

Senior Adult Ministry

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Develop a Healthy Understanding of Senior Adults

The first step to understanding senior adults is to develop a healthy image. Aging frightens most people. It reminds us of an end to life as we know it. A gray, shriveled, unhappy image comes to mind. Because of this image, we have placed the elderly in our churches and society in a second-class role. Individuals need the realization that senior adults have and will always hold important roles in our churches.

Avoid Common Myths Concerning Senior Adults

The truth about senior adults needs to be understood. Learn to see each senior adult as an individual, and avoid being misled by the general myths and misperceptions. For example, don't fall victim to such myths as: senior adults are not intelligent; loss of job ends life for senior adults; and senior adults should not live alone. For some seniors, these could be true statements, but they can also be true of people in their 20s, 30s, 40s, or 50s.

Focus on Developing a Healthy Senior Adult Ministry

- **Spiritual**—Spiritual development is still a must. A right relationship with God does wonders for one's outlook. The imminence of death, the dealing with loss, the reviewing of life—these are elements enhancing the interest of senior adults in spiritual matters.

Churches should not overlook the evangelizing of senior adults. There are only two periods of life when people are more open to receive the gospel than old age. One is adolescence and the other, is the period of childbearing, especially of the first child.

- **Socialization**—Losses such as friends or financial security create vacuums and, in turn, initiates the lack of stimulation and then isolation. The resulting loneliness and overwhelming sense of bereavement produce pessimism and depression. Senior adults need opportunities to build new social relationships that can help make up for losses and depression.

- **Education**—In a senior adult ministry, education means many things. One is the possibility of using the skills of the senior adult to teach others. Another aspect of education among senior adults is that they want to learn. This means not only special adult education classes but also the full range of classes at local colleges and universities.

- **Service**—Doing for others is vital in a senior adult life. It is the key to overcoming the loss of purpose that many have. To know that they are useful and contribute to other people's lives lifts their spirit. Service to others not only produces tremendous satisfaction, but also is a way to develop new friends.

- **Recreation**—Recreation has a vital role in coping with basic problems of old age. One is leisure and the other is their physical condition. Recreation comes in many different forms, such as exercise classes, tours, and outings

Steps in Starting a Senior Adult Ministry

- Select competent leadership—Leaders are always the key to a smooth-running ministry. Concentrate on recruiting senior adults to run a senior adult ministry.
- Survey church members—A survey of the church can help in the preliminary planning of a senior adult ministry. Interview church leaders such as: Sunday School, Discipleship Training, Women’s Missionary Union, Baptist Men, and deacons. By talking with these people, attitudes about the prospective ministry and their suggestions can be obtained.
- Survey the community—Leaders of community services for the elderly are generally accessible and willing to help. They can describe the social and physical conditions of local senior adults. A community survey can help in identifying present services and needed services for senior adults. A church senior adult ministry should not duplicate existing community programs.
- Plan based on survey—Poor planning produces poor performance. Develop the senior adult ministry around the survey results, lots of brainstorming, and lots of prayer. Senior adults nowadays do not like to just “eat and meet.” They want their needs met. There isn’t a better place for them to get their needs met than at a church.
- Initiating the program—A high profile for senior adult ministry in church affairs will contribute greatly to the success of the program. Launch the ministry in full view of the church. This is done first by a vote of the church during a business meeting to start a senior adult ministry. Then on the day it will begin have: Senior Adult Day; special sermons by the pastor with senior adults taking part in the service.

Adapted from an article by Joe Maddox in the *1993 National Resort Ministries Conference Notebook*. Used by permission