



Community Living & Social Connection

YOUR KEYS TO POSITIVE AGING

This book is courtesy of Lutheran Life Communities.
LutheranLifeCommunities.org



Whether you're a lone wolf or a social butterfly, planning your lifestyle around meaningful social connections adds quality years to your life.

TAKING A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO YOUR AGING PROCESS.

If there's one thing that unites us all, it's aging. Although aging isn't optional, HOW you age is up to you. The need for social connection is right up there with air, food, water and sunshine. This can be counterintuitive for some of us, especially those who have spent their years busy with careers and raising children, all the while thinking, "I can't wait to have time alone."

LIFE IS BETTER IN COMMUNITY.

At Lutheran Life Communities, we believe that people experience a higher quality of life by living in community. We've seen this happening: from connecting with team members to joining peers for meals, participating in fitness classes, speaking with clergy, and simply walking the grounds, there is healing in being social.

However, don't take our word for it. The guide you hold now is filled with insights, and science has much to say about both the positive benefits of living in a community as well as the negative impact of living in relative isolation. With that said, being social is voluntary and up to individual choice.





According to the Medical Advisory Secretariat's analysis of 11 research studies on aging and isolation, "Social and family relationships are a core element of quality of life for seniors, and these relationships have been ranked second, next to health, as the most important area of life."¹

Being socially connected doesn't mean you have to spend every waking hour with others. And not every connection is created equal. Being socially connected means having relationships that make you feel comfortable because you can show your true self. Science tells us that meaningful connections are nature's antidepressants; they improve our mood by allowing us to give and receive emotional care. In other words, healthy relationships give our lives meaning.

¹Medical Advisory Secretariat (2008). Social isolation in community-dwelling seniors: an evidence-based analysis. *Ontario health technology assessment series*, 8(5), 1-49.



The experts agree. Dr. Kristine Theurer, a leading expert on the value of social connection for older adults, highlights the necessity of giving and receiving emotional care. In her *Journal of Aging Studies* article, she describes how social reciprocity is an integral part of aging well:

“Through reaching out and tending to the needs of others, residents may regain a sense of self and purpose, view themselves and their problems from a new perspective and find that they are not alone.”²

Our mission is to help you age well whether you live at Lutheran Life Communities or choose to stay in your current home. That’s why we’ve created this collection of our best advice when considering healthy aging and your social life. We want to spark inspiration for your future social network with a little bit of science.

Enjoy and cheers to happy aging!

²Theurer, K., Mortenson, W. B., Stone, R., Suto, M., Timonen, V., & Rozanova, J. (2015). The need for a social revolution in residential care. *Journal of Aging Studies*, 35, 201–210. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2015.08.011>

A close-up photograph of a woman with short dark hair and glasses, wearing an orange polo shirt. She is smiling broadly and holding a white ceramic mug with both hands. The background is blurred, showing other people in a social setting. A white rectangular box with the text 'PART 1: THE SCIENCE OF BEING SOCIAL' is overlaid on the right side of the image.

PART 1: THE SCIENCE OF BEING SOCIAL



SOCIALIZATION IS HEALTHY.

Loneliness increases your risk for dementia, heart disease, anxiety and degraded mental health.

What does being social really mean?

To quote “What is Social Connection” in UC Berkeley’s *Greater Good Magazine*, “... humans are a profoundly social species; our drive to connect with others is embedded in our biology and evolutionary history. It begins at birth, in our relationship with our caregiver—and the effects of this relationship seem to reverberate throughout our lives. When we’re cared for as children, we’re more likely to have healthy, secure attachments as we get older.”³

Social isolation can increase worry-making cortisol levels. According to the Mayo Clinic, cortisol is a stress hormone, and too much of it can negatively affect our immune and digestive systems.⁴

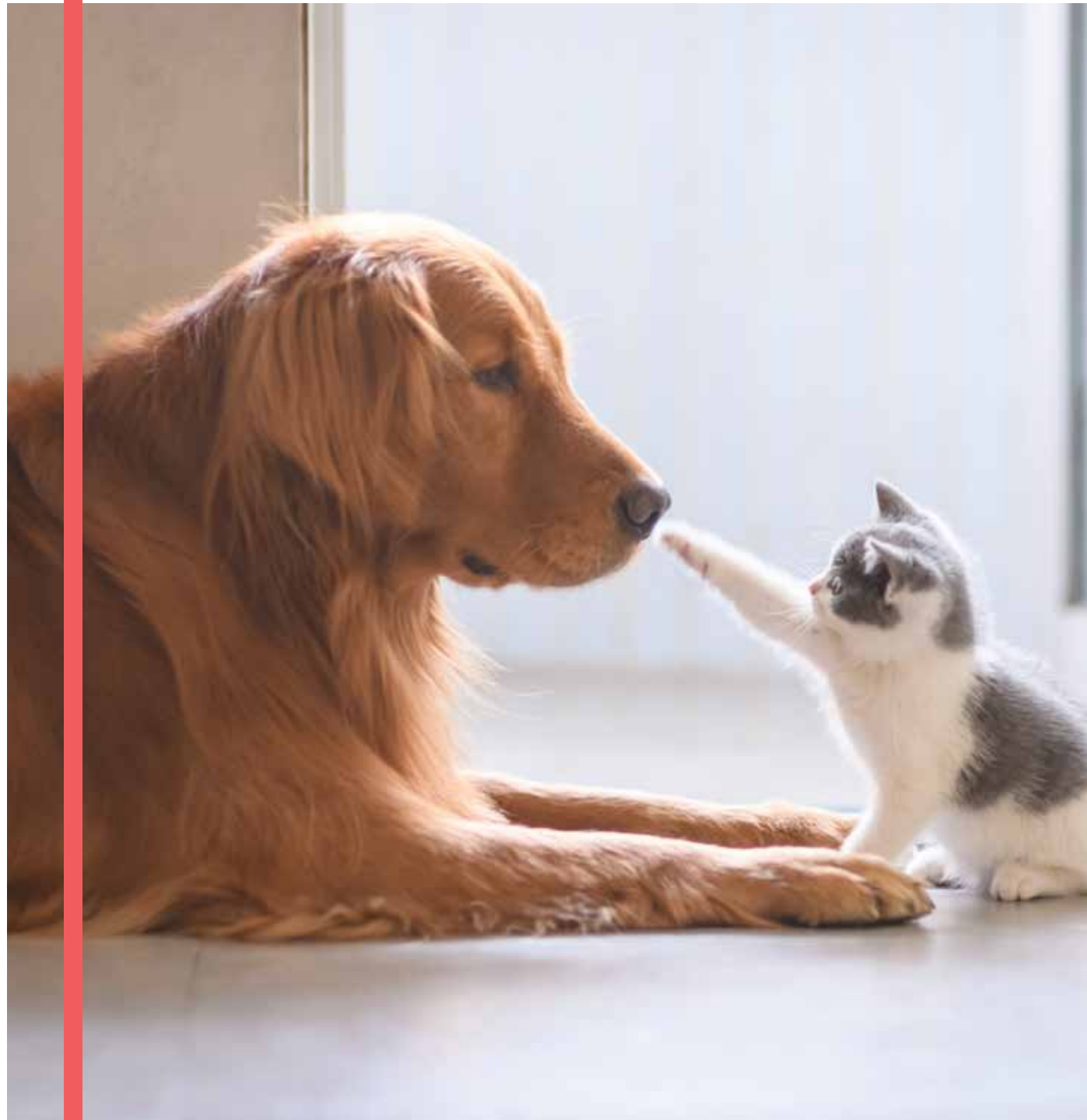
³The Greater Good Science Center at University of California, Berkeley. (n.d.). *What is Social Connection*. Greater Good. Retrieved March 7, 2022, from https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/topic/social_connection/definition

⁴Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. (2021, July 8). *Chronic stress puts your health at risk*. Mayo Clinic. Retrieved March 7, 2022, from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20046037#:~:text=Cortisol%2C%20the%20primary%20stress%20hormone,flight%2Dor%2Dflight%20situation> on page 5

The Mayo Clinic also notes that when we experience chronic stress, we are at an increased risk of several things:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Digestive problems
- Headaches
- Muscle tension and pain
- Heart disease, heart attack, high blood pressure and stroke
- Sleep problems
- Weight gain
- Memory and concentration impairment⁵

⁵Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. (2021, July 8). *Chronic stress puts your health at risk*. Mayo Clinic. Retrieved March 7, 2022, from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20046037#:~:text=Cortisol%2C%20the%20primary%20stress%20hormone,fight%2Dor%2Dflight%20situation>





Cruising Facebook is not socializing.

According to the Pew Research Center, a nonpartisan policy institute for research, in 2021, approximately 72% of all adults were engaged in at least one social media platform. The most common type of social media platform being used was listed as Facebook, with 70% of adults saying they use the platform every day. What's more, approximately 50% of all people 65 years and older say they use Facebook.⁶

While social media can provide a wonderful doorway to reconnecting with old friends, it can also set you up to feel socially isolated. Constant viewing of social media can make you feel inadequate, left out and isolated because you're comparing your reality to one that doesn't exist.

We invite you to check how you feel when you use it. Do you find yourself constantly checking the Facebook feed? Feeling the fear of missing out (FOMO)? Feeling jealous of other people who have a lot of kids and grandchildren in their lives? If this describes you, then it's time to start building an in-person network. It's good to remember that

people only post about their best lives, the best photos and all of the coolest things they're doing online. You aren't viewing their "real lives." Founding Facebook President Sean Parker once described Facebook as a "social-validation feedback loop ... exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology."⁷ Parker is describing the "fake reality" of Facebook, and the way it can actually close us off to new people and ideas.

Facebook and other social platforms can connect us to distant friends and family, but to maintain a healthy balance, you should choose to be an informed social media consumer. Enjoy social media in moderation. But also invest in your real life by nurturing real relationships and by becoming the best version of yourself.

⁶Parks, M. (2021, May 18). *Facebook calls links to depression inconclusive. These researchers disagree*. NPR. Retrieved March 7, 2022, from <https://www.npr.org/2021/05/18/990234501/facebook-calls-links-to-depression-inconclusive-these-researchers-disagree>

⁷Pew Research Center. (2022, January 11). *Demographics of social media users and adoption in the United States*. Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech. Retrieved March 7, 2022, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/social-media/>



PART 2: THE SOCIAL CIRCLE OF LIFE

EMBRACING OUR LIFE CYCLE HELPS US STAY CONNECTED TO EACH OTHER.

If you haven't heard the term "mortality awareness," it is a state of mind that can help you make important decisions about how you want to spend your time.

Perceptions about death vary wildly from culture to culture. Tibetan Buddhists practice an intentional, liminal phase called "bardo" which is a time for planning to exit one life and move into another. Western culture typically avoids the subject of death completely, which can create a variety of troubles.

Mortality awareness serves a purpose; it helps us identify social goals that can be freeing and positive. It helps to raise our awareness of our time on earth and helps us define how we want to spend our time. Do we want to waste time on fruitless, draining relationships? Or prioritize people and hobbies that feed our souls?

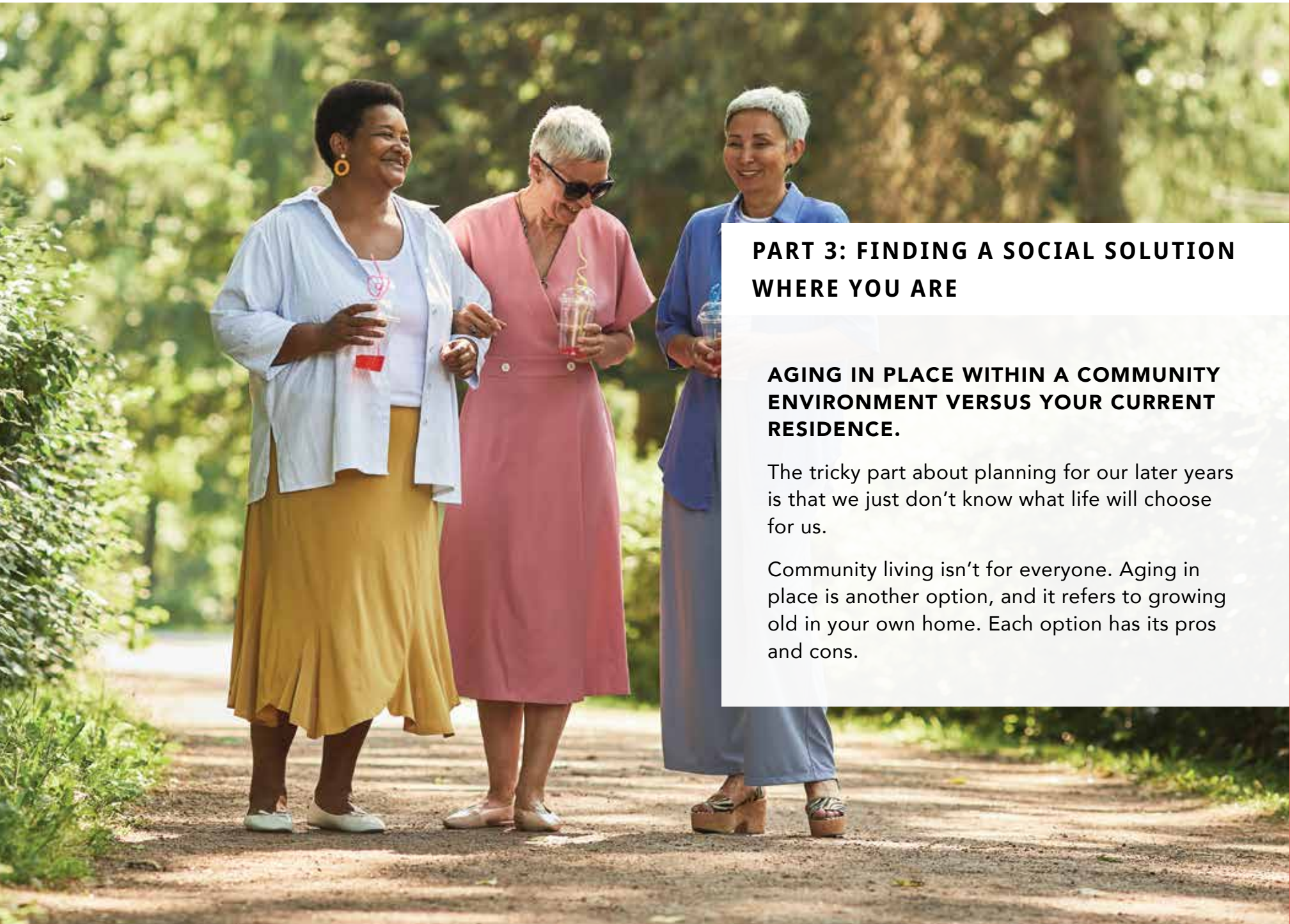
Often, people define themselves by their role as a parent to their children or grandchildren. But even if you have children and grandchildren, you can't rely on them to give your life meaning. After all, they are in their own liminal phases of discovery and focused on their own lives.

To help you gain a deeper understanding of your social circle and how it feeds you, ask yourself:

- If I transitioned today, who would I be thankful to have spent time with? Is it possible for me to do that again?
- What qualities do my favorite friends have in common?
- If I have 1,000 weeks, who do I want to spend them with?
- What kinds of memories would I like to make now?
- Am I at a point in my life when I need to expand my social circle?

Journal Prompt:

Ask yourself a few questions about what you value most in companions.



PART 3: FINDING A SOCIAL SOLUTION WHERE YOU ARE

AGING IN PLACE WITHIN A COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT VERSUS YOUR CURRENT RESIDENCE.

The tricky part about planning for our later years is that we just don't know what life will choose for us.

Community living isn't for everyone. Aging in place is another option, and it refers to growing old in your own home. Each option has its pros and cons.



No matter how much time and effort we spend on staying healthy, sometimes a medical event can change our aging trajectory, leaving us dependent on others for mobility, transportation, food and personal care. Aging favors the prepared, and there are several thought exercises you can do today that can help your aging tomorrow.

Consider the location of your home. Do you have to drive everywhere? Or can you walk a few blocks to a store, pharmacy or restaurant? Are there a lot of hills on your property and stairs in your home? Do you live in a snowy, icy climate that would prohibit you from moving around during the winter? Can you easily meet with people and join activities that keep you socially connected?

Bonus: We offer a free book titled *Rightsizing Your Life* to help readers consider their physical space and determine if it's right for their lifestyle. Ask us and we'll provide you with a copy!

We recommend taking preventative steps now to avoid isolation if you choose to age in place.

Remember, alone time does not equal isolation, and isolation does not equal independence. Isolation is a lack of support in case of emergencies, both physical and emotional. The time to take a pragmatic look at your situation is when you are active and healthy.

Reflect on your support connections:

- Does my community allow me to own dog or a cat? Are there limits on the number or the size of the pets I can have?
- Who can I call on when I need a friend? Are they able to reach me where I am?
- Does my residence allow me to host friends?
- If I were injured, could friends and family reach me to help?
- What are the casual social outings I enjoy, such as visiting my local coffee shop, bakery, bookstore or other businesses?
- How do I feel day-to-day? Am I bored? Do I crave intellectual stimulation? Or am I satisfied with my current routines and expect to feel this way for years to come?
- Would I benefit from a support group for grief, prayer or spiritual studies?

Take some time to think through these questions and write your answers on the next page.

If you plan to age in place within a single-family residence or condo, versus a retirement community, choose a home base that gives you easy access to people.

Perhaps your perfect arrangement is a condo community in a safe, walkable and urban neighborhood. Or, invite roommates into your home, à la *Friends* or *Golden Girls* so your social connections are built-in. A single-story home in a vibrant neighborhood near shops, public transit and a senior center is also a great option. There is no “one way” to age in place. But there are ways to ensure a higher chance at happiness and good health.

Good news! Planning gives you options. The key to success is thinking ahead and taking a practical approach for all of the “what ifs” that life can bring.

If you plan to age in a residence versus a community, shop home care services in advance and place a “plan card” in your wallet in the event you are hospitalized without notice. Preplan where you will rehab after a hospital stay and what your “going home” plan will be.





COMMUNITY LIVING BRINGS OPPORTUNITIES TO CREATE A NETWORK OF YOUR OWN!

If you haven't fully considered the differences between living in a community versus living alone in a single-family dwelling, let's first define what community living actually is.

There are often a lot of misconceptions around community living due to our own internalized ageism. Memories of grandparents or even our parents' aging experiences can equate community living with a "nursing home." That can't be further from the truth about today's modern lifestyle communities, which are designed for active living with a built-in continuum of care.

Both introverts and extroverts can gain a lot from community living.

- The ability to cast a wide net to make new and meaningful friendships
- Life-enriching opportunities that stretch your brain and boost your mood
- The support of a dedicated health services and life enrichment team that come together to empower your independence

What is life like in a community?

Imagine you have a beautiful apartment home that is one elevator ride and a walk away from dining, happy hour, library, chapel, pea patch garden, a fitness center and arts studio. All of these amenities and more exist at Lutheran Life Communities.

For some, moving into a community can feel intimidating. "How will I make new friends?" There is a process for moving that includes a welcoming committee of residents who greet you and spend time helping you to get to know others and learn the ropes.

There is also a wide variety of activities that encourage easy participation. These opportunities are the first step to embracing community life. They allow you to meet new people while exploring new sides of yourself. Consider the classic options, or invent something entirely new.

- Arts & entertainment
- Volunteerism
- Walking groups
- Game nights
- Happy hours
- Spiritual groups and services
- Live music performances and concerts



Plus, built-in social events are always happening.

Cocktail parties, celebrations, concerts ... a variety of ways to meet new people. There are also clubs that residents operate and manage on their own. Imagine joining the Environmental Club that discusses issues around our blue planet, or the Current Events discussion group that

gets together over coffee or a beer to talk about today's geopolitical issues. It's all built-in and helps you to create a new network or simply add people to your already existing group. Communities are ripe for new ideas—so you can bring yours!





When evaluating communities, look for diversity in activities. Are there opportunities to foster and encourage deeper conversations between residents? Are there peer support opportunities to allow residents to discuss challenges? Find out if leadership consistently asks the residents for new ideas. Lutheran Life Communities offer all of these experiences and more. Resident well-being is our number one priority, and we recognize that social connectedness requires more than just casual acquaintances.

Communities should not simply strive to “distract” residents with entertainment, but instead should diversify life enrichment to include meaningful conversations.

Here are our best suggestions to help you grow into a new community.

No matter our age, for some, entering new social situations can feel a little uncomfortable, especially if we're used to living alone. We might remember being the new kid at school and not knowing who we'll sit with at lunch.

Here are easy ways to integrate into community social life.

- Attend happy hour
- Lead a club
- Join a club
- Volunteer to serve on a committee
- Ask the restaurant host if anyone would like someone to sit with
- Sit in the common area of the community with a book or magazine. If you're new, it's likely that residents will approach you and introduce themselves





Open to romance? It's very possible when you live in a community.

Has there ever been a better time to fall in love than when we're older, wiser and have done our inner work? We feel confident in who we are and what we want, which makes finding a new partner in our third third of life very rewarding.

Living in a community that features a variety of dining venues, a pub, clubs and social activities means it's easy to casually meet people who share your interests. So much easier than online dating! We frequently see new couples fall deeply in love (or spiritually in love).

Community living lends itself well to connections that blossom into romance. Communities have previously hosted wedding ceremonies and receptions for residents. No matter your love philosophy, we believe there is always a time for you.



Community living comes with a built-in support system.

Imagine having your own concierge, mailroom and housekeepers. All of these support systems come with community living as part of the monthly service fee.

At Lutheran Life Communities, active, independent adults have the peace of mind of knowing that if they or their partner needs additional care, a full continuum of health

services is available right where they live. These services include personal care, memory care, skilled nursing, home care, a wellness clinic and short-term rehabilitation after a surgery or medical event.



The choice is yours:

AGING IN YOUR CURRENT RESIDENCE OR LIVING IN A COMMUNITY SETTING.

Our number one recommendation for anyone over the age of 62 is to plan, plan and plan. No matter where you physically live, prioritize planning for your social network along with estate planning directives and health insurance. It's a critical piece of healthy aging.

Consider the differences between a non-profit organization and a for-profit company. Non-profits invest funds back into the community to keep it updated, upscale and tend to offer a much more robust activities program.

Lutheran Life is here for you. Visit our website to get on our email list and learn about ongoing educational events designed to help you decide. Attend and learn what a Life Plan Community (formerly known as a Continuing Care Retirement Community) is all about. Reach out to a life plan counselor and they can show you around.

Cheers to happy, healthy social aging!

The series of pages next features a little information about each of our communities.

Pleasant View

LIFE PLAN COMMUNITY • OTTAWA

Experience the inviting hometown spirit that thrives at Pleasant View. These homes face a walkable park, giving you plenty of space to roam—inside and out. This pet-friendly 62+ community offers both solitude and socializing on your terms. Best of all, you'll have long-term peace of mind that comes with a full continuum of care rooted in a culture of Midwestern values. As the only true entrance fee Life Plan Community in Ottawa, independent living residents have access to a full continuum of care as well as a Benevolence Fund.

**Independent Living • Assisted Living • Memory Care
Skilled Nursing • Skilled Rehab • Inpatient & Outpatient
Rehab**

Address: 505 College Avenue | Ottawa, Illinois 61350

Phone: (815) 434-1130

Website: HelloPleasantView.org



Wittenberg Village

LIFE PLAN COMMUNITY • CROWN POINT, IN

Wittenberg Village is a 47-acre, tree-lined community with a booming small-city spirit just minutes from town. Our 62+ community is a walking paradise with beautifully landscaped grounds and scenic paths for enjoying the tranquility of nature. Wellness is a way of life here with a top-notch fitness center, personal training and exercise classes. Wittenberg Village is pet-friendly!

Independent Living • Assisted Living • Outpatient Rehab

Address: 1150 E. Luther Drive | Crown Point, Indiana 46307

Phone: (219) 663-3860

Website: (309) 557-8000



Luther Oaks

LIFE PLAN COMMUNITY • BLOOMINGTON-NORMAL

Discover Bloomington’s best-kept secret. Luther Oaks is perfect for active, independent people aged 62+ looking to live just minutes from town but wanting a country lifestyle. Luther Oaks offers more than 30 resident-run groups spanning from gardening to arts to history. This is a dog-lover’s paradise! As a true entrance fee Life Plan Community, independent living residents have access to a full continuum of care as well as a Benevolence Fund that ensures you always have a home. Join us for a tour.

**Independent Living • Assisted Living • Memory Care
Skilled Nursing • Outpatient Therapy**

Address: 601 Lutz Road | Bloomington, Illinois 61704

Phone: (309) 557-8000

Website: LutherOaks.org



Lutheran Home

ASSISTED LIVING AND MORE • ARLINGTON HEIGHTS

Located in the heart of Arlington Heights, IL, you'll immediately notice the difference when you step inside Lutheran Home. Our assisted living, memory care, skilled nursing and rehabilitation is a modern, upscale design similar to a boutique hotel.

Enjoy the laughter of children at the on-site Shepherd's Flock Childcare and Preschool. Elevate your lifestyle with chef-inspired dining experiences and a diverse array of engaging activities designed to inspire and entertain!

MyTapestry Memory Support at Lutheran Home offers a continuum of care, including a new neighborhood called MyTapestry Garden. This early entry point is designed for people with mild cognitive decline who require lighter support but still need some supervision and guidance.

Lutheran Home also operates an adult day club to support caregivers, home care services and moving services for older adults.

**Assisted Living • Memory Care • Skilled Nursing
Adult Day Club • Skilled Rehab • Inpatient &
Outpatient Rehab**

Address: 800 West Oakton Street | Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004

Phone: (847) 368-7400

Website: LutheranHome.org



Jenny's Bistro is a social hub at the Lutheran Home and it's open to the public!

Communities of Wellness, Connection and Inspiration.

Lutheran Life Communities has been serving older adults and their families for more than 130 years. As a faith-based organization, our work is the sincere response to a call to serve. Our focus is connecting and strengthening the lives of seniors of all backgrounds and their families.

Each Lutheran Life community has a unique personality, yet they all deliver on the same promise: inspiring growth, connection and vitality for older adults. Our signature programs cultivate a dynamic lifestyle where people of all ages and backgrounds can flourish. Whether it is wellness initiatives promoting holistic health, social activities fostering meaningful connections or educational programs encouraging lifelong learning, we are committed to enriching lives throughout life.

LutheranLifeCommunities.org

(877) 203-8822



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