

**British Columbia Baptist Conference  
10/23/04**

**“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 Brookwood Baptist Church on Saturday, October 23, 2004, from 9 am to 4 pm. 57 persons attended, representing various churches in British Columbia. Most participants were leaders in Older Adult Ministries in BCBC churches. BCBC Church Ministries team hosted the seminar.

**Celebration of Life:**

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

**Keynote Lecture:**

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!

### **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:**

- Medical check ups (7)
- Exercise (20)
- Emopause – PMS – Andropause (8)
- Adjusting diet (2)
- Downsizing (7)
- Onset of illnesses (10)
- Sight – hearing – mobility – bladder (1)
- Re-location (1)
- Reduced sexuality (4)
- Transportation (1)
- Changing of financial status (3)
- Lots of rest
- travel

#### **Social/Emotional Needs:**

- transportation
- visitation fellowship (2)
- develop and renewal friendship (6)
- social activities (1)
- community services
- lonely – empty nest (2) – if ill, if alone
- retirement (3)
- stress at work (7)
- caring for grandchildren (1)
- sandwiched generation / looking after children and parents (13)
- losses by death (1)
- loss of identity – because of retirement or loss of job (16)
- financial decline (3)

- loss of routine
- divorce and separation (3)
- need connection with younger generation (1)
- desire for independence (2)
- motorhome crowd – rootlessness
- preparation for retirement
- accept spouse illness (4)
- forced retirement (1)

Spiritual Needs:

- training, mentor those younger (11)
- missions – short term
- prayer ministry (1)
- spiritual renewal (5)
- to be God-centered in my life (17)
- to be of help to other people to know Christ
- involvement and participation in Bible studies and prayer meeting. (3)
- personal quiet time (3)
- evangelism (1)
- returning to spirituality of childhood
- tired of usual things and need a new challenge (9)
- want new experiences (3)
- increased responsibilities, feel trapped
- widows or widowers (1)
- depression (2)
- need small groups to develop friendships (14)
- dealing with mortality (1)
- purpose of life (50)

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical Needs:

- nutrition – meals on wheels (8)
- transportation (7)
- medical – sight
- housekeeping (upper age)
- financial advice (1)
- travel agent
- muscle (physical help)
- money
- activities (10)
- senior housing

- exercise (10)
- ramps, elevators
- loneliness
- retirement planning (1)
- body wearing out (walking is impaired)
- diminished activity level (1)
- lower energy (4)
- hearing
- slower thought processes (1)
- increased forgetfulness (2)
- catastrophic illness i.e. cancer (16)
- chronic illness (1)
- dementia (1)
- failing eyesight
- don't work as fast
- do less work than when you were young
- limitations in movement
- henritis – arthritis (sic)
- proper health care
- friendly environment
- human touch (15)

Social/Emotional Needs:

- feelings of loss of independence (10)
- don't want to be a burden (1)
- loss of loved ones (life partner) (4)
- fear of death
- reduced income (3)
- loss of sense of purpose (3)
- companionship (9)
- someone to read
- legal advice – wills, etc (1)
- counseling
- family loss, friends (4)
- loneliness
- being valued by society (20)
- wisdom being sought (1)
- being able to build into the next generation (1)
- relationships at age level, at younger age level (11)
- family connections (3)
- recognition
- accepted
- affirmation
- intimacy – key relationships (7)
- being needed, being used being wanted (1)

\

Spiritual Needs:

- more knowledge of God's word
- assurance – no assumptions
- eternal security issues
- mentorship (2)
- understanding from where speaker coming from
- changes
- TREES (16 – combined)
  - Teaching (10)
  - Relating
  - Evangelizing
  - Exalting God
  - Serving (6)
- Fear of death
- Fear of unknown (3)
- Salvation anxiety for family (3)
- Grief support
- Spiritual revival and commitment (13)
- Embracing change (6)
- Lack of mission (1)
- Salvation (8)
- Groups
- Ministry to be used in
- To serve God (purpose) (10)
- Worship (personal and corporate) (8)
- Recognize history of music, need the comfort of familiar “old” music (1)
- Recognize health limitations in worship
- Family loss and friends (3)
- Loneliness

Senior Life (80+)

Physical Needs:

- transportation (to and from) (19)
- meals on wheels (1)
- home care (21)
- wheelchairs / walkers
- someone to shop for them (2)
- pick up pension (2)
- medication supervision, administration
- someone with medical knowledge
- large print materials

- emergency person/people
- exercise
- hearing
- sight
- changes to living space (i.e. remove carpet so wheelchair moves easy)

Social/Emotional Needs:

- loneliness (17)
- need for friendships (7)
- depending upon others = low self esteem (5)
- need to be appreciated (3)
- need to feel like they are making valuable contribution (20)
- ways of dealing with depression (5)
- grieving (8)
- visitors (pets, children included)
- companionship
- safety (2)
- counseling
- volunteer help for keeping in touch with friends and family (5)
- respect from all
- outings (someone to accompany or drive)
- emergency person/people
- patience from others
- seniors restrain from bossiness, grumpy
- surprise gifts
- motivation to get up in a morning (2)

Spiritual Needs:

- fellowship (18)
- appropriate resources (3)
  - tapes, talking books, large print Bibles etc
- comfort – grief (2)
- attitude / character growth
- acceptance of their situation in life that God still has a purpose (23)
- spiritual need to be serving (2)
- worship (9)
- pastor / church people visits
- hearing aid facilities (1)
- affirmation of salvation (9)
- friends

## **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. onset of illness
3. menopause – PMS - andropause

#### Social/Emotional

1. loss of identity – because of retirement or loss of job
2. sandwiched generation – looking after parent and child
3. financial decline

#### Spiritual

1. to be God-centered in my life
2. need small groups to develop friendships
3. tired of usual things – and need a new challenge

### Retired Life (65-80)

#### Physical

1. catastrophic illness, i.e. cancer
2. human touch
3. activities

#### Social/Emotional

1. being valued by society
2. feelings of loss of independence – don’t want to be a burden
3. relationships at age level – at younger age level

#### Spiritual

1. teaching and serving (TREES acrostic)
2. spiritual revival
3. to serve God (purpose)

Senior Life (80+)

Physical:

1. home care – housecleaning, meal preparation
2. transportation
3. exercise

Social/Emotional

1. need to feel like they are making a valuable contribution
2. loneliness
3. grieving

Spiritual

1. acceptance of their situation in life – God still has a purpose
2. fellowship
3. affirmation of salvation

## **The Times, They are A-Changin':**

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 are in fact 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

### **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](http://www.chonline.org)

## **Let's Get Going**

### Workgroups:

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:

#### Ideas for Midlife (50-65) Ministry

Physical need: exercise

1. Walking / biking / hiking group
2. Take advantage of existing groups
3. Contest to reach a missionary overseas
4. Use pick up of empties (group raised \$400)

Social/Emotional need: Loss of identity

1. Offer skills to church
2. Provide mentoring opportunities
3. Business clubs
4. Church job jar

Spiritual need: God-centered life

1. (Read, study) Purpose Driven Life
2. 40 Days of Purpose (Rick Warren, Saddleback Church)

#### Ideas for Retired Life (65-80) Ministry:

Physical Need #1: Catastrophic illness, i.e. cancer

1. Couple of prayer partners
2. Prayer chain
3. Healing service
4. Meals to home – visits
5. Help with house cleaning
6. Process forms, etc
7. Weekly contact
8. Daily phone calls
9. Encouraging cards
10. Comforting

Physical Need #2: Activities

1. Organize field trips
2. seminars
3. Carpet bowling
4. Puzzles, knitting, scrabble

Social/emotional need: relationships at age level – at younger age level

1. Pray for whole family
2. Visitation
3. Invite to Church invite to your home
4. Smile
5. Play games
6. Accept them
7. Surrogate grand parenting

Social/emotional need: feelings of loss of independence, don't want to be a burden.

1. Learn new interests and skills
2. Learn to accept loss (humility)
3. Sharing experiences

Spiritual need: teaching and serving

1. Invited to church
2. Discipled (oriented)
3. "find" salvation in Jesus
4. Book and Bible study
5. Equipping
6. Use your gifts.

Senior Life (80+) Ministry:

Physical need: transportation

1. offer transportation

Physical need: exercise

1. exercise video

Social/emotional need: Grieving

1. small intimate groups
2. share and pray for each other
3. free to share negative thoughts, anger

Spiritual Need: Acceptance of life situation, assurance of salvation.

1. share biblical insights, precepts
2. Affirmation of salvation: provide opportunities to hear the gospel
3. Acceptance – explain how others are just as bad off or even worse.
4. Realize ministry of Holy Spirit in our lives.

## **Strategic Planning**

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 our purpose. Why does our ministry exist?

1. What is our church’s purpose (mission statement)?
2. What is the purpose or mission of our 50’s+ adult ministry?

Discover Our Passion: What are the core values of our ministry?

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 Our Potential: Where do we 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 Our Plan. How will we accomplish our vision?

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

Deploy our Personnel. Who will carry out this ministry?

### **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?”*

- *Presenters and the content*
- *Group discussion*
- *Topics are great*
- *The anecdotal information regarding the tremendous size of this group.*
- *The book entitled “Unleashing the Power of Age”*
- *Sharing of many insights gleaned from many interactions with other churches.*
- *Worship and lecture.*
- *The information – the variety of format – a power point that worked.*
- *Brainstorming with other people. I brought a team of interested people from our church. Now we can begin building a ministry.*
- *That it challenged me to begin seriously looking at this aspect of our ministry.*
- *Presentations and printed material.*
- *The brainstorming, others ideas.*
- *Learning that there are additional things to do that we had not done yet in our church.*
- *The importance placed on different needs of different stages of aging.*
- *The interactive nature of the seminar.*
- *Balance of expert input and discussion groups to assess needs and suggest strategies.*
- *Clearly presented – concise – lots of good ideas and encouragement.*
- *What I can look at as time goes on and that seniors are needed – Praise God!*
- *Interaction and groups*
- *The closeness and friendliness of the group.*
- *The exchanging of new ideas in the lecture.*
- *To evaluate and look for areas where I can help meet needs in our adult ministries.*
- *Workshops, new perspectives.*
- *The information and the flow.*

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 be recognisant of their needs!*
- *Involvement of older people as much as they wish to.*
- *Develop a more compassionate ministry.*
- *A change of focus will have to be undertaken by our church as a result of information received.*
- *More awareness of elderly people as a resource.*
- *Opportunities for seniors to be reassured of their salvation. For others to hear the gospel.*
- *To be able to apply what is learned into our ministry.*
- *We are in the stage of pulling people together to begin this ministry. We have some quality leaders here today.*
- *To begin to strategize and develop more ministry programming.*
- *Focus on recognizing the mid-,retired, and senior adults.*
- *Get more involved.*
- *This has made me more aware of what is being done in our church.*
- *I will think of ways to let older members of our church and community feel needed and that they still have a lot to contribute.*
- *Involve more of the senior women in our group in new ministry areas.*
- *Be more aware of the needs of others.*
- *Think more specifically of needs and how to be involved.*
- *Look at starting a group that ministers to my age group (50-65).*
- *Meeting their need and love them more.*
- *Let others know of some of the issues brought up.*
- *Be more considerate and conscious of the seniors in my congregation.*
- *Eventually divide into three categories.*
- *Ministering to different age groups (mid-, retired, senior) instead of just calling them all seniors.*
- *To serve with fervor and compassion.*
- *More outreach*
- *Offer help when I see a need where I am able to.*

**Thank you.**

We wish to thank Wally Weiser and the B.C. Baptist Conference for inviting us to facilitate the “Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation” seminar. Thank you to the planning committee and to Brookwood Baptist Church 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.

Richard L. Bergstrom  
President, ChurchHealth

Leona D. Bergstrom  
Director, Lifetime Ministries

**ChurchHealth**  
P.O. Box 1493  
Edmonds, WA 98020-1493  
(425) 774-8252  
[www.chonline.org](http://www.chonline.org)