

SEATTLE LIFETIME SEMINAR
Northshore Baptist Church, Bothell, Washington

**“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 Northshore Baptist Church on Saturday, April 26, 2003, from 9 am to 4 pm.

Thirty-five persons attended, representing several churches from Seattle and surrounding areas. Most participants were lay-leaders in Older Adult Ministries, while others were pastors, educators, and pastoral 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 Northshore 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. Exercise
2. Beginning of physical limitations – learning to cope
3. Stress relief
4. Resolution of debt, retirement planning
5. Diet changes
6. Weight control
7. Hearing
8. Sight
9. Mobility
10. Immunizations
11. Physical check-ups
12. Fears of physical change

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Being needed
2. Fellowship
3. Friendships
4. Empty nest
5. Retirement anxiety
6. Retirement planning
7. Family concerns – children
8. Aging parents
9. Handling death – friends and family
10. Life evaluation (Has it counted?)
11. Refocus on marital relationship
12. Career Transition
13. Interacting with people
14. Singleness – through death or divorce
15. Raising grandchildren
16. Early retirement adjustments
17. Re-evaluating purpose

18. Feeling over-committed (burn-out)
19. Companionship

Spiritual Needs:

1. Continued growth
2. Fellowship – relational, encouraging...with other Christians
3. Renewal
4. Involvement
5. Evangelized (many materialistic)
6. Application of Biblical principles
7. Mentoring/ being mentored
8. To “open up” to others – vulnerability
9. Being part of church community
10. Quick acceptance into spiritual community
11. God’s continued reassurance/love
12. Adaptability in worship
13. Continuity in worship
14. Choices in worship
15. Salvation assurance

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical Needs:

1. Transportation
2. Meals
3. Companionship
4. Health care
5. Financial
6. House cleaning
7. Medicine management
8. Insurance
9. Security
10. Comfort
11. Stairs/elevators
12. Little kids – get knocked over by them
13. Respect when disabled
14. Dealing with illness/injury
15. Support in grief
16. Protection from swindles and scams
17. Help in purchasing big ticket items
18. Yard care/fix-it/home, car, maintenance
19. Pick up to take to church

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Significance
2. Family closeness
3. Connection with familiar tradition
4. Realizing planned dreams
5. Something to invest in
6. Being valued
7. Need to be asked/needs noticed – won't volunteer needs
8. Community
9. Support in grief
10. Loneliness after loss of mate
11. Excitement/adventure with new learning
12. In rest home – not connected with change (need tapes/video)
13. Fellowship
14. Age denial
15. Connection to younger groups
16. Visitations
17. Listener
18. Grief support
19. Activities

Spiritual Needs:

1. Prayer – corporate
2. Worship
3. Communion at home
4. Bible studies
5. Prayer – individual
6. Evangelism
7. Community
8. Invited to share wisdom/listening
9. Support in grief/crisis and addictions
10. Scripture memorization
11. Mentoring
12. See God do something
13. Short term missions – long term
14. Ministry opportunities

Senior Life (80+)

Physical Needs:

1. Transportation assistance (to church, shopping, etc.)
2. Yard work
3. Housekeeping
4. Bathing, personal care
5. Adequate housing
6. Financial assistance (watchcare)
7. Forgetfulness
8. Confusion
9. Medical needs
10. Accessibility: home and public places
11. Estate planning
12. Meals
13. Assisted living
14. Medical equipment
15. Caregivers
16. Reading for visual impaired
17. Listening devices/ home, church, etc.
18. Liaison for medical care
19. Legal help
20. Physical decline
21. When to stop driving
22. Making medical decisions

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Visitors
2. Need help with identity after loss of spouse
3. Peer group relationships
4. Sense of belonging
5. Someone to listen (phone, etc.)
6. Dealing with family problems
7. Left out of decisions re: self and family
8. Worries about finances
9. Meaningful activities – social
10. Entertaining (help with)
11. Dealing with decline of mental acuity
12. Loss of loved one
13. E-mail connections
14. Having goals: writing memoirs, book, recollections
15. Fight HMO for rights

16. Loneliness
17. Depression
18. Loss of controls/ independence
19. Boredom
20. Need to be needed
21. Significance
22. Fear of being a burden
23. Appreciation
24. Opinions valued
25. Self worth
26. Pre-funeral planning

Spiritual Needs:

1. Assurance of salvation
2. Christian fellowship – belonging
3. Significant ministry
4. Comfort
5. Re-assurance of personal value
6. Facing death
7. Family relationships
8. Unable to read Bible
9. Transportation to services
10. Opportunities for meaningful/purposeful activities
11. Grace to pass on responsibilities to next generation
12. Mentoring younger Christians
13. Prayer (for self/for others)
14. Alternatives: Computer-based; worship/Bible study
15. Recall spiritual journey (write, dictate, record, etc.)
16. Recognition by younger leaders in the church

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. Resolution of debt, retirement planning
3. Stress relief

Social/Emotional

1. Re-evaluating purpose
2. Re-focus on marital relationship
3. Family concerns – children

Spiritual

1. Fellowship – relational, encouraging, with other Christians
2. Continued growth
3. Involvement

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical

1. Transportation
2. Companionship
3. Dealing with illness/injury

Social/Emotional

1. Significance
2. Fellowship
3. Being valued

Spiritual

1. Ministry opportunity
2. Worship
3. Invited to share wisdom/listening

Senior Life (80+)

Physical:

1. Transportation
2. Caregivers
3. Physical decline

Social/Emotional

1. Loss of controls/ independence
2. Loneliness
3. Meaningful activities – social

Spiritual

1. Christian fellowship
2. Re-assurance of personal value
3. Facing death

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. Resolution of debt, retirement planning
3. Stress relief

Ideas for meeting those midlife physical needs:

1. Exercise
 - a. Bike hikes, walking trails, walk around Green Lake
 - b. Physical activity – in lower level of church or fellowship hall
 - c. Group outings – involving walking
 - d. Walking 30 minutes minimum
 - e. Golf Days
2. Resolution of debt, retirement planning
 - a. Seminar retirement planning – BGC resource in Hal Lentz
 - b. Financial classes and retirement classes
 - c. Seminar on financial and retirement planning
3. Stress relief
 - a. Counseling
 - b. Physical activity – walks, classes

Mid-Life: Social and Emotional needs identified:

1. Re-evaluating purpose
2. Re-focus on marital relationships
3. Family concerns – children and aging parents

Ideas for meeting those midlife social and emotional needs:

1. Re-evaluating purpose
 - a. Sunday School class on “Purpose Driven Life”
 - b. Get involved in church ministry
 - c. Change focus from secular to spiritual
2. Re-focus on marital relationships
 - a. Provide Sunday School classes on marital relationships
 - b. Marriage seminars

- c. "Enrich" marital check-up
- 3. Family concerns – children and aging parents
 - a. Class on family issues; dealing with aging parents
 - b. Caregiving support

Mid-life: Top three **Spiritual needs identified:**

- 1. Fellowship – relational encouraging with other Christians
- 2. Continued Growth
- 3. Involvement

Ideas to meet those midlife **spiritual needs:**

- 1. Fellowship – relational encouraging with other Christians
 - a. Social event targeting 50-65's, 40's-60's?
 - b. Small group studies – friendship building
 - c. Small group Bible studies
 - d. Hymn sing-along programs
- 2. Continued growth
 - a. Small group studies – friendship building
 - b. Prayer groups
 - c. 1 on 1 prayer
 - d. Pastoral visitation
- 3. Involvement

RETIRED LIFE:

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

- 1. Transportation
- 2. Companionship
- 3. Dealing with illness/injury

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

- 1. Transportation
 - a. Transportation pools
- 2. Companionship
 - a. Identify those in need and match up with those who can provide
 - b. Adopt a grandparent/family
- 3. Dealing with illness/injury
 - a. Develop support groups
 - b. Visitation

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

- 1. Significance
- 2. Fellowship
- 3. Being valued

Ideas to meet those retired life emotional needs:

1. Significance
 - a. Volunteer appreciation program
 - b. Integrate older adult ministries with the rest of the church's ministries
2. Fellowship
 - a. Sports events
 - b. Story night
3. Being valued
 - a. Volunteer of the "month" – parking place, honor, etc.
 - b. Go visit older adults and ask them for their input and ideas

Retired Life: Top three spiritual needs identified:

1. Ministry opportunity
2. Worship
3. Invited to share wisdom/listening

Ideas to meet those retired life spiritual needs:

1. Ministry opportunity
 - a. Mentoring parents, grandchildren
 - b. Integrate older adults in other ministries
2. Worship
 - a. Hymn sings
 - b. Specials
3. Invited to share wisdom/listening
 - a. Tell stories to youth – through AWANA, Sunday School, etc.
 - b. Testimony time
 - c. Professional testimonies

SENIOR LIFE (80+)

Senior Life: Top three Physical needs identified:

1. Transportation
2. Caregivers
3. Physical decline

Ideas for meeting those senior life physical needs:

1. Volunteer driver program
2. Valet parking
3. Caregiver respite
4. Parish nursing/health ministry

5. Helping Hands program – help with home repair, meals, etc.
6. Equipment lending program: walkers, wheelchairs, etc.
7. Care or Helping Hands ministry of helps
8. Benevolence
9. Sign up sheet for areas members are willing to help...needs coordinator

Senior Life: Top three Social/Emotional needs identified:

1. Loss of controls/ independence
2. Loneliness
3. Meaningful activities - social

Ideas for meeting those senior life social/emotional needs:

1. Visitation program
2. Class/program about the physical aspects of aging
3. Comforters/devotional group (women/widows)
4. Seniors retreat
5. Theme parties
6. Ministry opportunity: telephoning, send cards/letters; prayer; office help.
7. Invite people home for lunch (or go out) – individuals and/or families

Senior Life: Top three Spiritual needs identified:

1. Christian fellowship
2. Re-assurance of personal value
3. Facing death

Ideas for meeting senior life spiritual needs:

1. “ Kingdom Transition” Planning (facing death)
2. Burial/cremation alternatives source list
3. Senior newsletter
4. Recognition of seniors
5. “Tea Cup” Bible study (take china teacups and refreshments to low-income residences to serve a tea party and teach the Bible)
6. Tape ministry and visitation
7. Encouragement notes
8. Prayer chain

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?”***

- The information was very valuable.
- New ideas and information
- Exchange of ideas with others
- It was practical.
- I have gained a greater insight into the need for developing more intentional focus on ministry to the senior adults in our congregation.
- Use of brainstorming and prioritization really involved participants.
- Information on the changing times.
- Practical suggestions
- It was well planned and maintained continued interest.
- Consideration/brainstorming of ideas.
- Some good ideas. It was very well planned and flowed very nicely making it easier to keep on track.
- The sharing of ideas with other folks concerned about ministry to seniors.
- Gus was great.
- All the ideas generated by each table.
- Gave me guidelines and many ideas for beginning a retired life program in our church.
- Enjoyed the varied pace activities.
- Connecting and seeing needs in each age group.
- Interaction and ideas.
- Well organized. A balance of lectures, research, challenge with small group involvement, together with practical application on a local church level.

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?”***

- Try new ideas!
- Try to interest others.
- Try to involve more people; raise profile and needs of senior adults.
- I will be focusing more on getting seniors involved in ministry rather than just ministering to adults.
- We are commissioned by our church to have some program underway by fall. Thanks for the three-level concept.
- To be more involved.
- Provide help to seniors adults in practical ways.
- Looking at seniors in a different light.
- Become more focused and intentional in whatever we are doing with and for seniors.
- More outreach!
- I would like to involve our seniors with new programs which will use their knowledge to assist others.
- The realization that the idea of “senior” is no longer what our parents see senior as, but is moving toward more active involved movement.
- Work with staff to develop middle adult ministries.
- More cognizant of older persons needs.
- Fresh insights into the three age categories of Senior Ministry.
- We will start!

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.

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