

Trinity Lutheran Church Santa Barbara, California

“Unleashing The Power Of Age In Your Congregation” Seminar

A Ministry Report

Summary:

The “Unleashing The Power of Age In Your Congregation” seminar was held at Trinity Lutheran Church, Santa Barbara, California, on Saturday, November 3, 2001, from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm.

Sixty persons attended, representing 13 churches and several healthcare and social service agencies from Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties.

Participants opened the day in a time of worship led by Rev. Tom Shelley, the senior pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church. The morning was filled with lectures and discussion regarding the reasons for developing older adult ministries, the changes in society as a result of the “age wave”, and the spiritual journey of aging adults. Small groups were formed to discuss and define the physical, emotional and spiritual needs that aging people in our community face. Participants were asked to determine the top needs of older adults by multi-voting. Those results will be discussed later on in this report.

Following lunch the afternoon sessions included a discussion of the priority needs of aging adults, and ideas for programming that would meet those needs to create a powerful and effective older adult ministry. The final session focused on Mark 2:1-12 as a Biblical model for successful older adult ministry.

It was suggested that the group follow up the day’s activities and discovery by forming task forces that would continue to look at the purpose, mission and operational strategies for older adult ministries in their churches and communities.

Results of Small Workgroups:

Participants were divided into small workgroups to discuss and define some of the needs and issues facing older adults in the community and within the church. Below is a sampling of some of the ideas generated:

Physical Needs:

- Chronic illness/care
- Longterm care
- Safe/healthy living environment
- Help with activities of daily living
- Adequate income
- Sex
- Touch
- Help with chores/yard and house
- Clothing
- Understanding
- Peace of mind
- Prescription drugs
- Fun activities
- Keep mind active
- Ability to hear, see and think
- Accept limitations
- Crutches, canes, walkers
- Love
- Stroking
- Education/information
- Rehabilitation
- Safety
- Exercise and fitness
- Fellowship
- Respect for physical body, touch
- Help
- Housing
- Food/nutrition
- Transportation
- Medical Care
- Learn ways to live healthier
- Outside activities

Emotional/Social Needs:

- Advocacy
- Adventure
- Relief of depression
- Affordable treatment
- Medication
- Relationship skills
- Legal assistance
- Attention and affection
- Love
- Strokes
- Support
- Lack of Finances
- Independence
- Memoirs-Personal History
- Meaningful vocation
- Satisfaction
- Affordable shelter
- Friends
- Understanding
- Support of family and loved ones
- Humor
- Good works
- Community Involvement
- Intellectual Growth
- Sense of giving and Receiving
- Stimulation
- Confidence
- Encouragement
- Fellowship
- Relatedness
- Love
- Compassion/caring
- Purpose/caring
- Companionship/support of spouse, friends and family
- Support for challenges/grief, etc.
- Interest/hobbies/leisure
- Ability to be alone/interest to support it
- Sense of worth, respect

- Appreciation for accumulated wisdom
- Letting go of the past (baggage, grudges, etc.)
- Money/stewardship/management
- Praise
- Visitation
- Communication
- Cards and letters
- Our patience
- Hugs and affection
- Opportunities to Serve
- Interaction with different generations
- Belonging
- Fun
- Play
- Mental stimulation
- Reminiscing of others already in God's world
- Empathizing with others
- Being needed and appreciated
- Mentoring of others
- Family connections

Spiritual Needs

- Faith
- Hope
- Love
- Forgiveness
- Word and Sacrament
- Community of like believers
- Guidance
- Relief from guilt
- Assurance of Grace
- Growth
- Stimulation
- A mission
- Renewal
- Passion
- Peace and joy
- Vision
- Comfort

- Challenge
- Drama
- Good reading material
- Education
- Relationship with God
- Worship, meditation, prayer
- Boldness in sharing spirituality
- Confession and commission
- Bible study
- Intercession, prayer
- Access to worship
- Disciplined life
- Intimacy with the Lord
- Healthcare
- Church home
- Belonging
- Variety
- Practice
- Heritage of Faith
- Journals
- Satisfaction
- Music for the souls
- Patience/endurance
- Share their journey with younger people
- Tape ministry
- Salvation
- Affirmation of gifts
- Spiritual growth/learning
- Companionship of grieving
- Worship
- Prayer

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:

- Medical care
- Food and nutrition
- Housing

Emotional/Social:

- Support of family and loved ones
- To be needed
- To have a purpose
To “belong”

Spiritual:

- Faith
- Relationship with God
- Forgiveness

Resources Older Adults Offer to Our Congregations and Communities:

A core value of ChurchHealth and Lifetime Ministries is that older adults are highly valued beings, created in the image of God, who have lived long, experienced a great deal, and have much to contribute to our congregations and communities. A discussion regarding the resources older adults have to offer enumerated the following suggestions:

- They can share their knowledge
- They can share their skills
- They have time to serve
- They have true life experience
- They can share specific skills (i.e. a retired physician may be able to offer medical assistance, a retired funeral director may

help others understand the details of funeral planning and estate planning)

- They have stories of God's activity in their lives
- They can mentor – both spiritually and practically regarding career fields
- They can show us how to witness and share our faith.
- They have money and resources to support ministry and people
- They understand charitable giving.
- They can share the realities of life's experiences (such as they do in Al-Anon and other support groups – can this be replicated in the church? What about support groups, grief support, personal renewal?)
- They can serve as surrogate grandparents.
- They can share specific skills such as handyman services, helping “de-clutter” a home, serve as a personal shopper, provide transportation, help connect with services, assist with paper work such as insurance claims.
- They can teach Sunday School and Bible studies and share knowledge and understanding.
- They can model preventative health care and healthy living.

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. There was some dissatisfaction with the sound system (lapel microphone was difficult to exchange between speakers and caused some distraction), and the quality of the video. Participants overwhelmingly appreciated the day and reported being challenged to think differently about aging and the potential of older people in congregations and community.

1. The following are the comments made when asked what one key concept participants took from the seminar:

- To be willing to change methods to reach a mission
- That adult ministries should be on the front burner. Aging is now.
- Don't put your seniors on the shelf.

- Understood the body, mind and spirit connection
- The importance of the older population in our congregation and community and helping them feel purposeful.
- There are some great older adults here and we need to connect.
- The power we have in our churches if we motivate older members and find out their needs.
- A lot more can be accomplished, particularly with united effort.
- Go forth on faith.
- Affirm what we're doing and commit
- The compassionate fellowship that thinks "outside the box" with creative freedom
- "Things" of the church can change and grow through a compassionate fellowship
- Utilizing the resources of the seniors
- The "time" to move and become involved in activities is NOW.
- The possibility of making a difference.
- The importance of cohesiveness in our parish and the need to rethink our caregiving for the elderly.
- Try to think of new ways to reach out.
- Our church is doing a good job.

2. When asked, "What do you believe is the top priority for older adult ministries at your church?" – the following answers were given:

- Caring for each other
- We have an older congregation so will try to reach out.
- Involving our elderly in serving through their unique talents.
- Caregivers to older members
- Visitation
- Assessing the needs
- Reaching out to older adults
- Outreach
- Variety
- "Do something" as we pray a lot!
- Have to think about how to channel energy and resources of older adults – how to be more invitational and inclusive
- Identify needs and move forward.
- Motivate organization and intergenerational involvement
- That it extends beyond the deacons
- Discovering the needs of our older adults.

- Outreach, assess needs, involvement
- Utilizing them in a way that will make them feel needed as well as providing meaningful service to others.

3. What suggestions do participants have for future activities, ministry opportunities or conferences for older adults?

- Keep St. Francis Parish Nurse program going! They are a great resource.
- Make better use of those available
- Affordable housing
- Perhaps a list of activities and possible outreach programs for seniors could be compiled while including a level of difficulty for each function.
- Visitation conferences/training

Thank you.

We wish to thank Trinity Lutheran Church for inviting us to facilitate the “Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation” seminar. 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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