

**Casa De Oro Baptist Church
Spring Valley, California
February 25, 2005**

**“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 Casa De Oro Baptist Church on Friday, February 24, 2005, from 9 am to 4 pm. 25 persons attended, representing a number of churches from L.A. to San Diego in the Southwest Baptist Conference of the BGC. Most participants were leaders in Older Adult Ministries in the SWBC. The SWBC district office sponsored this event. Walt Plumb served as committee chairman for this event. Robin Simmons and DeDe Basham provided administrative support from the SWBC district office.

Celebration of Life:

Pastor Cliff Olson from Grace Baptist Church in Fletcher Hills led all participants in an opening worship session called a *Celebration of Life*.

Keynote Lecture:

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!

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:

NEEDS AND ISSUES FACING OLDER ADULTS

Mid-Life (Ages 50-65)

Physical Needs:

- Healthy – maintain (12)
- Income, job change, stability(1)
- Preparing for retirement (4)
- Menopause – men and women (4)
- Retirement change (8)
- Role reversal (2)
- Family togetherness (4)
- Companionship (4)
- Challenge (1)
- Recognizing limitations (8)

Social/Emotional Needs:

- Empty nest (8)
- Hobbies, interests (4)
- Travel (1)
- Social contacts, outlets (3)
- Significance (5)
- Grandchildren (6)
- Love (1)
- Affirmation
- Value (1)
- Companionship (3)
- Service (8)
- Extended family
- Sensitivity
- Challenge
- Acceptance of situation (10)
- Need to be accepted, not on the shelf
- Midlife crisis

Spiritual Needs:

- God – growing (11)
- Care group – bible study (3)
- Fellowship (12)
- Challenge
- Responsibility – serving (12)
- Mentoring (9)
- Worship (2)
- Sensitivity

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical Needs:

- Exercise (8)
- Staying active (5)
- Mental stimulation (10)
- Discretionary income / Limited income (1)
- Driving limitations (4)
- Continuing education programs
- Some are still working
- Medical education
- Handy man needs (3)
- Understanding legal advice (6)
- Health needs (3)
- Productivity (6)
- Sexual needs (1)
- Nutrition (1)
- Caregiving (1)

Social/Emotional Needs:

- Live alone
- Friendships (4)
- Sense of purpose (12)
- Activities – secular and spiritual (1)
- Small group environment (1)
- Support – senior centers (4)
- Independent – dependent (1)
- Trips (4)
- Sense of community
- Volunteering (2)
- Family relationships (8)
- Widows – widowers (1)
- Romance (1)
- Humor (1)

- Opportunity to use talents and skills (8)
- Caregiving
- Financial management (4)

Spiritual Needs:

- Prayer support (8)
- Relationship to Christ (3)
- Depression – help (4)
- Bible study groups (2)
- Ministry involvement (12)
- Outreach
- Mentoring (3)
- Discipleship
- Fellowship (11)
- Evangelism (3)
- Caregiving (5)

Senior Life (80+)

Physical Needs:

- transportation (2)
- financial advice (11)
- health needs (14)
- caregiver – assisted living (7)
- accessibility (to different levels) (8)
- hearing loss, loss of sight
- loss of memory – dementia (3)
- exercise (3)
- home repairs / handyman service (6)

Social/Emotional Needs:

- fellowship (lonely) (11)
- loss of spouse (5)
- depression (3)
- living adjustments (4)
- experiencing loss of friends (7)
- denial – not owning up to being a senior (2)
- sense of purpose (13)

Spiritual Needs:

- changes in the church (14)
- unable to attend church services (8)
- encouragement (8)
- need to be a part of the church (family) (13)
- Bible study for age appropriate (5)
- grow spiritually (1)

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. healthy – maintain
2. recognizing limitations
3. retirement - change

Social/Emotional

1. acceptance of situation, aging
2. empty nest
3. service (tied for 2nd)

Spiritual

1. responsibility – serving
2. fellowship
3. God - growing

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical

1. mental stimulation
2. exercise
3. understanding legal issues, laws, trusts
4. productivity (tied for #3)

Social/Emotional

1. sense of purpose – ministry
2. family relationships
3. opportunity to use talents & skills (tied for #2)

Spiritual

1. ministry involvement
2. fellowship
3. prayer support

Senior Life (80+)

Physical:

1. health needs
2. financial advice – paying for Rx
3. accessibility (to church)

Social/Emotional

1. sense of purpose
2. fellowship
3. experiencing loss of friends

Spiritual

1. changes in the Church
2. need to be a part of the Church
3. unable to attend Church
4. encouragement (tied w/#3)

The Times, They are A-Changin’:

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

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

Let's Get Going

Workgroups:

The next 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:

Ideas for Midlife (50-65) Ministry

Physical Need:

- Jazzercise
- Health fair
- Nutrition
- Hike club
- Gym with climbing wall and racketball
- Walk-a-thon
- Indoor – outdoor sports activities: hikng, walking
- Bingo club

Social/emotional need:

- Meal club for childless couples
- Adopt parent-less children

Spiritual need:

- Bible study
- Short term missions
- Mentoring
- Dime-a-dip fundraisers
- Cross generational bible study5

Ideas for Retired Life (65-80) Ministry:

Physical need:

- Learning center
- Hot topics seminar series, outside speakers

Social/Emotional need:

- Grandparenting program
- Short-term missions opportunities
- Community service
- Church service center (survey)
- Party service center
- Potluck luncheons

Spiritual need:

- Prayer chain
- Using spiritual gifts
- Bible study
- Small groups
- Luncheon testimony from a known person.

Ideas for Senior Life (80+) Ministry:

Physical need:

- Have an exercise class
- Nutrition class
- Transportation: stores, doctors appointments, Church
- Meal on wheels program
- Someone available for financial advice

Social/emotional need:

- Regular group meeting
- Fellowship, support groups
- Jobs: sense of purpose
- Serving:
 - Mentors
 - Ushers
 - Preparing for communion
 - Help in Awanas (listeners)

Spiritual Need:

- Tape ministry for shut-ins, tape recorder, batteries
- Service to the church
 - prayer chain
 - prayer
- Bible study available

Strategic Planning

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 our purpose. Why does our ministry exist?

1. What is our church’s purpose (mission statement)?
2. What is the purpose or mission of our 50’s+ adult ministry?

Discover Our Passion: What are the core values of our ministry?

1. What are the values that we can affirm within our ministry to older adults?
2. Write out 3-7 core values as a part of your plan for ministry.

Determine Our Potential: Where do we 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 Our Plan. How will we accomplish our vision?

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

Deploy our Personnel. Who will carry out this ministry?

FINAL EXERCISE: CREATE A NEW MINISTRY:

Each group then developed a brief overview of a plan for ministry for their age group. In a 45-minute exercise, they were to come up with a strategic name for their particular age group, a mission statement for their area of ministry, and at least one program activity under each of the identified needs.

Here then are the results of their planning sessions:

MID-LIFE (AGES 50-65)

GROUP NAME: **ACT 2**

GROUP MISSION: *Act 2 exists to Apply the commands of Christ, Call the lost to Christ, and Teach the truth of Christ 2-day and 2-morrow.*

PROGRAMS TO MEET NEEDS:

1. Indoor –outdoor sports activities
2. Dine-out/dine-in for childless parents
3. Cross-generational Bible study.

RETIRED LIFE (AGES 65-80)

GROUP NAME: **PRIORITY LIFE**

GROUP MISSION: *To proclaim Christ through fellowship, social and learning activities and meaningful service.*

PROGRAM IDEAS TO MEET NEEDS:

1. Luncheon testimony from a known person.
2. Potluck – service (enter surveys, talents (interaction)).
3. Create a prayer chain

SENIOR LIFE (AGES 80+)

GROUP NAME: **JOY CLUB** (Just Older Youth)

GROUP MISSION: Keeping mature people growing by meeting their spiritual, emotional, social, and physical needs.

PROGRAMS TO MEET NEEDS:

Mobile persons	Shut-ins
Regular meetings	Take tapes
Group outings	Communion
Luncheons	Meals
Special programs	In home need: yard, inside of home
Daily phone contact program >>>	Visitation

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?*”

- *Good information, well presented*
- *Ideas presented*
- *Workshops*
- *New ideas*
- *The interaction of those in attendance and with the Bergstroms.*
- *The seminar presentations were excellent. Thank You!*
- *Workshops were good, but speakers were very good.*
- *I feel all of it will benefit us in working with the older adults in our church.*
- *The good fellowship and learning.;*
- *How to get a group started.*
- *The practical questions to ask in order to develop a senior adult ministry in our church.*
- *Relevance of material for every church.*
- *Brainstorming*
- *Very informative. I learned lots of good 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?*”

- *Using our seniors for devotions instead of always having ministers. Maybe having them give testimony of how God worked in their lives.*
- *Work harder to encourage service among our group and encourage interaction with our young children.*
- *Attempt to have a better way to reach other adults.*
- *More ideas to get more involvement in our programs*
- *I think we will be more intentional in reviewing our purposes, goals and future of our ministry.*
- *Develop programs that might be of interest to more people.*
- *Endeavor to get involved with our youth as mentors.*
- *Interest the pastoral staff in senior ministries.*
- *Try to get a senior group started.*
- *Try to get our church to be aware of this largely neglected opportunity for our church. Our is very Willow Creek / Saddleback where they appeal mostly to younger ones.*
- *Put a sense of purpose – a “why” to the ministry.*

Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation,
Presented by Richard and Leona Bergstrom of ChurchHealth, Edmonds, WA

Thank you.

We wish to thank the Southwest Baptist Conference for inviting us to facilitate the “Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation” seminar. Thank you to Walt Plumb and the San Diego planning committee, the SWBC District staff Robin Simmons and DeDe Bassham and to Casa De Oro Baptist Church for your wonderful hospitality!

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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