

A Quick Start GUIDE



SENIOR ADULT MINISTRIES

A Quick Start Guide for Senior Adult Ministries

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Introduction

The 65-plus age group is currently the fastest growing segment of our nation's population. Today's Baby Boomers will be the largest elderly generation in the world's history, according to Ken Dychtwald in *Catch the Age Wave*. In addition, more people are living active lifestyles into their 70s, 80s, and 90s. The church must value and affirm the worth of all individuals in all stages of life.

Although the number of older adults is growing much faster than the number of children and youth, our culture places value on busyness, productivity, and youth. As a result, older people who are no longer part of the bustle of society are undervalued and underappreciated. Their opinions are rarely sought; their stories rarely heard.

According to biblical values, Eastern cultures are right in showing respect for advanced age. Leviticus 19:32 says, "You shall rise up before the gray headed and honor the aged." (See also Psalm 92:12-14 and Proverbs 23:22-25.) We must cut through the cultural fog that sees later life as a non-event and rethink our strategies of ministry to include a balance between youth and seniors. Understanding the needs of senior adults through watching and listening is the first step in ministering to older populations in the church.

**God calls us to value every age group in the church,
from the youngest to the oldest.**

Understanding Senior Adult Ministry

Surveys indicate that among the general adult population the older a person gets the more important religion becomes in his or her life. This creates a great need for a specific ministry to reach out to the aging adult population.

A Senior Adult Ministry will achieve three main purposes. The first purpose is to bring people to Christ and a closer relationship with God. Many Baby Boomers are retiring and moving to new locales. There is a great opportunity for evangelism among these older adults; however, they do not often seek out a church family.

The second purpose of Senior Adult Ministry is to minister to the physical, emotional, and social needs of older people. An awareness of the phases of aging will help church leaders develop the necessary sensitivity to the needs of those in the later phases of life. In *Thriving After 55: Your Guide to Fully Living the Rest of Your Life* Henry Simmons and E. Craig MacBean have adapted a

model of later life stages alternating between times of transition and stability. This model, outlined below, is both comprehensive and clear.

The main purposes of Senior Adult Ministry are to:

- Bring people into a relationship with Christ
- Minister to their physical, emotional, and social needs
- Encourage and assist them in ministering to others

1. **Extended Middle Age:** This is the period when the children are grown and gone and the person is either considering retirement or has retired.
2. **Ready or Not:** Some type of loss requires a transitional time and change of lifestyle. (Examples: death of spouse and physical deterioration in oneself or partner.)
3. **The New Me:** This stage deals with accepting and embracing the changes resulting from the Ready or Not stage.
4. **Like It or Not:** Loss of independence occurs when body or mind ceases to function adequately. This is a traumatic transition for many people. Eventually, resistance to dependence is overwhelmed by the reality of not being able to cope on one's own.
5. **The Rest of Living:** This third stable period, while often a time of frailty, has the potential to be a rich and engaged phase of life. The deepest challenge of this period is to continue to express oneself and relate positively to others despite the limitations.
6. **Dying:** This final transition has been seen as the culmination of life for virtually all of human history. But this is not the mood of modern times. We live in a secular age where even death is often removed from the religious domain. In *Soulful Aging* authors Henry C. Simmons and Jane Wilson point out that dying is more than just an end. It is a profoundly human event. Its quality is enormously important and will have a profound and lasting impact on loved ones.

Understanding and being sensitive to these six stages is vitally important for anyone involved in ministry to senior adults.

The third purpose of Senior Adult Ministry is to encourage and assist older members in helping others. For many seniors the time pressures and heavy life responsibilities have lessened. These adults can be the “pillars of the church” by devoting their time and energies to serving others and sharing how Bible teachings have proven true in their own life experiences. Seniors who have experienced various stages of the aging process can encourage those currently adjusting to new situations. Seniors have adapted to a great many changes throughout their lifetimes; their wisdom is a treasure trove to be valued.

“The best way to cope with change is to help create it.” - I.W. Lynette

Senior Adult Ministries Leader Qualifications

The Senior Adult Ministries leader doesn't need a professional degree in gerontology or theology. He or she does need a solid and practical attitude and basic competencies. The spiritual gifts of encouragement, administration, and shepherding will be useful. This person needs to understand the challenges older people face and recognize their value to the church. The Senior Adult Ministries leader should be able to plan, organize, manage, and evaluate both outreach and nurture projects. He or she should be able to coordinate and supervise volunteers. The ability to communicate effectively with other church leaders and directors of various community agencies is also needed.

A qualified Senior Adult Ministries leader will:

- Know Christ as a personal Savior. Be a student of the Word of God, living a life rich in prayer and devotion.
- Care about senior adults. Strive to understand their challenges and needs.
- Possess spiritual and emotional maturity. Have a good sense of humor, sound judgment, honesty, and enthusiasm. Model Christ's methods of relating.
- Demonstrate the ability to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences. Show genuine courtesy to all under all circumstances.
- Be a team builder who is able to organize and delegate.

Organizing Senior Adult Ministries

First, think and pray about the mission and purpose of a ministry for seniors. In most congregations the aspects of a balanced program will include:

- Spiritual enrichment
- Socialization (fellowship)
- Learning opportunities
- Service opportunities
- Providing needed services to seniors

Steps for Starting a Senior Adult Ministries Program

1. Gather a small team of willing individuals who are interested in seniors and their needs.
2. With this group, research church and community demographics. Conduct interviews, record observations, and distribute surveys (see a sample on page 14).
3. Assess your congregation for possible resources, including potential volunteers.
4. Begin to network with community partners.
5. After studying the results of your research, start outlining programs to meet the most urgent needs and dominate interests.
6. Determine the structure of your ministry by establishing policies and guidelines in consultation with your pastor. Get your budget approved.
7. Gather information from potential training agencies, such as NAD Community Services and the Society of Certified Senior Advisors.

The Senior Adult Ministries leader serves as the chair of the Senior Adult Ministries team. You also function as a liaison between the team and the church board, and between the church and community agencies. The Senior Adult Ministries leader is responsible for coordinating all programs serving seniors and reporting to the church leadership and membership about their ministry.

Specific duties of the Senior Adult Ministries leader include:

1. Praying on a regular basis for the older generations of your church. Pray specifically for your church to gain an understanding of the purposes of Senior Adult Ministries and a recognition of the value of intergenerational connections.

2. Encouraging and facilitating meaningful spiritual, mental, and emotional growth among the senior adults of the church.
3. Working with a small team to establish goals and plans.
4. Developing and conducting on a consistent basis a wide variety of programs and activities that will meet the various needs of a diverse senior adult constituency.
5. Communicating with the church secretary and pastor when scheduling programs or activities.
6. Serving as the Senior Adult Ministries representative from your church to community organizations and agencies.
7. Communicating information and news of interest to senior adults from community organizations and other sources.
8. Giving reports about Senior Adult Ministries to church members and the church board.
9. Keeping up-to-date on issues relating to seniors by participating in seminars and using your local public library, the internet, and other resources.
10. Mentoring another person to eventually become a Senior Adult Ministries coordinator.

Working with Your Pastor

Your pastor can be one of your biggest allies. Because of that potential strength, be sure to keep the pastor informed and involved as an active member of your Senior Adult Ministries team. Here are seven suggestions for working with your pastor (adapted from *The ABZs of Adventist Youth Ministry* by Stuart Tyner):

1. Create a regular appointment time, at least once a month.
2. Discuss your philosophies, goals, and overall approach.
3. Talk about specific plans for the coming month, including details of special events and programs.
4. Ask your pastor to preach a sermon on the value of advanced age
5. Clear calendar items at least six months ahead of major events, projects, and programs.
6. Work together on budgets. Explain the financial support you are requesting from the church.
7. Extend personal invitations to attend events and give devotions or prayers even if your pastor can't stay for the entire program.
8. Evaluate the program together. Ask for your pastor's input and consider it carefully.

Maximizing the Ministry

The Value of Planning

Because the opportunities and challenges for seniors in different congregations vary greatly, each congregation needs to customize its own Senior Adult Ministry. And because stability is valuable to most seniors, careful thought and planning needs to go into developing reliable programs that can be maintained long-term. The Great Lakes Region of the Reformed Church in America uses the following questions as a guide for establishing ministries for seniors:

1. What is our mission? Create a clear mission statement.
2. What are specific matters we need to address? State the issues.
3. What specific things do we want to accomplish? List your goals.
4. How will we accomplish them? Outline an action plan.
5. What are specific tasks we need to complete to achieve our goals? Set your objectives.
6. Who will be in charge of each task? Determine responsibility.
7. When will each one be done? Establish a timeline for accountability.
8. What kind of help do we need? Identify your resources.
9. How will we know we've accomplished our goals? Devise a means of evaluation.

As part of this planning process the team can divide itself up so individual members are responsible for one or more of the following areas:

- Hospitality (greeting, food service at functions)
- Promotion (PR responsibilities)
- Communication (phone, email, etc.)
- Transportation (providing rides for seniors)
- Person Power (recruiting and organizing volunteers)
- Outreach (small groups, evangelism)
- Program Development (organizing the various programs)
- Resource Development (organizing fundraising and donations and connecting with available community resources)

Choose a week or month each year to focus the entire congregation on the seniors in your church and community. A suggested theme is "The world is changing and so are we" in recognition of the many adaptations seniors have made throughout their lifetimes.

Utilizing Small Groups in Senior Adult Ministries

Small groups are a staple in the life of most growing churches. That's because they bring many benefits to participants, including:

- A sense of belonging
- The experience of giving and receiving love and care
- The opportunity to learn and grow in God's Word and its applications
- Being able to reach out to those not yet in the community of faith

In his blog at www.christianitytoday.com Dr. Charles Arn lists the following questions as a springboard for establishing small groups.

1. Who is the target audience? The more specifically you can answer that question the more likely the group is to succeed. Example: women ages 60-70 who are widowed and like to travel.
2. What kind of group would best meet this audience's needs? Try to conduct a focus group session including a 30-minute interview with a group of 8-12 people representing your target audience. Find out what they consider to be important issues, concerns, questions, and problems.
3. Who will lead the group? This person should be mature in faith, supportive of church leadership, and similar in some way to the target audience. It is often easier and more desirable to recruit two leaders.
4. Will training be necessary for the leader? The type of group determines the level of training needed. As a rule, the more intimate you expect the relationships to become within the group, the more important it is to train leaders.
5. What support will the leader need to assure success? A monthly meeting of small group leaders to encourage and support them in their roles will go a long way toward maintaining morale, facilitating communication, and resolving minor problems.
6. When, where, and for how long will the group meet? When and where is best left to the discretion of the group. How long depends on the group's purpose. People who have not been previously involved in a group prefer short commitments (4-6 weeks). Twelve weeks should be the maximum time to meet before reevaluating and determining the group's destiny.

Specific Ideas for Ministering to Seniors

A major area of concern for senior adults is their health – emotional as well as physical. As the Baby Boomers are aging, traditional senior centers are declining in popularity and Wellness Centers are taking center stage. This trend provides a perfect opportunity for ministering to seniors physically, spiritually, and socially through the idea of the body, mind, and spirit being totally intertwined.

An example of this is a group that for several years has met once a week from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Their agenda includes time for exercising, telling jokes, enjoying refreshments, studying the Bible, and working on a mission project.

An enormous variety of ministry ideas and service projects exist to meet the needs of seniors. Here is a random sampling:

- Senior health fairs for the community
- Caregiver support groups
- Nursing services
- Homemaker services
- Benefits checkup
- Home repair and maintenance services
- Nutrition counseling and Meals on Wheels
- Companion services
- Telephone reassurance
- Grief support/recovery
- Free tax preparation assistance
- Yard work
- Walking club
- Transportation services (dial-a-ride)
- Adopt a grandparent
- Respite care services
- Elder care advocacy
- Prayer/Bible study group
- Assistance with financial management
- Travel club
- Social/recreational opportunities
- Help with end of life issues (funeral planning, creating wills)

- Retirement readiness class
- Communication class (teaching today's methods: computer and cell phone, etc.)
- Prayer partners
- Autobiography group (writing or recording life stories)

Working with Volunteers

One-on-one is the best path to successful volunteer recruitment. Always approach prospective volunteers in a kind and positive manner. Ask, "How do you see yourself being involved in ministry with senior adults?"

When recruiting seniors themselves, ask about projects they have worked on in the past. Many seniors have a vast array of experiences and much wisdom. Listen carefully to what they say. Each person's past experiences, dreams, personality, and spiritual gifts combine to determine his or her current level of willingness to commit to programs or projects. Talk about spiritual gifts, and pray together that God will help each person find just the right place to work for Him (see Resources on page 12).

Dealing with volunteers is not the same as working with employees. You must find ways to show workers on a regular basis how valuable their time and energy is to the success of the Senior Adult Ministries program, and how much you (and the entire church) appreciate their efforts.

Take pictures of volunteers at work and display them on your church bulletin board, in your newsletter, and on the church website. Also work with your church communication director in writing stories about members who are actively helping others.

Networking with Community Partners

Your Senior Adult Ministry can receive great benefits from programs and services provided by government and volunteer organizations and agencies in your community. Some of these agencies may even assist in conducting training workshops for your volunteers. Check with hospitals and other community organizations for information and literature.

The Eldercare Locator is the first step to finding specific resources for older adults in any American community. It is a free national service of the Administration on

Church Library

If your budget allows, purchase materials for your church library that will be of interest to seniors. There are many great books, DVDs and musical selections available. See the Resources section on page 12 for ideas or check with the Adventist Book Center at www.adventistbookcenter.com.

Aging in the Department of Health and Human Services. Visit www.eldercare.gov or call 800.677.1116 for an instant connection to resources that enable older persons to live independently.

Providing a Sense of Security

Many seniors are concerned about:

- The uncertainty of receiving Social Security benefits
- Threats of lowered pensions
- The increasing costs of healthcare
- The availability of health insurance

Seniors also have concerns about their personal safety. They may be worried about break-ins, personal attacks or being victimized by financial scams. Conducting a safety class for seniors can help educate them and alleviate their fears.

Safety Plan

Consider establishing a network for checking daily on elderly people who live alone. Develop a plan for evacuating and caring for these seniors in the event of natural disasters such as tornados, fires and floods. Make sure there is a well-stocked first aid kit in your church and consider conducting a CPR training class.

Establishing a Comfort Zone

Is your church a comfortable place for older persons? Is the building accessible for those using wheelchairs or walkers? Is the bulletin available in large print? Is audio assistance available? Could a person using a walker or cane speak from the platform or sing in the choir? Seniors need full access to be fully included in worship.

Remember also that many elderly people do not drive at night. Try to schedule programs that will be of particular interest to seniors during daylight hours. Times are changing and so is the way we worship. Older adults may long to hear hymns or readings from their childhood that would be enjoyed by members of all ages. Host a discussion about how worship was different 50 years ago. Encourage participants to share their stories and memories.

Visiting the Home/Facility Bound

When visiting those who are either home or facility bound it is important to remember a few guidelines. Try to visit regularly, at the same time each week. Always convey that you are there as a friend. Make sure to maintain eye contact

and shake or hold their hand if possible. Be aware of any physical limitations and be sensitive to them. When engaging them in conversation, try asking about their family or objects in their room. Don't bring gifts to your first visit; this may make them feel obligated to return the favor. Ask if they would like you to read out loud to them. You could have a devotional time where you pray, read the Bible, sing, and discuss related topics. It is good to laugh, so tell jokes when appropriate.

If the person you are visiting needs physical assistance, call a nurse rather than trying to help them yourself. Also remember that because of HIPPA, staff cannot give you any medical information. However, they can help you learn things you might not know about the person you are visiting.

Evaluating Your Senior Adult Ministries Program

Remember to regularly reassess the needs of the seniors in your church and community, as those needs may change. During your team evaluation meeting ask questions like:

- Which needs of seniors are we currently meeting?
- Which needs are still unmet?
- Are we utilizing church resources to their fullest potential?
- What about community resources?
- What types of feedback are we receiving?
- Are we regularly reporting to the church body?
- Is our budget adequate?
- Are we using it as efficiently as possible?

Asking these types of questions and answering them honestly will strengthen your ministry. And it will keep you on course for being the eyes and ears, the hands and feet of Jesus on this earth.

It is important to remember not to neglect the aging. One of our highest priorities should be to help them feel welcome and included in the worship process. We experience many changes as we age, but these changes can be made less difficult by a loving and supportive church family and an active Senior Adult Ministries program.

Resources

The following resources are available from AdventSource. For a complete listing visit www.adventsource.org or call 800.328.0525.

Soulful Aging: Ministry through the Stages of Adulthood

by Henry C. Simmons and Jane Wilson

The historical or mainline churches have increasingly larger percentages of older adults as congregants. They are characteristically vibrant and committed. In contrast, there are proportionally fewer younger adults or children active in the church. The older congregants in the last third of life can offer much by speaking about their lives, their spiritual journeys, and their hearts and souls. This book is about cultivating an informed conversation about some of the most important religious realities of life.

Catalog #330010

Spiritual Gifts

by James Zackrison

Did you know that all Christians have been blessed with spiritual gifts? Can you identify yours? Use this book as a starting point to identify and share your spiritual gifts. Take the spiritual gifts inventory and follow the author's suggestions for determining your spiritual gifts. Learn the biblical basis for spiritual gifts and read a list of which gifts fit well into which ministries. Start using your gifts today!

Catalog #550936

Adventist Elder Care Brochure

created by Adventist Community Services

This brochure outlines Adventist Elder Care Ministries, a service for seniors and caregivers. Learn how your church can coordinate education and services related to aging, health, finance, and social issues for seniors.

Catalog #115803

Check your local bookstore or online for the following titles:

Devotions for the “Chronologically Gifted”
edited by Les Bayer

Senior Adult Ministries in the 21st Century
by David P. Gallagher

Who Stole My Church? What to Do When the Church You Love Tries to Enter the 21st Century
by Gordon Macdonald

Living Fully, Dying Well
by Rueben Job

Senior Saints: Growing Older in God’s Family
by James and Martha Reapsome

Wisdom Keepers: A Resource for Faith Sharing Among Seniors
by Sharan A. Benton

Websites

The Eldercare Locator, www.eldercare.gov

Senior Adult Ministries, www.sam.ag.org

Facts Encyclopedia Seniors Online, www.refdesk.com/seniors.html

Christian Association Serving Adult Ministries, www.gocasa.org

Educational Travel and Learning Vacations for Adults, www.elderhostel.org

Elder Care Link, www.eldercarelink.com

Senior Adult Ministries, www.senioradultministry.com

Adventist Community Services, www.communityservices.org

Society of Certified Senior Advisors, www.society-csa.com

National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, www.n4a.org

Share the Care, www.sharethecare.org

Survey

Section One

On a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the best you could imagine, rate your perceptions of your local church:

1. I feel loved and appreciated at church. _____
2. The church acknowledges the significance and usefulness of older members. _____
3. I feel accepted and respected by the church body as a valuable member. _____

Section Two

Please indicate your level of interest in each category below, with ten being your highest interest:

1. I would like information on managing my finances. _____
2. I would like information on preparing a will or trust. _____
3. I would like to attend a seminar about healthful living. _____
4. I need transportation to church functions. _____
5. I would like information on community services available to me. _____
6. I need counseling for spiritual or family relationship issues. _____
7. I would like to join a travel club. _____
8. I'm interested in attending local concerts or programs with a group. _____
9. I would like to join a Bible study. _____
10. I would like to be part of a prayer group. _____
11. I'm looking for a service project to support. _____
12. I'd like to be more involved at church. _____
13. I'd like to join a walking club. _____
14. I would appreciate information on caregiver support groups. _____

Optional:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Senior Adult Ministries

This Quick Start Guide for Senior Adult Ministries is full of important information to help you start or revitalize a ministry at your local church. This guide contains a job description, instructions for getting started, tips for maintaining a successful ministry, troubleshooting suggestions, recommended resources, and more. Whether you're new to this ministry or a seasoned volunteer, this Quick Start Guide will inspire you with lots of great ideas you can immediately put to use in your local church.

Other titles in the Quick Start Guide Series include:

- Personal Ministries
- Adult Sabbath School
- Prayer Ministries
- Elder
- Deacon and Deaconess

For a complete listing of Quick Start Guide titles visit www.adventsource.org



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