

Intentional Ministry by, with, and for Older Adults

Building Community with Older Adults



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Presentation Objectives

Participants will learn:

- Why many churches are “graying”
- Ageism and its impact on older adults and churches
- The role of the church in an aging society
- Phases of aging that can be helpful for ministry
- Various older adult ministry models, ideas for ministry, and a few selected resources

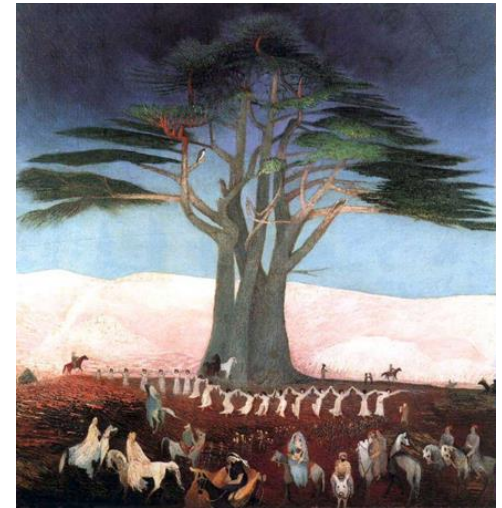


Let's Begin

*"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"*

- Psalm 92:12,14



A Rapidly Changing World

- We live in a world of rapid change
- One of the greatest changes facing our society is the aging population with growing numbers of older adults
- In 1900: 65+ = 4% (under 18 = 40%)
- In 2000: 65+ = 12.5% (under 18 = 24%)
- By 2035: 65+ will outnumber young people under 18 (*a first in USA history!*)

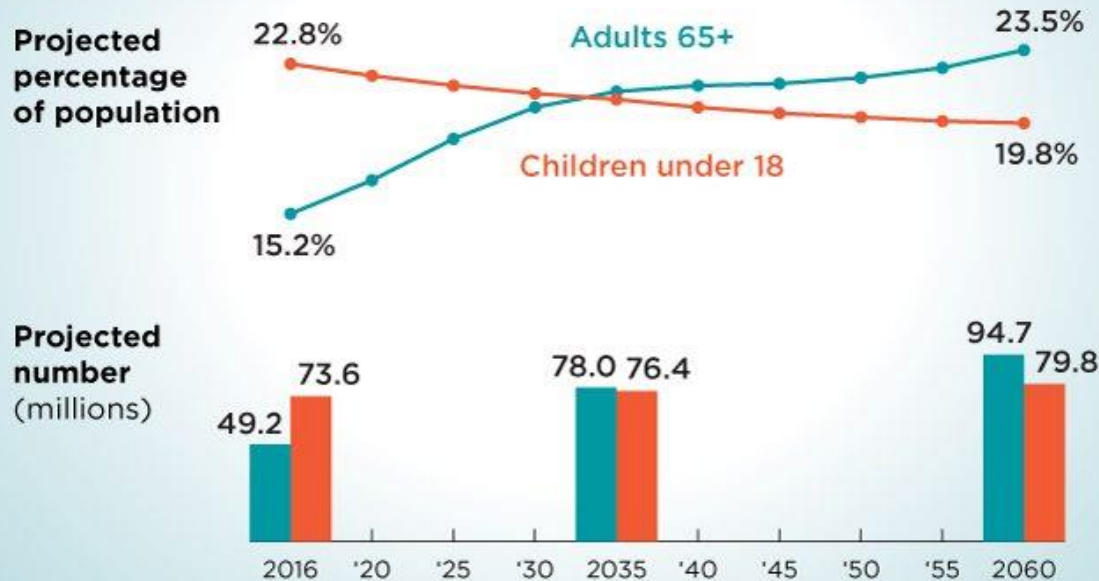




An Aging Nation

Projected number of children
and older adults

For the First Time in U.S. History Older Adults Are
Projected to Outnumber Children by 2035



Note: 2016 data are estimates not projections.



Reality Check: Most Congregations are Graying

- With advances in biology, neuroscience, healthcare, technology, and lifestyle changes more people are living longer
- The issue is not about whether churches will continue to grow older. They will. It is about what we will do as it happens
- Reaching young people is vital to Kingdom building, but churches that “beat themselves up” for not having young people may miss out on ministry opportunities presented by the very people sitting in the pews: *older adults*





Ageism Awareness Day



- Today is *Ageism Awareness Day*
- Ageism refers to stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel), and discrimination (how we act) toward others or ourselves based on age
- <https://asaging.org/ageism-awareness>

Ageism is an Ingrained Bias

- Our culture struggles with ageism which is an ingrained bias in our society that permeates all aspects of our lives
- There is the assumption that people age 65+, unlike younger ages, are all the same and undifferentiated, that their lives are in decline and not interesting or fulfilling
- Ageism, like racism, sexism, homophobia, and antisemitism, is another form of bigotry deeply ingrained in our societal perceptions





The Church is Not Immune to the Bias of Ageism



- The image of an aging congregation is often seen as outdated and closed-minded, living steadfastly in the past, hindering church growth, and dying
- Ageism causes faith communities to neglect the spiritual and psychosocial needs of older adults
- Older adults may often feel overlooked and undervalued by church leaders



Religious Involvement and Older Adults



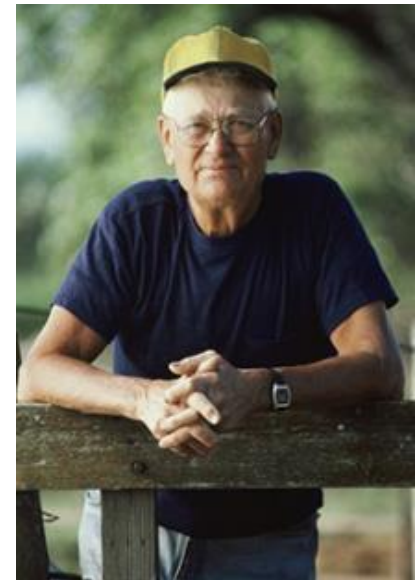
- Better Physical Health
- Reduced Need for Health Services (including hospital stays)
 - Less Depression
 - Cope Better with Stress
 - Greater Concern for Others
- Increased Contact with Social Support Networks
 - Greater Sense of Well-Being

Faith in the Future: Healthcare, Aging, and the Role of Religion
by Harold Koenig, M.D. and Douglas Lawson, PhD



Older Adults and Well-Being

- Well-Being involves something more than good physical health, financial security, and social support
- Well-Being also involves **meaning** and **purpose**
- As individuals enter the 2nd half of life, questions about the meaning and purpose of existence often arise
- For many older adults, religious practices and beliefs play a significant role in their well-being





The Church and Older Adults



When older adults see little interest directed at them by the church, they gradually lose their sense of having value and worth, which dampens and diminishes their faith development



An Age of Opportunity

Congregational transformation in an age of demographic longevity involves:

- Re-imagining church vitality
- Re-thinking personal ageist views
- Re-framing aging with a new vision
- Finding ways to celebrate and utilize the contributions, faithfulness, and wisdom of older adults
- Recognizing that we live in a time when “aging” is an opportunity and not an end





Building Community with Older Adults

- As older adults and leaders in Older Adult Ministry we need to help our churches see aging and older adulthood as an *opportunity* for faithful ministry rather than as a *burden*
- *Building community with older adults* begins when congregations become intentional in ministry by, with, and for older adults
- Intentionality involves inviting, empowering, and equipping older adults to make significant contributions to its ministry





Ways Your Congregation Can Make a Difference

- Overcome the temptation to view all older adults as being exactly alike
- Recognize that older adults have had different and unique life experiences... No two older adults age exactly the same way
- Learn to appreciate the positive aspects and unique challenges of an aging congregation
- Recognize that aging is not a problem to be solved but *a gift to be embraced*





Starting Older Adult Ministry



- Establish a team of 6 to 10 older adults
- Conduct a survey of older adults in your church and a service analysis of resources in your community
- Review the results of your survey and identify a need your church can take on
- Plan a high-visibility event targeted at older adults (in and out of your church)
- Survey the people who attended and then begin planning for future ministry



Selected Phases of Aging

Active Phase (Go-Goes)

Older adults pursue a variety of interests (e.g. volunteer, work, extensive travel, leisure activities)

Passive Phase (Slow-Goes)

Energy and health begin to ebb and extensive travel is replaced with shorter visits to family and friends

Final Phase (No-Goes)

Health problems restrict mobility and home health care services or alternative housing may be sought



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

Local Church Assessment

S.E.N.I.O.R.S. Ministry Model	Go – Goes	Slow – Goes	No – Goes
S pirituality			
E nrichment			
N utrition/Fitness			
I ntergenerational			
O utreach			
R ecreation			
S ervice			



Ministry Models in Churches

- ***Adult Day Ministry Model*** – e.g., “Sunny Day Club”
- ***Congregational Care Model*** – e.g., *Stephen Ministry*; Parish nurse; respite care; visitation of homebound
- ***Relational Model*** – e.g., Social gatherings and fellowship; luncheons; and, day trips
- ***Service & Missions Model*** – e.g., Painting school classrooms; Habitat for Humanity, Meals on Wheels, VIM
- ***Study Model*** – e.g., Sunday school classes, Bible study, book club, *Ventures in Learning*
- ***Support Group Model*** – e.g., *Wings of Hope* (widows) and widowers support, cancer/stroke survivors



Characteristics of Intentional Older Adult Ministry

- An Older Adult Ministry leadership team
- Needs, interests, and abilities of older adults are known and utilized
- Training is ongoing and provided for all leaders and volunteers
- Laity serve as program *champions* and guide ministry
- Older Adult Ministry has a *line item* in the church budget
- Various ministry options are available knowing that one type of ministry program does not reach all older adults





Characteristics of Intentional Older Adult Ministry

- Community resources are known and utilized
- Intergenerational opportunities are intentionally planned with older adults
- Church facilities are accessible
- The ministry reaches out into the community
- Evaluation is regular and ongoing
- If OA Ministry is **not** intentional, it's not likely to make much of a difference





Role of the Local Church in Older Adult Ministry

- Help older adults stay connected by providing opportunities for fellowship and learning
- Help older adults find meaning and purpose in the later years
- Provide opportunities for meaningful service and mission
- Empower older adults for outreach and being engaged in the community
- Engage older adults in spiritual growth and faith development





Role of the Local Church in Older Adult Ministry

- Help older adults model positive aging and practice “*generativity*”
- In worship, provide older adults with familiar religious symbols, hymns, and rituals to support their continuing identity as members of the church
- Develop visitation teams for all home-bound and long-term care residents
- Provide support for caregivers and people experiencing grief and loneliness



The Future of the Church

- Today, people who are 65 are generally healthier, wealthier, and more active than was true of previous older adults
- In multiple ways, the future of our churches *are in the hands of older adults* because they provide:
 - Leadership
 - Money
 - Presence
 - Service
 - Witness





Ministry Engagement



Rick with the late Dr. Elbert Cole, founder of the Shepherd's Center

- Advocate on behalf of the needs of older adults in your community
- Identify a pressing need in your community that matches your congregational strength
 - *If your church closed today, who would miss it other than the members?*
- Connect with other churches in your area
 - Learn what they are doing in OAM
 - Engage in collaborative ministry



Why Ministries with Older Adults Sometimes Fail

- Failure to have the “right” people at the table when planning
- Failure to have a shared vision
- Failure to have lay leadership *champion* older adult ministries
- Failure to know the needs, abilities, and interests of older adults
- Failure to recognize that no one ministry model fits all churches





Intentional Older Adult Ministry

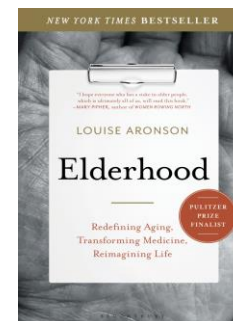
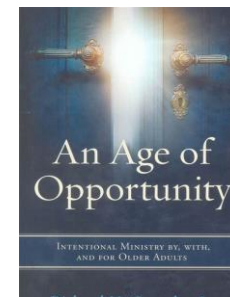
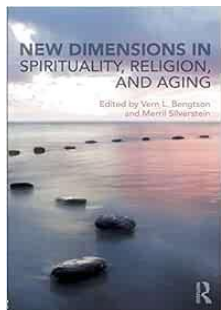
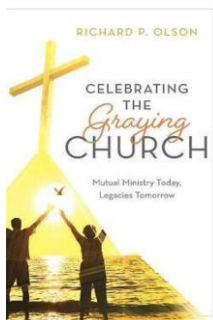
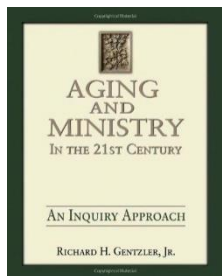
God's vision for Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults at _____ Church is

In order to achieve our vision, these steps will be taken:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Selected Resources

- ***Aging & Ministry in the 21st Century: An Inquiry Approach***, by Richard H Gentzler, Jr.
- ***An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults***, by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr.
- ***Celebrating the Graying Church***, by Richard P. Olson
- ***Elderhood***, by Louise Aronson
- ***New Dimensions in Spirituality, Religion, and Aging***, ed. by Vern Bengtson and Merrill Silverstein
- ***What Does the Bible Say About...Old Age?*** by Ronald Witherup





ENCORE Ministry Foundation

www.encoreministry.org

Purpose: *Intentional Ministry By, With, and For Older Adults*

We provide training & support, resources, grant funding, and networking opportunities to support intentional ministry by, with, and for older adults in the TN-Western KY Conference

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Questions

