers.

Rev. Dr. Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., Director, Center on Aging and Older Adult Ministries, General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church

Joyfully Aging is another example of Rich Bimler’s wonderful ability to encourage people of all ages to live in the joy of the Resurrection. Joyfully Aging is a celebration of the gifts of aging and of the importance of the Christian family, delivered with the stories and unique humor for which Rich is known and loved. Readers will come away reminded of who they are, whose they are, and the endless possibilities for lives of service and relevance made possible by God’s grace. Thanks, Rich!

Rick Herman, president, Wheat Ridge Ministries
In *Joyfully Aging*, Rich urges us to get rid of gloomy despair and re-focus on the reality of the risen Lord and our resurrection life, the true source of joy!

A profound biblical truth underlies *Joyfully Aging*: while the devil and his minions would wipe the smile from our faces, the world can laugh again, for despair is replaced by the joy of salvation in Jesus, the risen One! Pointing us to that reality, Rich encourages people of all ages to share the Good News that alone can lift hearts and spirits!

Thanks, Rich! Good theology! Good humor!

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Rev. Dr. Thomas R. Zehnder, pastor, president emeritus, Florida-Georgia District, LCMS, executive director, LCMS World Mission (retired)

Dr. Rich Bimler’s wit, wisdom, and inspiration shine through on every page of *Joyfully Aging*. Using Scripture as constant touchstone, Dr. Bimler (or “Rich,” as people all over the world know him) provides an antidote to our youth obsessed culture with a perspective on aging as a time to reflect, mentor, laugh, connect, and pray. What a treasure for old and young alike.”

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David Walsh, Ph.D., psychologist, author, and speaker
DEDICATION:

This book on celebrating the gift of aging is dedicated to my grandparents, who always seemed old to me; to my parents, who never seemed old to me; and to my grandchildren—Matt, Rachel, Hannah, Sarah, Aaron, Emma, and Abbey—who continue to bless Hazel and me with celebrating God’s gift of aging from generation to generation!
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If there is one thing we are all doing together in this life, it’s aging!

We are all aging! More of us are growing older. And more of us are growing older, longer.

So, what are you and I going to do about it?

Answering this question is what this book is all about. It is about celebrating God’s gift of aging instead of moaning and complaining about old age. It is about seeing aging as a blessing instead of a burden. It is about affirming life as a gift from God, despite all of our worries and woes and wrinkles and whining. It is about living an abundant life in the Lord, the kind of life that Christ proclaims to us as the reason for His coming.

This book is not an answer book. It will not tell you what to do to make the rest of your years fine and dandy. It will not rid you of your problems, pains, and pouting. It will not tell you that things are going to get better in your life if you only shape up and live right.

But it will promise that you and I will live “happily ever after” because of the promise we have in Jesus Christ! Through our Baptism, God in Christ has marked us with
water and the sign of the cross. By faith, we are His people forever, whether we are fifteen, fifty-five, seventy-five, or beyond. Mark 16:16 assures us that “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” God promises believers that He will never leave us, therefore, we can affirm that we will live “happily ever after” in Him, now and forever!

I have been preparing to write this book all seventy-two years of my life. However, I could not have written it any sooner because I did not have the experiences and relationships that I have now. These experiences and relationships have helped me make better sense of the aging process. For me, as it has no doubt been for you, life has been a roller coaster ride of Good Fridays and Easters, all mixed together. Just like you, I have experienced many low and dark times throughout my years as well as many high and lighthearted times. I have been frustrated as I struggled with fears and failures and foibles, and I have celebrated life through affirming people around me and the love and forgiveness of people whom God placed very strategically in my life.

Although I have been planning to write this book all these years, I was not ready to articulate my journey until now. I am slowly learning to better understand my earlier years through these later years as I reflect, discern, and mentor others in the process. And I hope that through these pages, I can communicate my perspective to you—
that a truly satisfying life story is possible only when we learn from life’s experiences, all of its “uh-ohs” and its “aha’s,” when we keep Christ’s cross and empty tomb at the center.

So enjoy the journey of aging well each day in the Lord. As Romans 14:8 reminds us, “If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s.”

Thank You, Lord, for allowing us to live another day in You! Yes, indeed, aging is the only way to live!
CHAPTER ONE

REFLECTIONS FOR OLDER ADULTS

As you move through these pages, feel free to make notes, skip chapters, and bounce around in order to have fun reading this resource. Here is one way to get you started as you think about aging.

Fill in the blanks and discuss the following thoughts:
1. One thing I like about being old is ______________
   ____________________________________________________________________.
2. Just because I’m over sixty doesn’t mean I can’t
   ____________________________________________________________________.
3. When I was young, one person who supported and encouraged me was ________________
   by doing__________________________________________.
4. The best thing I can do for someone younger than
   me is to _________________________________.
5. One thing I still want to do in life is ______________
   ____________________________________________________________________.
6. Being old is a ____________________________ experience.
7. What I like about myself right now is __________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________

8. One gift that I can give to someone younger than me is ________________________________
________________________________________

9. Something I did in my childhood that I am glad I did was ______________________________
________________________________________

10. Today, I thank God for my life because _________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________

Share your thoughts and reflections with someone else. Sit and talk with a youngster about your outlook and perspective on life, using these sentences as a starting point. Enjoy the discussion!
Aging is a gift and a blessing. To accept each day as a gift from the Lord is to celebrate Christ’s presence within us. In contrast, to see aging as a burden, a problem, or a chore is to deny what the Lord gives to us each day: a new life in Him!

I have a friend (at least two of them!) who likes to say, “My goal in life is to live forever! And so far, so good!” Well, bless him for his positive attitude, but some day . . . !

I shared many experiences of life with another friend, the sainted Herb Brokering. There were times during our trips to other countries when we were not sure if we would survive the situations in which we found ourselves. On one especially dreary evening, we talked about life and we talked about death. That day, we made a promise to each other that both of us would speak at the other’s funeral service! Well, in November 2009, I kept my promise and shared parts of Herb’s life at his funeral. We’ll just have to wait to see if Herb shows up at my funeral!

The point of these stories is that our attitude toward life is a key ingredient to the aging process. Seeing life as something to control, to get by with, or to last forever is
Joyfully Aging: A Christian’s Guide

quite foolish, obviously. Seeing life as something to endure, to make the most of, or to live with all the gusto you can is not at all centering on why the Lord gave us life in the first place.

I remember my days as a youngster—I was nine or ten at the time—when my mom said something like this to me: “Richie, this is the best time of your life. It doesn’t get any better!” I remember looking at her and thinking, “Yikes; if this is the best time of my life, I am in trouble!”

We live in a culture that still honors and worships youth. People still want to look youthful, smell youthful, and talk youthful. Those things aren’t bad if you are a teenager! But why sweat the wrinkles? Why worry about not being able to play three-on-three basketball or to run ten miles a day? Instead, why not work at being the most joy-filled person in the world, or at least in your neighborhood, as a _____-year-old (you fill in your age)?

I love the Japanese inscription on the wall of the hospice center at the Lutheran Medical Center in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. It states, “The setting sun is no less beautiful than the rising sun.” How true, how true!

To celebrate aging in no way denies the joys and opportunities of being young. Developing an aging attitude toward life actually affirms life at every age! And that’s just the point. Throughout Scripture, we do not hear much about people of different ages sitting or standing around
and talking about aging, do we? Instead, we read about young people (such as Mary, the mother of Jesus, for example) and older folks such as Abraham, Anna, and Noah, and on and on, who went about serving the Lord, listening to the Lord, and celebrating the Lord’s presence in their lives. Now that is what I call an attitude of aging!

Still another challenge we have as we age is the notion that we have now earned our chance to retire. We’ve been there, done that. We can now, finally, take it easy, go fishing and golfing when we want to, and relax, because we’ve paid the price. Remember the comic strip that has Grandma asking Grandpa, “What are you going to do today?” Grandpa says, “Nothing.” “I thought you did that yesterday,” responds Grandma. “That’s right,” he says, “but I didn’t finish!”

There is no such thing as retiring on this side of heaven. We leave jobs, we reposition from one area of focus to another, and we transition between places and people, but we never retire. It is not a concept shared in the Scriptures. Numbers 8:25 does say, “From the age of fifty years they shall withdraw from the duty of the service and serve no more.” In context, this verse talks more about the role of the person transitioning from one role to another of serving as a mentor or coach to younger people. The writer continues by encouraging these older people to assist the young people in the tasks at hand.
Unfortunately, our society has convinced people that after a certain age, be it fifty or sixty-five or even later, people lose their significance and purpose in life because of their age. The Church, however, is the one place where people of all ages come together around Word and Sacrament to proclaim to one another that Jesus Christ is Lord of all—and that includes all ages!

I’d say we have our work cut out for us. I hope you agree.