

**Central Bible Church
Kalispell, MT – September 18, 2004**

**“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 Central Bible Church on Saturday, September 18, 2004, from 9 am to 4 pm. 25 persons attended, representing several churches in the Flathead Valley. Most participants were older adults and/or leaders in Older Adult Ministries from Central Bible Church. Central Bible Church hosted the seminar. Clarence Boehm and Keith McNeal served as the primary conveners and chairpersons of the planning committee.

Celebration of Life:

Pastor Ron Youde led all participants in an opening worship session called a Celebration of Life.

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

Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation,
Presented by Richard and Leona Bergstrom of ChurchHealth, Edmonds, WA

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 – numbers in parenthesis indicate amount of votes each item received in the multi-voting exercise:

Mid-Life (Ages 50-65)

Physical Needs:

1. Food
2. Shelter (2)
3. Love (8)
4. Health needs (6)
5. Insurance (6)
6. Employment (6)
7. Exercise (6)
8. Physical activities (6)

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Love (5)
2. Someone to listen to them (5)
3. Appreciation for what they do (8)
4. Friend
5. Security (4)
6. Comfort in time of grief (3)
7. Challenges (2)
8. Ability to relax and ability to be excited (4)
9. Coping with different age groups (6)
10. Communication (1)
11. denial (6)

Spiritual Needs:

1. they need the Lord (10)
2. fellowship with other believers (11)
3. good library (1)
4. Bible study involvements (6)
5. an outreach of some kind (10)
6. ministry (7)

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical Needs:

1. Canes, mobility
2. Hearing (3)
3. Difficulty with exercise (4)
4. Nutrition concerns (6)
5. Medications > expensive (4)
6. Financial concerns (5)
7. Housing changes (4)
8. Insurance, medical expenses, etc (4)
9. Sorting through and dispensing “treasures” (4)
10. Loss of spouse
11. Acceptance of new physical limitations (9)_

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. nothing to do – change in responsibilities (1)
2. financial concerns (10)
3. concern for children and grandchildren (7)
4. lack of involvement (5)
5. need to belong (3)
6. lonesome (1)
7. loss of spouse (3)
8. acceptance of physical limitations (8)
9. retired spouse (2x the husband / ½ the income) (2)

Spiritual Needs:

1. self worth (9)
2. depression (5)
3. lack of involvement (3)
4. unresolved problems from past, family (8)
5. generational differences (2)
6. loss of spouse (2)
7. need for remembering to trust in God (8)
8. fellowship with God (3)
9. salvation (for unsaved) (6)

Senior Life (80+)

Physical Needs:

1. Health – strokes

2. Eyesight fails (1)
3. Hearing aids (3)
4. Transportation (6)
5. Furniture that aids – handicap accessible - (1)
6. Need caregivers (7)
7. Cars and vans that are easy to get into
8. Food and proper diet (7)
9. Stimulation – books, music (4)
10. To continue to learn (5)
11. To exercise both body and mind (7)
12. Side effects of medication (2)

Social/Emotional Needs:

1. Respect (3)
2. Loneliness (2)
3. Companionship (3)
4. Need to feel useful (6)
5. Need to serve
6. Fear of loss: driving independence (2)
7. Loss of dignity (2)
8. Depression
9. Cost of medication (2)
10. Keep on keeping on (2)
11. Need to feel responsible for younger generation (2)
12. share their life story (1)
13. encouragement and also allowed to do things (6)
14. need to feel safe and connected (1)
15. help with finances
16. need children and pets in their lives (2)
17. learn to accept help (dependence) (3)

Spiritual Needs:

1. Assurance of personal faith (8)
2. Fellowship (5)
3. Taped ministry (2)
4. Churches need to be accessible (4)
5. Home Bible study (3)
6. Ministry they can do (6)
7. Kept aware of needs of others (6)
8. Feel connected with their congregation (11)

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. love
2. health needs, insurance, employment, exerciser, physical activities (all tied for second place).

Social/Emotional

1. appreciation for what they do.
2. Coping with different age groups
3. denial

Spiritual

1. fellowship with other believers
2. they need the Lord
3. outreach

Retired Life (65-80)

Physical

1. acceptance of new physical limitations
2. nutritional concerns
3. financial concerns

Social/Emotional

1. financial concerns
2. concern for children and grandchildren (7)
3. acceptance of physical limitations (7)

Spiritual

1. self-worth
2. unresolved problems from past.
3. Need for remembering to trust God.

Senior Life (80+)

Physical:

1. food and proper diet
2. exercise both mind and body
3. need caregivers

Social/Emotional

1. need to feel useful (6)
2. encouragement and allowed to do things (6)
3. respect (3); companionship (3); learn to accept help (3)

Spiritual

1. feel connected with their congregation
2. assurance and personal faith
3. kept aware of the needs of others

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

Physical Need:

- 1: Re: Insurance:
 someone to talk about it
3. Re: employment
 - a. agency presenting opportunities

Social/emotional need:

- 1: Re: appreciation for what they do
 - a. appreciation dinner for S.S. or AWANA workers
2. Re: Coping with different age groups
 - a. plan program for mixing teens and adults in social situation

Spiritual need:

1. Re: Fellowship with other believers, they need the Lord, outreach
 - a. Dinner for 8
 - b. Bible study
 - c. Garden club
 - d. Appreciation dinner
 - e. Prayer for youth

Ideas for Retired Life (65-80) Ministry:

Physical need:

1. Re: Acceptance of new limitations:
 - a. Donna's Saturday morning exercise class
 - b. church golf tournament
 - c. walk with a friend.
2. Re: Nutrition concerns
 - a. Take meals to ones in need
 - b. Have celebrations for special events
 - c. Go out to eat with friends in need.

Social/Emotional need:

1. Re: financial concerns
 - a. Classes about budgeting, wills, stewardship.
 - b. Someone to help with medicare supplements
 - c. Help to facilitate admission to skilled care facilities

2. Re: Concern for children and grandchildren
 - a. Join in payer group to pray for children, grandchildren.

Spiritual need:

1. RE: self worth
 - a. Spend time with them
 - b. Share Bible verses re: God's love for them
 - c. Pray with them.

Senior Life (80+) Ministry:

Physical need:

1. Re: exercise of the body
 - a. Low impact exercise
 - b. hiking
 - c. aerobics
2. Re: exercise of the mind:
 - a. Reading,
 - b. board games
 - c. book clubs.
 - d. take books from church library, sermon tapes.
3. Re: respite care for caregivers
 - a. List people willing to offer transportation
 - b. List those willing to do odd jobs
 - c. Re: food and proper diet
 - d. Deliver meals on wheels
 - e. Shop for nutritious food
 - f. Take in prepared nutritious meals
 - g. Invite them to your home.

Social/emotional need:

1. Re: Need to feel useful
 - a. Call them with prayer requests (if able) or pray with them for others.
 - b. Tell them about others in the church so they feel a part of what's happening. Take pictures to show them. Listen to their experiences over and over. Ask for their wisdom.
2. Re: Encouragement and also allowed to do things.
 - a. Allow them to maintain control in their lives of the things they can do. Make the effort to include them in your family. Let them know their ideas are good and do what you can to make their ideas work.
3. Re: Respect, companionship.
 - a. Take the time. Make the time to visit them. Spend time with them – let them know they are important to you. Treat them with

love and respect. Speak kindly. Be patient. When you are helping, let them do as much as they can to help.

Spiritual Need:

1. Re: feel connected with their congregations
 - a. Gather life stories of faith and incorporate them into the worship
 - b. Showcase them in newsletters
 - c. Offer to channel their strengths
2. Re: assurance and personal faith
 - a. Senior to Senior ministry
 - b. Share faith in various ways – activities of all types)
 - c. 1-on-1 Bible Study on how our Lord cares for each of us.
3. Re: Kept aware of needs
 - a. Prayer chain – requests and answers
 - b. Allow for exchange of wisdom (cross generation) abilities or talents
 - c. Visitors from congregation share “news” of people and events.

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?

Thank you.

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



P.O. Box 1493
Edmonds, WA 98020-1493
(425) 774-8252
www.chonline.org