



# **Resource for Celebrating Older Adult Recognition Day May 2025**



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The material in this resource provides church leaders with information and ideas for celebrating Older Adult Recognition Day. For more information, visit [www.encoreministry.org](http://www.encoreministry.org)

Dear Church Leaders,

Every May, United Methodist congregations are invited to observe Older Adult Recognition Day. The reason Older Adult Recognition Day is held in May 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.

Churches can celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day on 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. The theme for 2025:



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, visit the ENCORE Ministry Foundation website at [www.encoreministry.org](http://www.encoreministry.org). In addition, the ENCORE Ministry Foundation publishes the monthly e-newsletter, *ENCORE Ministry Connection*. To obtain a *free* subscription, contact Cindy Solomon, Director of Operations, at [csolomon@encoreministry.org](mailto:csolomon@encoreministry.org).



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# **Worship Service Suggestions**

Congregations are invited to conduct a worship service to celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day, which can be held on any Sunday in May. If your church calendar cannot accommodate celebrating Older Adult Recognition Day on a Sunday, choose any day in May that's appropriate for your church and older adults.

The purpose of an Older Adult Recognition Day Worship Service is to introduce the congregation to the reality of **aging** in an effective, inspiring, and informative way. As you plan the service, involve older adults in planning and leading the service. If you have an older adult Sunday school class, 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 challenges and potential
- Birth, aging, and death are part of divine providence
- 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 loved, valued, and respected
- Older adults need a life with meaning and purpose
- Children, youth, and older adults can learn from one another
- God calls older adults into Christian discipleship and into a life of service
- An aging congregation is not a problem to be solved but a gift to be embraced

## **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*)

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|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| “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 witness 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 and then, 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 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 transportation if necessary. Following

the special Older Adult Recognition Worship Service hold a luncheon or dinner for older adults following the Sunday celebration. If space permits, invite the whole congregation to celebrate in the meal.

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 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'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. Invite capable volunteers to provide minor home maintenance and home chore services for older adults in your church and community
21. 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)

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

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

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

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

***Elderhood: Redefining Aging, Transforming Medicine, Reimagining Life*** by Louise Aronson (Bloomsbury Publishing)

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

***The Gift of Aging: Growing Older with Purpose, Planning, and Positivity*** by Mary Cottrell Hode and Elizabeth Eckstrom (Cambridge University Press)

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

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

***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)

***Stage (Not Age): How to Understand and Serve People Over 60*** by Susan Wilner Golden (Harvard Business Review)

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

## **Booklet:**

***Tips for Improving Communication by Church Leaders with Older Adults*** by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. (free download at [www.encoreministry.org](http://www.encoreministry.org))

## **Websites:**

**[www.acl.gov/programs/elder-justice/national-center-elder-abuse](http://www.acl.gov/programs/elder-justice/national-center-elder-abuse)** – Resources on elder abuse awareness

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

**[www.alzheimers.gov](http://www.alzheimers.gov)** – Resource information on Alzheimer's and caregiving

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

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

**[www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/older-adults](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/older-adults)** - Resources for church leaders on older adult ministries