

**Seattle Area Seminar  
Northshore Baptist Church, Bothell, WA**

**“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, adult ministry leaders, and persons interested in midlife and 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 the Northshore Baptist Church in Bothell, Washington, on Saturday, April 8, from 8:30 am – 1:30 pm

Twenty-five persons attended, representing various churches in the Seattle/Puget Sound area. The seminar was hosted by the 2<sup>nd</sup> ½ Ministries of Northshore Baptist Church and ChurchHealth/Lifetime Ministries.

**Session I:**

**Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation: A Biblical Model**

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 midlife and 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 midlife and older adults:

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

## **Session II: Boomers, Builders and Beyond**

The second presentation by Leona Bergstrom challenged participants to consider looking at Second Half ministries as being comprised of adults from at least three generational cohorts: Boomer, Builders and Beyond. While these divisions are not rigid, nor are they always clear, it helps to understand the developmental tasks, challenges, and unique distinctions that make up the generations in order to provide appropriate ministries and programs. The presentation described the top characteristics and values that make each generation unique, what their view of aging might typically be, and what impact they have on the church.

### **Beyond...**

These are today's current "seniors" or "elderly"

Born prior to 1925

Also characterized as "old-old"

Characteristics

- They lived in the shadow of WW I
- They fought in and supported more wars than any other generation
- Typically very patriotic
- Hard workers; frugal

How they view aging:

- Surprised to have lived so long
- Accept the fact they are “seniors”; enjoy the benefits
- First generation to experience long life together

Impact on the Church:

- See church as place for strong teaching and preaching; troubled by new approaches to worship
- Many are not able to attend
- Many are care receivers; some are caregivers
- Dealing with accessibility issues

Builders

Born 1925-1945

“Retired life”

Characteristics:

- Also patriotic – WW II;
- Built the nation’s suburbs, homes, families, businesses, Sunday Schools, churches

How they view aging:

- Most live in some form of “retirement”
- Enjoy the fruit of their labor, grandchildren, philanthropy

Impact on the church:

- Leadership issues
- Reluctance to be involved if past history of conflict, etc.
- Make up most of today’s traditional “seniors” groups

Boomers

Born 1946-1964

Midlife – age 42-60

“Boomer” identity – child of 60’s

### Characteristics:

- Share in common historical events (JFK assassination, Vietnam war, feminist movement, music, technology revolution)
- Common experiences with media/ television
- Huge numbers

### How do Boomers view aging?

- Defy
- Deny
- Re-define
- Re-generate
- Re-invent

### How do they impact the church?

- Need a new language
- New programming
- Don't want to be any part of traditional "seniors" groups
- The values and expectations of this group will define the church in the future.

### Overall challenge to us as leaders:

- If we expect to reach these generations of 50+ people, we must recognize their uniqueness
- The church has opportunities to provide people 50+ with significant and meaningful involvements and purposeful relationships
- We need to build infrastructures that capture the imaginations and energy of people 50+
- We need to understand God's purpose for long life
- We need to develop evangelistic mindsets as we work with people 50+ who need salvation, discipleship and spiritual nurture.

## **Small Workgroups:**

Participants were divided into small workgroups to brainstorm and discuss the needs and issues facing midlife, retired and senior adults. The following list was generated:

### **BEYOND....SENIORS (AGED 80+)**

#### Physical Needs of Senior Adults (age 80+):

- Diminished hearing and vision
- Increased illness
- Transportation issues
- Medication
- Loss of memory
- Activities of Daily living
- Adapting living space to needs
- Adapting transportation to needs
- Control and lack of control
- When not to drive – giving up driving
- Dementia

#### Social/Emotional needs of Senior Adults (age 80+)

- Loneliness
- Friendship
- Loss of purpose
- Sense of being judged
- Maintaining significant relationships
- Fear of the future
- How to transfer knowledge to younger group
- How to encourage receptivity
- Medicare enrollment
- Control/lack of control
- Depression (known and unknown)
- To have fun/celebrate
- Perceiving the right time to obtain intervening care (professional)
- Have recognition that they weren't always "old" – see the person

### Spiritual needs of Senior Adults (age 80+)

- Dealing with end of life issues
- Forgiveness/reconciliation issues
- Meaning of life/purpose
- What's next?
- Insecurity
- Process of moving on – death
- Guilt over being a burden
- Regular worship/ alternative worship styles
- Fellowship in smaller group
- Anxiety over changed financial situation
  - Inability to give as they used to
  - Predatory lenders, etc
- Feeling cut out of current communication media
- Frustration with technology
- Need to feel their stories are worth hearing; leaving a legacy

### *BUILDERS...RETIRED LIFE.....(age 65-80)*

#### Physical needs of BUILDERS (age 65-80):

- Cost of drugs
- Hearing loss
- Vision loss
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Trouble gripping handrails, door knobs
- More back and joint problems
- Difficult reaching, walking
- Positioning of equipment
- Driving constraints – when to give up?
- Mental decline; Alzheimer's Disease
- Diet
- Chronic diseases such as diabetes
- Addictions – including to TV
- Dementia and memory loss

#### Social/emotional needs of BUILDERS (age 65-80):

- Losing a spouse, friends; need for companionship

- Withdrawing
- Need to be needed
- Looking for acceptance
- Loss of community – facing a new environment
- Changing relationship with children
- Learning to accept ourselves as we are becoming – physical changes
- Need to pass a heritage of faith, wisdom, stories to other generations

#### Spiritual Needs of BUILDERS (age 65-80):

- Fellowship with those of like faith
- Biblical education
- Prayer support
- Need for being able to give
- Incorporate all ages
- Need to learn to be accepting; willingness to change
- To be more understanding of change
- Recognition that we need God
- Preparation and acceptance of death
- Need encouragement
- Continued spiritual growth

#### BOOMERS...MIDLIFE ....AGED 50-65

##### Physical needs of BOOMERS (age 50-65)

- Fitness emphasis: diet and exercise
- Active lifestyle
- Regular health care (exams, education, preventative care)
- Downsizing homes
- Second home
- Being able to adapt to technology

##### Social/emotional needs of BOOMERS (age 50-65)

- Pursue dreams
- New hobbies
- Consideration of growing family and the changes it brings
- Cementing friendships and starting new ones
- Interest in family history – genealogy

- Openness to inter-dependence
- Using technology to network (and Google)
- Support for their role as the sandwich generation
- Dealing with needs of aging parents and family members

#### Spiritual needs of BOOMERS (age 50-65)

- Develop a closer personal relationship with God
- Deepening/redefining our Christian walk
- Spiritual burnout
- Lifelong faith journey
- High interest in “spirituality”
- Resistance to absolutes
- Be bold for Christian faith
- Overcome independence
- To embrace the need to be grounded and make vision directed decisions
- Christian friendship and 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:

#### Senior Adults (BEYOND):

##### Physical Needs of Senior Adults:

1. Control and lack of control
2. Increased illnesses
3. Transportation

##### Emotional/Social Needs of Senior Adults:

1. Loneliness
2. Perceiving the right time to obtain intervening care (professional)
3. Loss of purpose

##### Spiritual Needs of Senior Adults:

1. Regular worship/ adapting to alternative worship styles

2. Dealing with end of life issues
3. Anxiety over finances; not being able to give as they used to, predatory lenders, etc.

### BUILDERS (Retired Life):

#### Physical Needs of BUILDERS:

1. Chronic diseases
2. Driving constraints; when to quit
3. Mental decline, memory loss, Alzheimer's Disease

#### Emotional/Social Needs of BUILDERS:

1. Loss of community and facing a new environment
2. Loss of spouse, friends
3. Need to pass a heritage of faith, wisdom, stories to other generations
3. Learning to accept ourselves and physical changes

#### Spiritual Needs of BUILDERS:

1. Continued spiritual growth
2. To be more understanding of change
3. Fellowship with people of like faith

### BOOMERS (Midlife):

#### Physical Needs of BOOMERS:

1. Fitness: diet and exercise
2. Regular health care
3. Adapt to technology

#### Social/Emotional Needs of BOOMERS:

1. Dealing with aging parents and family members
2. Cementing friendships and starting over
3. Consideration of growing families and the changes it brings
4. Use of Technology

#### Spiritual Needs of Midlife Adults:

1. Deepening/refining our walk

2. Christian friendships and mentoring
3. Embrace the need to be grounded and make vision directed decisions

### **Designing Our Future**

The final discussion was focused on how to develop powerful and effective ministries for boomers, builders and senior 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.

### **Workgroups**

Participants were divided into small workgroups to brainstorm program ideas that would meet the needs of various generational groupings based on the top priorities identified earlier in the day. The following are the ideas that were generated. Other ideas were also thrown into the discussion, but are not recorded in this report.

### **SENIORS (80+)**

1. Addressing the social/emotional need of maintaining control and dealing with lack of control:
  - a. Provide resources or “helpers”
    - i. Christian Hospice (such as provided by Eastside churches)
    - ii. Health screenings by church based volunteers
  - b. Recruit and mobilize youth groups to help
    - i. Chores and yard work
    - ii. Assist into church, etc

2. Addressing the issue of transportation
  - a. Provide education regarding existing community resources
  - b. Mobilize the church community to assist by providing transportation
    - i. To and from church
    - ii. To and from medical appointments
3. Addressing the issue of loneliness
  - a. Deploy a team of volunteers to phone, email and visit
  - b. Deliver mail and church circulars and bulletins to them
  - c. Provide fellowship opportunities
4. Addressing the issue of intervening care.
  - a. Provide education for potential patient and family
5. Addressing the issue of loss of purpose.
  - a. Sharing of intergenerational legacy goes a long way.
  - b. Provide opportunities to bring the generations together to tell stories of faith and experience

## BUILDERS

1. Addressing the issue of mental decline
  - a. Develop a “Lesson in a Lunch Box” ministry – where a story or lesson has visual aids packed in a box (lunch box) and is used with persons with dementia and/or memory loss to communicate Biblical truths
2. Addressing the issue of dealing with chronic diseases:
  - a. Develop support groups in home for persons dealing with cancer, diabetes, etc. Be sure and serve food.
  - b. Develop a “Health Squad” of allied health care professionals in a church to promote wellness consciousness throughout the congregation.
  - c. Provide health screenings

3. Addressing the issue of driving and transportation availability
  - a. Provide testing; eyesight screening, education about safe driving
  - b. Identify and promote community resources such as specialized transportation services
  - c. Make church buses and vans available for transporting adults during the week.
  
4. Addressing the issue of loss of community:
  - a. Develop a sensitivity to this generations' needs
  - b. Develop an awareness of sensory limitations, especially hearing
  - c. Develop opportunities for social fellowship and gatherings

## BOOMERS

1. To address the need for physical fitness
  - a. Develop church sports leagues that attract men and women who are in midlife – softball, biking, kayaking, etc.
  - b. Have a dinner planned and explained by a dietitian to demonstrate healthy eating
  
2. To address the need for cementing friendships and starting over
  - a. Establish a neighborhood care group
  - b. Facilitators note: Refer to Seattle Times article from 5/1/06 entitled “Circles of Caring”
  
3. To address the spiritual need to be grounded in faith and make vision directed decisions
  - a. Develop small accountability groups of 6-8 people

The ideas listed above were generated in a short amount of time by the small groups. They serve as a launching pad for others to develop creative freedom!

There are many other helpful resources to assist you in developing midlife and older adult ministries. One suggestion is obtaining the Bergstroms' book or CD, Amazing Grays: Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation, available online at [www.chonline.org](http://www.chonline.org)

Another helpful resource is CASA, Christian Association of Senior Adults, [www.gocasa.org](http://www.gocasa.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 midlife and older adult ministry?

Discover your passion. What are your core values of ministry?

1. What are the values that you can affirm within your ministry to midlife and older adults?
2. Write out 3-5 core values as a part of your plan for ministry

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

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

Develop your plan.

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

### **Reflection and Evaluation:**

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?”*

- Sharing the ideas from other churches and individuals
- Fellowship with like-minded Christians
- Division into groups to address matters
- Getting up to speed with “seniors” ministries
- The informational segments by the Bergstroms
- Brainstorming times
- The presentations
- Group brainstorming
- The handout/workbook was great.
- Reading recommendations and suggestions
- The shared expertise, especially the results of study about the characteristics of the three generations
- The teaching from Mark 2
- Seeing the possibilities for more ministry in my own church
- Sharing of the groups deliberations
- Round table discussions
- It was all great! Hard to point to one thing that stood out.

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?”*

- Develop new groups of older congregants as exiting ones become closed and/or extinguished
- More communication with our seniors
- The Parish Nurse program sounds worthy of pursuing
- Develop a compilation of life stories of our churches seniors to share with the congregation
- Develop a list of community resources
- Make a concerted effort to involve more 50+ers in ministry to/with/for the 50+ age group
- Laying down leadership with fire!
- Share these concerns and ideas
- Will have more enthusiasm for our commitment to our Senior Adult ministry
- Be more compassionate toward them

- Promote “equipping to serve others.”
- Communicating vision and with that forming a leadership team
- More concern for personal needs

The following are suggestions to improve the seminar:

- Need more time – longer workshop
- Improved acoustics, sound system
- Presenters should speak slower and allow time to record thoughts and ideas
- Add a resource table with information regarding community resources; have books for sale

Other comments:

- I liked being here!
- You offered us the opportunity to think and express. We were affirmed!
- Lots of great ideas!
- Easy to listen to, done with humor
- You challenged our thinking!
- Good stimulus for new thoughts.

**Thank you.**

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 midlife and 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.

Richard L. Bergstrom  
President, ChurchHealth

Leona D. Bergstrom  
Director, Lifetime Ministries



**P.O. Box 1493**  
**Edmonds, Washington 98020**  
**360-676-4824**  
[www.chonline.org](http://www.chonline.org)

**Northshore Baptist Church**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> 1/2 Ministries**  
**10301 NE 145<sup>th</sup> St.**  
**Bothell, WA 98011-5232**  
**www.nsb.org**