

SOUTH PUGET SOUND LIFETIME SEMINAR
Central Baptist Church, University Place, Washington

**“Unleashing The Power Of Age
In Your Congregation”**

A Ministry Report – May 10, 2003

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 Central Baptist Church in University Place (Tacoma), Washington on Saturday, May 10, 2003, from 9 am to 4 pm.

Twenty-eight persons attended, representing ten area churches. Most participants were lay-leaders in Older Adult Ministries, while others were pastoral staff. The seminar was convened by the Columbia Baptist Conference and was co-sponsored by Central Baptist Gold, The Pacific Association and Christian Association of Senior Adults.

The day commenced with a short worship service featuring Scripture and hymns.

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. More sleep
2. Exercise more
3. Health care provision
4. Handle stress (ways to work it out)
5. Depression/related symptoms
6. Eyesight – bifocals, etc.
7. Home-yard care needs

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Stress reduction
2. Empty nest – dealing with
3. Financial preparation
4. Job loss
5. Care groups
6. “Sandwich” generation – feeling overwhelmed
7. Support of all family groups – financial and emotional
8. Loss of a dream, life’s goal
9. Burnout
10. Feel useful (needed)
11. Depression related issues
12. Preparation for retirement
13. Friendship
14. Grandchildren – stepchildren relationships

Spiritual Needs:

1. Worship style comfort zone
2. Need to use spiritual gifts
3. Inviting nonbelievers to church and activities
4. Small groups
5. In-depth teaching

6. “Now what?” Direction, mentoring
7. Deeper spiritual walk (hunger)
8. Grief (parental loss)
9. The Bigger picture
10. Burnout-balance
11. Change – receptiveness
12. Be challenged to give to others – from experience
13. Incentive to continue working

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical Needs:

1. Movement
2. Seating
3. Memory
4. Flexibility
5. Illness
6. Sight
7. Hearing
8. Exercise/weight management
9. Watching out for safety needs
10. Diet
11. Safety precautions in house
12. Home maintenance/repairs

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Companionship
2. Respect
3. Feeling needed and useful
4. Ability to be able to re-invent life as losses occur (not death losses)
5. Acknowledgement of ability (vs. age discrimination)
6. Creative expression
7. Grief over death losses (and support after the flowers wilt)
8. Belonging
9. Hope
10. Ability to accept indignities
11. Loneliness
12. Status change
13. Widowhood
14. Financial
15. Mental depression
16. Addiction
17. Relationship to church leadership

Spiritual Needs:

1. Personal relationship with Jesus (or lack of)
2. Questioning
3. Concern for family
4. Evangelism
5. Feeling not needed
6. No growth
7. Good (old) hymns
8. Prayer
9. Joy in the Lord and in life – even in duress
10. Love (brotherly)
11. Giving losses to God
12. Ability to contribute to the spiritual development of others
13. Hope
14. Peace of God

Senior Life (80+)

Physical Needs:

1. Transportation (in general, to doctors)
2. Meals
3. Housekeeping
4. Repairs and maintenance
5. Help with medications
6. Financial assistance
7. Downsizing/moving
8. Death
9. Final preparations
10. Handicap access in church
11. Shelter
12. Audio-hearing (worship service, educational hour)
13. Sight
14. Clothing/grooming
15. Physical therapy
16. Hugs
17. Caregiving for them
18. Security

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Fellowship (within and outside the church)
2. Outings – meals/shopping
3. Banking
4. Legal affairs
5. Intergenerational interaction
6. Appointments
7. Loneliness

8. Communication
9. Companionship
10. To be needed/self-worth
11. Letter writing form them
12. Visit retirement/convalescent homes
13. Encourage with music
14. Bring joy
15. laughing, crying, joy
16. Security – protection against scams
17. Acceptance
18. Relay history

Spiritual Needs:

1. Housebound ministry (audio books, tapes/videos, Communion)
2. Opportunities to share faith
3. Transportation – to church and other functions
4. Bible reading
5. Reading in general
6. Small groups
7. Prayer
8. Companionship
9. Bible studies/ need to be asked/small groups
10. Tape ministry if cannot be in service
11. Meet Jesus – Salvation
12. Feel needed/acceptance, hope, faith, security, peace

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. Handle stress
3. Health – age related illness

Social/Emotional

1. Preparation for retirement
2. Empty nest

3. Death – family losses - grief

Spiritual

1. Worship style comfort zone
2. Small groups
3. B challenged to give to others from experience

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. Transportation
2. Downsizing/moving
3. Hugs

Social/Emotional

1. To be needed
2. Fellowship
3. Loneliness

Spiritual

1. Transportation
2. Feel needed/acceptance.
3. Homebound – need audio books, tapes/videos, Communion

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. Handle stress
3. Health-age related illness

Ideas for meeting those midlife physical needs:

1. Develop fitness facilities; utilize existing ones
2. Develop mentoring programs to help deal with stress
3. Secure a retired nurse or parish nurse to help with age-related illness, education, support

Mid-Life: Social and Emotional needs identified:

1. Preparation for retirement
2. Empty nest
3. Death-family losses, grief

Ideas for meeting those midlife social and emotional needs:

1. Have a financial planner speak
2. Re: empty nest – “whoopie!”
3. Develop visitation program for those in loss and grief

Mid-life: Top three Spiritual needs identified:

1. Worship style comfort zone
2. Small groups
3. Be challenged to give to others from experience

Ideas to meet those midlife spiritual needs:

1. Some feel obsolete, need consideration regarding worship style and preference
2. Develop small groups
3. Develop opportunities for mentoring and sharing stories.

RETIRED LIFE:

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

1. Diet/good nutrition
2. Exercise
3. Illness

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

1. Diet/good nutrition
 - a. Develop accountability groups;
 - b. classes, education
 - c. Food bank
 - d. Develop a shopping service
 - e. Nutrition classes (i.e. what is good nutrition as we age?)
 - f. A Ministry of "Can-do"
2. Develop level appropriate exercise classes, walking groups
3. Develop Parish nurse programs, Caring ministries

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

1. Feeling needed and useful
2. Companionship
3. Grief over death/losses

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

1. Feeling needed and useful
 - a. Have retired people mentor younger people regarding retirement planning
 - b. Survey skills and interests (a skill pool and time available)
 - c. Develop a data base of those with needs and volunteers to care
2. Companionship
 - a. Adopt a grandparent (include in Family Days)
3. Grief over death/losses
 - a. Develop Stephen Ministry,
 - b. Grief classes
 - c. Grief counseling (parish nurse)
 - d. Financial counseling

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

1. Personal relationship with God
2. Prayer
3. Feeling not needed

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

1. Personal relationship with God

- a. Help get to ministries.
 - b. Follow up.
 - c. Reading ministry to those unable to read/high school students?
 - d. Program outreach to community – facilitating transportation
2. Prayer
 - a. Prayer chain;
 - b. Small prayer groups
 3. Feeling not needed
 - a. Sharing stories,
 - b. Discipling younger people
 - c. Singing band to visit nursing homes

SENIOR LIFE (80+)

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

1. Transportation
2. Downsizing/moving
3. Hugs

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

1. Transportation
 - a. Utilize existing regional transportation services (i.e. King county “Access”)
 - b. Use church vans for functions, Sunday School, etc.
 - c. Ride share to church (families with mini-vans pick up older people, etc)
 - d. Provide van service on Sunday mornings
2. Downsizing/ moving
 - a. Target people without families near
 - b. Develop a resource list of realtors, attorneys, and people who own trucks
 - c. Men’s/Women’s groups/Youth groups help move, pack, etc.
 - d. Develop “Helping Hands” groups that can assist
3. Hugs
 - a. Care ministries
 - b. Be careful about cultural/gender comfort levels
 - c. Tap into retired persons/ seniors who are willing to go visit

Senior Life: Top three Social/Emotional needs identified:

1. To be needed
2. Fellowship
3. Loneliness

Ideas for meeting those senior life social/emotional needs:

1. To be needed
 - a. PMA's – Personal Ministry Assessments includes personality inventory, spiritual gifts inventory
 - b. Develop inter-generational activities – We need each other!
2. Fellowship
 - a. Transportation
 - b. Assess interests so that programming matches with need
 - c. Do in afternoon; in the home and bring out for activity
 - d. Small groups
3. Loneliness
 - a. Visitation teams/calling teams
 - b. Outlet for sharing stories – intergenerational
 - c. Small groups
 - d. Make a team list to rotate visits/ phone calls
 - e. Contact every week

Senior Life: Top three Spiritual needs identified:

1. Transportation
2. Feel needed/acceptance
3. Homebound – need audio books, tapes/videos, communion.

Ideas for meeting senior life spiritual needs:

1. Transportation
 - a. (see #1 under physical)
 - b. Provide van service (every Sunday)
2. Feel needed/acceptance
 - a. VBS Volunteers
3. Homebound – need audio books, tapes/videos, communion
 - a. YES to all three!
 - b. Visitation
 - c. Meals on Wheels
 - d. Time of prayer

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?

Discover your passion. *What are the core values of your ministry?*

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

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?

Determine your priorities. *What can we do first, second, third?*

- a. Which of the ideas generated is worth putting on the calendar for this month or quarter?
- b. What can we plan for the next quarter, year?

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

- a. Who is the primary point person in this ministry?
- b. Who will be a part of the ministry team?

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?”***

- Food!
- Excellent information and blending of statistical analysis with practical application
- Excellent speakers. I could hear you!
- Hand on discussion groups
- The awakening concerning the demographics of our aging population relative to the ministry.
- The organization and content of the presentation.
- Everything was done in a timely fashion.
- Well-informed presentation. Nice blend of teaching and interaction.
- I liked the ideas and solutions.
- General information that helped in evaluation of targeted group.
- Group interaction.
- The information was excellent in that our church is in the early stages of our older adult ministry.
- Openness and discussion
- Did not wander from its purpose
- Enthusiasm
- Well organized – also liked the small group work.
- The content. The presentation. Doing everything on time.
- Re-focus the vision.
- Good ideas.
- The group brainstorming of problems and solutions.
- Getting ideas from others.
- Down to earth.
- Experience based.

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?”***

- A “targeted” senior adult ministry!
- I’ll try to encourage others to get going!
- Be more sensitive to other needs.

- More recognition
- New name for our seniors group.
- Be more aware of the needs.
- I caught a greater vision of a need and my ability to help minister.
- I will try to get them involved in their own ministry.
- Build effective team to set direction.
- I can teach/show my children how to reach out and minister to seniors.
- Serious discussion about forming two groups verses the one we now have for 55+
- Try to get away from the “Senior Huddle”
- I have more of a focus on their real needs as opposed to what I feel they need.
- Being more aware of needs.
- More evangelism focus
- I expect to work with our youth pastor to get intergenerational fellowship generated.

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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