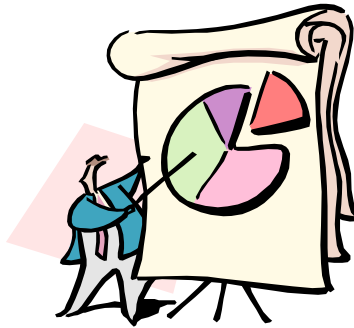


Starting A Senior Adult Ministry



One ministry with great potential within our society is ministry to senior adults. Statistics help to put this potential in perspective:

- 34% of all Americans is 50 years of age or older.
- Every 7 seconds another person turns 50!
- People age - 65 plus - number over 35 million representing one out of every 8 Americans.
- The number of older Americans (65+) has increased to 12.4% since 1990 (3.3 million). This number is expected to grow to 20% by 2030
- In the U.S., 2 million people celebrated their 65th birthday last year ... almost 5,500 per day.
- As of July 1983, there are more adults age 65 or older than teenagers in the United States.
- This growing number of senior adults is living longer than ever before. More than two hundred Americans reach age 100 each week.



Senior Adult Planning Committee

The pastor and official church board can appoint a senior adult ministry planning committee. This committee will most likely consist of key senior adults in the church, but it may include adults of any age with a concern for and desire to minister to senior adults. The pastor should review with each prospective member, the committee's responsibilities, purpose and length of commitment expected by those serving on the committee. It is also important for the pastor to point out that committee members may or may not be the leadership that eventually is elected or appointed to carry out the ministry. Two essential principles should be kept in mind:

- Pastoral involvement is necessary.
- Plan the program *with* the senior adults; not just for them.



Determining the Needs of Senior Adults

The planning committee and coordinator should work together to determine the needs of senior adults. This includes needs and interests of senior adults within the congregation and in the community. This information can be gathered by research, surveys and interviews, brainstorming by the planning committee, and by observation of senior adults. Remember, it is important to find out what the senior adults themselves would like in a senior adult ministry. One survey determined the following needs ranked according to importance:

- Love and appreciation
- Acknowledgement of usefulness and significance
- Acceptance and respect as a viable group by the church body
- Information and education regarding money, finances, wills and trusts
- Health information
- Transportation
- Counseling about spiritual and family issues
- Recreation

Keeping these needs in mind as you plan your ministry will add to the success of the group. Senior adults need someone to love and appreciate them. Families have scattered, friends have died, and incomes are often limited. Concern and fear can become overbearing, but friends, spiritual help and Christian fellowship can bring renewal to their hearts and minds. Not all seniors will be as actively involved as others due to personal circumstances. Remember to keep everyone informed of ministry available regardless of how often they attend.



Develop Familiarity With Services Provided By Community Agencies

There can be great benefit from programs and services provided by government and voluntary organizations and agencies in your community. Your church may want to research how it could support, assist in or utilize these programs. Check with County Social Services Department, Community Services Department, Council on Aging, the United Way, Health Department and other similar resources. Some agencies may be willing to present workshops and education seminars to your church. Contact local hospitals for literature they may have on such community services such as:

- Dial-a-Ride
- Meals on Wheels
- Legal services
- Nutrition programs
- Winterization programs
- Health care visitation
- Recreational and craft classes



Visit Other Senior Adult Ministry Programs

By visiting other programs in your city or nearby communities you can benefit from their experience. Look at the strengths or weaknesses of their programs. Determine the methodology they use to carry out their goals and objectives. Ask questions:

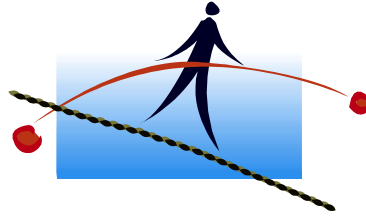
- How did you get started?
- What are the greatest needs of this age group?
- What programs did you begin with?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of your programs?
- What do you know now that you wish you had known at the beginning?



Call An Organizational Meeting With the Senior Adults

This meeting could be held following a covered dish dinner at the church or someone's home. This is the Planning Committee's opportunity to report on the planning they have done, and what the goal and scope of your program might be. Discuss these plans and hear from the group. This kind of interaction is essential! Let them feel like they "own" the program. As Attractive as programs may appear in other churches or groups, it is not wise to duplicate them unless you are sure your senior adults want them. Ultimately, the type of program and services offered will depend on your most urgent local interests and needs, and how your senior adults respond at the meeting.

If possible, use this meeting to set up the organization and leadership for your senior adult program. However, it may be necessary to meet again for this purpose. Keep the organization as simple a possible. Elect officers such as president, secretary, and treasurer. Consider finances. Will this ministry be subsidized by the church or self-supporting through fund-raising activities? Also establish guidelines and policies for the program. Who is responsible for what? What are the lines of authority and communication? How are officers to be elected? Set up your regular meetings. How frequently will the senior adults meet – weekly, biweekly, or monthly? Where will the meetings be held?



Maintain

Balance

Never allow your program's concern to become so narrow that it over emphasizes certain aspects while under emphasizing other equally important aspects of senior adult life. Consider the following five areas of ministry and seek to maintain an appropriate balance between them.

Spiritual Enrichment

Senior years provide great potential growth. Surveys have indicated that, among the general adult population, the older a person gets the more important religion becomes to their life. Senior adults can become the "pillars of the church". Time pressures and life responsibilities have lessened. Life experiences give deeper meaning to Bible teachings. Give senior adults spiritually enriching activities including Bible studies and special worship opportunities. Events should be planned for evangelism and outreach in the community.

Learning Opportunities

Through formal and informal groups senior adults should be actively involved in learning. It is a myth that senior adults are not interested in learning. Sunday School should provide meaningful and appropriate education opportunities. In addition, special workshops and seminars can be provided for the senior adults. It is useful to survey your senior adults to see what topics and subjects are particularly meaningful to them. Involve them in discussion groups and let them view interesting and educational films. Provide audio and videotape resources in the church library.

Socialization

This is the area most of us think of first concerning senior adult ministry. The need for interaction with other people continues throughout life. Is your program providing fulfilling and rewarding social activities?

Service Opportunities

Many churches have not begun to tap the potential resources in their older members. The church should not encourage the too frequent message of society that says senior adults have outlived their usefulness. Seniors want and need opportunities to serve as well as be served, to minister as well as be ministered to.

Needed Services

Most senior adults programs will be weakest in this area. There are many senior adults who feel "invisible" to the congregation. We must not allow them to be "out of sight, out of mind". What are the medical, financial, and legal services needed for your senior adults? Because there are limitations to what the church can offer, strong working relationships between community services and the church are needed. But we dare not overlook this area or think that "ministry" cannot or should not be concerned with all aspects of senior adult life.

Senior Adult Ministries: Suggested Committees And Definition of Roles



Senior Adult Coordinator Job Description

Add or delete depending on your specific church needs

- Work closely with the pastor.
- Serve as the chairperson of the senior adult committee.
- Act as the liaison between the planning committee and the church board.
- Act as the liaison between all church programs serving senior adults.
- Be informed of community agencies serving the senior adults.
- Correlate and coordinate all the activities of the senior adults.
- Report all senior activities to the church leadership.
- Recommend actions to take to enhance the senior adult ministry.
- Set in motion any new activities.
- Represent senior adults in the church and community.

The Purpose of Senior Adult Ministries is Threefold



To Bring People to Christ

- To bring people to Jesus Christ, and to bring Christians to a closer, more intimate relationship with Him.

To Minister

- Minister to the relational needs* of the local church congregation.
- To serve as a vehicle for interaction among the people of this congregation.

To Encourage Others to Minister.

To encourage commitment to ministry in God's kingdom. A light should not be kept under a bushel, but used to the continued service and glory of the Lord.

- To maintain the identity of people with regard to their continued value as vital parts of the body of Christ; to recognize their value in terms of wisdom, experience, knowledge, talents, and other God given abilities and gifts.

* Relational needs will be addressed in many ways including; prayer and worship activities, meetings, events, trips, programs, and other areas where Senior Adult Ministries can be of assistance.

“Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:28



Possible Committees

Others may be added depending on the needs and size of the group.

Program Committee – Plan programs for special banquets and events

Hospitality Committee – Take care of the food service at the various senior adults ministry functions.

Promotions Committee – Publicizes the events of the Senior Adult Ministry group.

Telephone Committee – Contact all senior adults concerning prayer requests, making announcements, or informing of special events.

Transportation Committee – Be sure all the senior adults have transportation to the various senior adult activities. This is a major problem for many elderly people.

The following pages are sample job descriptions, which were sent in from an actual ministry group. These can be altered to fit you specific needs.