

**OLDER  
AMERICANS  
MONTH**



**AGING UNBOUND: MAY 2023**

**Resources for Celebrating  
Older Adult Recognition Day  
In May 2023  
From ENCORE Ministry**



Compiled by Rev. Dr. Richard H. Gentzler, Jr.  
Director, ENCORE Ministry  
Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference – UMC

The material in this resource from ENCORE Ministry provides church leaders with information on ways churches can celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day. For more information, visit [www.encoreministry.org](http://www.encoreministry.org).



**Dear Church Leaders in Older Adult Ministry,**

Every May, United Methodist congregations are invited to observe Older Adult Recognition Day. The reason Older Adult Recognition Day is held this time of year is because our nation observes Older Americans Month during May. The Administration for Community Living ([ACL.gov/oam](http://ACL.gov/oam)) leads the nation's observance of Older Americans Month and has chosen *Aging Unbound* as this year's theme.

Churches can celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day any day in May that is appropriate for their planning and program ministry. By recognizing Older Americans Month, congregations celebrate the vital contributions of older adults whose knowledge, expertise, faith experience, and talents make our communities stronger. By using this year's theme, *Aging Unbound*, in your planning, you will have the opportunity to envision an array of aging experiences without being boxed in by expectations and stereotypes.

Church leaders will find the contents of this resource for celebrating Older Adult Recognition Day helpful during this time of transition in the life of our churches and society. As we move beyond the COVID pandemic, I encourage you to review this resource for creative ministry ideas and as you seek to reframe and reimagine aging in your church and community.

For more information about intentional ministry by, with, and for older adults, ENCORE Ministry publishes a newsletter, [ENCORE Ministry Connection](#). You can find it and additional resources at our ENCORE Ministry website at [www.encoreministry.org](http://www.encoreministry.org).

Dr. Richard H. Gentzler  
Director, ENCORE Ministry  
Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference – The United Methodist Church

# **Worship Service Suggestions**

Congregations are invited to conduct a worship service to celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day, normally held during any Sunday in May. If May is not appropriate for your church calendar, another opportunity to observe Older Adult Recognition Day is on the second Sunday in September (Grandparents' Day).

The purpose of this worship service is to introduce the congregation to the cause of aging in an effective, inspiring, and informative way. As you plan for a worship service to celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day, involve older people in planning and leading the service. If you have a Sunday school class that is primarily made up of older people, or your church has an active older adult ministry team, you will want to meet with them for discussion and planning. Here are some ideas that you might consider:

## **We Recognize**

- God loves and blesses people of all ages
- Aging is a natural progression in life
- Every age and stage of life is full of unique potential
- Birth, aging, and death are all part of divine providence and are to be regarded and taught as positive values
- The older adult population is a diverse group, and no two older adults are exactly alike
- Older adults, no less than people at every age and stage of life, need to feel valued and respected. They need a life with meaning and purpose.
- Children, youth, adults, and older adults can all learn from one another
- God calls people of all ages into Christian discipleship

## **We Celebrate**

- We are not only living longer, but people 65 years of age and older are healthier, wealthier, and more active than previous generations of older adults
- Age 65 is no longer the benchmark signaling the onset of late life
- As a result of medical advances, scientific discovery, better health care, nutrition, and job safety, more people are living into older adulthood
- The experiences of older people bring wisdom and insight to our congregation
- There are opportunities for all generations within our church to worship, study and learn, work, and play together
- Mature years bring a special opportunity to redefine life's goals and purpose

## Scripture for Sermon Ideas

- Genesis 6:3 – Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.”
- Genesis 12:4 – So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.
- Exodus 7:7 – Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.
- Joshua 14:10b-11 – And Caleb who said: “So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.” (NIV)
- Psalm 71:18 – 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 92:12, 14 – The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap.
- Proverbs 16:31 – Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.
- Proverbs 20:29 – The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their gray hair.
- Luke 2:36-37 – There was also a prophet, Anna...She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.
- John 21:18 – Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.
- II Corinthians 4:16 – For this reason we never become discouraged. Even though our physical being is gradually decaying, yet our spiritual being is renewed day by day. (GNT)
- Ephesians 6:2-3 – “Honor your father and mother” – this is the first commandment with a promise – “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”
- I Timothy 5:1, 2 – Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father...to older women as mothers....

## Hymns: (*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

“O For a Thousand Tongues,” 57

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” 140

“On Eagle’s Wings,” 143

“Jesus Loves Me,” 191

“My Hope Is Built,” 368	“Blessed Assurance,” 369
“There Is a Balm in Gilead,” 375	“Amazing Grace,” 378
“Lord, I want to be a Christian,” 402	“Every Time I Feel the Spirit,” 404
“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

**Prayers:** (*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

- “Serenity Prayer,” 459
- “Prayer to the Holy Spirit,” 329
- “All Saints,” 713
- “The Prayer of Saint Francis,” 481

**Psalter Readings:** (*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

- Psalm 23 – page 754
- Psalm 27 – page 758
- Psalm 63 – page 788
- Psalm 71:1-12 – page 794
- Psalm 90 – page 809
- Psalm 92 – pages 811-812
- Psalm 103:1-18 – pages 824-825
- Psalm 105:1-11 – page 828

**A Litany on Aging for Church Worship**

**Leader:** Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be 120 years” (Genesis 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 (Exodus 20:12).

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

**Leader:** The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their gray hair (Proverbs 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 (Deuteronomy 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 (Proverbs 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 (Proverbs 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: Yes, we too will soon know and understand God's gift of growing older; give us wisdom so that we may serve others as we have been served. Amen.**

## **Additional Ideas for Celebrating on Older Adult Recognition Day and Other Times**

As we celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day, reflect on the lives of older adults in your community.

- Who are the older adults in your church and community?
- What are past accomplishments of some of the older adults in your church?
- What are some disappointments and losses older people in your church have experienced?
- What are some dreams and goals they hold?
- What are ways your church reaches out to older adults in your community?

The primary characteristic of the older adult population today is diversity. With nationwide mobility throughout their lives, varying life and health experiences, and

socioeconomic differences, today's older adults are more diverse as a group than any other age group within the church. Older adult ministry must be intentional in its vision and planning as a ministry by, with, and for older adults.

1. Arrange a meal to celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day and consider recognizing older members for their faith and service to the church.
2. Assign a younger person or family to each older person in your congregation. Ask the individual or family to pray for the older person throughout the week and write a special note of appreciation to the older adult. They might also invite the older person into their home for a meal or to enjoy a community event together. Invite those people to sit together during the Older Adult Recognition Day worship service and/or a recognition dinner
3. Interview older people in anticipation of Older Adult Recognition Sunday. 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 and community. Share parts of their stories with the congregation and on the celebration Sunday.
4. Encourage older adults and other storytellers to share their experiences, perhaps around a certain theme (e.g., their faith journey, the history of their local church, etc.).
5. Make banners and posters to inform the congregation of the celebration. The posters don't need to be very large, but mount them at obvious places around the church.
6. Involve older adults in planning and conducting a worship service. Invite older adults to serve as greeters, ushers, lay readers, and speakers on a Sunday designated as Older Adult Recognition Day.
7. Use live flowers and plants to decorate the sanctuary on the Sunday of celebration and give these to older adults. Some may need to be delivered to homebound and residents of long-term health care facilities.
8. Pin a flower or colored 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.

9. Send out special invitations to older adults for a Sunday of celebration. Make the invitations personal and arrange for rides if necessary. If you plan to use ribbons to recognize older adults, send the ribbons and pins in the invitations. Hold a senior recognition dinner following the Sunday celebration.
10. Plan a senior expo or resource fair on Older Adult Recognition Day that provides services and resources available to older adults in your community.
11. Provide transportation for older adults so they are able to attend the Older Adult Recognition Day celebration. Provide respite care volunteers to stay with homebound people in their home so the primary caregivers can attend the Sunday celebration.
12. Host a workshop for older adults on key issues like nutrition and wellness, safety, scams and frauds, advance directives, and personal finance.
13. Find out the number of years of 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 older people.
14. Plan a 24-hour period of prayer. Ask individuals to sign up for 30-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 older adults and their contributions to Christ's ministry, concern for health problems, government policies that may be pending, and ways your church can be more caring and alert to the needs of older adults.
15. Invite older adults 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 acoustics; large-print hymnals, bulletins, and curriculum; lighting and hearing enhancements; number of steps to the 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 the recognition day so the completion can be celebrated.



17. Learn 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 what the community offers.
18. Develop a garden plot for older adults who enjoy gardening. Have someone do the heavy preparation of the garden, but provide tools for older people 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.
19. Begin a homebound Sunday school class. Use Zoom or other virtual conferencing platform or contact your local telephone company and arrange for a conference call during the Sunday school hour. The teacher and learners can use their computers/internet or telephones for connecting. If individuals have speakerphones, caregivers can also participate. Often, individual donations can be solicited to help defray any cost.
20. Use social media to connect older adults with resources and one another.

## **Suggested Resources for Further Reading and Study**

### **Books:**

*Aging and Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. (Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN, 2008)

*Aging Faithfully: The Holy Invitation of Growing Older* by Alice Fryling (NavPress, 2021)

*An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Older Adult Ministry* by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. (Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN 2018).

*Becoming Sage: Cultivating Meaning, Purpose, and Spirituality in Midlife* by Michelle Van Loon (Moody Publishers, 2020)

*Boomer Spirituality: Seven Values for the Second Half of Life* by Craig Kennet Miller (Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN 2017).

***Celebrating the Graying Church: Mutual Ministry Today, Legacies Tomorrow*** by Richard P. Olson (Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

***The Church Responds to Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of Older Adults*** by Joy Thornburg Melton (Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN 2012).

***From Dry Bones to Living Hope: Embracing God’s Faithfulness in Late Life*** by Missy Buchanan (Upper Room Books, 2021)

***The Grandparent Vocation: Wisdom, Legacies, and Spiritual Growth*** by Richard P. Olson (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2023)

***Light of the Setting Suns: Reflecting on Realities and Mysteries at Ninety Years of Life*** by Richard Morgan (Upper Room Books, 2021)

***Our Wisdom Years: Growing Older with Joy, Fulfillment, Resilience, and No Regrets*** by Charles Garfield, PhD (Central Recovery Press, 2020)

***Seasons of Caring: Meditations for Alzheimer’s and Dementia Caregivers*** edited by Dr. Daniel C. Potts, Lynda Everman, Rabbi Steven M. Glazer, Dr. Richard L. Morgan, and Max Wallack (ClergyAgainstAlzheimer’s Network, 2014).

***Third Calling: What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life?*** by Richard and Leona Bergstrom (Church Health, Edmonds, Washington, 2016).

***What Does the Bible Say About Old Age?*** by Ronald D. Witherup (New City Press, Hyde Park, NY, 2019)

## **Websites:**

[www.acl.gov](http://www.acl.gov) – Resources from Administration for Community Living

[www.agingcare.com](http://www.agingcare.com) – Resource information for caregivers

[www.discipleshipministries.org](http://www.discipleshipministries.org) – Resources for adult and older adult ministries

[www.encoreministry.org](http://www.encoreministry.org) – Resources for church leaders for older adult ministries

[ncea.acl.gov](http://ncea.acl.gov) – Resources on elder abuse awareness

[www.nia.nih.gov](http://www.nia.nih.gov) – Resources from the National Institute on Aging

[www.re-ignite.net](http://www.re-ignite.net) – Resources for church leaders for older adult ministries

[www.prci.org](http://www.prci.org) – Practical resources for church ministry