

SENIOR SUMMIT
Mount Sequoyah
November 14, 2002

A Summary Report

A **Senior Summit** was held at Mount Sequoyah on Wednesday, November 13, 2002 from 9:00 am to 4:30 PM. The Summit was sponsored by Mount Sequoyah. Presenters were Dr. Richard Bergstrom and Leona Bergstrom from ChurchHealth and Lifetime Ministries, Bellingham, Washington.

Twenty people attended from United Methodist Churches of the South Central Jurisdiction. Most of the participants were older adults interested in developing ministries to seniors within their churches. Several pastors or directors of senior adult ministries attended. Approximately twenty others attended the Introductory Track led by Dr. Timothy Starr from Christian Seniors in Action and Peoples Church in Toronto, Ontario. Books by the authors were available from both tracks in the bookstore. Additional copies of Amazing Grays may be ordered online at www.chonline.org, or by calling (360) 676-4824.

Purpose

The purpose of the Senior Summit was to convene representatives from many churches to:

- a. Define the challenges and opportunities facing an aging society and church,
- b. Discuss the issues,
- c. Determine resolutions, and
- d. Derive strategies.

Process

The Senior Summit utilized various methods to encourage participants' involvement. The day's activities included a worship service, lecture, personal reflection, small workgroups, multi-media presentation, and large group discussion.

Content Summary

There were four lectures presented during the course of the day.

Session I: The Future Is Aging

Never before in the history of mankind have we experienced such an extraordinary demographic evolutionary event as we are today: the mass aging of our societies.

Peter Peterson, in his work *Gray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America – and the World,*” describes it as such:

The challenge of global aging, like a massive iceberg, looms ahead. Visible above the waterline are the unprecedented growth in the number of elderly and the unprecedented decline in the number of youth over the next several decades. Lurking beneath the waves, and not yet widely understood, are the wrenching economic and social costs that will accompany this demographic transformation...

The Summit was a time to gather thinking minds together to discuss what the implications this “iceberg” will have on Christendom and the church. There are two reasons why this Senior Summit is so important:

- a. The Future IS Aging. We believe that with the exploding demographics, and because of the issues that are going to surround an aging society, from ethical to economical, we are going to witness a spiritual revolution unprecedented in history. We believe that the AGING of our society could be one of the most significant spiritual events in history—and that the church needs to be ready for opportunities for ministry, the likes of which we have never seen before.
- b. The Future of Aging is NOW. Not only will we see huge numbers of people enter their “golden years” in the future, but we must grapple with the issues our current elders face today and the church’s response. It is time for Older Adult Ministries to be on the front burner!

Consider the demographics.

- a. For most of history, people aged 65 and over represented 2-3% of the population. Today, they represent 12-14%. By the year 2030, 25% of the population will be over 65 years of age.
- b. Translate that general statistic into our churches. Before the Industrial Revolution, 1 in 40 persons in your church would have been over the age of 65. Today, the odds are about one in ten; a few decades from now, one out of four people in our churches will be over 65 years of age.
- c. By the year 2011, the Baby Boomers begin to turn 65.

The church can either adopt a problem-centered approach to the approaching Age Wave, or view it for its potential, as Marc Friedman does in his book Prime Time: How Baby Boomers will Revolutionize Retirement and Transform America.

A biblical model for Older Adult Ministry was then presented, using the text of Mark 2: 1-12 – the account of the Paralytic;

If we are to “Unleash the Power of Age in our Congregations, we must be characterized by:

1. Compassionate Fellowship (reach out to people’s needs)
2. Creative Freedom (understand the difference between our mission and our methods).
3. Corporate Faith (all going in the same direction: a unified vision)
4. The end Result being, Complete Forgiveness (the paralytic experienced spiritual healing as well as physical)

Conclusion:

We are staring into the future, and we see that it is aging! More and more of us are living longer and longer. It means incredible opportunity for the church of Jesus Christ to develop effective, dynamic, sensitive, and powerful ministries to, by and for older and aging adults. We live in an incredible time in history. We believe God has great things in store for those churches that unleash the power of age!

Session II: The Times They Are A-changin’

As we proceed into this age wave, it behooves us to anticipate the impact it will have on society as a whole and on the social structures within it. We also must think through how these changes will impact the church,

and how the church will respond. The impact on five social structures were discussed:

1. Family.
 - a. The aging of our society has a huge impact on the family. For example, it will not be unusual to find five-generation families, with middle aged caregivers in the center of a "double decker sandwich".
 - b. Caregiving responsibilities will increase as more grow older, but there will be fewer children to absorb them. Middle aged adults are increasingly involved in issues of parent care.
2. Health Care.
 - a. Staggering advancements in technology and biomedics will be commonplace in the next century. The outcome may be longer, healthier lives - but it may come with a high economic and ethical price tag.
 - b. The current medical system is not designed to support care for the kinds of chronic, long-term diseases we will witness - such as diabetes, arthritis, and dementia.
 - c. There will be increased need for personal care and assistance in daily living, in-home caregiving, health promotion and prevention.
3. Community.
 - a. Housing
 - b. community planning
 - c. transportation
 - d. nutrition
4. The economy.
 - a. A changing workforce
 - b. New products in the marketplace
 - c. Older consumers
5. Religion and Spirituality
 - a. renewed interest in religion, spirituality, and aging.
 - b. Focus on mortality
 - c. Generativity
 - d. Conversion

Workgroup I:

Participants were divided into groups of 6 people and asked to identify the physical, social, spiritual needs of older adults in the community and church. Middle adults were defined as ages 55-75, while Mature adults were defined as ages 75+.

MIDDLE ADULTS

List of Physical Needs of Middle Adults.

1. Women's physical health, menopausal
2. Men's prostate
3. Breast cancer
4. sexual relationship changes
5. mental health – emotional adjustments to sexual changes.
6. stress due to life situation changes: job, divorce, finances, etc)
7. dentures
8. assisted living
9. red convertibles (BMW Z3)
10. Touching
11. recognition
12. preventive medicine, exercise
13. joint replacements, transplants
14. drugs, dosage, cost
15. housing
16. food
17. recreation/therapy
18. vision, hearing

List of Social & Emotional Needs of Middle Adults.

1. computer
2. church, Sunday school
3. telephone
4. trips
5. transportation
6. entertainment
7. learning opportunities
8. fellowship
9. friendship
10. group events
11. need to feel needed
12. recognize special dates, birthdays
13. LOVE (hugs)

14. widow/widower – acceptance as a single rather than a couple
15. employment or lack of employment
16. financial insecurity – lack of employment, excess credit liability
17. multi-generational family needs – too stretched.
18. to find new focus and purpose

List of Spiritual Needs of Middle Adults.

1. rediscovering your own spiritual, looking for more meaning
2. place of service: “Am I really needed?”
3. discovering your values in new phase of life
4. supportive community
5. time sensitive events (daylight)
6. bible study
7. prayer groups
8. music (choir)
9. worship
10. need to give
11. God awareness
12. study groups
13. life review
14. witnessing – mentoring
15. service
16. giving

MATURE ADULTS

List of Physical Needs of Mature Adults.

1. rehab to enable yourself to use equipment to move around
2. dementia
3. preventative medicine – exercise
4. joint replacements, transplants
5. drugs, dosage, cost
6. housing
7. food
8. recreation, therapy
9. home care, hospice, nursing home
10. transportation
11. vision, hearing
12. ramps
13. commodes
14. handicap bars
15. wheel chairs

16. rockers
17. canes, walkers
18. BSC
19. touching
20. financial security

List of Social & Emotional Needs of Mature Adults.

1. Mind games, crossword
2. church, Sunday school
3. telephone
4. in house visitation
5. transportation
6. home break-up, i.e. selling parents home.
7. fellowship
8. friendship
9. family
10. one-on-one events
11. need to feel needed
12. recognize special dates.
 - a. Birthdays
 - b. Anniversaries
 - c. Marriages
 - d. Deaths
13. LOVE (physical, touching)
14. financial security
15. loneliness and isolation
16. leaving family home and security, lack of independence
17. health care costs
18. left behind – peer group start dying
19. facing your own mortality
20. home bound, no church, being dependent.

List of Spiritual Needs of Mature Adults.

1. God awareness
2. transportation
3. study group
4. life review
5. service
6. God really loves me
7. disbursement of assets after death
8. spiritual atrophy and apathy
9. visitation from the church

10. large print materials
11. worship
12. communion delivered
13. prayer
14. phone contact
15. need to give

WORKGROUP SESSION 2: PRIORITIZING NEEDS.

The lists of needs were posted and participants were asked to multi-vote to identify the top three needs in each category that they felt older adults would face, and to which the church would need to respond. The top needs are identified are listed below.

MIDDLE ADULTS

Top Three Physical Needs of Middle Adults.

1. Stress due to life situations (job, divorce, etc)
2. Vision, hearing
3. Rx – dosage, costs

Top Three Social & Emotional Needs of Middle Adults.

1. Need to feel needed.
2. Financial insecurity: lack of employment, excess credit liability (tied for 1st).
3. Widow/widower – acceptance as a single rather than a couple.
4. To find a new purpose and focus.

Top Three Spiritual Needs of Middle Adults.

1. Service
2. Discovering your values in a new phase of life.
3. Prayer groups.

MATURE ADULTS

Top Three Physical Needs of Mature Adults.

1. Home care – hospice, nursing home.
2. Financial Security
3. Touching (tied for 2nd)

Top Three Social & Emotional Needs of Mature Adults.

1. Leaving family home and security; lack of independence.
2. Need to feel needed.
3. In-home visitation

Top Three Spiritual Needs of Mature Adults.

1. Visitation from church.
2. Transportation
3. Prayer

Video Presentation:

Following lunch, participants viewed a video presentation entitled "*Even to Your Old Age.*" This video, produced by the National Council on the Aging, attempts to encourage people of all faiths to value the lives of older adults and encourage them to serve, learn, and lead lives characterized by vital spiritual health.

Session III: Designing Our Future – Ideas for Older Adult Ministry
Based on the Bergstrom's Book, Amazing Grays: Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation.

The presenters discussed how Older Adults represent a rich source of Wisdom, Service, and Giving. They need the opportunity to hear the gospel and respond. Participants shared ideas, best practices and suggestions for programs and activities to meet the physical, social, and spiritual needs of older adults.

Suggestions for a successful older adult ministry included:

1. Have a balanced program, which includes activity and ministry opportunities.
2. Be purpose driven.
3. Be evangelistically minded.
4. Develop programs that address the issues of a whole person – mind, body and spirit.

SESSION IV. In the final Session of the day, participants were given an overview of how to plan an effective senior adult ministry by asking three questions:

1. Why does our ministry exist? (Define Your Purpose).
2. Where do we want to be in the next 2-5 years? (Determine Your Potential or Vision).
3. How will we accomplish our vision? (Develop Your Plan).

Conclusion:

Clearly the desire of Summit and workshop participants was that aging adults be recognized for their value and worth to God and to His

church. All expressed a desire to be used by God, to serve Him and to pass on their heritage of faith to future generations. The summit concluded by assisting leaders in developing strategies for their own ministries. Churches need to purposefully think through the issues of an aging society; acknowledge the value of older adults; focus on ministry to, by and for them; develop programs and services that meet the particular needs of maturing adults; and reach out in the love of Christ to all people through ALL of their lifetime. Participants of the Senior Summit were given a list of resolutions that reflect their desires.

RESOLUTION

Whereas God calls persons of all ages to be in mission, ministry, and service to others; and

Whereas older adults, no less than persons of all ages, are called by God to be faithful Christian disciples, and

Whereas older adults are called to share their faith, wisdom, and knowledge with persons of every age and stage of life as it is written, "wisdom is with the aged" (Job 12:12 RSV); and

Whereas older adults have much to teach and much to learn and are interdependent upon persons of all ages; and,

Whereas older adults are uniquely gifted and empowered by God; and,

Whereas aging is a natural progression in life and is part of God's good gift to life; and

Whereas there are more older adults now than at any other time in the history of the world, and the numbers will continue to increase in the new millennium; and

Whereas God is granting the gift of longer and healthier lives due to improved medicine and technology;

Therefore, be it resolved that we acknowledge our God-given responsibility to honor and value the process of aging; to provide care to those who are in need; to construct ministry opportunities that nurture, serve, and challenge; and to share

the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ with each aging adult.

Be it further resolved that the participants of the Senior Summit encourage congregations to lift up the needs and concerns of older adults and develop on-going intentional ministries to, by and for older adults.

NEXT STEPS:

1. Share the Summit report with church leaders and others interested in ministry to, by and for aging adults.
2. Propose that Summits be held in communities, within other denominations, and in other churches to encourage dialogue and action regarding these issues.
3. Be an individual ambassador to your community or church to encourage appropriate, loving, dynamic ministry to, by and for older adults.
4. Buy the book Amazing Grays: Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation to further encourage creative thinking about older adult ministry in your local congregation. We also highly recommend Timothy Starr's two notebooks on ideas for Older Adult Ministry.