

# Embracing the Boundless Journey: The Lived Experience of Filipino Mensa Domini Sisters Towards Aging

Aris Kendell R. Bungabong, Jica Marie B. Gicaro

Nursing Department, St. Anthony's College, Antique, Philippines

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.916SCO0006>

Received: 19 April 2025; Accepted: 02 May 2025; Published: 29 May 2025

## ABSTRACT

The aging process is a significant journey in the life of the Mensa Domini Sisters in the Philippines who have dedicated a significant part of their lives to religion and spirituality. As they approach their later years, it becomes pertinent to understand their unique experiences and reflections on aging, especially considering their commitment to a life of spiritual dedication. This study aimed to delve into the lived experiences of the Mensa Domini Sisters as they grapple with the challenges of aging by adopting a phenomenological approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five Mensa Domini Sisters aged 60 and above. Data analysis using Gadamerian interpretive phenomenology revealed four core themes: (1) Transcending boundaries, highlighting adjustment to new roles while maintaining mission focus; (2) Unwavering faith, emphasizing faith as a source of strength and acceptance; (3) Tapestry of contentment, focusing on inner peace and fulfillment in their vocation; and (4) Lifelines of support, underscoring the importance of community and family connections. These themes encapsulate their resilient adaptation to aging, further accentuating their profound spiritual connections and unique perspectives on a life dedicated to service. The findings offer insights into the interplay of spirituality, community, and aging within this specific religious context.

**Keywords:** Aging, Mensa Domini Sisters, Phenomenology, Lived Experiences, Spirituality

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of aging has garnered significant attention due to the increasing percentage of older adults worldwide. The proportion of adults aged 60 and older is projected to rise from 11% in 2006 to 22% in 2050, reflecting the rapid aging of the world population (World Health Organization, 2022). By 2050, it is estimated that children under the age of five will outnumber the elderly population, and over the next 50 years, the world will be home to two billion elderly individuals (World Health Organization, 2022). In 2020, there were 9.2 million (8.5%) people aged 60 years or more in the Philippines, more than doubled from 2000 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2020). An official report from the Philippine Commission on Population and Development projects that people aged 60 years old and above will account for 14% by 2035 (Galvez, 2024).

Research has indicated that non-genetic and genetic factors mitigate the effects of human longevity and quality of aging (Passarino et al., 2016). Purposeful lifestyle choices, such as spirituality and maintaining social support systems, have been associated with behaviors that promote better health and a more successful aging process (McManus, 2020). Understanding the challenges faced by older individuals and their families can provide valuable insights into an aging society (Estebansari et al., 2020; Kizilkaya & Atug, 2023). Notably, studies have found that clergy and individuals who engage in passionate spirituality may experience relatively successful aging and enjoy longer periods of good health compared to others (Koenig, 2013).

The Missionary Sisters of the Lord's Table or the Mensa Domini Sisters trace their origins in Maasin, Iloilo when the first house of the Maasin Lay Institute was blessed on July 27, 1958. A group of three mature women was gathered together by Father Bernard Holthinrichs, under his guidance and direction. Their primary apostolates were the teaching of catechism, visiting homes, and helping in the charitable works of the parish. Father Cornelia De Wit took over the responsibilities of Father Holthinrichs in the following month. In 1960, the name of the group was changed to Mensa Domini.

Aging has increasingly been characterized as maximizing life expectancy while minimizing physical and mental disability (Martin et al., 2015). According to Ekwonye et al. (2023), there are cultural differences in the views about aging and a need to dispel negative stereotypes, as their study found that aging is about having good physical and mental health, having a meaningful life, good social connections, and a blessing. Exploring how certain cultural practices impact the process of growing older through studying Catholic nuns, a group that has been shown to age with grace and favorable outcomes for health, is valuable. In the present times, people strive to defy age, alleviate pain, and escape death. However, the key to longevity and contentment may lie within the walls of the convent, where the Mensa Domini Sisters follow a graceful way of life that has withstood the test of time. This perspective will shed light on the misconception that old age is synonymous with suffering and humiliation.

Although several qualitative studies have been conducted on the effects of aging (Kizilkaya & Atug, 2023; McManus, 2020; Oz et al., 2022), no local research has focused on the experiences of Mensa Domini Sisters in the Philippines concerning aging. Understanding their experiences will enable us to comprehend the existence of these phenomena and address the fears, issues, or needs they encounter in their old age. Furthermore, as the population continues to age, there will be an increased demand for supportive services, including holistic care, self-care, and general healthcare needs. This study bridges the gap created by the lack of research on the lives of Mensa Domini Sisters in the Philippines about aging and the insufficiency of supportive services. It is crucial to explore how the benefits of spiritual and religious practices influence the health, aging process, and holistic nursing care for older individuals.

### **Aim of the Study**

This study explored the lived experiences of Mensa Domini Sisters towards aging. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the Mensa Domini Sisters towards aging?
2. What insights and meanings can be derived from their experiences?
3. How will these meanings and insights be symbolically represented?

## **METHODS**

### **Study Design and Setting**

Gadamer hermeneutic phenomenology was used in this study to uncover the life world or human experience as it is lived by the Mensa Domini Sisters. Gadamer's ontological view was that researchers are deeply influenced by the traditions of their culture and therefore act on that way of being in the world (Converse, 2012). Therefore, researchers using Gadamer's philosophy need to identify their pre-understandings or prejudices on the topic of interest. It is recommended to remain open to hidden prejudices as unexamined prejudices may impact or limit the understanding of the study (Laverty, 2003). Gadamer believed that understanding and interpretation are bound together and interpretation is always an evolving process (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021).

### **Sample Procedure**

The target population was the Missionary Sisters of the Lord's Table in San Jose, Antique, Philippines. Purposive sampling was utilized to select five participants who met the following criteria: (a) cohort of Mensa Domini Sisters who are 60 years of age and older; (b) not bedridden; (c) have practiced religion, and spirituality over a long period of their lifetime; and (d) willing to share and express their lived experiences.

### **Data Collection**

Semi-structured interview questions were used. Face-to-face interviews were conducted lasting between 30 to 60 minutes using audio-tape recorders. All interviews were conducted using the Filipino dialect of Antique.

Specific interview questions focused on experiences, challenges, and meanings associated with aging within their vocation; a guide is available from the authors upon reasonable request.

## Data Analysis

As there were only five participants in this study, no qualitative software was used. The analysis followed Gadamerian interpretive phenomenology (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021) involving the following five steps:

- **Immersion:** All interviews were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly read to get a good understanding of the whole interview data.
- **Understanding:** Every sentence was investigated to identify the first order of the participant's constructs (create open coding using participant's words or phrases).
- **Abstraction:** The researcher begins second order by organizing open codes into categories and subcategories and groups into themes and sub-themes.
- **Synthesis and theme development:** Using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher begins to elaborate the themes to provide a deepened understanding of the meaning of the participants' voices.
- **Illumination and illustration of phenomena:** The themes are interpreted, discussed, and linked to the literature.

## Ethical Considerations

Permission from the Superior General of Mensa Domini in San Jose, Antique was also obtained to conduct the interviews. The Mensa Domini sisters were provided information about the study and obtained their written consent to participate and were assured of their privacy and that all information they shared will be kept confidential. They were also informed that they could accept or decline participation in the study. The time and place for the interview was also agreed upon.

## Establishing Trustworthiness

The four criteria (credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability) were used to establish rigor of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was maintained by ensuring voluntary participation and the use of audio-recorded interviews, which were transcribed and checked for accuracy by the research team. Procedures that enhanced dependability were careful documentation of the research procedures and methodology to allow an audit trail. Cross-checking of the generated codes and themes was also carried out among the study team to assure dependability. Critical reflection of the researchers including bias, values or preconceptions was abated. Transferability was enhanced by data saturation, as well as by the rich and vivid descriptions of the findings. Confirmability was enhanced by audio recording and verbatim transcriptions of interviews. Analyzed data were constantly discussed and checked by one independent person as a constant peer-review process to ensure the analyzed data were true findings and free from potential bias.

## RESULTS

### Participants

Five Mensa Domini Sisters participated in this study. They were all residing at the Mother House for nuns. The

participants consented to be described as follows: "Sister A" - 71 years old was diagnosed with brain aneurysm. "Sister B" - 84 years old was diagnosed with diabetes and eye problem. "Sister C" - 76 years old was diagnosed with diabetes. "Sister D" - 79 years old was diagnosed with hypertension and ovarian cyst. "Sister E" - 62 years old was diagnosed with breast cancer.

## Emerging Themes

Four themes emerged from the data analysis. These themes included: (1) Transcending boundaries; (2) Unwavering faith, (3) Tapestry of contentment, and (4) Lifelines of support.

### Theme 1: Transcending Boundaries

This theme describes how Mensa Domini Sisters strive to overcome the limitations of aging by adjusting to new roles while remaining committed to their mission. Despite the challenges they face, they continue to push beyond their physical and mental boundaries to carry out their work. The participant acknowledged that getting sick is a natural part of life and emphasized the importance of accepting it. The participant asserts that they will continue to live life to the fullest and conveyed that age should not dictate their abilities and passion to engage with the world and contribute to society. The essence of this theme was further echoed by three subthemes.

#### Subtheme 1.1 – Glimmers amid Shadows

Due to their health condition, a limitation they referred to as shadow impacted their ability to actively participate in their usual apostolate work. However, amidst this shadow, the participant found hope to continue making a meaningful impact to serve others, even in a different capacity.

*“I was glad that I was allowed to take on the assignment of facilitating the Alay Kapwa (Helping Others) Program. Despite not being actively involved in an apostolate, I am still able to provide support to those in need.”* (Sister A)

For them, wisdom comes with age, and recognize that having wisdom is valuable and needed within the congregation. The shadow presented the dynamic interplay between rest and continued service. They expressed their willingness to continue serving, emphasizing their desire to help others and support their fellow sisters. They acknowledged the importance of self-care and recognizing personal limitations, while also valuing the wisdom and experience that aging brings.

*“We are still climbing the mountain, but the assignments are being considered with our age in mind. For instance, in my 60s, the council would deem it somewhat impossible, but the other sisters who are under 60 and 70 years old will continue their missions. We do not allow our age to hamper us.”* (Sister E)

#### Subtheme 1.2 – Managing Anticipations

They knew that their contributions were highly regarded and sought after, even in a different capacity. This presented a contrast between their anticipation of rest and the reality of their ongoing involvement. They were able to manage their expectations and adapt their plans based on the community's needs and requests.

*“I also want to rest, but they said that we are still needed. I thought I could rest; that is to lessen my responsibilities but they still want me to get involved in our work.”* (Sister D)

The participants acknowledged their aging process but emphasized that they continue to make themselves available to help their fellow sisters. They were asked to guide various tasks within the parish or school. They understand that their role may need to evolve as they age but they are prepared to adapt and find alternative ways to serve.

*“I continue to be available to the sisters in whatever they need, they ask us what to do in the parish or school in the line of catechist and even though I’m getting older it seems like my guts to work for the glory of God are there still.”* (Sister B)

---

### Subtheme 1.3 – Embracing Change

They felt that their strength was diminishing, contrasting it with their previous state of being enthusiastic and energetic. They expressed that their physical limitations represent the shadows of aging, where the natural decline in strength and energy becomes evident. However, the participant emphasized the importance of accepting this reality as an inevitable part of life.

*“My strength is waning; it's not like before, when you were so enthusiastic and energetic. The only thing about me is that I have to accept it; that's part of our lives that I have to slow down because I'm aging.”* (Sister D)

They understand that these changes are a natural part of the human experience and not to shy away from acknowledging or accepting them. They were open to embracing the physical changes that occur as they grow older and adapt to the realities of aging, including the presence of pain in their bodies. By embracing change, they found meaning in promoting a positive and accepting attitude towards the transformative aspects of aging.

*“Pain is normal; there is no person who is not experiencing pain. It's normal for me to experience pain or changes in the body.”* (Sister B)

### Theme 2: Unwavering Faith

This theme highlights the significance of the Mensa Domini Sisters' faith as a guiding force in their lives. Even during the darkest moments, their faith provides them with strength and illumination. The participants acknowledged that in their journey of aging, they entrusted themselves to the divine will, expressing their willingness to follow whatever path God has destined for them. They wholeheartedly embraced the unknown, confident that their faith would sustain them through any circumstances they encountered. This unwavering faith empowers them to persist and continue their mission, regardless of the challenges or obstacles that they may face. The essence of this theme is further echoed by its three subthemes.

#### Subtheme 2.1 – Embracing Mortality Gracefully

The participants embraced mortality gracefully as they believed Jesus sacrificed his life for the assurance of eternal life. They relied on God's providence and grace, suggesting that by doing so, they realized that they don't truly own their lives. It signified the participant's acceptance of the transient nature of life. By relying on God's providence and grace, they accepted that their time on Earth is limited and ultimately controlled by a higher power. This understanding allowed them to approach their mortality with grace and humility and allowed them to navigate the challenges and uncertainties of aging with a sense of peace and contentment.

*“You rely more on God's providence; you rely more on God's grace so in the end you can just say that we don't own it.”* (Sister E).

The participant emphasized the importance of readiness and acceptance when it comes to whatever circumstances life brings. They highlighted the need to strengthen one's faith in God because only God knows what the future holds. By emphasizing the need to be ready and accepting whatever comes, they acknowledged the transitory nature of existence and the importance of embracing it with grace. Embracing mortality gracefully involves a deepening of faith in God. It showed their understanding that God holds the ultimate knowledge of what will happen in their lives, including the finality of death. By strengthening their faith, they aligned themselves with a sense of trust and surrender to God's plan, finding solace and guidance in God's wisdom.

*“Whatever comes into our lives, we must be ready to accept it. And we should strengthen our faith in God. Because only God knows what is going to happen in our lives.”* (Sister B)



---

## Subtheme 2.2 – Embracing Suffering

The participants embraced suffering the way Jesus showed love. They emphasized that suffering is a grace from God and should not be seen as a punishment. Rather than viewing suffering as a negative or punitive aspect, the participants believe that suffering is an inherent part of the human experience and has the power to shape and deepen one's spiritual journey. Thus, it allowed for a transformative outlook that transcends the mere physical or emotional hardships associated with growing older.

*“It’s really the Grace of God, because suffering is a grace from God. It is a gift; suffering is not having difficulties while getting older, that is not like God’s punishment for you.”* (Sister A)

They asserted that it is inevitable to encounter hardships and that running away from them is not a viable solution. They emphasized that encountering bad things is an inherent part of life, the inevitability of suffering, especially in the context of aging. They emphasized the need to accept these challenges and the willingness to confront and embrace the challenges. They shared that accepting suffering is essential for their spiritual and personal growth to face the realities of aging head-on. By accepting the presence of suffering, they find meaning, resilience, and inner strength in the face of hardships.

*“Just accept that we have to experience bad things, we can’t avoid those pains, we cannot run away from it because it is already there.”* (Sister B)

## Subtheme 2.3 – Deepening Spiritual Connections

They perceive their difficulties as a means for God to purify their life. This showed the participant's willingness to engage in a heartfelt conversation with the divine. It reflected their openness and vulnerability as they sought understanding and meaning in the face of adversity. By expressing their thoughts and emotions, the participants demonstrated a profound connection and reliance on their faith. Using deepening spiritual connection involves recognizing God's transformative power and purpose in difficult circumstances. They conveyed a sense of trust in God's plan, believing that positive change in their life could draw them closer to God as they embrace the process of aging.

*“Lord, why did this happen to me? Although it seems like I was reconciled, maybe Lord you want to, you want to purify my life, God still wants to change me and draw me closer to him, and to grow my trust in him--our faith, hope, and love.”* (Sister C)

They reported personal experiences during a moment of prayer and solitude and recounted feeling like dreaming of the God's presence. They related how the sisters, through their lifelong devotion to religion and spirituality, cultivate a profound connection with the divine. In their journey of aging, their spiritual experiences become more heightened and meaningful and how their spiritual beliefs and practices serve as a source of strength, comfort, and resilience throughout their aging process.

*“I’m alone in the room, continually praying, when all of a sudden I felt as though I’m dreaming, and I woke up because it felt like a shadow had passed over me on top of my head and covered me. I believe that it was God who passed me. I believe that it was God Himself who made me feel that he would not desert me.”* (Sister A)

## Theme 3: Tapestry of Contentment

The third theme emphasized the Mensa Domini Sisters' ability to find inner peace, serenity, and contentment as they age. They have deepened their spiritual connections and have come to a place of acceptance and gratitude for the life they have chosen as missionary sisters. Their contentment is rooted in their faith and their ability to appreciate each day as a new opportunity to thank God. Through their diverse experiences, they created a rich and fulfilling journey of aging, weaving together different aspects of their lives to find fulfillment and purpose. The essence of this theme is further echoed by two subthemes.

### Subtheme 3.1 – Inner Serenity

The participants expressed that they have reached a state of satisfaction and peace. They embraced each day as a new opportunity for gratitude and acknowledged the role of God in their journey. They have let go of personal aspirations and desires, recognizing that they have already attained the fulfillment of their life as missionary sisters. This showed a deep sense of acceptance and contentment with their chosen path and the stage of life they are currently in. By embracing the present and focusing on gratitude, they were able to cultivate a state of peace and harmony within themselves.

*“For me, I do not aspire for anything because I have reached the fulfillment of life as a missionary [sister], this is where I am getting old. Every day is a new day for me, it's a new life for me, it's a new day of thanking the Lord.”* (Sister D)

The participant highlighted the importance of living a simple life and finding contentment with what the congregation can provide. They acknowledged that simplicity entails accepting and being contented with what is available in the congregation. They showed an attitude of acceptance, letting go of excessive wants or expectations, and instead appreciating the simplicity and limitations of their current situation. By understanding that inner serenity can be found in living a simple life, they navigated the challenges of aging with grace and tranquility, not seeking excess or external validation but focusing on the essentials of what truly matters.

*“Living just simple [life], when we say simple life, accept what is just there. Just be contented of what the congregation can offer.”* (Sister E)

### Subtheme 3.2 – Divine Calling

They acknowledged that both choices come with their own set of challenges and difficulties: getting married or becoming a missionary sister. By weighing the pros and cons of each option, the participants demonstrated a thoughtful evaluation of their life choices. They have taken the time to consider the alternatives and the potential regrets associated with them. They have come to terms with the fact that challenges and difficulties are inherent in any life choice, and regrets can be found in any path.

*“I did weigh which is better in life: getting married or becoming a missionary sister. The others who get married also have problems. I think about myself too. Sometimes we have prayers with meditation where I ponder our past.”* (Sister E)

The participant reflected on the possibility of a different life path, specifically considering the option of marriage. However, they asserted that they would never be as happy in life as they are now. They indicated a deep sense of contentment and fulfillment in their current vocation as missionary sisters. It reflected their ability to find joy and fulfillment in their chosen vocation, regardless of the alternative paths they could have taken.

*“What if I got married, maybe my life would be different now. I will never be as happy in life as I am now. But then I said before that I don't want to be a missionary sister and I want to get married. But God has a different plan for me. I have no regrets.”* (Sister D)

### Theme 4: Lifelines of Support

The fourth theme underscores the importance of support networks for the Mensa Domini Sisters. The assistance, encouragement, and companionship they receive from their support networks enable them to navigate the challenges and changes that come with aging. They observe that even small acts of sharing and support have a way of coming back to them multiplied. They shared that the support and kindness from their community created a network of lifelines that sustain them through the challenges of aging. They also relied on each other as pillars of strength. They found solace and encouragement in the shared understanding and collaboration, knowing that they were not alone in their journey. These lifelines of support provide emotional,

spiritual, and practical assistance, enabling them to navigate the complexities of aging with resilience and grace. The essence of this theme is further echoed by its two subthemes.

#### **Subtheme 4.1 – Love of Family**

The familial relationships with their siblings and extended family members bring a sense of warmth and support to their lives, reminding them of the enduring bonds of love and care. They also highlighted their friendships with fellow Catechists, expressing gratitude for the companionship they provide. Their friends understand and share their spiritual journey, and their visits and conversations bring comfort and a sense of connection. It also emphasized the importance of relationships and human connection in their well-being. The presence of siblings, nieces/nephews, and friends, particularly those who share similar spiritual and vocational backgrounds, plays a vital role in their emotional and social support network. These interpersonal connections offer opportunities for shared experiences, conversations, and companionship reducing feelings of loneliness or isolation that can sometimes accompany the aging process.

*“My siblings and nieces/nephews, sometimes they visit here. And my friends, I also have many friends who are Catechists, it's okay, they also come here to visit and talk.”* (Sister C)

The participants expressed their deep gratitude for the support and love they received from their family both emotionally and financially. Their visits provide companionship, ensuring their well-being, and extending assistance and care when they are unwell. The strong bond of love and support within their family created a nurturing and secure environment for them. Their presence and involvement provided them with a sense of belonging, comfort, and emotional stability.

*“My family is very supportive because they love me, so their support is also all out. They visit [me], and they also help me financially. And if I am sick, they also help me.”* (Sister E)

#### **Subtheme 4.2 – Companionship and Comradeship**

The participants described the supportive community they belong to, where each elderly member has a designated health worker. This arrangement ensured that the elderly sisters received proper care and attention, including the management of medications and overall health needs. The congregation takes responsibility for ensuring that all aspects of their well-being are taken care of. The presence of dedicated health workers demonstrated the commitment of the congregation to the welfare of its elderly sisters. These health workers serve as companions, caregivers, and advocates for the elderly sisters, ensuring their health and well-being are monitored and attended to.

*“In our community, if you have to visit, every elderly sister has a health worker. All medicines and everything is being taken care of by the congregation.”* (Sister E)

They revealed a strong sense of unity and support that exists among the Mensa Domini Sisters by sharing financial support with those having difficulties as they age. By contributing to the foundation fund, they played a role in supporting the collective goals and initiatives of their community. This fund helps finance various projects, activities, and infrastructure that benefit all the missionary sisters. This act of generosity and solidarity exemplifies the bond and care that exist within their community.

*“Those money, I am sharing it to my foundation fund, to the sick fund, and our cooperative. Sometimes if there is extra money, I will share that with the sisters in their foundation, because I know that there are sisters whose fund is completely empty.”* (Sister A)

## **DISCUSSION**

From the analyzed results, the four themes represent the dynamic experiences of Mensa Domini Sisters as they embrace the journey of aging. Through their resilience, faith, contentment, and support, they exemplify the art of finding purpose and meaning in the transformative process of healthy aging.



---

## Transcending Boundaries

The impact of aging on physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being could affect their abilities to continue their work and how this has impacted them over time. As the Mensa Domini Sisters age, they may face physical and emotional challenges, prompting them to consider resting or slowing down their responsibilities. However, they overcome the limitations of aging by adjusting to new roles while remaining committed to their mission. They continue to push beyond their physical and mental boundaries to carry out their work with the congregation. Their determination to continue their work allows them to transcend these physical boundaries. They adapt their approaches, find alternative ways to serve, and embrace the changes in their capabilities while continuing to contribute to their missions. Spiritual practices help elders feel more connected to their communities and maintain greater physical health as they age and their bodies degenerate (Ilmi et al., 2024). Senior citizens can maintain more active roles in society by adopting a healthy lifestyle that includes regular and appropriate physical activity, especially in community-based health promotion projects (Moudjahid & Abdarrazak, 2019). They recognize that their strength may decline, and they may experience physical discomfort. Nonetheless, they embrace these changes as part of the natural progression of life. They find moments of inspiration and optimism even amidst the challenges they faced. Their dedication to their mission shines through as they continue to contribute, albeit in different ways. The perception of significance among older adults as they age encompasses multiple dimensions, with maintaining mental alertness and engagement being identified as essential factors. These are followed by elements related to self-determination, adaptive abilities, and overall well-being, encompassing both physical and psychological aspects (Teater & Chonody, 2020).

## Unwavering Faith

Mensa Domini Sisters' faith is a guiding force in their lives. Even during the darkest moments, their faith provides them with strength and illumination. Their deeply held beliefs sustain them and help them overcome the trials they encounter along their journey. This was also evident in the research study by Corwin (2012), that prayer becomes an instrument of interaction into particular perspectives and practices towards aging, as well as an opportunity for the sisters to gain social support from one another and God. The Mensa Domini Sisters' faith served as a foundation and source of strength as they navigated the physical and psychological changes that come with growing older. They embrace their experiences, even in the face of challenges and limitations, with a deep trust in God's providence. Prayer has been linked to happiness and emotions of overall well-being, and it may also affect coping and stress (Pandya, 2021). It contributes to their overall sense of happiness and well-being, as prayer fosters a deep connection with their spirituality and a sense of purpose in their mission. Through prayer, they can find solace, peace, and renewed energy, enabling them to embrace the aging process with grace. In the face of challenges, they seek knowledge and meaning, reflecting their perception of their difficulties along with their openness and vulnerability. The participants revealed a deep connection and reliance on their faith, as well as hope and love, by addressing the Lord and expressing their thoughts and emotions. A finding similarly shared with Cacho and Del Castillo (2022) shows how the three virtues of faith, hope, and love served as the lens through which lessons about living a life for life were viewed. With the help of beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors that give suffering purpose and make it more bearable, spiritual-religious coping seeks to lessen the emotional anguish brought on by unfavorable life events, such as losses or changes (Saad & de Medeiros, 2012). From the perspective of the Mensa Domini Sisters, faith encompasses more than simply believing in God. It also encompasses their unwavering trust and confidence in their healthcare providers. This trust and confidence provide them with a sense of comfort and inner peace, especially during times when their illness becomes overwhelming. By prioritizing the growth of their faith, they enhance their ability to endure suffering and agony in light of the uncertainties that lie ahead, making their experiences more bearable. As Oz et al (2022) pointed out, one of the most critical needs of old age is spiritual needs. Spiritual needs can influence older people's decisions about their health, illness, and quality of life. This was also reported by Cowlishaw et al (2013), who indicated the effect of spirituality on life satisfaction over time. They suggested that spirituality may influence older adults' experience and perception of life events, leading to a more positive appraisal of these events. Mensa Domini Sisters who have dedicated their lives to religious service and spiritual devotion, provide a unique perspective on how faith and spirituality can influence the aging process. Their commitment to a religious vocation often involves a lifetime of prayer, contemplation,

and service to others, which can significantly impact their experiences of aging. Additionally, research has explored how the sisters' faith shapes their attitudes toward aging and mortality. Feeling connected to a higher power, others, and life serves as a valuable approach to upholding a positive outlook on one's life, even in the face of potential adversities or negative situations (Lim & Putnam, 2010). As the sisters embrace the journey of aging, their unwavering faith in God's guidance and care acts as a constant source of guidance and strength for the missionary sisters. Their deep spiritual connections bring them comfort and profound inner peace, allowing them to embrace each challenge with gratitude and view every day as a precious gift.

### **Tapestry of Contentment**

This study shows the interconnectedness of various experiences that contribute to the missionary sisters of the Lord's Table's sense of contentment. Through their diverse experiences, they create a rich and fulfilling journey of aging, weaving together different aspects of their lives to find fulfillment and purpose. The Mensa Domini Sisters' ability to find contentment and peace within themselves, regardless of external circumstances or physical limitations. They express a sense of fulfillment in their lives as missionaries, appreciating each day as a new opportunity for gratitude and thanksgiving. Their focus on living a simple life and being content with what the congregation can offer reflects their inner serenity and detachment from material desires. This view of contentment is shared by Cordaro et al. (2016), when they say that the feeling of completion in life gives rise to the sensation of contentment. Furthermore, greater levels of happiness predicted lower levels of materialism and greed. Moreover, it is crucial to continuously prioritize the improvement and cultivation of a genuine concern for the well-being of individuals. This is typically reflected in their feelings of satisfaction, happiness, and zest for life, aligning with suggestions by Moudjahid and Abdarrazak (2019). Through the Mensa Domini Sisters' deepened spiritual connection and inner serenity, they exemplify the beauty of finding fulfillment and peace within oneself, independent of external circumstances. Their contentment serves as an inspiration and a reminder of the importance of cultivating a strong spiritual foundation and finding joy in the present moment. The Mensa Domini Sisters find deep satisfaction in their life accomplishments and the choices they have made, particularly in dedicating themselves to God and the community for the remainder of their lives. They feel a sense of fulfillment, knowing that they have pursued a path aligned with their faith and commitment to serving others. They accept their overall well-being as they entrusted it to God and what the congregation can offer to them. This common situation of level of contentment aligns with findings from a study by Pandya (2021), which shows that we consider two factors when determining our overall level of contentment with life: our general level of well-being and the degree to which our goals have been met.

### **Lifelines of Support**

This study underscores the importance of support networks for the Mensa Domini Sisters. The assistance, encouragement, and companionship they receive from their support networks enable them to navigate the challenges and changes that come with aging. These networks play a crucial role in their overall well-being and resilience. This was also evident in research done by Krause and Hayward (2014), which shows that those who attended church more often were likely to obtain a support system linked to a feeling of belonging that encouraged a positive state of health. The Sisters continue to receive support and maintain communication with their families and friends which play a crucial role in helping them navigate the challenges associated with aging. This was also seen in the study by Forlenza and Vallada (2018) which shows that both families and healthcare providers foster older people's spiritual growth. They also share to the community the things they have, because they believe that the support they receive from others should also be shared with other people. In this way, they can get the strength to continue their mission despite the challenges they encounter as they age. They demonstrated a spirit of generosity and sharing their blessings with the community reflecting their selflessness. This aligns with research by Graham and Haidt (2010), which shows that there is a significance for individuals engaged in community work, as shared religious beliefs and practices can serve as a unifying force that fosters cooperation within communities. The knowledge that some people and services genuinely care about their well-being strengthens their resolve and fosters a sense of acceptance toward the inevitable passage of time (Campbell et al., 2021). The Sisters draw strength from the knowledge that they are not alone in their journey and that they can lean on their loved ones during difficult moments.

---

## Thematic Embodiment

The experiences of Mensa Domini Sisters towards aging, as captured in the themes, can be symbolically represented as analogous to a boat's journey through time. This representation addresses the third research question concerning the symbolic interpretation of their experiences. As they navigate the path of aging, their experiences unfold and mature gracefully, much like the passage of time shaping a vessel. Through the years, they have encountered various situations (waters) and acquired wisdom (navigational skill) that enriches their journey. These experiences encompass both the joys (calm seas) and challenges (storms) that come with aging. While the reality of time running out (reaching the shore) may loom over them, the Mensa Domini Sisters have embraced a mindset (a sturdy boat guided by faith) that allowed them to live their lives with grace and purpose, navigating their final voyage with acceptance and spiritual depth.

## Limitations Of the Study

The findings are based on the lived experiences of five Mensa Domini Sisters from a single convent in San Jose,

Antique. Therefore, the findings of this phenomenological study cannot be readily generalized as it was restricted to this specific setting and small sample size. Drawing from the findings of this study, the researchers suggest future studies consider including contemplative nuns or involving Mensa Domini Sisters' family members, friends, and caregivers to gain a deeper and broader understanding and appreciation of their lived experiences. This particular focus would allow for a compelling comparison to the current study, taking into account the diverse aspects of their lives.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The themes that emerged represent the dynamic experiences of Mensa Domini Sisters as they embrace the journey of aging. It highlighted how their unwavering faith in God's guidance and providence served as a guiding light, providing them with strength and inner serenity. As the inevitability of mortality looms, their steadfast belief in an eternal life beyond offers a unique outlook on life and death. This study served as a foundation for further exploration of the intersection between aging, spirituality, and well-being.

The findings of this study shed light on the multifaceted aspects of Mensa Domini Sisters' journey of aging. In order to ensure the proper support for Mensa Domini Sisters and their healthy development in these constantly shifting conditions brought on by aging, comprehensive healthcare services should be prepared to cater to the specific needs of aging Sisters. This includes regular medical check-ups, specialized geriatric care, and access to healthcare professionals who understand the unique challenges and requirements of Mensa Domini Sisters. The experiences of Mensa Domini Sisters in the Philippines could inspire future researchers to conduct more in-depth investigations, expanding the knowledge base on aging within religious communities. The study could also guide future research in designing interventions and programs that promote successful aging, spiritual well-being, and enhanced quality of life for elderly individuals in various religious contexts.

## Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are not publicly available due to participant confidentiality restrictions but may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## REFERENCES

1. Alsaigh, R., & Coyne, I. (2021). Doing a hermeneutic phenomenology research underpinned by Gadamer's philosophy: A framework to facilitate data analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211047820>
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

3. Cacho, R. G., & Del Castillo, F. (2022). God's benevolent love in the time of COVID-19 pandemic: Articulations and experiences of select Filipino youth. *Religions*, 13(2), 162. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020162>
4. Campbell, M., Stewart, T., Brunkert, T., Campbell-Enns, H., Gruneir, A., Halas, G., Hoben, M., Scott, E., Wagg, A., & Doupe, M. (2021). Prioritizing supports and services to help older adults age in place: A Delphi study comparing the perspectives of family/friend care partners and healthcare stakeholders. *PloS one*, 16(11), e0259387. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0259387>
5. Converse M. (2012). Philosophy of phenomenology: How understanding aids research. *Nurse Researcher*, 20(1), 28–32. <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2012.09.20.1.28.c9305>
6. Corwin, A. I. (2012). Changing God, Changing Bodies: The Impact of New Prayer Practices on Elderly Catholic Nuns' Embodied Experience. *Ethos*, 40(4), 390-410. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1352.2012.01267.x>
7. Cordaro, D. T., Brackett, M., Glass, L., & Anderson, C. L. (2016). Contentment: Perceived completeness across cultures and traditions. *Review of General Psychology*, 20(3), 221–235. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000082>
8. Cowlshaw, S., Niele, S., Teshuva, K., Browning, C., & Kendig, H. (2013). Older adults' spirituality and life satisfaction: A longitudinal test of social support and sense of coherence as mediating mechanisms. *Ageing & Society*, 33(7), 1243-1262. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X12000633>
9. Ekwonye, A. U., Malek, A., Farah, I., Nguyen, S., Chonyi, T., Ponce-Diaz, V., & Hearst, M. (2023). "Aging is beautiful and graceful:" Exploring college students' perceptions of aging, older adults, and future older selves. *Educational gerontology*, 49(9), 803–816. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03601277.2022.2164642>
10. Estebsari, F., Dastoorpoor, M., Khalifehkandi, Z. R., Nouri, A., Mostafaei, D., Hosseini, M., Esmaeili, R., & Aghababaeian, H. (2020). The Concept of Successful Aging: A Review Article. *Current aging science*, 13(1), 4–10. <https://doi.org/10.2174/1874609812666191023130117>
11. Forlenza, O. V., & Vallada, H. (2018). Spirituality, health and well-being in the elderly. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 30(12), 1741-1742. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1041610218001874>
12. Galvez, D. (2024, January 22). Philippines to have 'aging population' between 2030 and 2035 – Popcom. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1893450/philippines-to-have-aging-population-between-2030-and-2035-popcom>
13. Graham, J., & Haidt, J. (2010). Beyond beliefs: religion binds individuals into moral communities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 14(1), 140-150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868309353415>
14. Ilmi, A. A., McKenna, L., Murphy, M., & Kadar, K. (2024). Spiritual care for people living in the community: A scoping review. *Contemporary Nurse*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10376178.2024.2310260>
15. Kizilkaya, M., & Atug, M. (2023). Views of family members who take care of an elderly person they live with in ageism, spirituality and death in Turkey: A qualitative study. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 62(5), 3095-3109. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-023-01873-0>
16. Koenig, H. G. (2013). Religion and spirituality in coping with acute and chronic illness. In K. I. Pargament, A. Mahoney, & E. P. Shafranske (Eds.), *APA Handbook of psychology, religion and spirituality: Vol. 2. An applied psychology of religion and spirituality* (pp. 275-295). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14046-014>
17. Krause, N., & Hayward, R. D. (2014). Religious involvement, practical wisdom, and self-rated health. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 26(4), 540-558. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0898264214524437>
18. Lavery, S. M. (2003). Hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology: A comparison of historical and methodological considerations. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 2(3), 21-35. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690300200303>
19. Lim, C., & Putnam, R. D. (2010). Religion, social networks, and life satisfaction. *American Sociological Review*, 75(6), 914-933. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122410386686>
20. Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Establishing trustworthiness. In *Naturalistic Inquiry* (pp. 289–331). Sage Publications.
21. Martin, P., Kelly, N., Kahana, B., Willcox, B. J., Willcox, D. C., & Poon, L. W. (2015). Defining successful aging: a tangible or elusive concept? *The Gerontologist*, 55(1), 14-25. <https://doi.org/10.1093/geront/gnu044>



22. McManus, D. (2020). A phenomenological study of the lived experience of Roman Catholic Sisters and successful aging. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 38(4), 350-361. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0898010120913174>
23. Moudjahid, A., & Abdarrazak, B. (2019). Psychology of Quality of Life and Its Relation to Psychology. *International Journal of Inspiration & Resilience Economy*, 3(2), 58-63. <https://doi.org/10.5923/j.ijire.20190302.04>
24. Oz, Y. C., Duran, S., & Dogan, K. (2022). The meaning and role of spirituality for older adults: A qualitative study. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 61(6), 4490-4504. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-021-01258-x>
25. Pandya, S. P. (2021). Meditation program mitigates loneliness and promotes wellbeing, life satisfaction and contentment among retired older adults: a two-year follow-up study in four South Asian cities. *Aging & Mental Health*, 25(2), 286-298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13607863.2019.1691143>
26. Passarino, G., De Rango, F., & Montesanto, A. (2016). Human longevity: Genetics or lifestyle? It takes two to tango. *Immunity & Ageing*, 13, 12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12979-016-0066-z>
27. Philippine Statistics Authority. (2021, July 7). Age and sex distribution in the Philippine population (2020 Census of Population and Housing). <https://psa.gov.ph/content/age-and-sex-distribution-philippine-population-2020-census-population-and-housing>
28. Saad, M., & de Medeiros, R. (2012). Spiritual-religious coping – health services empowering patients' resources. In M. Saad & R. de Medeiros (Eds.), *Complementary therapies for the contemporary healthcare* (pp. 127-144). Intech Open. <https://doi.org/10.5772/50443>
29. Teater, B., & Chonody, J. (2020). Reconsidering How Successful Aging is Defined: Perspectives from community-dwelling aging adults. *Advances in Social Work*, 20(3), 684-708. <https://doi.org/10.18060/24218>
30. World Health Organization. (2022, October 1). Ageing and health. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>