

Older Adult Resources for Celebrating Older Adult Sunday

Compiled and Edited by
Rev. Dr. Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., DMin
Director, Center on Aging & Older Adult Ministries
GBOD – The United Methodist Church
PO Box 340003
Nashville, TN 37203-0003
Telephone: 615-340-7173
Fax: 615-340-7071
Email: rgentzler@gbod.org

The material in this resource will provide you with information on how your local congregation can celebrate Older Adult Sunday.

Older Adult Recognition Worship Service Suggestions

by Delia Halverson

As you lay the groundwork for a worship service to celebrate Older Adult Sunday, involve older persons in the planning and leadership of the service. If you have a Sunday school class that is primarily made up of older persons, you may want to meet with them for informal discussion. Here are some thoughts that you might consider in your planning. These are also statements that might be incorporated into prayers, sermons, or a litany for the service itself.

We recognize that:

- God created the whole of creation, with the aging process as part of each life form. And God saw that it was good.
- The aging process involves the whole life span, from birth to death. The first grader is more aged than the toddler.
- God's unconditional love is a part of the whole of life, from birth to death, and is not dependent on society's standards of worthiness and usefulness.
- The church, as Christ's body in the world, is God's hands and feet, to bring about justice for all.

We celebrate!

- In the past 100 years, our life expectancy in the United States has increased by about 27 years.
- We not only live longer, but we are more active in our later years.
- Older persons today enjoy learning and continue to grow in their knowledge and spirituality. Although our physical bodies decline, our spiritual selves will mature.
- Christ's death sets an example of how suffering can be reconciling, even though it is painful.
- The experiences of older persons bring wisdom and insight to our congregation. There is joy in the harvest of a life-lived spiritual treasure.
- There are opportunities for all generations within our church to worship, work, and play together.
- Mature years bring a special opportunity to redefine our goals.

We express our concern that:

- Many older persons have incomes below a subsistence poverty level.
- Many have no or very poor medical coverage, paying less than 50% of their medical needs.
- Older persons sometimes must be dependent on others for life's necessities.
- Lifestyles of today often result in older persons having to live a distance from other family members.

We will make efforts to:

- Elect government officials and advocate policies that promote sharing with those who are less fortunate.
- Support endeavors to improve health, education, medical, and housing needs for the older adults, as well as opportunities for volunteer work and employment.
- See that our church is welcoming to all ages.

Our Social Creed:

We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, and people with disabilities; to improvement of the quality of life; and to the rights and dignity of all people.

-- From Our Social Creed, *The Book of Resolutions 2004*, page 66.

Scripture and Sermon Ideas:

- Genesis 1:26-31; 6:3 We were created in the image of God, and God created the aging process.
- Genesis 18: 1-8; 21:1-7 Older persons are of worth to God.
- Ex. 20:12; Job 12:12; and Proverbs 16:31; 20:29; 23:22 Celebrate the wisdom of mature years.
- Psalm 71 Responsibility of older people.
- Psalm 92:14; Isaiah 46:4 God gives us strength for our mission.
- Micah 6:6-8 What God requires of people of all ages
- Zechariah 8 Thank God for the diversity of ages.
- Luke 2:22-38 Expectation of joy in later years.
- Luke 5:36-39 The old is good.
- John 3:1-8 Nicodemus (the elder pharisee) visits Jesus
- Hebrews 11:8-16 Faith of Abraham and Sarah and God's blessing

Suggested Hymns: (The United Methodist Hymnal)

- *O For a Thousand Tongues* #57 *Great Is Thy Faithfulness* #140
- *On Eagle Wings* #143 *Jesus Loves Me* #191
- *My Hope is Built* #368 *Blessed Assurance* #369
- *I Am Thine, O Lord* #419 *Be Thou My Vision* #451
- *Trust and obey* #467 *Sweet Hour of Prayer* #496
- *The Old Rugged Cross* #504 *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* #526
- *Are You Able?* #530 *Blest Be the Tie That Binds* #557

Suggested African-American Hymns: (The United Methodist Hymnal)

- There Is a Balm in Gilead* #375 *Lord, I Want to be a Christian* #402
- Every Time I Feel the Spirit* #404 *Come Out the Wilderness* #416
- Stand By Me* #512 *I Want Jesus to Walk with Me* #521
- Leave It There* #522 *Let Us Break Bread Together* #618

Suggested Asian American Hymns: (The United Methodist Hymnal)

- God Created Heaven and Earth* #151 *Come Back Quickly to the Lord* #343
- Come, All of You* #350 *Dear Lord, Lead Me Day by Day* #411
- Lonely the Boat* #476 *Rise to Greet the Sun* #678

Suggested Hispanic Hymns: (The United Methodist Hymnal)

- Cantemos al Señor* #149 *Come, Christians, Join to Sing* #158
- En el Frio Invernal* #233 *Cristo Vive* #313
- Tú Has Venido a la Orilla* #344 *Pues Si Vivimos* #356

Suggested Native American Sources: (The United Methodist Hymnal)

- Many and Great, O God* #148 *'Twas in the Moon of Wintertime* #244
- Daw-Kee, Aim Saw-Tsi-Taw* #330 *Amazing Grace* #378

Prayers:

- ***Serenity Prayer*** - # 459 The United Methodist Hymnal
- ***Prayer to the Holy Spirit*** - #329 The United Methodist Hymnal
- ***All Saints*** - #713 The United Methodist Hymnal
- ***The Prayer of Saint Francis*** - #481 The United Methodist Hymnal

A Litany:

Leader: As we gather today, we celebrate the great diversity among our church family.

Children and Youth: We children and youth have excitement over life. But we must look to adults for help in our areas of inexperience.

All Adults: We were all children once. That is something, which every one of us has in common. We may seem to forget, but we ask you to help us remember.

Older Adults: Change comes so fast today that we hardly become adjusted to one change before another comes along. Much has changed in our lifetime, and sometimes it makes us fearful.

Young and Middle-age Adults: You laid the foundation upon which we were able to bring about change in our world. Without your experience and knowledge, we would not be able to find cures for diseases,

Children and Youth: or develop the new technology that helps us learn in exciting ways,

Young and Middle-age Adults: or grow food in larger quantities,

Children and Youth: or travel around the world so easily,

Young and Middle-age Adults: or communicate with all parts of the world.

Older Adults: We are thankful for the freedom from competition, but we do not want to be placed on a shelf. We must continue to be active and in ministry. Will you see that we continue to be in mission and that we have the opportunity go grow in our spirituality?

Congregation: Yes. We who are younger recognize that which you have given us and appreciate that which you will continue to give through kind words and example. We will look to you as you continue to grow through a creative elderhood. This is a process, which we all expect to share someday.

Leader: Our God, we do thank you for your gift of diversity. We thank you for the heritage that these older people bring to us. Help us to support each other in our various life responsibilities. Help us to truly be the one body of Christ, the church. Amen.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS FOR CELEBRATING ON SUNDAY AND DURING THE WEEK

by Delia Halverson

As we celebrate Older Adult Sunday, reflect on the circumstances of older adults in your community.

- What is the primary character of your older adult population?
- What are some disappointments and losses that older persons in your church have experienced?
- What are past accomplishments of some of the older adults in your church?
- What are some dreams and goals that they hold?

The primary characteristic of the older adult population today is diversity. With nationwide mobility throughout their lives, varying life experiences, and early retirement, today's older adults are a much less homogeneous group than any other age in our church. No longer can we make a blanket statement of what older adults want from their church involvement. Older adult ministry must emphasize the **BY** and **WITH** of ministry as well as the **TO** and **FOR**.

1. Assign a young family to each older person in your congregation. Ask the family to pray for that person throughout the week and to write a special note of appreciation and love to the older adult. They might also invite the older person into their home for a meal or enjoy some community event together.
2. Interview older persons. A variety of media might be used for this interview: video, audio, printed, or pictures and stories on a bulletin board. In the interview, include ways that the person has been active in the church, locally and district or conference-wide. Accent positive actions and events.
3. Help older adults maintain their independence. Inform older adults of the services available in the community. Develop congregational services that meet the needs of older adults (e.g., transportation, visitation, telephone reassurance, minor repair and home maintenance, etc.).
4. Make banners and posters to inform the congregation of the celebration. The posters need not be very large, but mount them at many obvious places around the church building.

5. Involve older adults in planning and conducting a worship service. Invite older adults to serve as greeters, ushers, lay readers, and speakers, etc. on a Sunday designated as “Older Adult Sunday.”
6. Use live plants to decorate the sanctuary on the Sunday of celebration and give these to older adults. You may use small plants massed together, but see that each of the seniors in your congregation receives a plant after the service. Some may need to be delivered to homebound and residents of health care facilities.
7. Pin a flower or special color of ribbon on each older person. Be sure to make a statement in your worship bulletin to inform the congregation of the significance of the ribbon or flower.
8. Invite the children and youth of your congregation to visit homebound older adults. Encourage your children and youth choirs to regularly share their ministry in song at a local nursing home or retirement community.
9. Have older adults adopt a child in the congregation. This is sometimes called “foster grandparent” program. Older adults become “grandparents” for the children of the church.
10. Send out special invitations to older adults for a Sunday of celebration. Make the invitations personal, and arrange for rides if necessary. If you will use ribbons to recognize the elders, send the ribbon and pin in the invitation. Hold a senior recognition dinner following the Sunday celebration.
11. Plan a celebration of driving careers. Plan this on a regular basis for persons who have given up their driver's licenses. Find out from each ex-driver some of the ways that that person used driving skills to enable their ministry for Christ. Build a celebration and recognition service around these. Include the total number of driving years within the group, and thank God for all that was accomplished in ministry during those years. You might combine this with recognition of the youth beginning their driving careers. Stress driving as an act of stewardship of the car.
12. Find out the number of years in church membership (in any church) of each older adult, and add these together. Announce or publish the total amount of years as a collective heritage that we receive from the older persons.

13. Release butterflies after the service. These can symbolize the freedom that the older persons have from work (competition) and family responsibilities. (Recognize that some elders must continue to work, and some once again have family responsibilities.) Butterflies may be ordered from 1-800-LIVE BUG.
14. Plan a twenty-four hour period of prayer. Ask persons to sign up for thirty-minute increments and either come to the church at a specific place to pray, or pray wherever they might be. Offer written suggestions for what to include in their prayers, such as: thanksgiving for the persons and their contributions to Christ's ministry, concern for health problems, government policies that may be pending, and ways that your church can be more caring and alert to the needs of older adults.
15. Invite older persons to prepare and lead the children in a "children's sermon" during the worship service on Sunday morning.
16. Check and correct accessibility problems in your church facilities. Consider these points: acoustics; large print hymnals, bulletins, and curriculum; lighting and hearing enhancements; number of steps to building or altar rail; handicap provisions such as parking, restrooms, doorways, and pew space for wheelchairs; sidewalks clear of ice in cold weather or bird seed after a wedding; uneven pavement or carpet; cushions on pews. Begin this before your week of celebration so that the completion can be celebrated.
17. Analyze signals that your programs give older adults. Consider these points: listing programs as "family centered"; day or night programs; involving them as teachers or worship leaders; blend of old and new hymns; intergenerational seating; program aimed at all ages; worship and program times properly publicized; removal from leadership responsibility without replacement opportunity for service.
18. Become educated about how the needs of older adults are met in your community. Check on public transportation, adult day care programs, assisted living and nursing facilities, meals on wheels, and accessibility of public places. Share what you learn with the congregation and search out ways to improve them.

19. Develop a garden plot for older adults who enjoy gardening. Have someone else do the heavy preparation of the garden, but provide tools for older persons to use in planting and tending the garden. Use flowers from the garden in the sanctuary, and use the produce from the garden for an intergenerational meal of celebration.
20. Have a library book shower. Select books about aging and spirituality for the library. Place them on a table with the cost displayed, and encourage persons to find a book they'd like to donate to the church library in honor or in memory of someone. Have a typewriter or calligrapher on hand to put the name of the donor and honoree on a bookplate inside the book. Afterwards, feature the books in the newsletter and provide a special place for them in the library.
21. Begin a homebound Sunday school class. Contact your local telephone company and arrange for a conference call during the Sunday school hour. The teacher will use a church phone, and the homebound persons will listen in and participate from home by phone. If they have speakerphones, then a caregiver can also participate. If there is interest, arrange for its continued use. Often individual donations can be solicited to cover the cost.
22. Develop Congregational Health Ministries. For information about Congregational Health Ministries, contact the Health and Welfare Ministries Program Department, General Board of Global Ministries, 475 Riverside Dr., Room 350, New York, NY 10115.
23. Offer courses of interest:
 - Simplifying your life.
 - Ways to share your faith with your grandchildren.
 - Writing your life story.
 - Writing your faith biography.
 - Making memory albums for family members.
 - Understanding wills, living wills, organ donations, official forms (Social Security, Medicare, etc.), and other such things.
 - Death and dying.

A LITANY FOR AGING

by Rev. Dr. Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., DMIN, CSA

Leader: Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be 120 years. (Gen. 6:3)

People: *Dear Lord, we do need time to grow.*

Leader: Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. (Ex. 20:12)

People: *We pray that the long years will be good years.*

Leader: The glory of youth is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their gray hair. (Prov. 20:29)

People: *Give us strength and experience.*

Leader: Remember the days of old, consider the years long past; ask your father, and he will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you. (Deut. 32:7)

People: *Remind us to ask, and teach us to listen.*

Leader: Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life. (Prov. 16:31)

People: *Day by day, we strive to be more holy.*

Leader: Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old. (Prov.23:22)

People: *We are grateful for parents who teach and nurture in love.*

Leader: So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come. (Psalm 71:18)

People: *We love to tell the story of Jesus and his love.*

Leader: In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap. (Psalm 92:14)

People: *We must look past the wrinkles and see the soul.*

Leader: You who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. (I Peter 5:5)

People: Yes, we too will soon know and understand....give us wisdom so that we may serve others as we have been served. Amen.

Selected Resources For Older Adult Ministry

Books:

***Adult Ministries: Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation** by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. Cokesbury, Nashville, TN (2004). A “how-to” guide, providing practical ideas and models for adult ministry (including older adult ministry) in congregational settings.

***Aging: God’s Challenge to Church and Synagogue** by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. and Donald F. Clingan. Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN (1996). This resource provides practical ideas and important information necessary for understanding our aging society and “graying” congregations.

And Not One Bird Stopped Singing: Coping with Transition and Loss in Aging by Doris Moreland Jones. Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN (1997.) This book helps the reader look openly at their bereavement and grief. A valuable resource for persons facing any kind of loss.

Building a Ministry for Homebound and Nursing Home Residents by Marie White Webb. Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN (2003). An excellent guidebook for doing ministry with homebound and residents in continuing care retirement communities.

A Deepening Love Affair: The Gift of God in Later Life by Jane Marie Thibault. Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN (1993). A classic book on spirituality in life’s later years and ways to become aware of our gifts.

***Designing an Older Adult Ministry** by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN (1999). A “how-to” and informative resource for organizing and sustaining an intentional ministry by, with, and for older adults in local church settings.

***Forty-Sixty: A Study for Midlife Adults Who Want to Make a Difference** by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. and Craig Kennet Miller. Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN (2001). A small group study book for Baby Boomers and midlife adults who are personally confronting the many issues of aging.

***The Graying of the Church: A Leader’s Guide to Older Adult Ministry in The United Methodist Church** by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN (2004). Valuable information about aging in our society and in the church: who are they, what do they believe, how are they motivated, and what resources are available?

I Never Found That Rocking Chair: God’s Call at Retirement by Richard L. Morgan. Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN (1992). A collection of 74 meditations focusing on the emotional and spiritual aspects of retirement.

Mature Years. Cokesbury, Nashville, TN. A large print quarterly magazine filled with articles and a Bible study based on the International Lessons. Especially written for older adults.

A Ministry of Caring by Duane A. Ewers. Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN. A skill training course divided into 11 sessions for helping laity in a ministry of caring. There is both a leader's guide and a participant's workbook.

No Wrinkles of the Soul: A Book of Readings for Older Adults by Richard L. Morgan. Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN (1990). A collection of 60 inspiring devotions for the many lifestyles of older adults.

The Power of the Dream by Marie White Webb. Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN (1999). A moving testimony of faithful living in the later years.

Remembering Your Story: A Guide to Spiritual Autobiography by Richard L. Morgan. Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN (Revised edition, 2002). Designed for small groups, this resource encourages and guides participants through 10 sessions of life review and future direction.

****Rock of Ages: A Worship and Songbook for Retirement Living***. Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN (2002). A large print worship and songbook for older adults.

10 Gospel Promises for Later Life by Jane Marie Thibault. Upper Room Books, Nashville (2004). This helpful resource invites readers to identify their own fears and learn to make the most of God's gift of longer life.

Winter Grace: Spirituality and Aging by Kathleen Fischer. Upper Room Books, Nashville (1998). A classic book showing how the losses that accompany aging can lead to freedom and new life.

Videos:

****New Beginnings: The Gifts of Aging*** by the Center on Aging & Older Adult Ministries, Nashville, TN (2005). A 20-minute video focusing on individual short stories of older adults and the role their faith plays in their churches and communities. Order – 1-800-972-0433.

The Unburdening of Losses For Older Adults: A Christian Clowning Skit by Baltimore-Washington Conference – UMC. A 10-minute video focusing on the transition from home to a nursing home. Order – 1-800-492-2525.

(* Books and videos by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., D.Min, CSA, Director, Center on Aging & Older Adult Ministries, General Board of Discipleship - UMC, PO Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203)