
LIFT

Ministry Group September Resource

Developing an age-sensitive adult ministry

If you were to develop an age-sensitive adult ministry, how would you begin?

Here are five components:

1. Find, select, and train leaders.

The success of your adult ministry will be directly related to the quality of your leaders. Someone needs to own the goal of ministry/outreach to young, middle, and senior adults. The leaders who will be most successful in each group will have a genuine love for people in that group. It's not a job, it's a ministry.

2. Get the facts.

Find out how many members in your church are over age 50, 55, 60, 65. What are the age groupings in your community? How many are homebound? What percentage are male or female? What are the various needs and interests represented in your prospective constituency? Your findings will lead you to organize effective programs and activities.



Is your ministry senior sensitive?

“You are never too old to set another goal or dream a new dream.”

- C.S. Lewis-

In an article, written by Charles Arn, for Ministry Magazine, I read a statement that stopped me in my tracks:

“Most churches have a token senior adult class, perhaps a monthly potluck or field trip for older adults. But such approaches are woefully inadequate, if not entirely irrelevant, to the task of reaching and ministering to the rapidly growing community of persons over 50.”

Discuss: As a pastor/minister are you sensitive to the needs of the aging population of your congregation? How are you addressing them?

Arn notes, “The 60-plus age group is growing three times more rapidly than the population at large. Those churches that are not prepared will be swamped by the sheer numbers, diversity, and impact of these older adults.”

So how do we reach, engage, and develop this segment of our church’s age demographic?

3. Begin with an adult ministry, not a senior adult group.

The distinction is important. If you have a "senior adult group," you limit the potential involvement to those individuals who see themselves as "senior adults." Many other senior adults in your congregation and in your community will not identify with "those old people." In contrast, if your paradigm is an adult ministry, all kinds of groups can develop, many of which would not even be identified as "senior adult." A church of 300 members could have 10 to 15 various adult groups responding to a variety of needs and touching the lives of many more people.

4. Develop a purpose statement.

A well written purpose statement will be the guiding light for a successful older adult ministry. This purpose statement should be "owned" by the members and be a yardstick to measure regularly the progress. If a clear purpose statement is not established and used early in the ministry, the activities will become increasingly self-serving and self-centered.

5. Build your adult ministry on adult motivators.

Older adults are motivated by one of five values that form the foundation of most of their meaningful activity:

Autonomy---they desire to be or remain self-sufficient.

Social and spiritual connectedness---they respond to people more than programs.

Altruism---they desire to give some thing back to the world.

Personal growth---they desire to continue developing as human beings.

Revitalization---they respond to activities that bring fresh and new experiences.

"The aging population provides an unprecedented opportunity for churches to increase their ministerial effectiveness."¹



Discuss: How is it that senior adult ministries seem to be on the decline at the same time that the average age of church members increases?

We need a different viewpoint or approach to ministry related to senior adults if we hope to effectively minister to their needs while engaging them in the ministry of the church.

How do we do that?

According to Arn's article here are a couple of paradigm shifts we need to make in how we think about senior adult ministry:

1. Recognize that all seniors aren't seniors.

"A new generational grouping has emerged in our times, known as "middle adults," and includes those between 50 and 70 years of age. They are, says U. S. News & World Report, "different not only in size, but in vitality and outlook."

Older adults are living healthier, more active, more productive, and longer lives. A person of 50 or 60 can expect to live 15 to 30 more years. It is, indeed, their middle years. They are not, certainly in their minds, "senior adults." They feel as though they still have something of value to contribute and desire to engage in the life of the church.

2. Recognize that age does make a difference.

"People 30 years old are different from people 60 years old, not only in the hair on their head but the mind inside. Older adults think differently from younger adults. Most senior adult members have been Christians for years. Having experienced life's mountains as well as its valleys, they can share their maturity and wisdom with others." They tend to stay in one church longer, give more, and have more time for church related activities than any other age group.



This resource was drafted exclusively from Charles Arn's article, "Is your church senior-sensitive?," from the April, 1998 archive of Ministry Magazine. Link: <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1998/04/is-your-church-senior-sensitive>