

**Mideast Baptist Conference
10/30/04**

**“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 Evangel Baptist Church on Saturday, October 30, 2004, from 9:30 am to 4 pm. 35 persons attended, representing various churches in Ohio and Pennsylvania. Most participants were leaders in Older Adult Ministries in Mideast Baptist Conference churches. The Mideast Baptist Conference hosted the seminar. Gary Schroeder, Associate District Executive Minister was the primary convener. Jim & Julie Berry serve as District Champions.

Celebration of Life:

A worship time was held at the beginning of the seminar, with Gary Schroeder providing a devotional.

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:

- Soft chairs (1)
- Stairways (1)
- Companionship (15)
- Involvement
- Love (2)
- Compassion (4)
- Acceptance (16)
- Magnification (print, hearing) (2)
- Health issues (9)
- Finances (12)
- Clear-concise directions (3)
- Transportation
- First time physical problems (7)
- Women – menopause
- Prostrate
- Arthritis: new pain areas
- Hearing loss (2)
- Weight issues (3)
- Energy change (12)
- More importance on exercise and diet change (13)
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Social/Emotional Needs:

- acceptance of limitations (14)
- when to say no/yes ((9)
- identifying with like problems (2)
- time management (1)
- purpose – defining (13)

- feeling needed, respected by younger people (13)
- family dependence (2)
- depression (11)
- losing mates (2)
- refocus social life from kids to meet more of couple's needs (5)
- dealing with aging parents (9)
- preparing for retirement (9)
- raising grand kids

Spiritual Needs:

- spiritual renewal can happen or needs to (4)
- finding a new or changed ministry (8)
- lean on God more to do right way (parent care) (1)
- pray for children instead of solving their problems (20)
- be self controlled
- dealing with death, grief, divorce (6)
- salvation (1)
- continue Bible study (2)
- learning to pray (2)
- how to serve God (13)
- confidence in the Lord (1)
- change – willing to accept (17)
- being thankful (1)
- wisdom – counsel (10)
- mentoring (ex: older women teaching younger women)
- fellowship (4)

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical Needs:

- money – meeting obligations(5)
- ability/mobility (10)
- health coverage (1)
- transportation
- vision – poor, blind (2)
- hearing (4)
- health: aches & pains (14)
- home maintenance (19)
- nutrition (2)
- strength (10)
- anxiety

Social/Emotional Needs:

- loneliness (16)
- fellowship (10)

- financial (5)
- housing
- family strife, location (1)
- adaptation to change (17)
- guilt over past life (1)
- unforgiveness
- emotional energy (5)
- technology fear (12)
- fellowship: singles, newcomers, unifying age group, trips & travel (4)

Spiritual Needs:

- more knowledge of God's word
- connectedness (20)
- unforgiveness (3)
- resentment (4)
- lack of commitment (4)
- feel no longer needed (19)
- continued growth (26)
 - Bible group participation,
 - support of leadership

Senior Life (80+)

Physical Needs:

- transportation (groceries, doctor, visits, personal) (15)
- hearing problems (4)
- comfortable and secure place to live (19)
- cleaning home for them (6)
- yard work (4)
- meals (7)
- hygiene
- physical activity, exercise (13)
- medial diagnosis, treatment (8)
- help with nutrition, diet (7)
- help with sensory perception (1)
- caretaker (companion for doctor's visits etc) (19)
- handicapped accessibility (1)

Social/Emotional Needs:

- phone calls and visits (11)
- senior social meetings
- dining out with others (4)
- visit from younger members (7)
- good rapport with doctors (2)
- listen to them (8)

- financial needs (5)
- contact with peers (5)
- get to know them (2)
- companionship/connection (18)
- fellowship
- significance, purpose (11)
- security (13)
- maintain past ties, visitation (6)
- communion/sermon tapes
- leave a legacy – oral history
- needs met personally
- loneliness (14)

Spiritual Needs:

- minister as able (5)
- share faith (10)
- worship opportunities (6)
- counseling – faith questions, family connections (10)
- intergenerational fellowship (14)
- feel they belong in church (17)
- tapes for those who cannot see well (1)
- fellowship with other believers (13)
- reading scripture to them (1)
- talk and praise them for their work in the church in the past (9)
- visit from their pastor (15)
- intergenerational fellowship (2)

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. acceptance
2. companionship
3. energy change

Social/Emotional

1. acceptance of limitations
2. defining purpose
3. feeling needed (respected by young people) (tied for 2nd)

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. home maintenance
2. health – aches and pains
3. ability/mobility

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. continued spiritual growth
2. connectedness
3. feeling no longer needed

Senior Life (80+)

Physical:

1. comfortable, secure place to live
2. caretaker (companion for doctor visit, etc) (tied for 1st)
3. transportation (groceries, dr. beauty shop)

Social/Emotional

1. companionship/connection
2. loneliness
3. security

Spiritual

1. feel like they belong in Church
2. visit from their pastor.
3. Intergenerational fellowship

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

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

A. Physical need: Acceptance

1. Enfolding greet
2. Support groups
 - a. Empty nest
 - b. Grandparenting group
 - c. Prodigal group
 - d. "Homing pigeons"
3. Exercise groups
4. Educational classes
5. Mission trip

B. Social/Emotional needs: acceptance of limitations, defining purpose, feeling needed

1. Intergenerational pizza
2. Reverse mentoring
3. Purpose classes: R. Warren, Buford
4. Gift re-assessment
5. Life stage training
6. Service activities
7. Spiritual support

C. Spiritual need: to be God-centered in my life; need small groups; to develop friendships

1. (Read, study) Purpose Driven Life
2. 40 Days of Purpose (Rick Warren, Saddleback Church)
3. prayer for grandchildren
4. peer counseling
5. intergenerational support
6. parent support/prayer group sharing
7. art of grand-parenting
8. boundaries, transition, spiritual

Ideas for Retired Life (65-80) Ministry:

A. Physical Need #1: home maintenance

1. handy man who volunteers
2. small group adopt
3. youth projects

Physical Need #2: health: aches and pains

1. Parish nurse
2. Visit and listen

Physical Need #3: ability/mobility

1. Transport volunteers thru church, agencies

B. Social/emotional need #1: being valued by society

1. Older minister to youth

Social/emotional need #2: feelings of loss of independence – don't want to be a burden.

1. Phone call, cards – monthly to all shut ins
2. Nursing home ministry

Social/emotional need #3 relationships at age level – at younger age level

Phone call, cards – monthly to all shut-ins

1. Offer classes (youth)

C. Spiritual need: continued spiritual growth

1. Bible studies
2. Ministry fellowships
3. Mentoring

Spiritual need: feeling no longer needed

1. Create ministry opportunities
2. Resist the lie with scripture
3. Encourage church wide participation

Senior Life (80+) Ministry:

A. Physical Need: transportation

1. Visitation pastor – call to fill need
2. Hospitals
3. Nursing home
4. Private home – elderly
5. Brochure – 1st time visitor packet
6. Registration card

A. Physical need: comfortable, secure place to live

1. Home security check up
2. Phone check
3. Newsletter to advertise the program

B. Social Need: companionship

1. Read scripture – S.S. Class
2. Cards and gifts at Christmas

- B. Social need: security
 - 1. Magnet with phone numbers to call.
- C. Spiritual need: feel like they belong, intergenerational fellowship
 - 1. Party meeting (tea party)
- C. Spiritual need: intergenerational fellowship
 - 1. Wood working – involve senior and younger

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?”*

- *How well it was presented*
- *Content – all very relevant*
- *It was real. The presenters used common situations etc were relevant.*
- *Interaction with others in senior adult ministry.*
- *The fast pace – covering much in a day’s time.*
- *Covered a lot without feeling rushed – time to stand and move around.*
- *Interesting topic.*
- *The presentation – sharing with other believers.*
- *Ideas*
- *Affirmation about which the church will look like/need to deal with now and in the immediate future.*
- *Chance to brainstorm, fast paced, covered much.*
- *A lot covered in a small time*
- *Abundance of information, brainstorming*
- *Great ideas*
- *It gave me an entirely new perspective on adult ministries*
- *Practical nature of the program*
- *It made me more aware of needs which I did not think about*
- *Enlarging my vision.*
- *The work groups*
- *Information presented was timely.*
- *Sincere concern for senior ministry and valuing them.*
- *New ideas to make our seniors feel an integral part of our local church.*
- *Fast moving and right to the point.*
- *It made me focus on what I could contribute to the elderly physically impaired.*
- *Practical ideas, great to meet with other churches.*
- *Sharing practical ideas for meeting needs.*

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?”*

- *Be more available.*
- *Mission statement*
- *Better set up and dispersal of brochures telling every old timer and new comers what is available from our church to these people.*
- *For a team to develop a vision-mission statement and further develop the ministry.*
- *Share the ideas learned today with the larger group of our age level with the hope of developing a wider ministry.*
- *To get started have a vision.*
- *Include other age groups.*
- *Clarify purpose*
- *Think about legacy Sunday*
- *Evaluate 3 life stages of seniors*
- *Connect with 50-65 year olds in same way. Brainstorm.*
- *Creating a purpose for our senior groups.*
- *Consolidate and organize some things that are already being done.*
- *Being more cognizant of senior's needs*
- *Focus more activities/ministry on older adults*
- *Be more aware of seniors in our church.*
- *Try to be more faithful in keeping in contact with others.*
- *Learn to listen better and find out their needs*
- *Write a purpose statement*
- *Let each senior & talk with that (?) “God isn’t finished with them yet and to keep active.”*
- *We need to expand to a team in some areas of ministry.*
- *More vision needed. Ministry team needed.*
- *Need senior ministry mission statement.*

Thank you.

We wish to thank Gary Schroeder, Associate Executive Minister, District Champions Jim & Julie Berry, and the Mideast 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 Evangel 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.

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