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Center for Healthy Aging Ministries, Programs & Services



FROM THE CHAMPS PARISH NURSE

Life Transitions: I've got So Much 'Stuff'—Clearing Out and Downsizing

Looking at your possessions from a different perspective may help you decide on how you can bear to part with your personal 'treasures'. For a moment, pause and reflect on all that you have and then consider what Jesus had:

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Luke 9: 57-58)

When you think of it from this viewpoint, isn't it interesting that we have trouble parting with our material possessions in order to downsize to a smaller home, an apartment, condominium, independent living, assisted living, or nursing home. Our ultimate home is not based on property, assets or personal wealth is it?

Through prayer and introspection we can open our hearts to view our current circumstances and not be paralyzed to make a decision that our home is just "too big" to maintain or keep up, economically it is not sound to continue in the current living arrangement, or health issues preclude staying where we are. Or, one can simply want to move closer to children, to a particular area of the country where the winters are warmer, or to a place where our 'life dream' can be fulfilled. Planning this while there is time to approach the move in a leisurely manner is so much more enjoyable than having to do it in a crisis. By doing it ourselves in a concrete, well-planned manner it allows the individual to maintain control over their lives and the freedom not to be told "what" or "when" they 'have' to do something.

Most people who are considering 'downsizing' as an option have enough life experience to understand the scripture that states,

*"I...know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every **circumstance** I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need." (Philippians 4:12)*

Ultimately, the quality of our life revolves around our relationships with God, family and friends in order to maintain connections. One thing that allows us joy wherever we are is the memories of a life enriched by family relationships. Therefore you might want to start the downsizing process by developing a 'living family history' that you assemble from all the old photographs, cards and letters you've collected. Making an effort to do a family history allows you to share treasured memories of your life that otherwise would wither and fade away, hidden forever. The values passed from your life to others are the ultimate seeds that will grow into the future generations. Pray and reflect on:

*Listen, my son, to your father's instruction
and do not forsake your mother's teaching.*

*They will be a garland to grace your head
and a chain to adorn your neck.*

(Proverbs 1:8-9)

During the adventure of 'remembering' and assembling the family history you can also rediscover items to gift or bequeath to family members or friends that would impart a special significance to both you and the recipient. This can be done now or in a will, or you may want to give the item(s) to the individual personally so you can share the joy of the moment together.

While exploring the forgotten areas of your home you usually discover adult children and grandchildren need to retrieve all the items they have 'stored' for years in your home. Remember all that high school and college collection of memorabilia they left with you to 'take later'? Call or send a note asking them to take their possessions by an established date.

Approaching the process of downsizing systematically can help you to avoid becoming overly fatigued and stressed out. Thirty, forty or fifty plus years of a 'collection' can look like a daunting task.

- Make a list of everything you treasure and want to hold onto when you relocate.
- Sort items into categories such as “gifted or bequeathed”, “keep”, “for family review”, “donate”, and “undecided”.
- Start in areas within the home you use the least and proceed to those frequented the most.
- Decide which pieces of furniture you will keep and then proceed to tag bigger furniture items using the categorizing approach you adopted; leave the so-called “trinkets or knick-knacks to categorize until last.
- Seek advice from reputable experts before throwing out a bunch of “old things”. Remember there is a difference between sentimental value and the market value of an item.

First and foremost, before having a sale or disposing of anything, make absolutely sure that family members have gone through the house and taken any of the items they are particularly attached to **that you are willing to give up and have marked as “for family review”**. It is wise to be prepared for some disagreements over items with particular monetary or sentimental significance. **Having a system and letting the family know it** will help to maintain and not fracture relationships while taking into account a way for each individual to get something of special significance.

Finally, there are several options for re-distributing items from your home and garage you are not keeping:

Hold an auction This is a procedure usually for the finer quality items that have significant market value (antiques, collectibles, and valuable jewelry). Contact several local auction companies for an estimate on the costs of their services and exactly what their ‘service’ entails. Be sure you understand if the company you hire is going to appraise, tag and catalog your items, hold the actual auction and what the charges or percentage of the sales they charge for these services.

Liquidation sale This is a term usually used when everything in the home is for sale; in fact the house may also have been sold when the sale is held.

Donations Think outside the box with regard to donating items. Give books to the local library or a school, musical instruments to a church or youth group that is starting a community band, clothing can be given to a church or community mission site, furniture to a church or community mission that helps homeless individuals become re-established. If taking a tax credit, state and/or federal is a consideration, so check with your tax advisor for the rules. Generally, it is necessary to maintain a list of items donated with their fair market value that is signed by the recipient agency. Check with the agencies you plan to contribute to regarding the types of items they accept and specific times they will pick up.

Garage sale Once the auctioneer or liquidator establishes the items appropriate for an auction or liquidation sale, they may suggest a garage sale for the remaining items. Mark each item clearly with the price you want and then consider lowering the price on an item when an offer is made by a prospective buyer. On the final day of the garage sale consider cutting prices by 50% or as appropriate to ‘get rid of the’ the remaining items. Investigate what arrangements have to be made with non-profit organizations to pick up items that are left after the garage sale.

Finally, remember that you are not your possessions, you are a child of Christ and as such you are loved. Ponder the scripture,

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” (Hebrews 11: 8-10)

We too can move ahead in faith trusting the Lord, *“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the belief of things not yet seen.”* (Hebrews 11:1)

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