

Keys Points for Church Leadership about Adults over 50 by Bob Chism, CAM

Unleashing older adults' power in wisdom, experience, time, and financial resources requires church leadership to rethink attitudes, strategies, organizational structure, staffing, and roles. The new paradigm sees older adults as active, healthy, and capable of making significant contributions, as after WWII, six decades ago, before societal aging saw youth ministry. Consider the following issues which were identified by research, and how older adults can be called upon to respond to these needs.

Research Findings indicate church leadership needs to rethink strategies and roles in response to newly discovered potential of older adults.

Healthful Longevity indicates church leadership needs to promote respect and fully utilize the gift of added years that is consistent with the Scriptures. Prayer and faith in promoting healthful longevity is beginning to be taken seriously by both the scientific community and congregations. (Achenbaum, 2005, Chapter 5) Jeffrey Levin postulated on the bases of his research that religion affiliations benefits health by promoting healthy behavior and lifestyles; buffering the effects of stress and isolation; strengthening the physiological effects of positive emotions; reinforcing health promoting personality styles; nurturing hope, optimism and positive expectations; activating an altered state of consciousness; and invoking paranormal means of healing others. (Levin, 2001, 13-14)

Chronological age is an empty variable which church leadership needs to recognize as not considering gender, race, education, religion, health, physical fitness. **Life course** is the entire cycle from birth to death. Life course structure brings the generations together, while life stages (education of youth; work and family of middle life; and retirement and leisure of older adulthood) create separation which church leadership needs to change.

Ministering across the Life Course indicates church leadership needs to design new approaches to Christian education and ministry for aging generations.

- It is essential to revisit current attitudes regarding the interaction of people of all ages in the congregation.
- The scriptures tell us that God has a plan for each of us and it is a plan of hope and meaning. There is no age limit on that promise.
- Sometimes people are limited by the attitudes of congregations as to how they can serve. Attitudinal adjustment is essential regarding aging in following God's Word.
- If there is an emphasis on cross-generational fellowship and service there is spiritual health in that congregation.

Demographic trend planning is essential by church leadership.

- A youth oriented society no longer exists. Instead we are now an aging society. No historical models exist for aging nations or churches.
- Ethnic-minority older adult population growing faster than major ethnic population.
- Older adults are the fastest growing part of the population, especially in churches.
- A reassessment of society requires a new definition of youth, middle adults, and older-adults to recognize that older-age:
 - Have experienced more change than all other generations combined.
 - Have more abilities and personal resources than any other group.
 - Combining generations the church can experience spiritual synergy.
- Older adults are different.
 - There are **Go-Go** older adults.
 - The largest portion in or out of the church.
 - They'll either be going in Kingdom work or in secular work or personal goals.
 - They can be challenged to pursue Kingdom goals and objectives.
 - There are **Slow-Go** older adults.
 - They can do anything younger groups can, slower.
 - Health, economics, family commitments may slow them down.
 - Kingdom work through the church's ministry can be adjusted to allow participation.
 - There are **Can't-Go** older adults.
 - Physical, economic, or family may prevent active engagement in Kingdom work.
 - They want to be a part of the church's ministry.
 - Creative planning can enable them to make contributions according to their available physical, emotional, and relational resources.
 - There are **Won't-Go** older adults.
 - Many can, but choose not to be involved.
 - The task is to discover their motivational blockage.

Postmodernism Biblical Principals which church leadership needs to adopt include Intergenerational Service; Life Course Evangelism; Positive Longevity Attitudes; Christ Characteristic Modeling; Church Website and Email Marketing. (The above are takeaway points from Instructors Dickerson and Watkins CLA 101 "Changing Images of Aging and Generations", CASA Academy)

Trend Awareness which church leadership needs to acquire.

- Recognize the place of older adults as active and engaged members in congregations;

- Help older adults continue to learn and grow in Christian faith;
- Value and respect the wisdom and faith experience and testimony of older members;
- Recognize that older adults represent an opportunity for the church, not a problem.

(Takeaway points in *“Who Will Shape Our Future?”* by Richard H Gentzler)

Life Course Evangelism which church leadership needs to pursue.

- Not all mature adults are Christian.
- Because of the uncertainties of today's society, older adults, like everyone else, want to know about the great stabilizer—Jesus.
- The way to connect with older adults is to decide you want to reach out to this age group.

(Takeaway points from Dr Amy Hanson’s workshop on Evangelism)

Generosity and Wellness Ministry takes on new meaning for church leadership. Since approximately 88 percent of wealth is tied up in non-cash assets, it's essential for church leadership to understand this dimension of potential stewardship and to provide proper education as to available tax sheltered giving opportunities.

The major contributors to shorter life are obesity, alcohol consumption, smoking, lack of spiritual health. Knowledge about proper nutrition, exercise, disease and illness (heart, cancer, stroke, and mental health), long-term care centers, end of life treatment and religious beliefs, as well as the choices one makes effects the potential length and quality of life enjoyed by the individual. (Achenbaum, 2005, Chapter 4).

Pastor of Globe Missions, Pastoral Care, and Older Adult Ministry as well as Pastor of Development and Middle Adult Ministry are new staff positions which church leadership needs to create. The first and more traditional position some church leadership already have in place. The second position is more revolutionary. The position overview follows:

Development: to identify, cultivate, and challenge partners; increase the level of generosity, participation, and ownership to through direct involvement and consistent financial giving.

Middle Adult Ministry: to build and/or expand a healthy multi-faceted ministry for both those who attend and those in our surrounding community within the 50-65 age range by providing leadership training and meeting numerous other needs of these individuals.

(Takeaway points from environmental scanning)



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