

OREGON LIFETIME SEMINAR
Temple Baptist Church, Portland, Oregon

**“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 Temple Baptist Church in Portland, Oregon, on Saturday, May 3, 2003, from 9 am to 4 pm.

Twenty-four persons attended, representing Temple Baptist Church, Glisan Street Baptist Church, New Heights Church in Vancouver, Oregon Baptist Retirement Home and Western Baptist Seminary. Most participants were lay-leaders in Older Adult Ministries, while others were pastoral or seminary staff. The seminar was convened by the Columbia Baptist Conference and was co-sponsored by Pacific Association and Christian Association of Senior Adults.

An opening worship service was led by a worship team from Temple Baptist Church.

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 Richard and Leona Bergstrom, was entitled “The Times, They Are A-Changin’: How the Age Boom Will Transform the Church.” This lecture discussed some of the social implications of the “longevity revolution.”

The question was also asked, “How will these new re-defined attitudes toward retirement impact and transform the church?” The Bergstroms outlined 8 things that can be expected in the next few decades:

1. Increased longevity will drastically impact the composition of the church.
2. Today’s concept of “retirement” will be re-defined.
3. Expectations in retirement and old age will change.
4. Lives will be characterized as “cyclical” rather than “linear.”
5. The age boom will redefine “old age”
6. Ministry infrastructures that are sensitive to changing demographics will change.
7. There will be greater degree of diversity in values, lifestyle and population mix.

8. New retirees and baby boomers won't fit into traditional categories.

What is the essential message to the church?

1. If we expect to reach the emerging generation of retirees and attract their interest in the church and kingdom ministries, then we must recognize the uniqueness of this new generation of retirees.
2. We have the opportunity to provide them with significant and meaningful involvements around purposeful relationships to replace those lost from career and family.
3. The involvements offered must be tailored to the goals and desires of this population group.
4. We need to be sensitive to the kind of language that we use in seeking to reach out to them and involve them:
 - a. Many of the traditional labels, with which a current generation of 70-100 year olds may in fact be comfortable, are not acceptable to the newly emerging generation of retirees;
 - b. By using words that build upon their potential or their contribution, we may open doors that would otherwise be closed.
5. We need to create a completely new infrastructure that will capture the imaginations of new retirees, motivate them to live lives of purpose and direction, and release them to meaningful and significant service.
6. We need to thoroughly understand and teach that God has a purpose for long life.

Small Workgroups:

Participants were divided into small workgroups to brainstorm and discuss the needs and issues facing three groups of aging adults: Midlife (ages 50-65), Retired life (ages 65-80) and Senior Life (ages 80+). ***The following are the lists of needs that were generated by the small workgroups:***

Mid-Life (Ages 50-65)

Physical Needs:

1. Stamina
2. Good diet
3. Relief from stress
4. Concerns for parents – children
5. Finances
6. Health concerns
7. Physical – exercise
8. Dependable helpers

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Friends
2. Companionship
3. Reassurance
4. Acceptance
5. Volunteering
6. Activities
7. Hobbies
8. Mental challenges
9. Encouragement
10. Confident friend
11. Confidential and competent financial advisor
12. Moral support
13. Sense of humor

Spiritual Needs:

1. Bible
2. Bible Study Groups
3. Daily devotionals
4. Prayer chains/partners
5. Home church
6. Outreach

7. Church involvement
8. Responding to others needs
9. Faith
10. Prayer

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical Needs:

1. See doctor more often (other issues: eyesight, prostate health, medication costs, recognizing physical limitations, heart problems, cancer checkup)
2. Wheelchair (handicapped) accommodation
3. Sound system – pews with headsets
4. Mobility – transportation
5. Handrails where needed
6. Health spas – exercise
7. Mammograms
8. Preventative health care

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Companionship
2. Loneliness (guard against)
3. Undertanding
4. Friendship (especially for men)
5. Usefulness
6. What to do with your time
7. Keeping your mind active
8. Intellectual stimulation
9. Group activities
10. Isolation (guard against)
11. Men' groups
12. Women's groups
13. Travel – cruises – voks-walking
14. Volunteering
15. Attention from their families
16. Paying attention to their families

Spiritual Needs:

1. Assurance of salvation
2. Bible studies
3. Prayer times
4. A ministry (avenue of service)
5. Closeness to God

6. Retreats (eg BGC Gold @ Lake Retreat)
7. Be a good model to younger Christians
8. Have a good role model in a senior age range
9. Involvement in discipleship – making disciples
10. Sharing your faith with non-Christians
11. Adaptive ability (e.g. to different worship styles)
12. Accountability

Senior Life (80+)

Physical Needs:

1. Single-level home
2. Elevators
3. Medication/Insurance/Physicians
4. Warmth
5. Bright lights
6. Hearing
7. Transportation
8. Lawncare/other maintenance
9. Limited mobility
10. Declining health/personal hygiene (dementia, Parkinsons, diabetes, etc)
11. Good diet
12. Estate planning – wills
13. Funeral planning – cemetery plot, etc.

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Loss of mate and friends
2. Loneliness
3. Companionship/friendship
4. Transportation
5. Loss of hearing/sight
6. Support other seniors – driving, visiting, etc.
7. Sense of humor
8. Making decisions

Spiritual Needs:

1. Assurance of salvation
2. Assurance of love from family
3. Ability to adjust to changes in churches and younger generations, etc. etc. etc.
4. Finding a place for ministry
5. Visitation from pastors
6. Ministry to appropriate age
7. Positive outlook on life

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:

Midlife (50-65)

Physical

1. Exercise
2. Good diet
3. Concern for parents - children

Social/Emotional

1. Friends
2. Mental challenge
3. Encouragement

Spiritual

1. Daily devotionals
2. Responding to others needs
3. Faith

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical

1. Preventative health care
2. See doctor more often\
3. Exercise

Social/Emotional

1. Keeping your mind active
2. Attention from their families
3. Usefulness

Spiritual

1. Adaptive ability (e.g. different worship styles, etc.)
2. A ministry avenue for service

3. Assurance of salvation
4. Be a good model to young Christians

Senior Life (80+)

Physical:

1. Medication/insurance/physicians
2. Good diet (nutrition)
3. Limited mobility

Social/Emotional

1. Loss of your mate and friends
2. Companionship/friendships
3. Sense of humor

Spiritual

1. Ability to adjust to changes in churches and younger generations
2. Positive outlook on life.
3. Finding a place for ministry.

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.

Exciting and helpful ideas were shared by presenters and participants. Many of the ideas shared by the presenters were from the book, Amazing Grays: Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation, and from their research with older adult ministries across the country.

Helpful resources for ideas to develop powerful and effective ministries 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 or by calling 360-676-4824.

Let's Get Going

The final workgroup session placed participants at new tables to discuss ideas for programming that would meet the top needs for each age group identified in earlier breakout sessions. The following ideas were generated by the workgroups:

MIDLIFE:

Mid-Life: Top three Physical needs identified:

1. Exercise
2. Good diet
3. Concern for parents - children

Ideas for meeting those midlife physical needs:

1. Diet and exercise support group
2. Separate class and support group regarding caring for parents
3. Separate class and support group regarding caring for children

Mid-Life: Social and Emotional needs identified:

1. Friends
2. Mental challenge
3. Encouragement

Ideas for meeting those midlife social and emotional needs:

1. Any kind of small group
2. A variety of new challenges, e.g. computer classes, golfing, college courses
3. Learn (join) something new every year. Be active

Mid-life: Top three Spiritual needs identified:

1. Daily devotionals
2. Responding to needs of others
3. Faith

Ideas to meet those midlife spiritual needs:

1. Paired-off daily devotion guide; accountability possible and needed with 2 or more people
2. Coordinator to use talents of members to meet needs of other members.
3. Helping hands ministry for unusual needs – 10 people rotate as coordinator
4. Any of the above can be an outreach opportunity to bring people to faith.

RETIRED LIFE:

Retired Life: Top three **Physical** needs identified:

1. Preventative healthcare
2. See doctor more often
3. Exercise

Ideas to meet those retired life **physical** needs:

1. Develop Parish Nurse program
2. Provide healthcare assistance
3. Class on exercise
4. Rent exercise videos and do it together in the church

Retired Life: Top three **Emotional** needs identified:

1. Keeping your mind active
2. Attention from their families
3. Usefulness

Ideas to meet those retired life **emotional** needs:

1. Classes and help on financial assistance
2. Bible study and social times
3. In-house computer class (with good instructor, not just anyone)

Retired Life: Top three **spiritual** needs identified:

1. Adaptive ability (e.g. different worship styles, etc.)
2. A ministry avenue for service
3. Assurance of salvation

Ideas to meet those retired life **spiritual** needs:

1. Ministry avenue: Help in Daycare. Need storytellers. Etc.

SENIOR LIFE (80+)

Senior Life: Top three **Physical** needs identified:

1. Medication/insurance/physicians
2. Good diet (nutrition)
3. Limited mobility

Ideas for meeting those senior life **physical** needs:

1. Organize volunteer nurses to advise, take blood pressure
2. Help provide transportation
3. Lending closet with medical equipment

Senior Life: Top three Social/Emotional needs identified:

1. Loss of your mate and friends
2. Companionship/friendships
3. Sense of humor

Ideas for meeting those senior life social/emotional needs:

1. Phone calls and visits
2. Grief counselors
3. Walk the mall
4. Join health club
5. Decision/advise group

Senior Life: Top three Spiritual needs identified:

1. Ability to adjust to changes in churches and younger generations
2. Positive outlook on life.
3. Finding a place for ministry.

Ideas for meeting senior life spiritual needs:

1. Adjustment resources. Generational “talks” – teens and seniors
2. List ministry opportunities

3. Strategic Planning:

At the end of the day, participants were encouraged to begin to think strategically about purposeful and effective older adult ministries by considering 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?

Conclusion:

The seminar concluded with the reading of a set of "resolutions" defining our commitment to developing powerful and effective ministries by and with older adults in our congregations and in our communities.

Reflection and Evaluation:

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?”***

- It was practical and very inclusive (hardly nothing left out.)
- Well organized
- The multi-media presentation (print, screen and voice) of the key points
- Sharing at the tables
- Love special information when we shared around tables.
- Presentation and information
- A focus only on this topic – too often overlooked. I feel badly that the under 50 generation was not here to participate.
- Your overall presentation of the Power of Age – clearer understanding.
- Material was well presented and prepared.
- Clearly stated material about objectives of senior adult needs and ministry.
- The rapid dissemination of information.
- Keeping up the pace.
- Quite comprehensive.
- Things were kept moving.
- Recognition of needs of older people.
- Many new ideas, all easily implemented. Practical, helpful and necessary.
- Well thought out material and information.

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?”***

- Get our group going with new ideas!
- Recognize that senior adults, just like anyone else, have to “own” with a passion any ministry they are asked to do.
- Just to “get started” on something new would be nice!
- Greater understanding of older adult needs.
- Be more attentive to the elderly of our church.
- An awareness of senior ministry.
- Focus more on outreach.
- Time will tell.
- I will consciously think more about seniors, their needs and contributions.

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 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 2112

Bellingham, Washington

98227-2112

360-676-4824

www.chonline.org