

SPOKANE LIFETIME SEMINAR
Manito Presbyterian Church, Spokane, 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 Manito Presbyterian Church on Saturday, April 12, 2003, from 9 am to 4 pm.

Seventy-one persons attended, representing several churches from Spokane and surrounding areas. Most participants were leaders in Older Adult Ministries, while others were pastors, educators, parish nurses, and pastoral staff. The seminar was convened by participating churches of the Inland Empire Presbytery.

An opening worship service was led Rev. Bill Peterson of Emmanuel Presbyterian 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 eight 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:

Mid-Life (Ages 50-65)

Physical Needs:

Travel
No stairs
Insurance
Wider aisles
Prepare for retirement/financial
Housing
Larger print
Lighting
Hearing/acoustics/sound system
Transportation
Wills/trusts
Padded seats
Softer pews
Athletic activities/exercise
Kleenex
Amplifiers
Place for wheelchairs
Ramps
Community nursing program
Transportation for night driving
Medical/disabilities, plans
Retirement income planning
Age discrimination
Diminishing physical capabilities
Estate planning (funeral, etc)

Social/Emotional Needs:

Depression
Website/email access
Computer class
Retirement and financial planning
Caring for parents
Community outreach
Grandparenting
Welcoming committee
Singing outreach
Empty nest support
Couples/marriage issues
Travel
Singles
Talent shows
Problems of empty nest

Diminishing stable relationships
Depression
Loneliness
Low self esteem
Support groups
Community resources, i.e. legal, clinics
Outings, i.e. cruises, concerts
Volunteering
Connection
Relationships
Mobile population (family apart)
Divorce/death (support)
Blended families
Less money – prepare for retirement
Change of purpose
Impact of world situations
Job change/loss
Age discrimination
Emotional outlet for retirees – still have purpose

Spiritual Needs:

Bible studies and Sunday School
Small groups
Bereavement/support
Visiting shut ins
Greeters for contemporary service
Involving this age group in a new way
Cross-generational activities – child care/ mentoring
Senior's service
New believers
Using faith at this stage
Death/eternity
Changing worship style
Change
Christian relationships
Mentors/leaders (being)
Growth in faith (grounded)
Daily disciplines (Bible, prayer)
Peace
Bible studies
Worship preferences
Continuing Christian education
Prayer groups
Opportunities for ministry involvement
Pastor staff

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical Needs:

Hearing

Sight

Mobility (closer parking, elevators, ramps, walkers, wheelchairs)

Pain (back, legs, standing)

Transportation

Energy

Housing

Healthcare (diet, blood pressure, Alzheimer's)

Transportation

Diet

Elevator

Medical care

Financial

Accessibility

Housing

Homebound

Chronic illness support

Hearing and sight

Frailty

Maintain health

Adapt to energy level decline

Access to medical expertise and medication

Complacency of medical staff

Maintain and adapt home environment

Transportation

Safe-sex education

Affordable nutrition, health foods

Affordable caregiving

safety

Social/Emotional Needs:

Decline and loss of social contact

Loss of loved ones, health, etc.

Need of sense of community

New friendships to replace lost

Re-define family

Credit for advanced education

Integrate – intergenerational

Impart knowledge
Loneliness
Friendship
Depression
Activity
Interaction
Stimulation
Touch
Accountability
Respect/sense of worth
Patience
Networking
Humor
Interdependence
Communication
Acceptance
Loneliness/isolation
Need to be needed
Affirmation
Unresolved issues
Abuse
Complexity (anxiety; decision making)
Lack of funds
Family problems

Spiritual Needs:

Compassionate minister
Life review
Meaningful worship
Community support
Connectedness
Blessed assurance
Experiencing God's presence and reality
Love
Permission to grieve
Celebration
Recognition
Rest
Fear of death/dying
Guilt
Lack of prayer
Lack of self-forgiveness
Need for corporate worship

Acceptance of worship styles
Lack of Biblical understanding
Prepare for final exam
Respect for tradition
Adapt to change
Feel loved and valued
Continued learning
Integrate life experiences

Senior Life (80+)

Physical Needs:

Keep busy physically and mentally
Caregivers
Finances often decrease
Safe environment
Help with mobility
Help with prescriptions – if we can't afford them, we suffer
Need doctors who accept Medicaid and Medicare
Dressing and bathing
Hugs and Smiles
Bathrooms
Elevators; stairs with railing or ramps
Sound systems
Visual aids – large print, etc.
Light – more needed
Transportation – more availability
Reminders – help with memory
Medical – crises in health
Hugs, smiles, etc.
Assisted living needs – preparing meals, dressing, bathing, personal care
Hearing
Sight/vision
Medication – help with taking it, right amount at the right time
Preparing meals/eating
Transportation/driving self or others
Personal mobility – canes, wheelchairs, walkers,
Preventative care – actual care
Memory loss – safe place to be, caregiver assistance/support
Wellness programs - strengthen body – exercise programs
Nutrition/diet
Health monitoring
Are you healthy or unhealthy?
Frailty
Diseases

Crisis support

Social/Emotional Needs:

Respect

Caregivers

Finding an understanding physician

Transportation to assist people getting to events

Coping with loss of family, spouse, friendships

Managing relationships – with adult children/peers/other generations

Financial concerns – worrying about the money you have; managing and understanding financial planning

Grandparenting – full time grandparenting; Can you see them? (because of divorce or physical location?)

Great grandparenting

What is my purpose in life? What do I do for the day? Am I valued?

Balanced lifestyle

Age range in relationships – differences in 80 year old/65 year old spouse

Attitude – mental look on life ages you, not just your chronological age.

Crisis support

Reliable transportation; vans that are on time to medical appointments

Political leaders need to understand senior needs

Transportation to social events spontaneously

Entertainment

Fighting loneliness

Friendly and compassionate, caring environment

Recognition and respect towards all our experience

Not being discriminated for age or HUD facility

Sensitivity to others

Reading body language

Warm welcoming and greeting

Smiling

Building trust

Hospitality

Affirmation

Loneliness – needs relationships

Good listening

Community Resources

Sharing our lives

Spiritual Needs:

The Word

Prayer

Living Word – Christ

Fellowship

Giving to others

Study groups

Worship
Home pastoral care
“Two or three gathered together”
Telephone fellowship
Evangelism
Big faith questions: Why am I here? What’s my purpose? Why me, God?
Sermons and Bible studies that relate to your needs
Hymns that speak to our generation
Respecting need for traditional service
Facilities: Better lighting, sound systems, large print, elevators, steps
Feel welcomed and included
Transportation to church – relationships with others
Multiple ways of providing services: Serve people where they are - communion
at table/in the pew/ at home
Sharing my 80+ faith – leadership roles, faith mentors – recognizing that we are
holding history/ tradition of the church
I can still serve (as well as or instead) I need to be served
Crisis support – funeral/memorial planning/ bereavement support, caregiver
support
Pastoral visit (recognition of 80+ - know we are – listen to me please!)
Independent parishioners
Homebound parishioners
Listeners
Bible study
Visiting pastors or chaplains
We need a way to be useful to others
Prayer chain

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. Estate planning
2. Retirement/income planning
3. Athletic activities/exercise

Social/Emotional

1. Less money – prepare for retirement
2. Support groups
3. Caring for parents

Spiritual

1. Using faith at this stage
2. Growth in faith
3. Prayer groups

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical

1. Healthcare
2. Access to medical and medication expertise
3. Affordable caregiving

Social/Emotional

1. Loss of loved ones, health, etc.
2. Need to be needed
3. Acceptance

Spiritual

1. Feel loved and valued
2. Prepare for final exam
3. Connectedness

Senior Life (80+)

Physical:

1. Assisted living needs – (help with activities of daily living i.e. bathing, grocery shopping, etc.
2. Hugs, smiles
3. Personal mobility
4. Memory loss

Social/Emotional

1. Loneliness – need relationships
2. Friendly, compassionate and caring environment
3. Coping with loss of family/spouse and friends

Spiritual

1. Fellowship
2. Listeners
3. Home pastoral care

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.

Many exciting and helpful ideas were shared by both the presenters and participant.

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:

MIDLIFE:

Midlife Physical needs identified:

1. Estate planning
2. Retirement/income planning
3. Athletic activities/exercise

Ideas for meeting those midlife physical needs:

1. Estate planning
 - a. Have speakers to address:
 - i. Creating a will
 - ii. Tax issues
 - iii. Living wills
 - iv. Property ownership (life estates)
2. Retirement/income planning
 - a. More senior adults offer guidance on retirement
 - b. Insurance, investment planners speak
 - c. Support groups
 - d. Encourage involvement in ministries
 - e. Tithing or stewardship
3. Athletic activities/exercise
 - a. Early AM exercise
 - b. Sports teams (basketball, baseball, bowling, etc)
 - c. Golf – scramble to include all levels of experience/skill
 - d. Seniors game room for visits, card games
 - e. Chair aerobics
 - f. Women's breakfast
 - g. First Place weight loss program

Midlife Social and Emotional needs identified:

1. Less money – prepare for retirement
2. Support groups
3. Caring for parents

Ideas for meeting those midlife social and emotional needs:

1. Less money – prepare for retirement
 - a. Financial counseling – invite speakers in field

- b. Job bank – clearinghouse
- c. Retraining – computers, etc
- 2. Support groups
 - a. Identify area of need
 - b. Planning meeting – goals
 - c. Training
 - d. Place/refreshments
- 3. Caring for parents
 - a. Support group
 - b. Community resources – information
 - c. Respite care for caregivers
 - d. Parent-sitting co-op
 - e. Adult daycare in church building

Midlife Spiritual needs identified:

- 1. Using faith at this stage
- 2. Growth in faith
- 3. Prayer groups

Ideas to meet those midlife spiritual needs:

- 1. Using faith at this stage.
 - a. Mentor/teachers
 - b. Sharing faith
 - c. Adult class – age specific areas of faith
 - d. Intergenerational
 - e. What does the Bible say about the stage we're in now?
- 2. Prayer groups
 - a. Prayer focus groups – specific area of need (police, teachers, etc.)

RETIRED LIFE:

Retired life Physical needs identified:

- 1. Healthcare
- 2. Access to medical and medication expertise
- 3. Affordable caregiving

Ideas to meet those retired life physical needs:

- a. Student nurses
- b. Exercise
- c. Blood pressure clinics
- d. Diet, weight and diabetes classes
- e. Low cost prescription plans

- f. Insurance coverage (low cost)
- g. Estate planning
- h. In home caregivers
- i. Talk to pharmacists; draw on their knowledge
- j. Assisted living – low cost
- k. Elderly services – send a nurse to assess needs
- l. Doctor to give needed referrals

Retired life Emotional needs identified:

- 1. Loss of loved ones, health, etc.
- 2. Need to be needed
- 3. Acceptance

Ideas to meet those retired life emotional needs:

- 1. Loss of loved ones, health, etc.
 - a. Support groups
 - b. Community resources
 - c. One on one
 - d. Telephone and visitation
- 2. Need to be needed
 - a. Assessment of needs
 - b. Provide opportunities for ministry (i.e. meals on wheels)
 - c. Elderly services
 - d. Potlucks
- 3. Acceptance
 - a. Acceptance comes with involvement
 - b. Visitation
 - c. Hospitality
 - d. Telephone

Retired life spiritual needs identified:

- 1. Feel loved and valued
- 2. Prepare for final exam
- 3. Connectedness

Ideas to meet those retired life spiritual needs:

- 1. Feel loved and valued
 - a. Visitation (telephone, at the door, in the hospital)
 - b. "Diamond Jubilee" honoring those 75 and older
 - c. Trips (care for their needs)
 - d. Greeter
 - e. Welcome packets
 - f. Biographies of seniors

- g. Coffee hours
- h. City forum

- 2. Prepare for final exam
 - a. "When I Die" forms
 - b. "Legacy of Love
 - c. Programs on dying – "Save your fork"
 - d. Bible study
 - e. Making final arrangements
 - f. Evangelism – "Where am I going?" "How do you know?"

- 3. Connectedness
 - a. Adult education classes related to being older
Deal with depression, stress, loneliness
 - b. The Fellowship of Survival (widowers group)
 - c. Bereavement groups

SENIOR LIFE (80+)

Senior life Physical needs identified:

- 1. Assisted living needs – (help with activities of daily living i.e. bathing, grocery shopping, etc.
- 2. Hugs, smiles
- 3. Personal mobility
- 4. Memory loss

Ideas for meeting those senior life physical needs:

- 1. Assisted living needs – (help with activities of daily living i.e. bathing, grocery shopping, etc.
- 2. Hugs, smiles, etc.
 - a. Greeters at all entrances with warm handshakes
 - b. Welcome center to answer all questions about the church
- 3. Personal mobility
 - a. Transportation provided by the church and other mobile seniors
- 4. Memory loss
 - a. How can we exercise our memories?

Senior life Social/Emotional needs identified:

- 1. Loneliness – need relationships
- 2. Friendly, compassionate and caring environment
- 3. Coping with loss of family/spouse and friends

Ideas for meeting those senior life social/emotional needs:

1. Loneliness – need relationships
 - a. Telephone
 - b. Small groups (Christcare)
 - c. Bible study
 - d. Prayer
2. Friendly, compassionate and caring environment
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Sharing of joys and concerns
 - c. Greeting
 - d. Fellowship/coffee (Krispy Kremes)
3. Coping with loss of family/spouse/friends
 - a. Support group
 - b. Friends
 - c. Pastoral care

Senior Life Spiritual needs identified:

1. Fellowship
2. Listeners
3. Home pastoral care

Ideas for meeting senior life spiritual needs:

1. Fellowship
 - a. Pot luck/hymn sing
 - b. Tea party (grandmothers and granddaughters)
 - c. Fish dinner (with fish stories)
 - d. Computer mentoring (in reverse)
 - e. Birthday parties
 - f. Senior fellowship room (Gymnsox)
2. Listeners
 - a. Life stories
 - b. Care alls
 - c. Interview seniors – students and others that are interested
3. Home pastoral care
 - a. Tape ministry
 - b. Communion at home
 - c. Prayer
 - d. Pastor staff visits

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?

Discover your passion. *What are your core values?*

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 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. *How will you accomplish your vision?*

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

Deploy your personnel. *Who will carry out this ministry?*

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?”***

- Interaction with small groups
- Variety in presentations/ good ideas
- Interacting with others in similar situations – acknowledging the problems that exist as seniors
- Getting many new ideas
- The whole program
- It was all very relevant
- Small groups that enabled the attendees the opportunity to contribute
- Great ideas
- Brainstorming
- Everyone’s ideas
- Bringing a team of us together to think about senior adult ministry
- I gained a better understanding of the stage of life I’m in.

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?”***

- To communicate the needs and opportunities for older adult ministries to the church council
- Start one!
- Add seminars on caring for adult parents and financial planning
- As part of my ministry I am planning to incorporate a time in visiting to ask the question, “How did you become a Christian? Or What has been the most important part of your faith journey?”
- Listen
- Celebrate their lives
- Be an advocate of seniors and programs for seniors
- Raise the attention given to seniors in a way that honors them while trying to change the view of seniors as a negative element of the congregation.
- Try some of the ideas that were mentioned.

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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