

S.E.N.I.O.R.S. Ministry

“In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap” (Psalm 92:14)
Our churches are graying! As a result of better health care, nutrition, job safety, physical fitness, and medical technology, more people are living longer than ever before. As a result, many of our congregations are enjoying the blessing of increasing numbers of older adults.

Growing old is no longer synonymous with death. For many older adults, old age is not a time of disability or disease; instead it is a time of generally good health. As people live longer and retire earlier, the post-retirement period can last 25-35 years or more. We are witnessing a historically unprecedented expansion of free time in the last stage of life.

Unfortunately, some churches express a “myth-conception” that if they engage in focused ministry by, with, and or for older adults, they will soon have no congregation left. They do not realize that a church filled with older adults does not necessarily mean that it is dead or dying. Rather, churches may need to rethink and refocus their priority for ministry. Many congregations, concerned about making disciples of Jesus Christ, have come to understand that the older adult population provides tremendous potential for vital ministry.

Older adults want to continue contributing to future generations and to feel valued because of their contributions. Congregations with a strong focus on older adult ministries realize that the wealth of experience, wisdom, and faith that often abound in older persons should not be lost or underutilized.

Persons ministering with older adults realize that there is no “general” older adult population. Rather, there are multiple older adult populations, and each is very different. No single ministry-type reaches all the older adults in a congregation or community. Not only are there many different age cohorts, from 55 to 105, there are married couples, widows, divorced, never married, healthy-active, frail-inactive, homebound, and residents of continuing care retirement communities, just to name a few. As people grow older, they become *less* alike, not *more*. Therefore, their needs and talents, their likes and dislikes, are all vastly different.

A helpful model for congregations seeking to plan ministry with older adults is the S.E.N.I.O.R.S. Ministry model, briefly described in this brochure. It is more fully explained in the book *The Graying of the Church* by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. (Discipleship Resources, 2004).

Ministry Opportunities with Older Adults

- Adult Children Coping with Aging Parents
- Adult Day Service
- Advance Directives: Living Wills, Health Care Agent Designations, and CPR Directives
- Bible Study
- Congregational Health Ministry
- Death and Dying Classes
- Elder Abuse Seminars
- “End of Life” Concerns
- Exercise and Fitness
- Field Trips
- Fine Arts: Senior Theatre
- Grandparenting Concerns
- Grief and Loss Support Groups
- Home Maintenance and Minor Home Repairs
- Intergenerational Activities
- Long-Term Care and Housing Choices
- Marriage Enrichment Retreats
- Medicare and Social Security Seminars
- Mentoring
- Myths and Realities of Aging Seminars
- Older Adult Recognition Dinner and Worship Service
- Parish Nurse Ministry
- Pre-Retirement Seminars
- Respite Care
- Spirituality and Aging Classes
- Travel Opportunities
- Visitation Ministry

Center on Aging and Older Adult Ministry

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S.E.N.I.O.R.S

MINISTRY

Spirituality

Enrichment

Nutrition and Fitness

Intergenerational

Outreach

Recreation

A congregational model for intentional ministry with older adults

Service

OLDER
ADULT
MINISTRY



S.E.N.I.O.R.S. Ministry

Spirituality

Spiritual renewal is essential to life fulfillment. The church plays a vital role in helping older adults attain this goal. In addition, older adults can serve as teachers and mentors for the spiritual well-being of others. For older adults, spiritual guidance is made available through worship, pastoral care, Bible study, prayer groups, and support networks.

Plan and Develop:

Bible study groups; prayer groups; adult Christian education classes; life review classes; retreats; worship participation; rituals to acknowledge transitions dealing with change, separation, and new commitments; healing services; and workshops on “end-of-life” issues.

Enrichment

In a fast-paced and changing society, older adults need opportunities to continue the life-long process of learning and growing. The church plays a vital role in helping older adults grow in the faith and in their understanding of life and world issues.

Plan and Develop:

Seminars relevant to the specific needs and concerns of older adults (e.g., community issues and current affairs; technology; financial, legal and medical concerns); health and wholeness classes; drama and fine arts; and field trips.

Nutrition and Fitness

The great majority of older adults live in the community and are cognitively intact and fully independent in their daily activities. Those who remain active may be individuals who exercise, eat nutritiously, and have a positive psychological view of life.

Plan and Develop:

Congregational Health Ministries (e.g., Parish Nurse Program and “Stephen Ministries”); low-impact aerobics and other physical fitness classes; “Body Recall” program; “cooking for one” classes; and “health fairs.”

Intergenerational

All people, young and old, need each other very much. This need expresses itself in healthy relationships as nurturing and caring opportunities (i.e., physical, emotional, educational, and spiritual).

Plan and Develop:

Opportunities for mentoring, visiting, tutoring, and listening. Provide “Foster Grandparent” programs. Invite children and youth to visit the homebound and residents of healthcare facilities. Invite older adults to share their faith with children, youth, and young families.

Outreach

A program of outreach and evangelism seeks to include all the older adults in its fellowship, recognizing that many older adults do not have an active relationship with any congregation.

Plan and Develop:

Adult daycare center; Meals on Wheels; telephone reassurance; minor home maintenance and repair; home chore service; taping of worship services for delivery to the homebound or persons in nursing homes; hold worship services, Bible studies, and meetings in continuing care retirement communities.

Recreation

Older adults need creative self-expression as well as opportunities to develop and maintain self-confidence. Recreation adds an extra measure of zest to the lives of aging persons, enhancing both physical and mental well-being.

Plan and Develop:

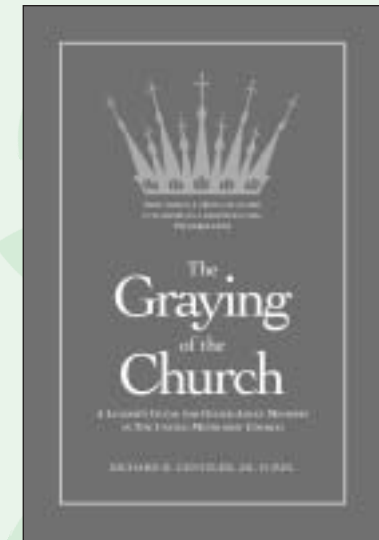
Outdoor activities (e.g., golf, fishing, and tennis tournaments; walking and hiking; camping; and gardening); flower arranging; bridge and other game parties; quilting; traveling; parties and banquets; cooking classes.

Service

Many older adults delight in serving the needs of others. Encourage older adults to participate in the programs and services of their local church, community, and social service agencies. Mobilizing for peace and justice issues, feeding the hungry, and providing shelter for the homeless are just a few of the many possibilities for older adults to engage in service.

Plan and Develop:

Literacy program; neighborhood watch; “latchkey kids” program; tutoring children and youth; mentoring young adults; prison ministry; volunteer work mission project; Habitat for Humanity participation; respite care programs; delivering meals to the elderly; and, grandparenting seminars.



The Graying of the Church
A Leader's Guide for Older Adult Ministry in The United Methodist Church
By Richard H. Gentzler, Jr.
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