

Leader's Message
May 2011

Oh my, I'm retiring! Now what? Since through the years I have given my life a certain degree of direction, the wide-open freedom of retirement is a bit frightening. Necessity and youthful dreams have always combined to set a direction for employment but also for the rest of my time—recreation, hobbies, politics, etc. But with retirement the future has now a too obvious endpoint and there is also a sense that I've escaped out the back door of responsible living. As a teenager I slowly entered the front door of adulthood that included at least appearing to share the responsibility of holding this sad world together. Now, I will be one of those senior citizens in the backyard whose role in life seems to be restricted to worrying about their benefits and eating early.

Of course like other seniors I will still be playing a part in building our community life, and actually many seniors in retirement take up some of the work the economic/social system leaves undone. Much of the volunteer work that holds our human world together is performed by retirees.

But the temptation is to step aside from all responsibility. Recently Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced his retirement and when asked what he was going to do, he said, "tend my garden." Gardening will also occupy some of my newfound free time but the question retirement creates is a more existential one. Who am I without this job and what do I do with freedom? We are never free from responsibility but increased freedom from others' expectations allows us to be more honestly personal in our choices.

Since I have to some extent been doing my dream job for the last twenty years, I'm not about to walk away from my involvement with Ethical Humanism. I will continue writing and speaking, but without as much restraint on my imagination or voice. Since I believe that Ethical Humanism continues to be unappreciated as a life changing philosophy, I will be taking up the cause of spreading the word about this relational understanding of life.

I can't help but offer a final pastoral recommendation: don't wait until retirement to free yourself from supposed necessity. A salary might be the most oppressive creation of humankind. The freedom that retirement offers is actually always there. Many retirees don't use that freedom as they move from wage slavery to accepting their new senior citizen designation. It would be so refreshing and exciting to hear generations of 65+ folks saying "take your senior citizen role and shove it." And while you're at it, tax the rich, cancel the military budget and put the money into education.