

**Denver Seminary  
Denver, Colorado**

**“Unleashing The Power Of Age  
In Your Congregation”**

**A Ministry Report**

**Purpose of the Seminar:**

The purpose of the seminar was to convene pastors, church leaders, older adult ministry leaders, and persons interested in older adult ministries representing many churches to:

- Define the challenges and opportunities facing the church as a result of radical demographic changes in the next several decades,
- Discuss the issues,
- Determine resolutions and
- Derive strategies for effective ministry.

**Summary:**

The “Unleashing The Power of Age In Your Congregation” seminar was held at Denver Seminary, on October 9, 2002, from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm.

Twenty persons representing various churches in the Denver Metropolitan area attended. Most participants were leaders in Older Adult Ministries in local churches or in the Conservative Baptist Association. There were also several seminary students who attended. The seminar was hosted by Lifequest, Rocky Mountain CBA, and Denver Seminary. Rev. Cavin Harper of Lifequest served as the primary convener of the summit.

A worship team led all participants in an opening worship session.

The keynote lecture, delivered by Dr. Richard Bergstrom, was entitled “Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation.” The lecture

discussed the radically changing demographics in our country and in the world as the numbers of people living longer increases dramatically. These changes call for a defined response on the part of church leadership. We must conclude whether the vast amounts of older adults in our society and church will be viewed as an “obstacle or an opportunity.” As churches look at the coming age wave, it would behoove them to recognize the needs of older adults and acknowledge the contributions they can continue to make. Dr. Bergstrom challenged participants to discover four biblical principles in order to unleash the power of age in congregations. Taken from Mark 2, the story of the paralytic who was carried to Jesus by his friends, Dr. Bergstrom suggested the following characteristics required by a church to be effective in ministering to and with older adults:

- Compassionate fellowship
- Creative freedom
- Corporate faith
- Leading to complete forgiveness!

A second lecture, delivered by Leona Bergstrom, was entitled “The Times, They Are A-Changin’.” This lecture discussed how the coming age wave will impact five social structures, and ultimately how they will impact the church. Areas in our society most affected will be:

- The family
- Health care
- Community
- Economy
- Religion and Spirituality

There are radical shifts all around us as we encounter this age wave. The family, economists, healthcare providers, social service agencies and religious institutions are all reeling to stay ahead. The question is: Where is the church in all of this? When should the church pick up some of the slack left by abandoned government programs, faulty health care systems, and stressed families? How can the church acknowledge, recognize, encourage and empower older adults to use their skills, knowledge and experience to serve?

### **Small Workgroups:**

Participants were divided into small workgroups to brainstorm and discuss the needs and issues facing middle and mature adults. The following list was generated:

#### Physical Needs of Mature Adults (age 75+):

- Transportation
- Physical aids (elevator, large print, sound systems, lighting)
- Diet/exercise
- Home care – cleaning, yardwork
- Health protocols, living wills, DNR
- Encourage independence – rehabilitation if possible
- Large signs
- Loudness
- Mobility
- Health Care (\$, availability)
- Access to healthcare
- Housing
- Chronic health conditions
- Handicapped facilities
- Legibility
- Transportation

#### Social/Emotional needs of Mature Adults (age 75+)

- Friendships
- Mental stimuli
- Purpose in living
- Fellowship
- Transportation
- Meaningful activities
- Helping hands – networking
- Respect
- Love and acceptance
- Be understood
- Security
- Ability to laugh with others
- Isolation, connection with outside world

- Family care
- Dealing with grief, loss, emotional problems
- Preparation for nursing home/assisted living
- Wills, estate planning

#### Spiritual needs of Mature Adults (age 75+)

- Encouragement
- Active involvement
- Evangelism
- Depending on God
- Stagnation
- Hope
- Be teachable
- Servant Attitude
- Let go of control
- Security
- Servanthood
- Spiritual growth/discipleship
- Preparation for death
- Worship – especially hymns
- Patience
- Mentoring
- Celebration of life
- Salvation
- Serving the Lord

#### Physical needs of middle adults (age 55-75):

- Diet & Exercise
- Health education – books, seminars
- Good primary care doctor
- Service projects – stay active
- Age-based activities
- Hearing problems
- Health conditions developing
- Caring for aging parents
- Caring for grandchildren
- Regular physicals
- Loss of mates
- Need physical help

Social/emotional needs of middle adults (age 55-75):

- Purpose – need to be needed
- Companionship
- Professional relationships
- Senior choir
- Looking for identity
- Overcome barriers
- Intimate relationships
- Friendships
- Challenge – fulfillment, interaction, need to be needed
- Trips, travel – short/long, global/across the street
- Transition into Senior citizens
- Dealing with grief, emotional problems
- Social issue activism; political awareness
- Volunteerism
- Ministry – especially missions
- Preparation for retirement - \$\$, stay employed? Become a consultant? Work part-time
- Wills, estate planning

Spiritual Needs of Middle Adults (age 55-75):

- Salvation
- Serving outlets
- Expand Christian world view
- Mentoring
- Using finances and resources for the Kingdom
- Bridging past to present
- Humility
- Dependence on God
- Hope
- Parent care
- Personal relationships
- Relevance of the Word
- Worth
- Retirement
- Meaningful Purpose
- Accepting or handling change
- Dealing with regrets

- Servanthood
- Spiritual growth/discipleship
- Evangelism
- Worship/patience
- Mentoring

### **Top Priorities Identified:**

Through a process of combining similar suggestions and multi-voting (each participant was allowed to vote for their three “top” needs per category), the following needs were identified as priorities:

#### **Physical Needs of Mature Adults:**

1. Transportation
2. Health care – for chronic conditions
3. Adaptive aids – for visual impairment, hearing, etc.

#### **Emotional/Social Needs of Mature Adults:**

1. Dealing with grief, loss and acceptance
2. Friendship and companionship
3. Love and acceptance

#### **Spiritual Needs of Mature Adults:**

1. Hope
2. Salvation
3. Spiritual growth

#### **Physical Needs of Middle Adults:**

1. Diet and exercise
2. Age based activities
3. Service projects – stay active

#### **Emotional/Social Needs of Middle Adults:**

1. Need to be needed/ challenge/fulfillment
2. Intimate relationships/companionship/friendship
3. Preparation for retirement

### Spiritual Needs of Middle Adults:

1. Salvation
2. Mentoring
3. Servanthood

### Designing Our Future

The final lecture/discussion was focused on how to develop powerful and effective ministries for middle and older adults. It was concluded that ministries must reflect the following:

- Middle and older adults represent a rich source of wisdom, service and giving. Ideas were shared on how an older adult ministry group can equip members to pass on a heritage of faith, be involved in service, and be encouraged to give.
- Middle and older adults need the opportunity to hear the gospel and respond to its life-changing message of forgiveness and renewal. Ideas were shared regarding evangelistic outreach targeting middle and older adults.
- Middle and older adults need communities of faith surrounding them as they face unprecedented transitions, changes and loss. Ideas were shared regarding activities, caring ministries, lifelong learning opportunities, and purposeful planning.

Helpful resources can be found! One suggestion is obtaining the Bergstroms' book, Amazing Grays: Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation, available online at [www.chonline.org](http://www.chonline.org)

### Let's Get Going

Participants were encouraged to begin to think strategically about purposeful and effective older adult ministries. In a session entitled "Let's Get Going" participants were challenged to discuss the following:

- Define your purpose. Why does your ministry exist?
1. What is your church's purpose (mission statement)?
  2. What is the purpose or mission of your senior adult ministry?

Determine your potential. Where do you want to be in 2-5 years?

1. What vision do you have for your Senior Adult ministry?
2. What are the major objectives for your ministry?

Develop your plan.

1. What goals do you have for your Senior Adult ministry?
2. What programs and ministries can you undertake to accomplish your vision?

### **Reflection and Evaluation:**

Copies of the evaluations are enclosed with this report. All evaluations reflected a high degree of satisfaction with the presenters, facilities, and workgroups. Participants overwhelmingly appreciated the day and reported being challenged to think differently about aging and the potential of older people in congregations and community.

The following are some of the comments made when asked: *“What did you like best about the seminar?”*

- Idea that not all seniors have the same needs
- Practical ideas
- Like secular input
- Renewed motivation
- The critical nature of senior care in the future based on demographics
- Information and ideas for implementation
- Good information – good challenge
- Sharing of ideas
- Fellowship
- Lunch
- Fellowship, interaction, motivation to get to work in areas of need!
- Sharing of ideas, fellowship
- Determining top needs – ministering to seniors

The following are answers to the questions: *“What is one thing that you will add or change in your ministry with older adults as a result of attending this seminar?”*

- Ask the adults what they want
- Use your plan to start a senior ministry - it's new to me. I need steps
- Life long learning
- To begin!
- Make my congregation aware of ministry to one another as they age. Most are already "seniors"
- Increasing development of a senior ministry
- Initial planning for overall CB ministry
- Be more involved with other seniors
- Evaluate what we are doing. Identify needs and determine how we will meet these needs. Need stronger evangelistic emphasis.
- Try to add more evangelism opportunity. Look for each person's love and try to get them involved in that ministry.
- Ministry to top 3 needs

*Other comments:*

- Encourage more people to attend – lay as well as ministers.
- I appreciate your spirit and eagerness to share your vision. The book is an excellent follow-up of what was presented in the seminar.

**Thank you.**

We wish to thank the Lifequest, Denver Seminary and the Rocky Mountain Conservative Baptist Association for inviting us to facilitate the “Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation” seminar. Thank you to the staff of Denver Seminary for taking care of all of the details and making the day go smoothly! Thank you to Cavin Harper of Lifequest, whose vision it is to inspire churches to minister effectively with middle and older adults.

We hope that the insights shared during this day will inspire the churches involved to continue to develop powerful and effective ministries to and by older adults in the future. If we can be of further assistance in helping you fulfill that mission, we would be honored to do so. May God richly bless you as you follow His leading.

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