

Northlake Community Church

“Unleashing The Power Of Age In Your Congregation” Seminar

A Ministry Report

Summary:

The “Unleashing The Power of Age In Your Congregation” seminar was held at Northlake Community Church, Bellingham, Washington, on Saturday, October 20, 2001, from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm.

Twenty-nine persons attended, which included nine married couples, nine individuals, and two presenters. Representatives from both the “Second Wind” group (ages 50-70) and the Northlake Seniors and Keenagers groups were present.

Participants opened the day in a time of worship led by Pastor Don Rutledge, and a welcome and challenge by Pastor Bill Gilfillan. The morning was filled with lectures and discussion regarding the reasons for developing older adult ministries, the changes in society as a result of the “age wave”, and the spiritual journey of aging adults. Small groups were formed to discuss and define the physical, emotional and spiritual needs that aging people in our community face. Participants were asked to determine the top needs of older adults by multi-voting. Those results will be discussed later on in this report.

Following a wonderful lunch, the afternoon sessions included a discussion of the priority needs of aging adults, and ideas for programming that would meet those needs to create a powerful and effective older adult ministry. The final session focused on Mark 2:1-12 as a Biblical model for successful older adult ministry.

It was suggested that the group follow up the day’s activities and discovery by forming a task force that would continue to look at the purpose, mission and operational strategies for older adult ministries at Northlake Community Church.

Results of Small Workgroups:

Participants were divided into small workgroups to discuss and define some of the needs and issues facing older adults in the community and within the church. Below is a sampling of some of the ideas generated:

Physical Needs:

- Mobility
- Accessibility of buildings
- Hearing impairments
- Vision impairments (particularly driving at night)
- Chronic pain
- Mental decline
- Exercise
- Food, clothing and shelter
- Health care
- Home Maintenance
- Adequate rest or sleep
- Finances
- Appropriate ambient temperatures
- Elimination problems
- Adequate nutrition
- Senses
- Touch (hugs)
- Wellness
- Bathing, dressing, personal hygiene
- Side effects of medications or polypharmacy
- Sexual changes
- Worry of future
- Disabilities and loss of mobility
- Energy
- Transportation
- Continuing education and opportunities to learn

Emotional/Social Needs:

- Comfort
- Loneliness
- Human contact

- Depression
- Be accepted by others
- Usefulness
- Self-esteem
- Purpose
- Family connection
- Reconciliation and forgiveness
- Sense of Community
- Touch (hugs)
- Times of celebration
- Laughter
- Life review
- Compassion
- Understanding ethical and medical issues
- Discontentedness
- Generational and family stress
- Nostalgia (good and bad; productive and nonproductive)
- Resistance to Change
- Finances
- Technology inferiority
- Prayer
- Social interaction
- Someone to “unload” on
- Sharing the burden
- Small groups
- Lack of independence
- Denial of facing old age
- Need to feel important, wanted, needed and appreciated
- Fear of future
- Fellowship
- Isolation
- Leaving your home
- Vulnerable to fraud
- Estrangement from children and grandchildren and worry over them
- Handling paperwork
- Unresolved family conflict
- Mental illness
- Regrets
- Home visits

- Volunteering
- Opportunities to make new friends
- TLC for retired missionaries

Spiritual Needs

- Salvation
- Prayer for physical problems
- Encouragement
- Sharing
- Dealing with regrets
- Small groups
- Prayer partners
- Communion
- Visits, phone calls
- Bible study
- Short-term mission trips
- Understand ethical and medical issues
- Passing on the painful wisdom earned – “our legacy”
- Fellowship and involvement
- Loss of vision: less spiritual nourishment
- Finances
- Experience God’s love, care and presence
- Understanding of eternal life
- Understanding and acceptance of suffering and how it fits into God’s plan
- Need to grow spiritually
- Fellowship with believers
- Witnessing
- Hear the Word
- Sharing God’s love, care and presence – being involved in ministry to others
- Need to get to church

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:

- Dealing with healthcare issues, disabilities and chronic pain
- Impaired mobility – need for transportation, accessible facilities and assistance
- Need for adequate nutrition and meals

Emotional/Social:

- Lack of independence
- Self-esteem and sense of usefulness and purpose
- Loneliness

Spiritual:

- Salvation and conversion
- Loss of fellowship and involvement
- How to pass on a legacy of faith and wisdom.

Reflection and Evaluation:

Copies of the evaluations are enclosed with this report. All evaluations reflected a high degree of satisfaction with the presenters, facilities, workgroups and lunch. There was some discomfort with the temperature of the room.

1. The following are a few comments made when asked what one key concept participants took from the seminar:

- It's time to be more creative!
- At our age we still have ability to serve.
- We need to plan well now for seniors because of the age wave on the horizon.
- There are a lot more needs that seniors have than we might realize. Seeing the three kinds of needs has been helpful.

- Don't just sit in God's "waiting room"!
- Go with the mission of the church but be flexible.
- We are still needed to do God's work at every age.
- Pick and choose our ministries carefully, creatively, compassionately and with concern.
- Look at the needs of the people we will serve as we develop ministry!

2. When asked, "What do you believe is the top priority for older adult ministries at Northlake Community Church?" – the following answers were given:

- Outreach to unsaved/evangelism
- Shut-in ministry
- Double priority: Help seniors continue to serve, and give TLC to those who need it
- Get more older adults involved in ministry
- Work toward making "Second Wind" group stronger
- To reach more seniors that don't join or don't belong to any group.
- To get together in groups to "brainstorm" ideas.
- Reaching local older adults for salvation and fellowship
- Reach out to those who are lonely or unable to get to church.
- Fellowship, companionship and fun
- Reaching out to people for the Lord.
- Provide a place to belong
- Make certain people know that God cares for them.

3. What suggestions do participants have for future activities, ministry opportunities or conferences for older adults?

- Senior School one day a month
- "My mind is swimming with ideas and possibilities!"
- Keep thinking of new and different models for groups already formed.
- Retreats and trips
- Classes and instruction
- Personal Renewal Seminar
- Provide transportation for those who need it
- Sponsor health conferences and workshops/ educational opportunities
- Take this to step #2 and develop specific ideas for ministry.

Thank you.

We wish to thank Northlake Community Church for inviting us to facilitate the “Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation” seminar. We hope that the insights shared during this day will inspire you 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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