

Aging is Changing

*A congregational resource for ministry with
and by older adults*



Lifelong Christian Formation Office and the Older Adult Ministries Task Force
of the Episcopal Church

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Introduction

According to statistics, the “baby boomer” generation is becoming the largest older adult population in world history. Our older adults are living longer and want to maintain their active and productive lives. In particular, Episcopalians tend to be older than the general population. About 30 percent of Episcopal members are age 65+, and they range from very active to homebound members.

With this in mind, we created this resource to help clergy and lay leaders identify issues of older adults, their families, and caregivers to highlight existing program ideas that others might replicate in program development, and to identify local, state and national resources that might be helpful.

This resource is aimed at changing the perception that older adults become less useful as they age. It highlights the potential of this generation and signals us to remember that as Christians, we are called by God to “The Five Marks of Mission”:

- To *proclaim* the Good News of the Kingdom
- To *teach, baptize, and nurture* new believers
- To *respond* to human need by loving service
- To *seek to transform* unjust structures of society
- To *strive to safeguard* the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

I’m reminded of something my friend Betsy said when she was 75 years old. She said a group of her peers were complaining that they were tired and that it was time for the younger generation to do the work of the church. Betsy responded, “I don’t know about you, but there is no expiration on my Baptismal Certificate.” Betsy has since passed away, but she was a wise and prophetic voice in the church.

We hope you use this resource to enhance your Older Adult Ministries or start one and ensure the involvement of the older members of the body of Christ. Think of it as a living document filled with personal stories, referral information for caregivers and examples of successful programming that can be replicated in your parish because Christian formation IS lifelong.

Thank you to those who helped to make this resource possible.

Ruth-Ann Collins

Ruth-Ann Collins
Lifelong Christian Formation Officer

Preface for Older Adult Ministries Guide

By The Rt. Rev. Rayford B. High, Jr.

It should come as no surprise to us that our population is aging. Presently, there are more people age 65 and older living in the U.S. than the total population of Canada, and by 2030, there will be about 72.1 million older persons living in the U.S.

The oldest Baby Boomers are reaching 65 years this year. Every day, for the next 19 years, about 10,000 more will join this throng. By numbers alone, this group will redefine old age in America. However, many Boomers are in good health and feel younger than their years. Recent economic changes have cut short retirement plans or decimated retirement income.

The [Charter for Lifelong Formation](#), adopted by General Convention 2009, calls for the church to invite, inform and inspire Christians their whole life-long.

I was rector of a larger downtown parish and proposed to the vestry to undertake the Meals on Wheels ministry, using our own kitchen and parish volunteers to cook and deliver three meals a week for 15-25 people, 52 weeks a year. Most of the volunteers were our older members! They were overjoyed to have a ministry opportunity they could do.

More often than not, they would look at the proposed menus and say, “Well, that doesn’t look too tasty so why don’t we add some of this and some of that,” and one would say, “I’ll go home and get some of this to add to the food.” They were creative in the kitchen, had fun and felt they were a small part of God’s plan to do God’s will. They were given an opportunity to serve and serve they did!

Older adults have wisdom, history, gifts to offer and “The Story” as it has played out in their lives. We cannot afford to lose this treasure. How can we find meaningful ways for our older adults to live as faithful disciples through liturgy, study, service, witness and community without being burdened with institutional maintenance tasks that can turn church into yet another demand? How can we make ministry of and for this population easy?

Older adults may not like meetings at night. They may not be able to drive at night or are afraid of going home alone. They many need larger print, better lighting and enhanced audio quality. They may live far from families and grandchildren and may welcome the opportunity to be with a spread of ages.

Older adults can take responsibility for their own learning and want their life experiences to be valued and integrated into this learning. Frailer older adults may not be able to be

active participants in their congregations, but they do have a continuing need, and responsibility to learn and to teach.

Older adults have different levels of faith formation just as other ages do. It is wonderful that these new resources take this fact into consideration.

Let us be open to the Holy Spirit to lead us in ministry and not be afraid of where this may take us. Let us not be afraid to ask older members to take on a servant ministry. Let us find ways to encourage them and give them the opportunity to share their stories with the entire congregation. Let us seize the moment to reach out and explore, with our older members, ways to continue our life-long learning and faith development pilgrimage.

We promise at every Baptism we attend that we will continue in fellowship, the Eucharist, teaching and learning, seeing Christ in others, forgiving others and spreading the good news. St. Paul reminds us in I Corinthians 12 of the variety of gifts God has bestowed on each of us for ministry. And at our Baptism and Confirmation we have been empowered to serve Christ and his people, using these gifts. There is no age limit on these promises.

This group of Disciples is an invaluable resource in Christ's ministry. I urge you to invite, ask and encourage our older sisters and brothers into ministry, and I'll bet you will be surprised and overjoyed.

Senior Moments

By Barbara Crafton

There's the waking up in the night, of course.

And the aches and pains, about which it is so tempting to go on and on, as if they were as interesting to other people as they are to us; which they are not.

And there is the increasing bewilderment at the ways of people younger than us -- their music, their taste in television shows, the things they can do with computers and smart phones and probably other devices of which we have not yet heard. When we talk about them with others in our age group, we sound like our parents used to sound when they talked about us.

When somebody our age dies, people are saddened. But they are no longer horrified. Death is no longer a burglar, an unnatural intruder snatching us away from the prime of our lives. "Oh, it's you," we say wearily, unsurprised when we catch a glimpse of him standing silently in the corner of a room. Death never answers, though. He just stands in the corner and waits.

We meet a friend in the street. An old friend, someone we haven't seen in a long time, but certainly someone we know. We know we know him. His name, though --- what is his name? And from which avenue of life do we know him? We stand and talk for a few minutes. His name and place in our history surfaces, and we relax. Or it doesn't, and the conversation ends with a friendly farewell. We walk on alone, cheered by the encounter. But still -- who was that? I know I know him.

And then there is the little matter of our independence. Your children adopt you, my friend Anna used to say, before Alzheimer's stole away that sly intelligence we all cherished. Our first hint of this comes when we realize that they don't think we know how to take care of babies. It's all changed now -- the things we were cautioned never to do with our children have all become de rigueur, and the ones to which we were most faithful have fallen out of use. They lay out elaborate instructions for us when we babysit. We roll our eyes, but follow them to the letter.

Gradually, it becomes clear that they're not sure we know how to take care of ourselves very well, either. And here is the rub: a time will come when they are right. They may see things in us we dare not see in ourselves. But when will that happen, exactly? How will we know?

It might be well underway, and we just don't want to see it; eminently possible. They begin to assume a regulatory posture towards us, and we find it jarring.

I walk past the polished plate glass of a store window. It mirrors me as I pass. So we walk along together, my late mother and I, walk along together the length of the window, dressed alike, carrying the same handbag, stealing sidelong glances at each other as we walk. And then I leave her there in the glass, as I walk on, thinking as I go that I seem to have become her.

Aging and Ministry

Melody Marshall, PhD, ARNP

There are at least three things I believe about ministry. First, a ministry is God's, not ours. We do not own what we do in God's name. God does. Ministry is God's work with our hands.

Second, ministry evolves over time. We do not suddenly find ourselves in full ministry overnight. Ministry has a beginning, many times small but, over time and as we age, often blossoms gradually into a significant offering to God.

It is in creating our spiritual biography, that we may trace the development of our ministry as we age. For me it began with Sunday school kindergarten when our teacher, Mrs. Williams, would ask each of us to answer in turn, "What did you do to help your mother this week?" So simple and yet for me, although I did not recognize it at the time, this was the beginning of the concept of ministry. Over the years I have been involved in a number of ministries. While these ministries have been, and some continue to be important to me, spiritually none have touched me as much as the Downtown Ministry, the one in which I feel currently called.

Third, it is not always necessary to search for a ministry. Ministry often finds you. You only need to be open to opportunities that present themselves that may become ministry.

Four years ago our rector asked me and another parishioner to develop and coordinate a ministry to assist homeless and working poor who came into our downtown parish each day with a variety of needs. Today, this Downtown Ministry helps more than 1,000 guests each year with obtaining birth certificates, IDs, prescription medications, and other needs of particular significance.

The Downtown Ministry is a "natural" for me as a nurse practitioner with a community health and primary care background. I feel that this ministry is my calling because of my years of experience with the needy and less fortunate in our society, and is where God wants me to be at my age and at this time.

Maybe this will change. God may call me to another ministry as I continue to age. I pray that I hear, and am responsive to that call when it comes.

The Episcopal Guide for Older Adults

Older adult membership in the Episcopal Church is growing rapidly. Traditionally, the role of older people in congregations has been limited, either by choice or circumstance. Society has viewed older adults as a liability rather than an asset. Congregations have seen aging as a time of decline rather than a time to see the potential for a renewed ministry. However, many of the myths and stereotypes of aging and older persons are changing.

Today's demographics and insights are compelling for clergy and lay leaders to consider:

- Today over 13 percent of the U.S. population is age 65+.
- Every hour, about 330 “baby boomers” are turning 65 and by 2030, the 65+ age group will comprise 20 percent of the population.
- Within 10 years, the high risk age 85+ population will increase by 40%, exacerbating a crisis in care giving and a rise in adult abuse.
- For every reported incident of elder abuse, neglect, exploitation, or self-neglect, approximately five go unreported. In almost 90 percent of the elder abuse and neglect incidents with a known perpetrator, the perpetrator is a family member.
- Risk factors for suicide among the elderly include: a previous attempt, the presence of a mental illness or a physical illness, and social isolation (some studies have shown this is especially so in older males who are recently widowed).
- Episcopalians tend to be older than the general population. About 30 percent of Episcopal members are age 65+, and they range from very active to homebound members.
- A substantial percentage of leadership, gifts and services are provided by older parishioners, the fastest growing age group everywhere.
- The unprecedented rapid growth of the older adult population nationwide, and worldwide, and the resultant challenges to the social and economic system, demands responses from the church.

This Guide was created to keep a promise made to the 76th General Convention as stated in [Resolution D004](#) to help support the [Older Adult Ministries](#) Task Force. The task force's goals were “to determine programs currently being offered by congregations, dioceses and provinces, to establish a method of sharing this information; and to explore ways that the church can expand ministries by, with and for older adults and to explore how we might connect with one another in intergenerational opportunities.”

How to use this Guide

The Guide is meant to help clergy and lay leaders identify issues of older adults and their families, to highlight existing program ideas that others might replicate in program development, and to identify local, state and national resources that might be helpful. The purpose of the Older Adults Ministries Task Force (OAM) is:

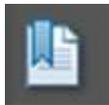
To educate, to raise awareness about positive aging and quality of life issues, as well as to shed light on the hidden impacts of issues such as family care giving and elder abuse on the elderly and their families.

A goal of the Guide is to assist leaders in developing linkages within the Episcopal Church and to offer family and aging resources at the national, state and local levels, and to encourage OAM committees, parish by parish, diocese by diocese and province by province.

Tips for using this resource

In addition to simply creating an electronic version of a written document, FOCUS and NEHM have tried to utilize the unique tools available in an electronic resource. For instance:

1. Throughout these sections you will find hyperlinks to web-based resources and referenced articles.
2. Each section features a Table of Contents. Clicking on any line in the Table of Contents will take you to that section.
3. Each document utilizes the 'Bookmarks' feature of PDF files. This means that a series of bookmarks have been created in the documents, much like a permanent Table of Contents in the sidebar. Clicking any of these sections will take you to that section of the document.
 - a. Be sure you have saved the document to your computer and open the document in Adobe Acrobat Reader. On the left, you will see an icon that looks like this:



- b. Simply click the icon and you will open the Bookmarks menu that provides the ability to navigate the document regardless of which page you are currently viewing.

4. Because this resource is electronic, we will have the ability to add additional resource sections or update information as necessary.