

Church of the Nazarene Kennewick, 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 the Church of the Nazarene in Kennewick, Washington, on Saturday, October 26, from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Ninety persons attended, representing various churches in Central/Eastern Washington and Oregon. Most participants were leaders in Older Adult Ministries in the Churches of the Nazarene. The seminar was hosted by the Churches of the Nazarene from the Tri-cities and Hermiston, Oregon. Pastor Jerry Cole served as the primary convener and chairperson of the planning committee.

A worship team led all participants in an opening worship session.

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 Leona Bergstrom, was entitled “The Times, They Are A-Changin’.” This lecture discussed how the coming age wave will impact five social structures, and ultimately how they will impact the church. Areas in our society most affected will be:

- The family
- Health care
- Community
- Economy
- Religion and Spirituality

There are radical shifts all around us as we encounter this age wave. The family, economists, healthcare providers, social service agencies and religious institutions are all reeling to stay ahead. The question is: Where is the church in all of this? When should the church pick up some of the slack left by abandoned government programs, faulty health care systems, and stressed families? How can the church acknowledge, recognize, encourage and empower older adults to use their skills, knowledge and experience to serve?

Small Workgroups:

Participants were divided into small workgroups to brainstorm and discuss the needs and issues facing middle and mature adults. The following list was generated:

Physical Needs of Mature Adults (age 75+):

- Exercise
- Transportation
- Visitation/caregiving
- Nutritional needs
- Facility access
- Hobbies/crafts
- Energy level
- Healthcare
- Housekeeping
- Home upkeep
- Insurance/Medicare/Medications
- Depression
- Loneliness
- Hygiene issues
- Stress (not the same as when younger)
- Despair
- Chronic pain
- Loss of vision/loss of hearing
- Structural accessibility to homes and public places
- Independence
- Financial needs
- Support of caregivers
- Coordination of meals
- Sound systems – in churches
- Denial/obsession regarding our bodies
- Transitions
- Giving up/losing control
- Whose body is it? (Medical system, kids or me?; privacy issues; who decides who decides?)
- Facing physical mortality
- Old and unhealthy people caring for each other

- Hard to separate physical from emotional and spiritual – cyclical
- Power and control issues: providing and protecting

Social/Emotional needs of Mature Adults (age 75+)

- Feeling needed
- Getting involved
- Living longer than children
- Housing
- Healthcare
- Wisdom (sharing with the young)
- Getting involved
- Doing for others
- Emotional support
- Contacts
- Recreational Activities
- Sharing problems
- Visit shut ins
- Loneliness
- Miss work
- Fellowship
- Companionship
- Prayer partners
- Transportation
- Exercise
- Sense of isolation
- Sense of purpose
- Beauty care – for self esteem
- Events/Activities
- Accepting physical limitations
- Nurturing creativity

Spiritual needs of Mature Adults (age 75+)

- Loneliness/companionship/friendship
- Physical limitations
- Lack of purpose, goals, motivation
- Financial concerns
- Transportation
- Living accommodations
- Be encouraged in their faith
- Participation in corporate worship

- Newness in spiritual life
- Need to share what they have learned
- Need for acceptance and approval in spirituality
- To be Born again
- Understanding of the relationship between belief and behavior
- Understanding and education concerning terminology and basic beliefs
- Understanding of why corporate worship
- How to live out their faith in everyday life
- Feel needed
- Need connection
- To be able to adapt gracefully

Physical needs of middle adults (age 55-75):

- Driving/transportation
- Exercise/activity
- Nutrition
- Declining senses/health (sight, hearing, memory)
- Where to live
- Community integration
- Touches/relationships
- Involvement
- Purpose/need to serve
- Heat
- Adequate income/trusted advisor
- Physician/healthcare

Social/emotional needs of middle adults (age 55-75):

- Feeling needed
- Loneliness
- Changing identities
- Changing roles
- Loss
- Empty nest
- Parenting again
- Financial challenges – better/worse
- Change location
- Peers/siblings deaths

- Loss of mobility
- Isolation
- Depression
- Lack of companionship
- Feeling needed/having a purpose
- Families don't care
- Stress
- Compassionate ministry
- Self pity – see the needs of others and act!
- Physical – homes, yards, personal, transportation
- Isolation

Spiritual Needs of Middle Adults (age 55-75):

- Define “spiritual” needs
- Awareness of our needs (everyone has spiritual needs)
- Conquer fear
- Recognize level of need in each life
- All are on a spiritual journey
- End of life issues
- Depression
- What have we accomplished?
- Realities/dreams
- How will we be remembered?
- Salvation
- Prayer needs
- Good deeds
- Be a cot bearer
- Go the extra mile
- Fellowship
- Good listener
- Moral support
- Encourager
- Social time
- Mac buddies
- Arby Group
- Bible Study group
- Taxi service
- Meal service for the ill or needy
- Conversation which interjects the blessings of the Lord

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 Needs of Mature Adults:

1. Exercise
2. Independence/transportation
3. Accessibility (Structural – home and public)

Emotional/Social Needs of Mature Adults:

1. Sense of purpose
2. Feeling needed
3. Loneliness

Spiritual Needs of Mature Adults:

1. Be encouraged in the Faith
2. Know how to live out their faith in everyday life
3. Loneliness

Physical Needs of Middle Adults:

1. Declining senses/health (sight, hearing, memory)
2. Purpose – need to serve
3. Driving/transportation

Emotional/Social Needs of Middle Adults:

1. Loneliness
2. Changes in identities, roles, finances
3. Stress

Spiritual Needs of Middle Adults:

1. Salvation
2. End of life issues
3. Recognize the level of need in each 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

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 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?

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?”*

- The sharing and brainstorming
- Many ideas dealing with seniors ministries
- Data that shows change and encourages thoughtful planning for the future
- Putting things into focus, and hearing how others are using/putting things into practice.
- People of all ages have similar needs, plus differences
- Things to do for our seniors that encourage and strengthen their faith
- Workshops and old man puppet
- Well presented and many great ideas were presented
- The commitment of the presenters
- Flow and honesty; kept us relaxed
- Varieties of approaches
- I enjoyed every bit! Thank you.
- Teaching how to minister to the older group and how to reach them
- The opportunity to share with others
- Material presented with humor. Also we were kept moving and awake
- I truly enjoyed all of what I've heard and seen.
- The sharing sessions following the data were great!
- Short broken periods – moving around.
- All the new comments

- To learn better how to deal with our aging.
- All the whole day
- All the various areas of suggested needs, many of which we hadn't thought of.
- Gus
- Video. But I enjoyed all of it!
- The lectures and the small groups
- Relevance of materials
- Being with others involved in senior ministry
- Identifying and sharing commonalities by networking with others.
- Round table – realizing needs in our church.
- Quality materials/presentation
- The fellowship and good presentations
- Each individual has a story to tell
- Good planning and information from the leaders
- I liked all I heard.
- The multi-media approach.
- Watching a couple work well together.
- Excellent presentations. Good suggestions.
- Sharing of ideas of concern for the two different age groups
- Information on ministry ideas
- All was excellent. Gus was wonderful.
- Many things to lift my awareness and desire to become more involved. Brainstorming and hearing the many responses were invaluable
- The challenge
- Small groups for feedback
- Morning sessions

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?”*

- Get more involved.
- I will encourage my young boys class to interact with the Saints Alive.
- This is helping me bring things, as well as my call, into a clearer perspective.

- Being more aware of older folks.
- To make them feel worthwhile and needed and to visit the lonely.
- Try to visit and knock on doors in our community and invite them to come.
- Encourage more involvement
- Get one going again.
- Gave me much to contemplate and put into action.
- Outreach for the 45 to 60 year old group
- Being willing to serve
- I will appreciate my own aging process more.
- More respect for the knowledge they've to offer me from Bible knowledge to advice. Plus the joy of just being with them now means more to me.
- Awareness of needs of others
- Begin a "seniors" ministry program
- Recognize spiritual needs of all seniors
- Try to be more considerate and listen more
- More interaction with younger generation
- Organize a 50-60 group to try to organize an active group for them
- We need them and they need us!
- Reaching the community more effectively for Christ. See older persons won to Christ and better educational opportunities.
- Give seniors valued positions of ministry.
- Try to match ministry with needs.
- More emphasis on caring component to PLUS ministries.
- We plan to have a calling group.
- Corporate faith.
- Reach out more consistently to others.
- Being more aware
- Encourage more prayer when visiting or encouraging those visited.
- "Grays represent the future" – we can be obstacles or opportunities
- New ideas
- Planning
- Awareness of those with needs, acting upon these needs by contacting, assisting, visiting, transporting, after developing a network of willing participants to aid the needy.

Thank you.

We wish to thank the Churches of the Nazarene for inviting us to facilitate the “Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation” seminar. Thank you to the planning committee and to the Kennewick Church of the Nazarene 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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RESOLUTION

Whereas God calls persons of all ages to be in mission, ministry, and service to others; and

Whereas older adults, no less than persons of all ages, are called by God to be faithful Christian disciples, and

Whereas older adults are called to share their faith, wisdom, and knowledge with persons of every age and stage of life as it is written, “wisdom is with the aged” (Job 12:12 RSV); and

Whereas older adults have much to teach and much to learn and are interdependent upon persons of all ages; and,

Whereas older adults are uniquely gifted and empowered by God; and,

Whereas aging is a natural progression in life and is part of God’s good gift to life; and

Whereas there are more older adults now than at any other time in the history of the world, and the numbers will continue to increase in the new millennium; and

Whereas God is granting the gift of longer and healthier lives due to improved medicine and technology;

Therefore, be it resolved that we acknowledge our God-given responsibilities to honor and value the process of aging; to provide care to those who are in need; to construct ministry opportunities that nurture, serve, and challenge; and to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ with each aging adult.

Be it further resolved that the participants of the Unleashing the Power of Age seminar encourage our congregations to lift up the needs and concerns of older adults and develop on-going intentional older adult ministries.