

Scope of Senior Adult Ministry

How can senior adult ministry focus on making and growing disciples and helping believers find their place in ministry?

Why?

The Great Commission is both timeless and ageless. Many people have bought into the myth that there is some magical age at which one retires—even from Christian service. Some churches unintentionally feed this myth. The generations of senior adults have a history of mobilizing to get the job done. Why would they stop just because they become older? If anything, becoming older is more of a reason to stay faithful to the mission—The Great Commission.

What? Senior adult ministry must be about developing strategies for involving older adults in making disciples, maturing or growing believers, and multiplying leaders and ministries.

Who? Senior adult ministry should involve all older adults (according to your church's definition) in ministry with, to, and through seniors. Their ministries will target persons of all ages. For example senior adults may minister to children as they volunteer through a community public library.

How? Ideally, senior adult ministries will use the existing caring and ministry structure of the church's Sunday School or other ongoing Bible study groups. These classes or groups are already attempting to make and grow disciples and send them out in service. Senior adult ministries would always seek to provide leaders and volunteers for existing or expanding ministry teams, committees, or groups.

When? Any time—senior adult ministry cannot and should not be limited to any one event or meeting.

Where? Any place--down the street or around the world.

Anticipated General Results of Senior Adult Ministry for Churches: Churches will see senior adults come to know Christ as personal Lord and Savior and follow Him in baptism. Churches will regularly hear stories of how God has changed lives of senior adults and those to whom they reach and minister. Churches will see senior adult ministry leaders sending out seniors in service, as well as see senior adults themselves seeking out places of service. Senior adults will discover how they can link their giftedness and passions with ministry opportunities beyond the walls of the church.

Biblical Basis for Senior Adult Ministry:

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20) – The marching orders of every church ministry must be based on the command to make, mature, and multiply devoted disciples of Christ. Frontrunners (Hebrews 12:1-2) – Paul’s words still encourages believers to lay aside anything that hinders them from running with endurance. Believers are not spectators in this race—they are the runners and older adults are further ahead in the race—they are closer to the goal. Keeping our eyes on Jesus as the source and perfecter of our faith will help us make sure the important things continue to be the important things.

Life coaches (Titus 2:1-8) – Older adults must live the Christian life in such a way as to glorify Christ and help other generations who are coming along the road of life. Walking alongside, teaching, encouraging, praying for and coaching others allows older adults to share the wisdom that comes only through having walked and come through the mountains and valleys in one’s spiritual journey.

Foundational Principles for Senior Adult Ministry:

Make disciples. If evangelism is central to what you do in senior adult ministry, more times than not, the other things will follow. Avoid assumptions that just because someone is at least a certain age and that they “show up” at church, they are believers.

Mature believers. Emphasize the lifelong journey of spiritual transformation for all believers of all ages and all life stages. Make sure every senior adult is plugged into a Sunday School class or other open, ongoing Bible study group.

Multiply leaders and expand ministries. Work at growing missionaries instead of members. Think of ways to send senior adults out in service. Find a balance between ministry to church members and ministry beyond the church walls.

Senior Adult Ministry Actions:

Develop intentional strategies for older adults to regularly share their faith as they reach people of all ages for Jesus Christ. Include strategies targeting people at all stages of spiritual development.

Use your Sunday School (or whatever you call your ongoing Bible study groups) as the skeleton of your senior adult ministry. You can still have persons from each older adult class serve on a senior adult ministry team or committee.

Lift up and tell stories of senior adults who understand believers never retire from Christian service. Help seniors learn to tell their stories in such a way that they do not feel they are bragging on themselves, but on God.

Create a new “score card” for the effectiveness of senior adult ministry. Instead of how many do we have at our monthly meetings, consider how many are being sent out in ministry in the church, the community, and around the world, how many people are coming to know Christ because an older adult shared with them, etc.

Evaluate how your church communications may feed many of the myths associated with older adults (such as retiring from Christian service). Read your last four church newsletters and/or worship bulletins to notice what picture you paint of older adults in service.

Consider the many possibilities of what senior adult ministry may look like (or not look like) as the large numbers baby boomers determine how they will move or transition from midlife to

the next stage. Acknowledge boomers will not likely be actively involved in present senior adult ministry structures, and that lack of involvement does not necessarily reflect on the effectiveness of such structures.

Don't throw the baby out with the bath water. Many churches consider eliminating their monthly senior adult club meetings. Consider refocusing those gatherings to provide the relationship building and fellowship that already exists, but expand them to help persons experience a "taste" of ministry opportunities. Recognize that over time these gatherings may become a part of adult ministry teams (such as a fellowship team).

Recommended Resources:

The Present Future – Reggie McNeal

The Resilient Life – Gordon MacDonald

Simple Church – Tom Rainer and Eric Geiger

Stuck in Halftime – Bob Buford

From Success to Significance – Lloyd Reeb

We're always glad to hear how your church is reaching older adults and helping them grow in their lifelong journey of following Christ. Email Pam Cashatt at pamcashatt@scbaptist.org or call her at 800-723-7242, ext. 2100 (outside S.C. 803-765-0030, ext. 2100) to share what is working or not working for your church in senior adult ministry.