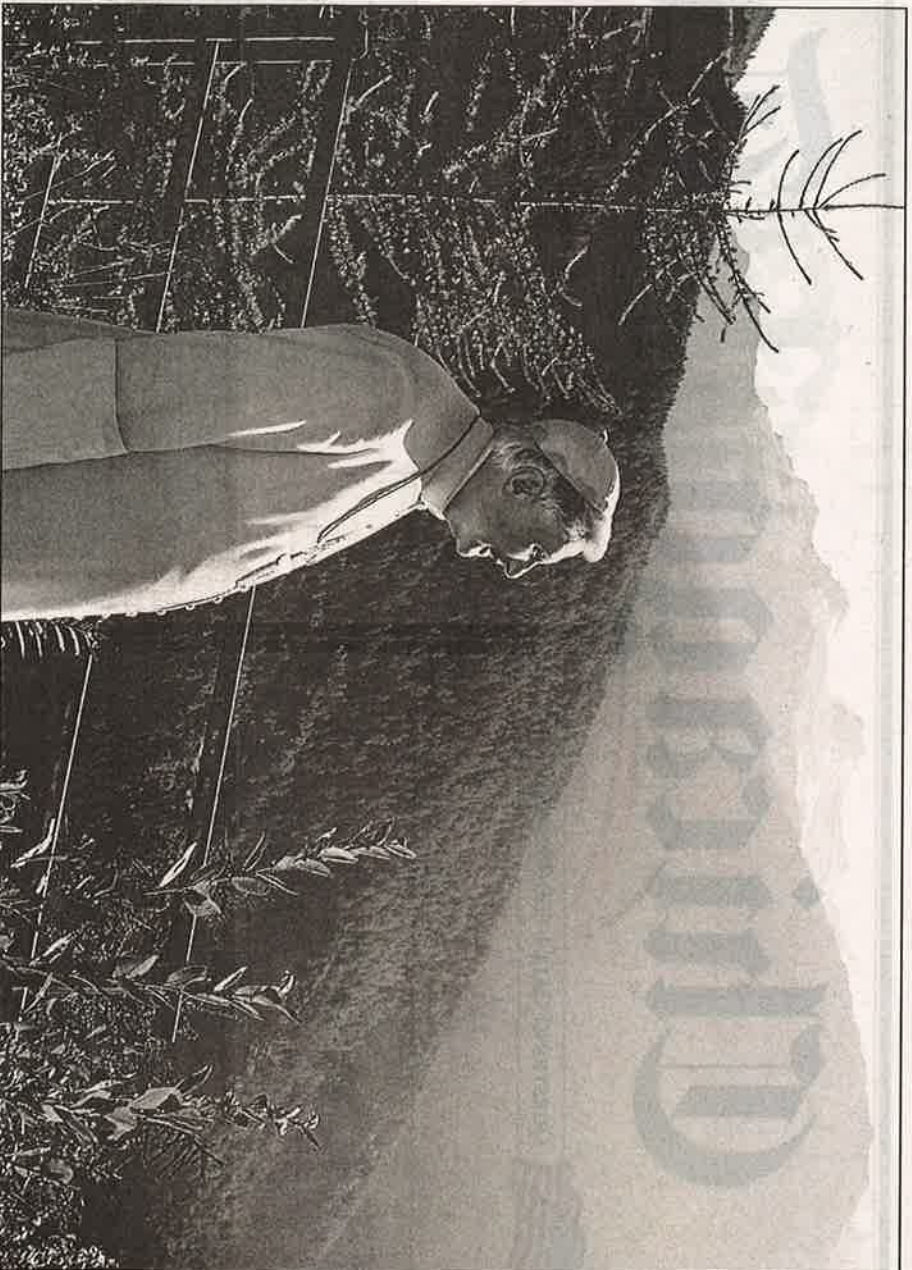


TRIBUNE VOICES



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As Pope Benedict XVI prepares to retire, some older folks in the area say the Catholic leader should stay physically active.

# Cafe customers offer divine advice for retiring Benedict



BARBARA BROTMAN

Pope Benedict XVI may be the first pope to resign in 600 years, but he is not the first person to step down from his job as he ages.

That's called retiring. As a retiree, the pontiff has plenty of company.

And if he wanted it, he would have no shortage of advice on the best way to approach retirement.

A few men at Mather's — More Than A Cafe, a Northwest Side neighborhood business geared toward people older than 50 that offers programming for senior citizens, were happy to offer their suggestions.

Some were worthy of a rim shot. "He can be a carpenter; he already has a miter," Faro Vitale said impishly.

But many were pragmatic, although probably not for a pope who last week said he plans to withdraw into seclusion and prayer.

Retirement can be enjoyable, the men agreed as they sat around a large table in the cafe.

"A lot of guys meet once a month at a coffee shop and BS like us guys," said Wayne Miller, 68. "You discuss whatever's going on or where your latest ache and pain is."

Several people suggested travel. But Mitchell Kasprzyk, who is 62 and semiretired, pointed out the impracticality of that for Benedict.

"That's the reason he retired, he couldn't travel," he said.

No matter. There were plenty of other suggestions for a retired pontiff.

"He's got to be physically active,"

Miller said.

"Keeping busy is very important," said Rich Lang, 74. "Saying 'busy, staying fit.'"

"He should do 'Laughter Yoga,'" said Sam DiMatteo, 78, who leads a Laughter Yoga class here. He gave a hearty demonstrative belly laugh.

"Laughter is good for you," he said. "If you take deep breaths and belly laughs, it creates endorphins."

"He should stay connected, keep up with current events," said Joe Sciana, 87. "Get a hobby, keep active, write a book."

He and DiMatteo are writing a children's book about a goose named Polly.

"The thing is keeping busy, mentally and physically," Sciana counseled. He has done woodworking and metal casting, he said, and for brain exercise, "I do crossword puzzles."

Some of the ideas were specific to Benedict's pre-retirement work. Bill Gessl, 82, who was born in Munich and has visited Benedict's birthplace in Marktl in Bavaria — he was showing photos — suggested a kind of papal spa retreat.

"He should take the popemobile, go down to the Red Sea and get his mobility back, and put that mud on his face," he said.

"Maybe he could redesign the calendar," said Vitale, 59, who still works, selling advertising promotional items. "Gregory did the last one."

"What I would suggest to him is that he start a multireligion organization that can meet once a month and talk about peace among religions and people," said DiMatteo.

"Second, he should volunteer. Maybe he can bring biscotti and cookies to the meetings. Volunteering is very important. It keeps your mind off things.

"Last thing — he should do Aquasize. It puts much less strain on your body and it's four times as beneficial."

And one more last thing: "He should get a woman companion."

A purely platonic companion, DiMatteo hastened to say.

"But you get a different view of life," he said. "When you're around all men, you only get one opinion. ... You need to get a woman's opinion. I enjoy getting a woman's point of view."

There is so much to do in retirement, the men said.

Through Mather's — More Than A Cafe, they said, there is a weekly dance with a disc jockey and an open mic for joke-telling, a bowling club and a full schedule of classes and fitness programs.

"They're not thinking about how old they are," said Wayland Woo, who described his own age as "let's say 85."

And in retirement, they said, they are free to dress any way they want.

"I very seldom wear long pants any more," said Buddy Cole, 65. "I wear shorts."

They speculated on what Benedict would wear after he steps down; Vatican watchers have wondered the same.

But he may find other freedoms, the men said, small ones that could be profound.

"As pope, you can't smile or crack jokes," said DiMatteo. "Now he can let himself be himself."

He would be welcome to be himself at More Than A Cafe, the guys agreed. In fact, they recommend it highly.

"They have a lot of exercises," said Cole.

"And the soup — the soup makes you very happy. And it's a different soup every day."

brotman@tribune.com