

# **Faith Formation & Spirituality of Aging**

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## Provocative Headlines and Theological Lifelines

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“Octogenarian Ministering Still”: This headline caught my attention recently while doing research on the leadership of older women in the Episcopal Church. Why wouldn’t an older adult be engaged in ministry? Is this really surprising? Could it be that the authority for ministry, as recognized and affirmed in Holy Baptism, really shuts down at an advanced age?

Then, reading the story below the headline, I was doubly aghast. The article was about that commanding teacher, prophet and theologian: Verna Dozier. Unsurprisingly Verna, then a resident of an Episcopal Life Care Community, was still continuing to help others explore *The Dream of God*, a title of one of her books on biblical theology.<sup>1</sup> Verna regularly asserted that she was *always* a minister. She would add, “Ministry is serving God wherever we are.”<sup>2</sup> Verna also knew about provocative stereotypes: noting that people responded to her like “Aunt Jemima” though she spoke “like Sojourner Truth.”<sup>3</sup> I could go on and say more about Verna, as she and another great Episcopal lay leader, Marion M. Kelleran, were sages, saints and mentors who for me and still model wise leadership.

In this brief reflection, I wish to move beyond the headlines, stereotypes, and pervasive assumptions that limit our appreciation of God’s abundant love for humanity and of the generosity of God’s invitation to ministry. As an Anglican theologian, when I wish to deepen and illumine understanding, I turn to the traditional principles and theological touchstones of our faith.

In Anglican theology, the doctrine of the Incarnation is one of the most cherished focal points. It underscores the Good News of a God who dwells among us (John 1:14), a God who not only creates but also restores the dignity of human nature. The Incarnation stresses God’s initiative in moving toward us. It reinforces awareness that our incarnation, our fleshly bodies, are made for goodness. It provides a foundation for Anglican optimism about humankind. The Incarnation is also, for me, the foundation for appreciating the fullness of human life. In particular it gives new awareness to a theology of aging.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Dream of God: A Call to Return* was first issued by Cowley Publications in 1991, and by Church Publishing in 2006.

<sup>2</sup>Shawnn K Shears, Staff Writer, *The Gazette* (April 12, 2001).

<sup>3</sup>*Confronted by God: The Essential Verna Dozier*, edited by Cynthia L. Shattuck and Fredrica Harris Thompsett (Church Publishing Inc.: New York 2006), p. 31. Verna Dozier died September 1, 2006 at the age of 88.

Are there age limits to incarnational theology? Does the dignity and potential it promises for men and women fade with advancing years? Does its empowering vision steadily dim beyond childhood's innocence and the vigor of youth? Are there limits to incarnational theology? Do our baptismal promises grow faint when we get older? When sharp ravages of illness, extreme neurological disorders, and, yes, even advanced Alzheimer's arrest recognition and communication, is it possible to believe that Christ still dwells within? I do not intend to valorize the oldest old, or to refigure aging only in glowing terms. I do intend to draw upon the theological and spiritual perspectives of our faith.

The truth of God's Incarnation is ageless. Aging is ongoing incarnation. The sacramental gift of proclaiming that "Christ [is] in us and we in him" is fully present in every stage of life or else it is in none. Another way of thinking about this is to note that growing old still involves *growing*. I am confident that God's identification with humanity does not stop when we "retire"! In baptism, we are "marked as Christ's own forever." This prevails whether or not we recognize Christ within one another. Mother Teresa referred to the dying poor of Calcutta as imaging Christ in "such distressing disguises." The doctrine of the Incarnation invites us to experience theology intimately, including life's attendant challenges, losses and risks. We are invited to comprehend an embodied expectation of God's presence continuing throughout the last of life.

A realistic theology of aging can help us look to the future. Dorothy Sayers – English theologian, dramatist, and detective story author – observed that "to look forward we must believe in age."<sup>4</sup>The biblical record is full of visionaries. Older prophets serve as enfleshed heralds of the new, such as Abraham and Sarah, Elizabeth and Zechariah, or Anna and Simeon. Older adults in the Bible are not primarily objects *for* ministry; rather they are often those who express deep concern for the welfare of future generations.

Jeanette Piccard, ordained as an Episcopal priest when she was 79 years old, believed a true luxury of old age is being able to see more of the narrative as a whole. The belief that elders have distinctive gifts and spirituality to offer others is not new. In some Native American cultures, young persons are sent to learn wisdom by spending time with elders. Some of my friends and colleagues, who are octogenarians and beyond, have a theology that encompasses a sense of God's absence as well as presence. Among the lessons they have taught me are appreciation for the psalms' lamentations, the profound sense of struggling with God, as well as the joy of waking each morning.

Life from an incarnational perspective is not valued solely for its activity, but for its essence. As people of the Incarnation we enjoy, if we choose, the capacity for an infinite relationship with God. Growing old in the knowledge of God's continuing manifestation and presence can help us combat provocative stereotypes about aging. We are all invited

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<sup>4</sup>I cannot resist adding that Sayers, who possessed an engaging and blunt sense of humor, was once quoted as saying: "Time and trouble will tame an advanced young woman, but an advanced old woman is uncontrollable by any earthly force."

to view the inherent dignity of humanity, bathed in the bright light and theological lifeline of the Incarnation.

# Baptismal Covenant

*"Do you reaffirm your renunciation of evil and renew your commitment to Jesus Christ?" (Book of Common Prayer, p. 292)*

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A mini catechism used at baptisms and on Easter and other special occasions, the Baptismal Covenant opens with a question-and-answer version of the statement of faith that is the Apostles' Creed and adds five questions regarding how we, as Christians, are called to live out our faith.

## The Baptismal Covenant

Celebrant: Do you believe in God the Father?

People: I believe in God, the Father almighty,  
creator of heaven and earth.

Celebrant: Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?

People: I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit  
and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended to the dead.  
On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Celebrant: Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?

People: I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting.

Celebrant: Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and  
fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the  
prayers?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

People: I will, with God's help.

Celebrant: Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

People: I will, with God's help.

## 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.

The General Convention of the Episcopal Church adopted the Five Marks of Mission in 2009\* to help inform strategic mission and budget priorities for our future. The Marks are not a new way to live out our faith, but they provide a common language and a simplified tool for articulating and living out our Baptismal promises across the Anglican Communion and throughout the world.

*\*Resolution #2009 – D027*

# **A Response to the Call of**

## ***The Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation***

### ***A Call to Action by the Task Force for Older Adult Ministries***

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Our vision for the Episcopal Church is that each congregation will be a place where people of all ages are welcomed and valued, where the Episcopal Church will provide resources and assistance to its members as they go through the lifelong process of aging, particularly those times of change when new callings need to be discerned, and where the grace and fellowship of the local congregation will surround each of its members, wherever they may be in the aging process.

Our vision for our Episcopal Church is that we will support dioceses and congregations in their ministry with older members, and that this support will be reflected in policies, worship, and training for all the ministers of the church.

#### **We Invite the Episcopal Church:**

To embrace older adults in all parts of the life of the Church.

To recognize our almost universal fear of our own aging.

To examine our own individual process of aging.

To encourage all generations to make their own discoveries in the journey of lifelong aging.

To foster liturgical rites and traditions that embrace older adults.

#### **We Inspire the Episcopal Church:**

To celebrate and learn from the individual, intra-cultural and inter-cultural diversity in aging

To understand that spiritual discovery and discernment is a lifelong process.

To respond to injustices toward older adults.

To recognize that all older adults have the right to be loved, accepted and included.

#### **We Challenge the Episcopal Church to become a transforming community that:**

Includes people of all ages as participants in baptismal ministries.

Responds to the changing culture as it relates to aging.

Confesses that no one has the “whole truth,” or completely understands the aging process.

Believes aging starts at birth and ends at death—it is a life process.

Allows for ultimate freedom, individuality in aging.

Provides a place of resource and solace for families dealing with aging.

Understands there is wholeness in aging, including mind, body and spirit.

This call to action is grounded in our understanding of the Baptismal Covenant and our identity as Episcopalians. Lifelong Christian Faith Formation in the Episcopal Church is lifelong growth in the knowledge, service, and love of God as followers of Christ and is informed by Scripture, Tradition and Reason.



*Developed by the Task Force for [Older Adult Ministries](#) in response to [GC2009 A082](#).*

**Re-Creation of Aging**  
**Finding the gift of grace at every age**  
by Tracey E. Herzer

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## A Response to the Call of *The Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation*:

### A Call to Action by the Task Force for Older Adult Ministries

Our vision for The Episcopal Church is that each congregation will be a place where people of all ages are welcomed and valued, where The Episcopal Church will provide resources and assistance to its members as they go through the lifelong process of aging, particularly those times of change when new callings need to be discerned, and where the grace and fellowship of the local congregation will surround each of its members, wherever they may be in the aging process. Our vision for our Episcopal Church is that we will support dioceses and congregations in their ministry with older members, and that this support will be reflected in policies, worship, and training for all the ministers of the church.

#### We Invite the Episcopal Church...

1. To embrace older adults in all parts of the life of the Church
2. To recognize our almost universal fear of our own aging
3. To examine our own individual process of aging
4. To encourage all generations to make their own discoveries on the journey of lifelong aging
5. To foster liturgical rites and traditions that embrace older adults

#### We Encourage the Episcopal Church...

1. To celebrate and learn from the individual, intra-cultural and inter-cultural diversity in aging
2. To understand that spiritual discovery and discernment is a lifelong process
3. To respond to injustices toward older adults
4. To recognize that all older adults have the right to be loved, accepted and included

#### We Challenge the Episcopal Church to become a transforming community that...

1. Includes people of all ages as participants in baptismal ministries
2. Responds to the changing culture as it relates to aging
3. Confesses that no one has the “whole truth,” or completely understands the aging process
4. Believes aging starts at birth and ends at death—it is a life process
5. Allows for ultimate freedom, individuality in aging
6. Provides a place of resource and solace for families dealing with aging
7. Understands there is a wholeness in aging, including mind, body and spirit

This call to action is grounded in our understanding of the Baptismal Covenant and our identity as Episcopalians. Lifelong Christian Faith Formation in The Episcopal Church is

lifelong growth in the knowledge, service, and love of God as followers of Christ and is informed by Scripture, Tradition and Reason.

*Developed by the Task Force for Older Adult Ministries in response to GC2009 A087.*

## Resolution A007 (2003)

<b>Resolution Number:</b>	2003-A007
<b>Title:</b>	Authorize Creation of an Executive Council Task Force for the Aging
<b>Legislative Action Taken:</b>	Concurred as Amended
<b>Final Text:</b>	

**Resolved,** That the 74th General Convention authorize the creation of a six-person Task Force of the Executive Council, coordinated through the Office of Ministry Development, to assess ministry opportunities with and for an aging population both within and outside the church; and be it further

**Resolved,** That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$10,000 for implementation of this resolution.

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Minneapolis, 2003* (New York: General Convention, 2004), p. 476.

## Resolution D004 (2009)

**Resolution Number:** 2009-D004  
**Title:** Authorize a Task Force on Older Adult Ministries  
**Legislative Action Taken:** Concurred as Substituted  
**Final Text:**

*Resolved, That the 76th General Convention authorize the creation of a 12 member Task Force on Older Adult Ministries to determine programs currently being offered by congregations, dioceses and provinces, to establish a method of sharing this information, and to explore ways the Church can expand this ministry to connect with one another in intergenerational opportunities; and be it further*  
*Resolved, That the Task Force would formulate a comprehensive plan to raise awareness and address the emerging crisis in health, care giving and faith issues which cross generational and economic lines with emphasis on support of Congregational, Diocesan and Provincial programs for older adult ministry; and be it further*  
*Resolved, That the Task Force will be comprised of individuals with a background in this ministry area and will represent a cross section of our church; and be it further*  
*Resolved, That the Task Force will work collaboratively with the Evangelism and Congregational Life Center and report annually to the Executive Council and provide a complete written report to the 77th General Convention; and be it further*  
*Resolved, That the General Convention request the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance to consider a budget allocation of \$35,000 for the implementation of this resolution.*

**Citation:** General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* (New York: General Convention, 2009), pp. 711-712.

## Resolution A082 (2009)

<b>Resolution Number:</b>	<b>2009-A082</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Adopt the Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation</b>
<b>Legislative Action Taken:</b>	<b>Concurred as Amended</b>
<b>Final Text:</b>	

*Resolved*, That the 76th General Convention of The Episcopal Church adopt the following text as The Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation:  
Lifelong Christian Faith Formation in The Episcopal Church is lifelong growth in the knowledge, service and love of God as followers of Christ and is informed by Scripture, Tradition and Reason.

"I have called you friends..." -John 15:14-16

Through The Episcopal Church, *God* INVITES all people:

- To enter into a prayerful life of worship, continuous learning, intentional outreach, advocacy and service.
- To hear the Word of God through Scripture, to honor church teachings and continually to embrace the joy of Baptism and Eucharist, spreading the Good News of the risen Christ and ministering to all.
- To respond to the needs of our constantly changing communities, as Jesus calls us, in ways that reflect our diversity and cultures as we seek, wonder and discover together.
- To hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people, placing ourselves in the stories of our faith, thereby empowering us to proclaim the Gospel message.

"...You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit..." - John 15:14-16

Through The Episcopal Church, *God* INSPIRES all people:

- To experience Anglican liturgy, which draws us closer to God, helps us discern God's will and encourages us to share our faith journeys.
- To study Scripture, mindful of the context of our societies and cultures, calling us to seek truth anew while remaining fully present in the community of faith.
- To develop new learning experiences, equipping disciples for life in a world of secular challenges and carefully listening for the words of modern sages who embody the teachings of Christ.
- To prepare for a sustainable future by calling the community to become guardians of God's creation.

"...I am giving you these commands that you may love one another..." -John 15:17

Through The Episcopal Church, *God* TRANSFORMS all people:

- By doing the work Jesus Christ calls us to do, living into the reality that we are all created in the image of God and carrying out God's work of reconciliation, love, forgiveness, healing, justice and peace.
- By striving to be a loving and witnessing community, which faithfully confronts the tensions in the church and the world as we struggle to live God's will.
- By seeking out diverse and expansive ways to empower prophetic action, evangelism, advocacy and collaboration in our contemporary global context.
- By holding all accountable to lift every voice in order to reconcile oppressed and oppressor to the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

And be it further

*Resolved*, That we affirm that Christian Faith Formation in The Episcopal Church is a lifelong journey with Christ, in Christ and to Christ; and be it further

*Resolved*, That

1. We urge each diocese to read and study the Charter for Lifelong Christian Formation and to live it out locally.
2. We urge the seminaries and other institutions concerned with formation and education and leadership in The Episcopal Church, to engage the charter as a tool to advance their support for persons in their Christian Formation.
3. We urge The Episcopal Church's Evangelism and Congregational Life Center to commit staff during this triennium to communicate, advocate and implement the charter, and report progress to the Standing Commission on Lifelong Christian Formation and Education before the 77th General Convention.

And be it further

*Resolved*, That the 76th General Convention request that the Joint Standing Committee on Program, Budget and Finance consider a budget allocation of \$30,000 for the implementation of this resolution during the 2010-2012 triennium.

**Citation: General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of...The Episcopal Church, Anaheim, 2009* (New York: General Convention, 2009), pp. 190-192.**

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2009-A082



## Scriptures About Aging

There are many, many passages in the Bible that speak to the gift of aging or the wisdom of listening carefully to our elders. As Christ's church, we are called to care for one another and are especially challenged to care for the weak, the orphaned, the needy and the widowed. Here are some of the scripture passages we reference in this guide:

<b>Genesis 1:27</b>	So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
<b>Leviticus 19:32</b>	Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.
<b>Deut 27:19 (New Living Translation)</b>	'Cursed is anyone who denies justice to foreigners, orphans, or widows.' And all the people will reply, 'Amen.'
<b>Deuteronomy 32:7</b>	Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations. Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders, and they will explain to you.
<b>1 Kings 12:6</b>	And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men... and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people?"
<b>1 Chronicles 29:28</b>	"a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour"
<b>Job 12:12 (NASB)</b>	Wisdom is with aged men, with long life is understanding.
<b>Job 32:7</b>	Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.
<b>Psalms 48:14 (KJV)</b>	For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.
<b>Psalms 66:9 (KJV)</b>	"[He] holdeth our soul in life...."
<b>Psalms 71:1; 9</b>	In you, O Lord, I take refuge;... Do not cast me not off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent.
<b>Psalms 71:17-18 (NRSV)</b>	O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come.
<b>Psalms 91:14-16 (NRSV)</b>	Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them. With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation.
<b>Psalms 92:12-14</b>	The righteous flourish like the palm tree... they are planted in

<b>(NRSV)</b>	the house of the Lord...; in old age they still produce fruit..."
<b>Psalms 103:2-5 (NRSV)</b>	Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits—  who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.
<b>Psalms 143:5 (NRSV)</b>	I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.
<b>Psalms 148:12-13</b>	Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted;
<b>Proverbs 9:10, 11</b>	"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased."
<b>Proverbs 3:1, 2 (KJV)</b>	My son, ... keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee."
<b>Proverbs 3: 13-18 (NIV)</b>	Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.
<b>Proverbs 16:31 (NRSV)</b>	Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.
<b>Proverbs 20:29 (NRSV)</b>	The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their grey hair.
<b>Proverbs 23:22 (NIV)</b>	Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.
<b>Isaiah 40:29,31 (NRSV)</b>	He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless... Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
<b>Isaiah 43:19</b>	Behold, I do a new thing! How can they not perceive it?
<b>Isaiah 46:3b-4a (The Living Bible)</b>	I have created you and cared for you since you were born. I will be your God through all your lifetime, Yes, even when your hair is white with age. I made you and I will care for you.

<b>Joel 2:28 (Also Acts 2:17)</b>	"... I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; ....and your old men shall dream dreams...."
<b>Matthew 6:25-34 (The Message)</b>	Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.
<b>I Timothy 5:1-2 NRSV</b>	Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters—with absolute purity.

## Older Adult Ministries & The Five Marks of Mission

The Five Marks of Mission were developed by members of the Anglican Consultative Council (ACC) over several years. They are not new initiatives, but rather a way to define common language around who the Church is called to be. They have been adopted by a number of congregations and people throughout all parts of the Anglican Communion and have helped provide a framework for talking about and reflecting on mission.

At the 2009 General Convention, the Episcopal Church voted to officially adopt the Five Marks of Mission (resolution D027) so it is now a part of our life together. Below is the list of the five marks and some commentary about how Older Adult Ministries strive to embody and live ever more fully into these principles.

### **THE FIVE MARKS OF MISSION:**

#### **1. TO PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM**

Part of the good news of God's kingdom is that all are invited; none are marginalized. God reaches out to us in many ways, offering love and acceptance and redemption. When we work diligently to imitate this love, we authenticate a broader understanding of the presence of God's gifts found in God's wildly diverse people. We celebrate the knowledge that God knows and loves us at every age and stage of life, and we proclaim God's kingdom as we work to ensure that everyone is included, valued and honored.

#### **2. TO TEACH, BAPTIZE AND NURTURE NEW BELIEVERS**

Teaching and nurturing all generations has always been an important aspect of passing on our faith. There are many places where scripture speaks specifically to the formation that happens when older people teach younger ones --- see Deut. 32:7, Titus 2: 2-5 and much of the book of Proverbs if you'd like to read more. The Church needs to ensure that opportunities for growth and study are made available for every age and older adults need not just to be encouraged to

continue their own spiritual development, but also invited and empowered to share their gifts with all the other generations as well!

### **3. TO RESPOND TO HUMAN NEED BY LOVING SERVICE**

In Eucharistic Prayer C we pray, “Deliver us from the presumption of coming to the Table for solace only and not for strength...” and we remember again that the Church is not just about Christians coming together to celebrate, but also is a place where weary pilgrims receive encouragement and sustenance so they can go back out into the world and continue to share God’s love. When we reach out to other human beings, we have the opportunity to be the hands, the voice, the feet of God... traveling into a world desperate for hope and transformation and offering the balm of love, acceptance, hope and provision. In this diverse population of aging, there are older adults who need help and older adults who can offer help. When our churches embrace both of these realities, we are offering unique and powerful gifts to the world around us.

### **4. TO SEEK TO TRANSFORM UNJUST STRUCTURES OF SOCIETY**

There are many facets of the world of the elderly that are touched by despair and injustice, and so there are many ways the church can live into this characteristic of mission. Scriptural edicts to care for widows and orphans illustrate a long history of faithful people being asked to speak for those with no power and no voice. When we work to challenge imbalanced power structures and fight against injustice, we shine God’s light into these places of darkness and we are living out the mission of the church. But our quest doesn’t stop there... God’s people have often led the conversations that helped our society rethink and readdress issues of equality and discrimination. In today’s world, we again have the opportunity to be a prophetic voice in our culture, championing the gifts of our older generation. When we hold up the wisdom of the aged, we encourage ourselves and others to rethink and reject the ageism that can be so pervasive in the world.

### **5. TO STRIVE TO SAFEGUARD THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION AND SUSTAIN AND RENEW THE LIFE OF THE EARTH**

There are many ways to respect and safeguard the integrity of creation, but perhaps one way of doing this is to realize and appreciate that all of creation ages. Aging is a natural and expected part of life... a life that God created and called very good. We are called to respect and care for the resources of this

Earth, which of course includes Earth's human resources. In the same way that we honor and care for our physical resources, we should also nurture the generations who have gone before us, respecting the astonishing legacy they have created.

### PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

#### Did you know ... ?

- **The fastest growing age segment in the country is 85+.** By 2012 there will be more than 200,000 Americans over age 100, and by 2050 the projection is for there to be 4.2 million over age 100.
- **Currently one in every eight Americans is age 65 or older,** and over one in four live alone. Every hour, 330 Americans reach the age of 60. Baby boomers will start turning 65 in 2010 and by 2020, the age 85+ population will increase by 40% (US Dept of Health and Human Services).
- **Over one in three Episcopalians is age 65+** and they range from very active to homebound. Another 41% are age 45-64, which means 3 of every 4 members are age 45 or older. Think of it in terms of economic stressors alone (retirement age, technology gaps, social services, Social Security, and Medicare) and then wonder at the impact on local congregations.
- **By 2020, we will be dealing with the largest elderly generation in history...** and also a generation of elders that will experience ages 65+ in radically different ways.

These are just a few important statistics to help us begin to look at why it is imperative for the Church to develop a comprehensive and compassionate theology of aging. This is something that literally every single human being will deal with and it presents a unique and important opportunity for the church to reach beyond its doors. As we seek to better understand the gift of aging and embrace the vital roles that older adults can and do play in our congregations, we open the door for a new era in the field of Older Adult Ministries, and perhaps we also invite the possibility of the Church becoming a forward-thinking, proactive, world-changing force in dealing with this new sociological phenomenon.

In our churches, we spend a lot of time, energy and money in the formation of children and youth... and that is a wonderful, vital, important ministry. But the Charter for Lifelong Formation (Resolution A082-2009) challenged us to broaden our definition of Christian formation and realize that what we are called to do – and who we are called to be – is about SO much more than Sunday School and youth group activities.

A growing, vibrant church acknowledges the fact that we never stop learning and discovering. Christians of all ages are constantly being formed and transformed by our Creator and it is important that our churches reflect this reality. There is no church who can afford to ignore these demographic shifts in our culture. As our population ages, so do our churches and we want to continue to offer gifts and ministries to the people both inside and outside our doors if we are going to remain relevant and significant in this culture.

In short, if the church is going to survive, we MUST focus some of our attention on both the needs and the abilities of our older generations.

## **THE HISTORY OF OLDER ADULT MINISTRIES IN THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

In 2003, General Convention passed resolution A007 which established a Task Force for Senior Ministries as a Task Force of Executive Council. In 2009, General Convention passed a further resolution (D004) recognizing the church's need for Older Adult Ministry and the importance of endeavoring to answer the following questions:

1. How do we recognize, honor, and utilize the experience, wisdom, and gifts of "older" adults?

How do we develop ministries that integrate and weave multiple generations together spiritually?

How do we cultivate Christ's message of hope and service for older adults, families, and their caregivers?

How do we examine, explore, and create innovative and contemporary liturgical, spiritual, and service ministries by, with, and for all generations in the Body of Christ?

## THE TASK FORCE FOR OLDER ADULT MINISTRIES

So a General Convention Task Force was created for this vital work. The Task Force on Older Adult Ministries was mandated to determine programs currently being offered by congregations, dioceses and provinces, to establish a method of sharing this information, and to explore ways the church can connect with each other in intergenerational opportunities. The Task Force was also directed to create a comprehensive plan to raise awareness of issues related to older adults. The work of the Task Force was guided by *The Charter for Lifelong Formation*, *The Five Marks of Mission*, and *The Baptismal Covenant* as well as by 2009-D004.

## HOW CAN THIS DOCUMENT BE USED?

This document arises from the work of the Task Force for Older Adult Ministries. There are several pieces to this study guide and many ways that it can be used. Our hope is that it will be a helpful resource for people and congregations to better understand the ministry to, for and with older adults in the Episcopal Church.

Here are some ways in which this document may be helpful:

- Individual reading or research to better understand Older Adult Ministries
- Guide for small group discussions for committees and other interested parties
- A multi-session Adult Formation process to increase awareness of Older Adult Ministries or to begin the process of implementing new Older Adult Ministries in a congregation
- A resource to facilitate meaningful conversation around the topic of aging



We'd also love to hear from you! Please share your stories, activities and ideas at

[www://episcopalchurch.org/page/older-adult-ministries](http://www://episcopalchurch.org/page/older-adult-ministries)

### THE “NEW OLD”... HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Before we launch into a discussion of ministry with Older Adults, let’s look a little bit at the cultural developmental pieces that got us here.

The process of aging has never been a one-size-fits-all kind of proposition... but this is even more real now as the first members of the Baby Boomer generation reach retirement age. It is said that this group who has redefined so many things in our society is now redefining aging. They are being called the “new old” because their active, vibrant lives don’t look like the stereotypes we’ve previously thought of as retirement.

More than 76 million children were born between the years of 1946 and 1964. This population boom was the largest generation the world had ever seen – although now Generation Y, born roughly 1977-2001 and also called the “Echo Boomers” are the largest generation, spanning more than 80 million! But the Baby Boomers were the first enormous generation and they have changed things in each stage of their lives. AARP did an Executive Study called **Baby Boomers Envision Their Retirement** and in that study they said of the Boomers, *“Their mass alone has had an enormous impact on the national psyche, political arena and social fabric. From the youth culture they created in the 1960s and 1970s to the dual-income households of the 1980s and 1990s, this generation has reinterpreted each successive stage of life.”* This will continue to be true and the lessons we learn as the Baby Boomers age will be invaluable to help us prepare for the aging of the Echo Boomers.

It’s always dangerous to put too much stock in generalities, and this is especially true of the Baby Boomers because there are so many of them, but it still might be helpful to look at some generally-accepted characteristics of the Baby Boomer generation.

#### GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BABY BOOMERS

- As a group, Boomers were the healthiest and wealthiest generation born at that time
- Their childhoods were mostly traditional and stable, giving most Boomers a strong sense of self and family

- In general, they are confident, self-sufficient and independent. They prize individuality and many have a historic distrust of “the establishment” or heavy-handed authority
- They are hard-working and often define themselves by professional accomplishments; to varying degrees, they are motivated by prestige and financial security
- They value freedom of expression and are motivated to work for causes they believe in
- They are willing to take risks and rally against oppression – which is part of why they’ve made such remarkable contributions to society

Even just looking at these few generalized characteristics, it’s easy to see that this generation has had a huge impact on the world. They’ve witnessed and instigated a lot of changes and have made immeasurable contributions to our society.

This generation currently includes most of our major decision makers and they will continue to hold the majority of powerful positions until at least 2025. But this is also a group who has always been ready to challenge the status quo and question everything. They are energized by the quest for new and exciting objectives that have not been achieved before and they have a profound group-level optimism that seems to be lacking in later generations. Add all of this together and it means that the Baby Boomers are uniquely poised to not just be the catalyst of huge social upheaval, but they also have the potential to find creative and effective solutions.

## **BABY BOOMERS & RETIREMENT**

In 2011, the oldest of the Baby Boomers began to reach age 65 and early indications show that this revolutionary generation will change expectations about retirement in the same way they have redefined so many things in previous life stages.

In *The New Retirement Survey* done by Merrill Lynch, researchers found that over 70% of Baby Boomer retirees plan to work in some capacity during their retirement years up to at least age 70 and almost half of these people say they don’t plan to stop working – ever. Now clearly, with today’s economic concerns, financial stability is one important factor in why people intend to keep working, but other reasons cited include mental and physical agility, social interaction and receiving a sense of identity or self-worth. It’s also interesting to note that more than half of the respondents indicated that they were interested in pursuing a completely new career field or opportunities during retirement,

and many expressed an interest in increasing work with charities or causes they believe in.

These are important facts for the Church to be aware of because over the next decades, we will have a significant number of people with extraordinary skills and experiences who are looking to pursue their passions and contribute something of intrinsic value to society.

## GENERATIONS IN THE CHURCH

Another significant aspect for us to be aware of is how faith formation has changed over the last several decades and how that has impacted different generations. For the first time in history, we have four distinct and active adult generations:

1. **BUILDERS (Born 1922-1945)** — “The Greatest Generation” is now roughly 70-90 years old; they value traditional roles, respect knowledge and stability, and value hard work.
2. **BOOMERS (Born 1946-1964)** — Value innovation and independence; passionate and driven in career fields, but may have more time/energy for charitable work during retirement.
3. **BUSTERS (Born 1965-1983)** — Very small “Gen X” sandwiched between two huge generations; first “latchkey kids” and widespread divorce; cautious and careful – share more characteristics with older Builders than they do with either Boomers or Bridgers.
4. **BRIDGERS (Born 1984-2000)** — These “Echo Boomers” are tech-savvy and bright, but more likely to see job as a means to an end; they embrace pluralistic views with little trouble and place a high value on authenticity and relevance.

Having these four different groups in the Church gives us a unique opportunity for collaboration and partnership. Also, because of the two very large generations, it means that for the first time in history, we have many, many people who are sandwiched between caring for family members from both the generation ahead of them and the generation behind them.

If the Church is going to continue to be relevant in our ever-changing society, we will have to listen carefully for the prophetic voices from each generation and find ways to support and empower new expressions of ministry.

# SESSIONS TO USE WITH SMALL GROUPS

## ABOUT THESE SESSIONS

Our hope is that the lesson plan outlines on the following pages will help raise awareness and foster a better understanding of the importance to offer intentional and ongoing ministry to, for and with a wide variety of aging adults in your church and community.

Each session provides scripture passages and related framework to help your group have conversations around topics that can sometimes be difficult. In each session, you will find a wide variety of discussion questions and conversation starters. Feel free to adapt or ignore questions to best meet your group's needs... the provided questions are simply a way to help you get started.

## MEETING TIMEFRAMES

These sessions were originally designed for five sessions of approximately 45 minutes each, but the timeframe can be shortened or expanded as needed for your group.

Likewise, you can focus on just the three main sessions (Sessions 2, 3 & 4) that explore the three sections of the call to action --- and skip over or consolidate Session 1 (Introduction) and/or Session 5 (Conclusion).

Sessions can easily be used as Sunday-morning Adult Education opportunities or mid-week small groups. One of the reasons we offer this resource in an electronic format is to make it easy for you to adapt to whatever best suits your group.

## PARTICIPANTS

There are many groups who might benefit from and enjoy these sessions... here are some different groups we imagined might find this resource to be helpful, but feel free to use it in any way that is helpful for your group:

- Adult Sunday School class
- Committee for Older Adult Ministries
- Clergy group
- Families who care for older adults
- Diocesan groups

## **SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION --- THE RE-CREATION OF AGING**

### **SESSION OVERVIEW**

Introduce some of the known issues around aging and introduce the Call to Action

### **RELEVANT SCRIPTURES**

- Psalms 48:14 (KJV) — For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.
- Psalms 71:17-18 (NRSV) — O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come.
- Isaiah 40:29, 31 (NRSV) — He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless... Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Bibles or copies of scriptures above
- Secure a television, computer or video projector with internet connection. Make sure you know how to operate the equipment
- “The Value of Older Adults” video from the Older Adult Ministries You Tube Page <http://tinyurl.com/7ig63rw>
- Copies of A Call to Action for each participant
- Hymnals to sing #602 – Jesu, Jesu (optional)

<b>PREPARE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather materials listed above</li><li>• Read over the full text of A Call to Action</li><li>• Invite key leaders like clergy, vestry members and chairs of various committees to come participate in your discussion as you begin this conversation. Invite them to attend the other sessions as well – particularly the closing session</li></ul>
<b>WELCOME</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Welcome participants</li><li>• Introduce facilitators</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go over any logistical or housekeeping issues – location of restrooms, planned timeframe, available resources, etc.</li> <li>• Ask for volunteers to read today’s scriptures about the gift of aging and the role of the church as a way to set our hearts open to hear God’s prophetic word today.</li> </ul>
<p><b>INTRODUCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin by asking participants to introduce themselves – just quick introduction to get people talking. Maybe ask them to share their name, how long they’ve lived in the area and one thing they’d like to get out of the upcoming weeks/sessions.</li> <li>• Tell a little bit of your story – how you got involved with this Call to Action, etc.</li> <li>• Now ask a question that goes a little deeper, but still comfortable for a group setting such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In what ways has your life intersected with older adults?</li> <li>○ What gift(s) have you received from older adults?</li> <li>○ Think for a moment about your parents’ and grandparents’ lives at the age you are now. What things are similar and what things are different?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>WATCH</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch “The Value of Older Adults” on the Older Adult Ministries YouTube Channel (<a href="http://tinyurl.com/7jg63rw">http://tinyurl.com/7jg63rw</a>) with The Episcopal Church Staff Officer for Congregational Research C. Kirk Hadaway, Ph.D.</li> <li>• Ask participants what ideas or statements stood out for them.</li> <li>• Is there anything in this video that is surprising? Assuring? Uncomfortable?</li> </ul>
<p><b>EXAMINE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pass out copies of the Call to Action</li> <li>• Ask participants to take a couple minutes to read it over in silence... then ask them what words or phrases stand out?</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything in this document that is surprising? Assuring? Uncomfortable?</li> </ul>
<p><b>DISCUSS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Looking at this document, what are some ways our church is already embracing some of the concepts?</li> <li>• What are some things we could do better?</li> <li>• What resources for older adults and their families exist in your community? How could the church partner with or support these ministries?</li> </ul>
<p><b>REFLECT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what ways do you see connections between Older Adult Ministry and our Baptismal Covenant?</li> <li>• How could these ministries help us reach out to others?</li> </ul>
<p><b>CLOSE</b></p>	<p>(optional) Sing Hymn #602 – Jesu, Jesu (second verse)  <i>Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,  Show us how to serve  The neighbors we have from you.  Neighbors are rich and poor,  Neighbors are black and white,  Neighbors are nearby and far away.</i></p> <p>Close with this prayer or another one of your choosing:</p> <p>O God, you made us in your own image and redeemed us through Jesus your Son: Look with compassion on the whole human family; take away the arrogance and hatred which infect our hearts; break down the walls that separate us; unite us in bonds of love; and work through our struggle and confusion to accomplish your purposes on earth; that, in your good time, all nations and races may serve you in harmony around your heavenly throne; through Jesus Christ our Lord. <i>Amen.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">(BCP, p. 815)</p>



## SESSION 2: A CALL TO ACTION, PART I

### SESSION OVERVIEW

We will examine in depth the first section of the Call to Action

### RELEVANT SCRIPTURES

- Genesis 1:27 --- So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
- Isaiah 43:19 --- Behold! I do a new thing...
- Isaiah 46:4 --- Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he who will sustain you.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Bibles or copies of scriptures above
- Copies of A Call to Action for each participant
- Secure a television, computer or video projector with internet connection. Make sure you know how to operate the equipment
- “Advocating for Aging Communities in Church and Society – Part One” video from the Older Adult Ministries You Tube Page <http://tinyurl.com/bmoh5fg> prepared to 3:57
- Newsprint
- Markers
- Magazines (optional)
- Recorded television commercials (optional)
- Hymnals to sing #680 – O God our help in ages past (optional)

<b>PREPARE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather materials listed above</li><li>• Read over the full text of A Call to Action (pg 2), paying special attention this week to the first section (“We invite the Episcopal Church...”)</li><li>• Prepare sheets of newsprint or poster board with the following words: Childhood, Teenagers, Young Adults, Middle Age, Retirement, Old Age</li></ul>
<b>WELCOME</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Welcome participants</li><li>• Introduce facilitators</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Go over any logistical or housekeeping issues – location of restrooms, planned timeframe, available resources, etc.</li> <li>• Give a very brief synopsis of last week’s class</li> <li>• Ask for volunteers to read today’s scriptures about the gift of aging as a way to set our hearts open to hear God’s prophetic word today.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INTRODUCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin by asking, “What do you think about the aging process?” Invite some quick responses.</li> <li>• What does society tell us about aging?</li> <li>• If you have them, show examples from print or television ads and ask participants to name the assumptions these ads seem to make. Who is the target audience for this ad? Does that influence the perspective of the ad? Does the ad imply that aging is a bad thing, something to be fought against at all costs? Or are they showing older years as something to be enjoyed and relished? Do you agree or disagree with what you see?</li> <li>• Even if you don’t have magazines or recorded commercials, you can ask participants to think about things they’ve seen, heard and experienced and discuss those.</li> <li>• Point out the papers hanging around the room that are labeled with different life stages.</li> <li>• Give each participant a marker and ask them to take 10 minutes to move around the room, quickly writing words and first impressions of each stage of life. The words can be their own descriptions of these stages or they can be messages they hear from outside sources. It’s okay (and even preferable!) for there to be conflicting messages on the sheets.</li> <li>• After no more than 15 minutes, gather the group back together and briefly review what’s on the sheets. Where do you see conflicting or competing ideas? Where do you think that comes from? Do you think some messages are</li> </ul>

	<p>erroneous?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What advice have you ever been given about aging? Or what have you observed in other people as they age? In what ways did your parents, grandparents or other adults influence your perception of aging?</li> <li>• How do your personal impressions and experiences about aging compare or contrast to the ideas portrayed in advertising?</li> <li>• How do any of these personal or commercial images line up (or not) with the messages of the Gospel and the concept of ongoing lifelong formation?</li> <li>• Watch a portion of “Advocating for Aging Communities in Church and Society – Part One” from the Older Adult Ministries You Tube Page <a href="http://tinyurl.com/bmoh5fg">http://tinyurl.com/bmoh5fg</a> prepared to 3:57</li> <li>• The most well-known phrase in our church is “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You.” Is this true for all ages??</li> </ul>
<p><b>EXAMINE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pass out copies of the Call to Action</li> <li>• Ask participants to close their eyes for 30-60 seconds to think about the impressions they’ve seen and remembered in silence.</li> <li>• Then, ask a volunteer(s) to read the first section that begins “We Invite the Episcopal Church...” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It can be very effective to read “We Invite the Episcopal Church” at the beginning of each of the five statements, as shown in the next section.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>DISCUSS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What words or phrases stand out to you? What parts do you most agree with? What parts do you least agree with?</li> <li>• Looking at each statement individually: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>We invite the Episcopal Church to embrace older adults in all parts of the life of the Church</b> — Are</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

older adults embraced in all parts of the life of this church? What are we doing well? Where can we make improvements and offer further inclusion?

2. **We invite the Episcopal Church to recognize our almost-universal fear of our own aging** — What do we fear about aging? Why is it so hard to talk about? In the bible, we see many examples of how naming something gives us power; and talking honestly about death and dying helps us find both peace and hope. Death is a great unknown and a difficult, frightening concept for all of us at one point or another. But as Christians, we place our hope in resurrection (both figurative and literal), so how can that figure into our equation? How can we remind ourselves (and each other) of our foundational belief that death never has the last word?
3. **We invite the Episcopal Church to examine our own individual process of aging** — We have the ability to make many decisions about a wide variety of things, but none of us has a choice in the aging process. It is inescapable, whether we dread it or embrace it. How were your own views formed about the aging process? In what ways do you view your own aging as similar or different to your parents, grandparents or other adults?
4. **We invite the Episcopal Church to encourage all generations to make their own discoveries in the journey of lifelong aging** — If we really embrace the idea of lifelong formation, we can also celebrate the fact that we never stop growing and changing. With this in mind, what ongoing discoveries or new gifts might await us as we grow older that we've never seen before? What factors of life (location, schedules, relationships, etc.) might influence our discoveries?
5. **We invite the Episcopal Church to foster liturgical rites and traditions that embrace older adults** — What are the life events and transitions that define older adulthood? How might the church

	<p>offer rites or blessings or support to those transitions?</p> <p>If time allows, split into 2-3 groups and ask participants to quickly come up with a simple “advertisement” for a broader appreciation of the gifts of aging. What would that look like? What would be the “product” you are selling.... Contentment?</p> <p>If you choose to do this, give the groups only 7-10 minutes to come up their ideas and then 2-3 minutes to explain or demonstrate. Keep it lighthearted and encourage them to be a little silly... maybe act out a quick commercial that illustrates their ideas or rewrite the words to a well known song like Happy Birthday or Row, Row, Row Your Boat to create a jingle.</p> <p>Encourage the groups to laugh and “play” with these concepts. Remind them that doing so will help crystallize new concepts in our heads and move the information into long-term memory.</p> <p>It is also an exercise of faith and trust... when we can discuss serious subjects and find ways to also laugh at some aspects of them, we remind ourselves that darkness cannot overtake the Light and that no matter what may befall us or our loved ones, God is present with us.</p>
<p><b>REFLECT</b></p>	<p>Thinking over our discussion today, where might God be working to create or show us a new thing? How can we continue to be good stewards of the gifts God has given us at every age?</p> <p>What is something new, surprising or reassuring that you heard today?</p>
<p><b>CLOSE</b></p>	<p>(optional) Sing Hymn #680 – O God our help in ages past (last verse)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>O God our help in ages past, Our hope for years to come, Be thou our guide while life shall last and our eternal home.</i></p> <p>Close with this prayer or another one of your choosing:</p> <p>“Look with mercy, O God our Father, on all whose increasing years bring weakness, distress, or isolation. Provide for us</p>

	<p>homes of dignity and peace; give us understanding helpers and the willingness to accept help; and, as our strength diminishes, increase our faith and our assurance of your love. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.</p>
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(pronouns adapted slightly from BCP, p. 830)

## **SESSION 3: A CALL TO ACTION, PART II**

### **SESSION OVERVIEW**

We will examine in depth the second section of the Call to Action

### **RELEVANT SCRIPTURES**

- Job 12:12 (NASB) — Wisdom is with aged men, with long life is understanding.
- Deuteronomy 27:19 — Cursed is anyone who denies justice to foreigners, orphans, or widows.' And all the people will reply, 'Amen.'
- Acts 2:17 (also Joel 2:28) — I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;... and your old men shall dream dreams...

### **MATERIALS NEEDED**

- Bibles or copies of scriptures above
- Copies of A Call to Action for each participant
- Secure a television, computer or video projector with internet connection. Make sure you know how to operate the equipment
- “Older Adult Ministry Task Force” video from the Older Adult Ministries YouTube Page <http://tinyurl.com/7qg64mt>
- Newsprint
- Markers
- Handout of “Influences on My Perceptions of Aging” – one per participant
- Pens or pencils – at least one per participant
- Smooth stones or river rocks in a bowl or basket (You’ll need one rock per person. If you’ve got a big group, use more than one bowl/basket to make distribution faster)
- Small Table
- Tablecloth (optional)
- Bowl for water
- Water
- Soft music during the ritual with the stones (optional)
- Hymnals to sing #685 – Rock of Ages (optional)

<b>PREPARE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather materials listed above</li><li>• Read over the full text of A Call to Action (pg 2), paying special attention this week to the second section (“We Inspire the Episcopal Church...”)</li></ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before class, set up a table near the front of the room with a bowl of water, and a basket of smooth rocks</li> </ul>
<p><b>WELCOME</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome participants</li> <li>• Introduce facilitators</li> <li>• Go over any logistical or housekeeping issues – location of restrooms, planned timeframe, available resources, etc.</li> <li>• Give a very brief synopsis of the previous weeks’ classes.</li> <li>• Ask for volunteers to read today’s scriptures about the gift of aging and the role of the church as a way to set our hearts open to hear God’s prophetic word today.</li> </ul>
<p><b>INTRODUCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin by asking, “For those of you who have been here before, what did you remember or find yourself thinking about from our previous classes?” Invite some quick responses.</li> <li>• What do you think are some of the issues we face today as we age? Allow participants to quickly brainstorm a list which you may wish to write up on newsprint so the group can refer back. <i>(Possible answers may include health care concerns, death of a spouse, the stress of moving, finding good caregivers or facilities, dealing with dementia or other mental illnesses, long physical health coupled with failing mental health, etc.)</i></li> <li>• Summarize for the group some of the statistics from the Introduction to this Study Guide so that everyone understands the effects aging Baby Boomers could have on our culture.</li> <li>• “Older Adult Ministry Task Force” video from the Older Adult Ministries You Tube Page <a href="http://tinyurl.com/7qg64mt">http://tinyurl.com/7qg64mt</a></li> <li>• Looking at all the issues around aging and how widespread these issues are likely to be over the next two decades, what do you see as the role of the church? (You may again wish to record these ideas on newsprint.)</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extensive and increasingly prevalent issues around aging can quickly become overwhelming to think about. The burden on our society will be enormous and we will need people who can “dream new dreams” in order to figure out workable solutions. How could the voice of the church be part of that conversation??</li> </ul>
<p><b>EXAMINE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pass out copies of the Call to Action</li> <li>• Ask participants to close their eyes for 30-60 seconds to think about these issues in silence.</li> <li>• Then, ask a volunteer(s) to read the second section that begins “We Inspire the Episcopal Church...” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It can be very effective to read “We Inspire the Episcopal Church” at the beginning of each of the four statements, as shown in the next section.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>DISCUSS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What words or phrases stand out to you? What parts do you most agree with? What parts do you least agree with?</li> <li>• Looking at each statement individually: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>We inspire the Episcopal Church to celebrate and learn from the individual, intra-cultural and inter-cultural diversity in aging</b> — There are almost as many different ways to experience and describe aging as there are people who age. Each of us is a vibrant tapestry of stories, relationships, experiences and so much more; so it makes sense that there is so much diversity in how we age and how we talk about that aging process. It gets even more diverse when you move out from the individual to the culture (“intracultural = interaction within one culture); and then as you move out from within your own culture to learn and exchange ideas with people from other cultures (“intercultural” = interaction among and between different cultures)</li> </ol> <p>Pass out handouts “Influences on My Perceptions of Aging” and ask participants to jot down quick memories or experiences that have helped shape their views. If time allows, you can ask for 2-3</p> </li> </ul>

	<p>volunteers to share a couple things from their sheet.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <b>We inspire the Episcopal Church to understand that spiritual discovery and discernment is a lifelong process</b> — How has your own spiritual awareness and involvement changed over the course of your lifetime? How do you imagine it might continue to change? What are some ways that our Church could actively encourage people to keep learning, growing and deepening their relationship with God at every single age and stage of life?</li> <li>3. <b>We inspire the Episcopal Church to respond to injustices toward older adults</b> — We’ve heard stories of elder abuse or other kinds of inappropriate behavior by caregivers and other people. Like any news of this sort, it makes us more than a little heartsick, but the church is called to do more than just feel badly about these kinds of incidents. In scripture, we are consistently challenged to work for justice, speak out for those who have no voice and work to change systems of power and abuse. In light of this, how might the church enter into this conversation or be a resource for individuals or families who have to deal with these kinds of heartbreaking situations?</li> <li>4. <b>We inspire the Episcopal Church to recognize that all older adults have the right to be loved, accepted and included</b> — In his earthly ministry, Jesus set a consistent example of meeting people where they were and loving them unconditionally. How can the church live this statute out in our interactions with older adults in our midst? In what ways are older people marginalized and overlooked in our society and how might the church work to be counter-cultural in this regard?</li> </ol>
<p><b>REFLECT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try to time your discussion to move into this reflection piece 15-20 minutes before your dismissal time. (If you have a small group, you can probably finish this in less time, but you don’t want participants to be rushed.)</li> </ul>

- Pass around the basket(s) of rocks and ask each person to take one. As that is happening, say the following in your own words:

*We've talked about some hard things today and these stones can represent some of that... as well as some of the hard things that each of us has to live with. No rock is exactly like any other rock – each one has its own beauty and its own imperfections. They are made up of many different colors, the same way each of us is made up of our own unique memories, experiences, lessons and relationships. A stone by itself can be admired for its beauty and individuality, but the power of a stone is really revealed when stones are put together. Placed side by side, stones can create a path to places no one has ever traveled before or they can become a great building to offer protection and comfort from the outside world.*

*In our case, we're looking at some big concerns – bigger than any of us can completely deal with on our own. But in a minute, I'm going to ask you to do something special with your rock that I hope will serve as a reminder: I'm going to ask you to come up here and place your rock inside this bowl of water.*

*Because here's the thing: some of us may already be dealing with some of these big questions or transition in life. In all likelihood, we wouldn't have to search very far to find someone who is caring for an aging parent, or someone who has gotten worrisome medical news or someone who is lonely and unsure of what the next phase of life will bring. Handling these things on our own, we feel small and inconsequential in the face of such big, hard things.... But that's not the whole story now, is it?*

*When you bring your rocks up here and place them in the water, I'd ask you to consciously remind yourself that you are not alone. When we share the waters of baptism or wade into this sea of community, we become something more than just ourselves.*

*In some ways that's true of almost any community, but in a community of faith, there's even more significance. Because*

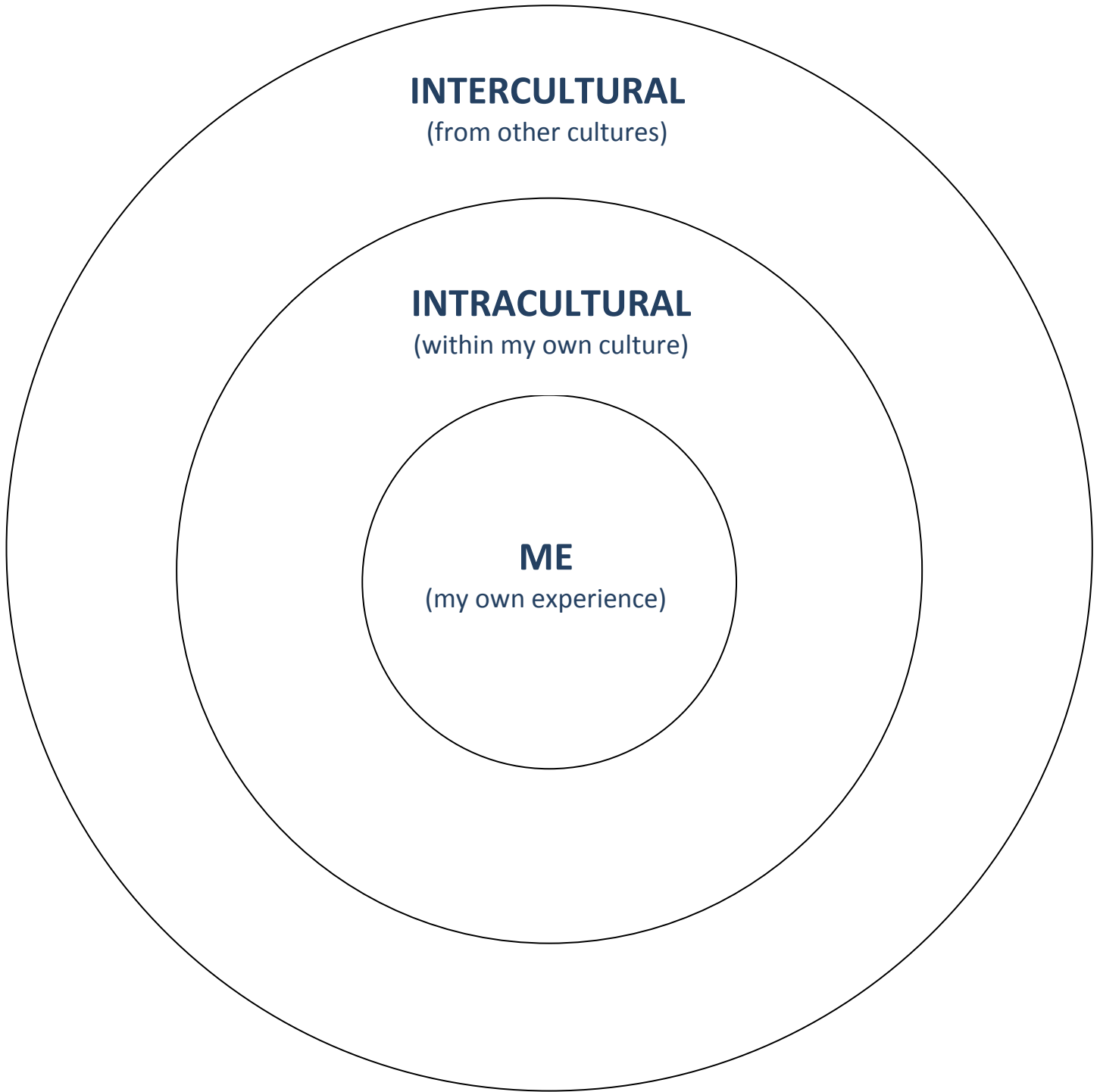
	<p><i>if we allow ourselves to truly know and be known in a community of faith, we often discover surprising ways in which God’s spirit washes over each one of us individually... covering our differences with a grace that brings us together and has the power to transform everything!</i></p> <p><i>Now I’m not saying that putting rocks in water is going to solve any of the complicated issues we’ve been talking about, but perhaps it is a good first step to remind ourselves of the waters that have shaped and nurtured us, and of the Spirit that God pours out on all of us, inspiring us to dream new dreams.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You can of course do this ritual in silence, but while people bring their rocks up to the water, you may want to play some soft recorded music or you could even have everyone sing or hum a well-known hymn.</li> <li>• When everyone has placed their rocks in the water, move on to the closing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>CLOSE</b></p>	<p>(optional) Sing Hymn #685 – Rock of Ages (third verse)</p> <p><i>While I draw this fleeting breath When mine eyelids close in death When I rise to worlds unknown And behold thee on thy throne, Rock of Ages, cleft for me, Let me hide myself in thee.</i></p> <p>Close with one of these prayers or one of your choosing:</p> <p>Almighty and most merciful God, we remember before you all poor and neglected persons whom it would be easy for us to forget: the homeless and the destitute, the old and the sick, and all who have none to care for them. Help us to heal those who are broken in body or spirit, and to turn their sorrow into joy. Grant this, Father, for the love of your Son, who for our sake became poor, Jesus Christ our Lord. <i>Amen.</i> (BCP, p. 8)</p>

O God, you have bound us together in a common life. Help us, in the midst of our struggles for justice and truth, to confront one another without hatred or bitterness, and to work together with mutual forbearance and respect; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

(BCP, p. 8)

- After your session is over, you may wish to invite participants to come retrieve a rock out of water to take home with them as a reminder. If rocks get mixed up and someone can't find "their" rock, consider it a teachable moment to remind ourselves that sometimes we're called to bear one another's burdens. 😊

# INFLUENCES ON MY PERCEPTION OF AGING



## SESSION 4: A CALL TO ACTION, PART III

### SESSION OVERVIEW

We will examine in depth the third section of the Call to Action

### RELEVANT SCRIPTURES

- Deuteronomy 32:7 — Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations. Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders, and they will explain to you.
- Psalms 148:12-13 — Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Bibles or copies of scriptures above
- Copies of A Call to Action for each participant
- Secure a television, computer or video projector with internet connection. Make sure you know how to operate the equipment
- “Inter-generational Part 2” video from the Older Adult Ministries You Tube Page <http://tinyurl.com/7widxx7>
- Newsprint
- Markers
- Picture of your church (or even just the name & city of church written in marker) on card stock or cardboard. Cut cardboard into shapes so that each person will have and decorate one piece of the puzzle and then work to put it back together. You can also buy blank cardboard puzzles online at school or stationery supply stores such as <http://www.discountschoolsupply.com/product/ProductDetail.aspx?product=16911&es=7680210000W>
- Crayons or markers to decorate puzzle pieces
- Book: ***Old Turtle and The Broken Truth*** (by Douglas Wood; watercolor illustrations by Jon J. Muth)
- Hymnals to sing #304 – I come with joy to meet my Lord (optional)

<b>PREPARE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather materials listed above</li><li>• Read over the full text of A Call to Action (pg 2), paying special attention this week to the third section (“We Challenge the Episcopal Church...”)</li><li>• Before class, read the Old Turtle book. If time gets short,</li></ul>
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	<p>you may need to summarize parts of it, instead of reading verbatim.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure the puzzle is already apart before class so that people can easily choose a piece to decorate</li> </ul>
<p><b>WELCOME</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome participants</li> <li>• Introduce facilitators</li> <li>• Go over any logistical or housekeeping issues – location of restrooms, planned timeframe, available resources, etc.</li> <li>• Give a very brief synopsis of the previous weeks’ classes.</li> <li>• Ask for volunteers to read today’s scriptures about the gift of aging and the role of the church as a way to set our hearts open to hear God’s prophetic word today.</li> </ul>
<p><b>INTRODUCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin by asking, “For those of you who have been here before, what did you remember or find yourself thinking about from our previous classes?” Invite some quick responses.</li> <li>• Frequently when I visit a church, I find myself looking up at the ceiling and thinking of all the emotions that have been present in this place. Sometimes it feels as if I can almost see the colored tints of so many different prayers... the pristine white promises of a wedding day, the buttery yellow hopefulness of a baptism, the dark, spreading stain of grief, the endless pain of waiting for answers that never come, the joy of holidays and the bittersweet colors of change and age.</li> <li>• Think about your own church for a moment... think of the different moods you’ve brought with you when you enter those doors, and the stories of different families you’ve known... the stories of people who were here before you ever even knew the name of this place... and the people who will be here years after you’ve gone. If it’s true that “there are eight million stories in the naked city” then it must be doubly true of our churches, the scene of so many different aspects of human drama.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I’ve always had a secret theory that this is why stained glass windows are so appropriate in our places of worship. Brightly colored, vivid daubs of emotion... but if you look at each one individually, you miss the bigger picture. What truly makes a church family lovely in all the ways that really matter is when an outside Light shines through all those fractured little pieces and makes them shimmer together as part of a much, much grander story.</li> <li>• Sure, each of us have our own significant story... we each cultivate and contribute a piece of the story. But the true work of transformative community happens when we stand together – greater than the sum of our parts could ever be.</li> </ul>
<p><b>EXAMINE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pass out copies of the Call to Action</li> <li>• Watch the “Inter-generational Part 2” video from the Older Adult Ministries You Tube Page <a href="http://tinyurl.com/7widxx7">http://tinyurl.com/7widxx7</a></li> <li>• Ask participants to close their eyes for 30-60 seconds and think about their own story – and how their lives have been touched by issues of aging.</li> <li>• Then, ask a volunteer(s) to read the third section that begins “We Challenge the Episcopal Church...” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It can be very effective to read “We Challenge the Episcopal Church” at the beginning of each of the seven statements, as shown in the next section.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>DISCUSS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What words or phrases stand out to you? What parts do you most agree with? What parts do you least agree with?</li> <li>• Looking at each statement individually: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>We challenge the Episcopal Church to become a transforming community that includes people of all ages as participants in baptismal ministries</b> — when we gather as community of faith, we share a unique gift: the gift of the gathered generations.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>

The church is the only intergenerational institution left in this country – it is the only place where people of all ages gather in the same place at the same time for the same reason. How can your congregation celebrate this gift by inviting a broad spectrum of ages to participate fully in the life of the church?

2. **We challenge the Episcopal Church to become a transforming community that responds to the changing culture as it relates to aging** — The church has always been called not to ignore its surrounding culture, and not to just respond to it, but also to help shape and direct it. There have been times in our history where the church has been a powerful influence in the rest of society, but in today’s world, we more often leave the attempts at culture-changing to our entertainers. When the church does get involved, it’s often groups at one of the extreme ends of a political, theological or ideological spectrum. What might be introduced into our larger culture if everyday Christians found gentle, authentic ways to share the transforming faith they’ve discovered? What if our churches became vibrant centers of compassionate outreach and a place where deep connections to God and other people could be fostered? What might that contribute to the growing issues around a large aging population?
3. **We challenge the Episcopal Church to become a transforming community that confesses that no one has the “whole truth” or completely understands the aging process** — Far too much of our world operates under an “I’m right; you’re wrong” mindset. What if the Church could be instrumental in changing this? How might we learn to be vulnerable with each other and what could happen if we all could get to a place where we admit we don’t have all the answers and we need each other for help?
4. **We challenge the Episcopal Church to become a transforming community that believes aging**

**starts at birth and ends at death; it is a life process** — As we've discussed before, no living person is exempt from the aging process. How can we offer this part of human existence into God's redemptive hands? How might that reframe our understanding of age?

5. **We challenge the Episcopal Church to become a transforming community that allows for ultimate freedom, individuality in aging** — Each one of us are extraordinarily unique... in personality, eye color, memories, expressions of faith... the list goes on and on. How can the church embrace this individuality when it comes to the aging process? How might that play out in new expressions of ministry, outreach or policies?
6. **We challenge the Episcopal Church to become a transforming community that provides a place of resource and solace for families dealing with aging** — With so many families struggling to live into new roles and new understandings of age, this is a critical place for the church to reinterpret our mission. Whether we struggle with our own issues of aging or watching parents or loved ones age, when we wrestle with these difficult transitions, we are in a unique place of vulnerability. How might the church embrace and comfort people during such times of change? And how might that vulnerability give birth to new expressions of how we understand Church?
7. **We challenge the Episcopal Church to become a transforming community that understands there is a wholeness in aging, including mind, body and spirit** — The ancient Israelites shared their shema: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might..." (Deut 6:4) We have always known that we are created with three distinct parts that are meant to function as a whole. How can the church work to support and strengthen this kind of wholeness and integration? How can the church attempt to find a place of balance and wholeness

	<p>in nurturing not just the spirit, but the mind and body as well??</p>
<p><b>REFLECT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After discussing the seven statements in the third section of the Call to Action, pass out blank puzzle pieces and crayons or markers. Invite participants to decorate the blank side of their piece with words or symbols that represent their own story.</li> <li>• As they work, read or summarize <b><i>Old Turtle &amp; the Broken Truth:</i></b> <p><i>A profoundly moving fable about a wise old turtle who advocates listening to the "language of breezes...learning lessons from stones and animals and trees and stars." In this story, a truth falls from the stars, breaking in half when it lands.</i></p> <p><i>The creatures of the earth see the pieces and discard it because of its rough edges and broken nature. But when a human being finds it, and reads the words "YOU ARE LOVED" written on it, he and his people cherish it as their most important possession. Time passes, and jealousy, fear, and anger rise up in the people who hold what they now call the Great Truth, as well as in those who do not have it. The people will not share their truth and the world begins to suffer.</i></p> <p><i>Then one brave Little Girl seeks the wisdom of Old Turtle, who explains that the people's Truth is not a whole truth, and that the people need the lost portion of the broken truth in order to make the world whole again. So the Little Girl journeys back home and takes the missing piece of the broken truth with her. When the pieces are brought together, and the broken truth is made whole at last: YOU ARE LOVED...AND SO ARE THEY. Then the people &amp; the earth are healed</i></p> </li> <li>• When everyone has finished their individual pieces, have the group try to reassemble the puzzle by looking at the picture or message that unifies all the individual parts.</li> </ul>

## CLOSE

(optional) Sing Hymn #304 – I Come with Joy (last verse)  
*Together met, together bound  
We'll go our different ways,  
And as God's people in the world,  
We'll live and speak his praise.*

If you have the appropriate books or music licenses, you might also use “They’ll Know We are Christians by Our Love” or “The Servant Song”

Close with this prayer or one of your choosing:

Keep, O Lord, your household the Church in your steadfast faith and love, that through your grace we may proclaim your truth with boldness, and minister your justice with compassion; for the sake of our Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.* (BCP, p

- After your session is over, invite participants to take their puzzle pieces home if they wish.

## SESSION 5: CONCLUSION --- MOVING TO ACTION

### SESSION OVERVIEW

We will summarize our discussions about the Call to Action and begin to think about what our particular church or group might be called to do in response

### RELEVANT SCRIPTURES

- Psalms 48:14 (KJV) — For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.
- Psalms 71:17-18 (NRSV) — O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come.
- Isaiah 40:29, 31 (NRSV) — He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless... Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Bibles or copies of scriptures above
- Copies of A Call to Action for each participant
- Secure a television, computer or video projector with internet connection. Make sure you know how to operate the equipment
- “Prison Ministry” video from the Older Adult Ministries YouTube Page (<http://tinyurl.com/c5ptu45>) with the Rev. Canon Petero Sabune, former Chaplain, Sing Sing Prison
- Newsprint
- Markers
- Small slips of paper
- Pens or Pencils
- Candle
- Matches
- Metal bowl or basin
- Water (just in case)

<b>PREPARE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Gather materials listed above</li><li>• Read over the full text of A Call to Action</li><li>• Invite key leaders like clergy, vestry members and chairs of various committees to come participate in your</li></ul>
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	<p>discussion as you look at ways your church might apply these lessons about the gift of aging and the wisdom of the combined generations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Print the following on newsprint and hang on the walls: “What Older Adults Need”; “What Older Adults Can Offer”; “What the Church Can Provide to Older Adults”</li> </ul>
<p><b>WELCOME</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welcome participants</li> <li>• Introduce facilitators</li> <li>• Go over any logistical or housekeeping issues – location of restrooms, planned timeframe, available resources, etc.</li> <li>• Give a very brief synopsis of the previous weeks’ classes.</li> <li>• Ask for volunteers to read today’s scriptures about the gift of aging and the role of the church as a way to set our hearts open to hear God’s prophetic word today.</li> </ul>
<p><b>INTRODUCE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin by asking, “When you first came into this class, what were you expecting or hoping for? Were those expectations met? What might we do better?”</li> <li>• Today we are going to try to summarize some of what we’ve learned from studying A Call to Action and dream some ideas of how the church might be involved</li> <li>• Let’s start by doing some brainstorming. Like we’ve done before, please take a marker and walk around to each sheet – write your contributions on each sheet. Feel free to include things that may be impractical or even impossible because you never know where those dreams may lead! 😊</li> <li>• Give everyone a few minutes to respond to each of the three sheets: “What Older Adults Need”; “What Older Adults Can Offer”; “What the Church Can Provide to Older Adults”</li> <li>• After everyone has had a few minutes to jot down ideas and dreams, gather the group back together and review</li> </ul>

	<p>at least some of what is on the sheets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Are there similar items that could be grouped together?</li> <li>○ Are there some items on our lists that might dovetail with ministry opportunities we already have?</li> <li>○ Who else could contribute to this conversation?</li> <li>○ What are the barriers to future projects and can we figure out any way through or around them?</li> <li>○ Watch “Prison Ministry” video from the Older Adult Ministries You Tube Page (<a href="http://tinyurl.com/c5ptu45">http://tinyurl.com/c5ptu45</a>) with the Rev. Canon Petero Sabune, former Chaplain, Sing Sing Prison</li> <li>○ This is an example of how one specific community looked at their calling to ministry and developed a specific program for their community</li> <li>○ What are ways that our community is called to a specific ministry?</li> </ul>
<b>EXAMINE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Pass out copies of the Call to Action</li> <li>● Ask participants to close their eyes for 30-60 seconds and think about their own story – and what they’ve heard and learned over the last few weeks.</li> <li>● We end our time together the same way we started it in our first session... by looking at the Call to Action as a whole.</li> </ul>
<b>DISCUSS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● After several weeks of working with this text, have any of your questions or insights changed? Now after all we’ve done together, what words or phrases stand out to you? What parts do you most agree with? What parts do you least agree with?</li> <li>● Are these special words or phrases the same ones you</li> </ul>



	<p>started out with? Why or why not?</p>
<p><b>REFLECT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give everyone several slips of paper and ask them to quickly jot down several concerns they know about... perhaps issues they worry about or situations in their own lives or the lives of other friends or family members.</li> <li>• While they write, be sure you have the bowl set up for their completed slips. Light the candle if it's not already lit and be sure to have some water on hand just in case. (If the weather permits, it may be easiest to do the closing exercise outside.)</li> <li>• After a few moments of silence, gather the group in a circle around the bowl or basin you've provided and invite them one at a time to slowly drop their concerns into the bowl.</li> <li>• As people come forward, remind the group that these issues of aging are universal. There are some big decisions coming up for families, churches, communities, government, etc.... we will have to work together to find solutions, and we will have to trust that God walks this part of the journey with us as we struggle.</li> <li>• Once the slips are placed in the bowl, gently light a match from the candle and drop it into the bowl so that the slips will burn.</li> </ul>
<p><b>CLOSE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use litany on the next page for prayers and closing</li> </ul>

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# A Theology of Aging and a Vision for the Church<sup>5</sup>

*By the Rev. Dr. Carlson*

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We have a great deal of thought on the aging process and its relationship to the creating, redeeming, sanctifying God whom we Christians worship. In this paper, we shall look at some of this theological reflection on aging.

Aging, of course, is a universal phenomenon. Humans, as far as we know, are the only creatures with the ability to reflect on their own aging, but all biological life ages. All of us are born, grow and engage in a process of decay leading up to death. Even inanimate creation is caught up in a process of change in which mountains rise and are eroded, continents move and recombine in new patterns over the millennia. Change is the process out of which new things emerge. It would appear that the creative God is in a ceaseless process of creating new things. We are fascinated by this process as we see it revealed on public television or one of the science channels. We are less fascinated by it when we see its debilitating aspects: a friend no longer able to care for himself, a former college roommate dying of Parkinson's disease, our own loss of athletic powers which we imagine we once had!

Aging, however, is a lifelong process of change and our attitudes toward it vary with our age. Elementary school children can't wait to age to the point where they will be going to middle school and where they will be able to go to the shopping center without their parents. Middle aged people may begin looking forward to retirement. Sixty four year olds may fear the approaching day when they leave their offices for the last time. Older people may wonder why physical weakness and arthritic pain seem to accompany their advancing years. My theology of aging is based on three things: first, our theology of baptism, second, a theology of kenosis related to the "self emptying" attributed to our Lord, and third, a theology of time.

Let me begin with baptism. As birth begins the process of aging for all people, so for Christians baptism begins the aging process we think of as spiritual maturing. It begins the process of our spiritual lives and points the direction in which we and our parents and sponsors pray that we will go. Holy Baptism affirms two fundamental truths: the first is that we are valued, that we are precious in God's eyes, and the second is that we are called, that we have a vocation or calling to serve God and those about us.

The slogan, "God doesn't make junk" is old hat now, but it reflects this baptismal truth of our value in the eyes of God. One Easter even at the baptism of three children aged 10 to 13 and one infant, and I was impressed again with the outrageous claim that we make in baptism. "You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ's own

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<sup>5</sup>Based on a paper presented by the Rev. Dr. Carlson at a meeting of ESMA in April 1998, as edited and expanded by the author and members of the Older Adult Ministry Task Force.

forever.” In saying this to one about to be baptized, we are saying that the great and loving, omnipotent, omniscient God is not only related to this child, but is the source of her being, the hope of her life. At the same time, we have to make it clear to those about to be baptized, we as Christians can never make the negative claim that God does not feel the same way about those poor children and adults who haven't been washed and sealed as you have. In fact, because we affirm that God values this child in this way, we also affirm that God values every child, every person. This good news of our value in God's eyes doesn't stop after we cease being loveable infants, or charming children, or handsome adolescents, or productive adults. It continues throughout our lives, and as long as we live. That is why Christians have to be offended whenever older adults are caricatured as silly, irrelevant, superfluous creatures, which have lost their value in our society. The value that baptism attributes to each older person is grounded in a rich Jewish tradition stemming from the commandment to Honor your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.® Our theology of aging is grounded in the theology of baptism that declares each of us is precious and of value. No one is expendable, even when the ravages of extreme old age may leave us a small reflection of the selves we were at the best time of our lives. .

The second truth which is affirmed in baptism is that we are each called by God, called to serve God and those around us in our own individual way. God has intentions for us, intentions which begin with the call that we be good stewards of our own bodies, minds and spirits. After all, if we don't love our own selves, then the love we show our neighbors will be worse than useless! But beginning with stewardship of our own selves, we are then called to love our neighbors as ourselves and the world about us. We have a part to play in God's purpose of creation, redemption, sanctification. It is unfortunate that much of the time you and I live totally oblivious to our place in God's purpose, our calling. It is much like how we use the potential of our brain, utilizing less than half of its potential in our lifetime. I'm certain that the time I spend in awareness of God's calling for me is far less than 50 percent, perhaps less than 10 percent, but when I do find myself living intentionally as someone called to serve God, some amazing things happen. At those times I am most creative and most helpful to others.

Our response to God's calling doesn't need to be dramatic or unusual. As I age I am more and more aware of God's providence, that God puts us in places, in situations, in jobs, in families, for particular purposes. Our lives can have special meaning and grace when we seek to identify those purposes. As we age our lives can become less encumbered and we can take more time to seek the answer to the question of calling, "What is it that God wants of me in this particular situation of my life?" Being able to respond to God's calling presupposes that we spend considerable time in prayer, perhaps with assistance from a spiritual guide or director to help us discern the direction and shape of our calling. The time may come for all of us that we may be able to do very little but pray, but who knows we might then be finding the most important calling of our lives. In baptism, then, we are told that we are of value, and that we have a calling.

The second source of my theology of aging was a theory expressed by a Roman Catholic theologian Lucien Richard with whom I had an extended conversation several years ago.

He called it a kenotic theory. Kenosis is the word used in the Epistle to the Hebrews in which we read that Christ "emptied himself," put off parts of his divine being in becoming human and taking on human attributes. This may or may not be your theory of the Incarnation, but the theory does have an interesting parallel to us as we age. The aging process, which begins at the moment we are born, is a process of losing and gaining. I could even see it in my youngest grandson. When he was three months old his body was so flexible that he could put his toes in his mouth. When he turned one, he had lost that ability, but his body was getting much more efficient at doing other things. He was very good at crawling, but soon he began to make the transition to being a biped, a walker. The process continues throughout life. Great figure skaters and gymnasts often lose some of their athleticism by ages 17 or 18, but can become more graceful in their movements. Other professional athletes are over-the-hill by their late 30s, but may become wise enough in their sports to coach or train others. In my own life as I become older, my eyesight and memory are not what they used to be, but my ability to relate to ideas and my ability to create without a lot of procrastination were never better. "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away" is not just a truth for the burial service!

The process of losing and gaining is grounded in the way God created us, and creative aging involves our coming to terms with gains and losses in our lives. I'm not encouraging you to surrender your abilities, to accept all losses, without a fight. Physically, especially, we need to be good stewards of our bodies through exercise and good medical care. We know too, that mental ability can be preserved by reading and exploring new ideas. We are stewards of the abilities we have as long as we have them. But when we must let go, we can let go with the understanding that it is part of God's creative process, and that we are called to move on to use and cultivate other gifts of God in our lives. The Jewish tradition of freeing older members of society to spend their later years in studying "Torah" is in keeping with this understanding of "self emptying" for the sake of the spirit. As we empty ourselves of some abilities or skills or perceptions as we age, we need to be open to receive the new abilities, skills, perceptions to which God calls us.

The third thing that informs my theology of aging is the theology of time. The first thing we need to say about time and human life is that each of us lives within certain time limits. The psalmist puts it, "The days of man are threescore and ten..." 70 years. This passage gave me a jolt when I celebrated my 70 birthday. I was further jolted when I received a letter from my insurance company saying that this was my last chance to buy insurance from them. We are, however, always living with time limits and sometimes we do not make those expected limits. One of the tragedies of war is the number of young people who are deprived of so many years of life. My grandmother lost two of her adult children before her own death. I remember as a teenager observing her grief and her disbelief at the death of her youngest son. This wasn't the way it was supposed to be. She had lived a full life. He still had so much for which to live. The days of our lives are limited, and from our human perspective it is troubling when those limits are increased by the ravages of war, accidents and disease.

All of us have a limited time, be it 70 years, 30 years or a 100 years. One of the tragedies of aging is the older person who reviews her life and realizes that it was wasted time, that she never did what she intended to do or was called to do, and like the Babylonian king reads the words, "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting!" We have a limited amount of time and it is important how we use it. If life went on forever, I suppose it would not matter as much, but life does not go on forever. For me and probably for most of us it comes as a shock each Ash Wednesday to have ashes placed on my forehead with the solemn reminder, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

The second way in which a theology of time informs our theology of aging is in the truth that time is a gift. We cannot assume that we have three score and ten years, or even what insurance actuary tables say we have. We are, therefore called to live in the present, "one day at a time." Of course for practical purposes, we assume that we have a future, but today is all we are guaranteed. Today is the gift which I am responsible for using, and it is a precious gift. That gift may be quite ordinary or quite exceptional. The New Testament calls such exceptional moments "kairos," time whose major feature is not length but quality. This is what St. John was talking about when he spoke of "the fullness of time." On the human side, these times are times of faith, times of truth breaking into our lives, times in which God confronts us and calls us to respond in obedience and love. Time in this dimension is not affected by the length of our lives except for one thing. As we age and become more aware of the shortness of time (the fact that time is limited) we can be graced with an appreciation of those moments of "kairos," as precious opportunities to listen, experience, and be present with God or our fellow human beings. Time is limited, but time is a gift, a gift rich with potential because God has come into time to redeem and sanctify it.

These, then, are some reflections on a theology of aging. It is grounded in our baptism and in the twofold truth that it affirms, that each of us is valued and precious in God's scheme of things, and that each of us is called to be the unique persons and stewards that God wills us to be. Our theology of aging is also informed by the realization that life is a process of losing and gaining which we are to live out and embrace. It is, finally, informed by our theology of time that reminds us that our human time is limited and yet has the potential to be rich with divine meaning as we seek to live out our lives with faith and in God's love.

Given our Christian theology of aging, our vision for the church is that each congregation will be a place where people of all ages are accepted and valued, where the church will provide assistance to its members as they go through the lifelong process of aging, particularly those times of loss when new callings need to be discerned, and where the grace and fellowship of the local congregation will surround each of its members, wherever they may be in the aging process. Our vision for our national church is that we will support dioceses and congregations in their ministry with older members, and that this support will be reflected in our policies, worship and training for ministry.



## Scripture

There are many, many passages in the Bible that speak to the gift of aging or the wisdom of listening carefully to our elders. As Christ's church, we are called to care for one another and are especially challenged to care for the weak, the orphaned, the needy and the widowed.

<b>Genesis 1:27</b>	So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.
<b>Leviticus 19:32</b>	Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.
<b>Deut 27:19 (New Living Translation)</b>	'Cursed is anyone who denies justice to foreigners, orphans, or widows.' And all the people will reply, 'Amen.'
<b>Deuteronomy 32:7</b>	Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations. Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders, and they will explain to you.
<b>1 Kings 12:6</b>	And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men... and said, How do ye advise that I may answer this people?"
<b>1 Chronicles 29:28</b>	"a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour"
<b>Job 12:12 (NASB)</b>	Wisdom is with aged men, with long life is understanding.
<b>Job 32:7</b>	Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.
<b>Psalms 48:14 (KJV)</b>	For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.
<b>Psalms 66:9 (KJV)</b>	"[He] holdeth our soul in life...."
<b>Psalms 71:1; 9</b>	In you, O Lord, I take refuge;... Do not cast me not off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent.
<b>Psalms 71:17-18 (NRSV)</b>	O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds. So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come.
<b>Psalms 91:14-16 (NRSV)</b>	Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honour them. With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation.
<b>Psalms 92:12-14 (NRSV)</b>	The righteous flourish like the palm tree... they are planted in the house of the Lord...; in old age they still produce fruit..."
<b>Psalms 103:2-5 (NRSV)</b>	Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits— who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.



<b>Psalms 143:5 (NRSV)</b>	I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands. I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.
<b>Psalms 148:12-13</b>	Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted;
<b>Proverbs 9:10, 11</b>	"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased."
<b>Proverbs 3:1, 2 (KJV)</b>	My son, ... keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee."
<b>Proverbs 3: 13-18 (NIV)</b>	Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.
<b>Proverbs 16:31 (NRSV)</b>	Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.
<b>Proverbs 20:29 (NRSV)</b>	The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their grey hair.
<b>Proverbs 23:22 (NIV)</b>	Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old.
<b>Isaiah 40:29,31 (NRSV)</b>	He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless... Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.
<b>Isaiah 43:19</b>	Behold, I do a new thing! How can they not perceive it?
<b>Isaiah 46:3b-4a (The Living Bible)</b>	I have created you and cared for you since you were born. I will be your God through all your lifetime, Yes, even when your hair is white with age. I made you and I will care for you.
<b>Joel 2:28 (Also Acts 2:17)</b>	"... I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; .... and your old men shall dream dreams...."
<b>Matthew 6:25-34 (The Message)</b>	Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes.
<b>I Timothy 5:1-2 NRSV</b>	Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters—with absolute purity.

## Elder's wisdom guides the future

*By Sarah Eagle Heart, Indigenous Missioner of the Episcopal Church*

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As a member of the tribal nation the Oglala Lakota, of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota, we open our prayers to “Tunkasila” which means... Great Spirit or Creator or Grandfather. That means in every prayer, we ask for the guidance and wisdom of our grandfather God. Not to be outdone “UnciMaka”, or Mother Earth, is also one and the same with Tunkasila as we know all of creation is nurtured by Mother Earth. So you see, the Lakota revere grandparents.

Our grandparents spend endless hours with us, sharing heart breaking stories of the past and teasing us with stories of yesterday. By example, they show us the way to live a generous and compassionate life by demonstrating traditional values: wisdom, kinship, fortitude, and generosity. This is the same across all tribes, especially true in today's society where children are often left orphaned by violence, or drug and alcohol abuse. Our grandparents today raise their grandchildren bringing a generation of young adults with old eyes...their vision focused on healing so the next generation would not have to face what they did. I see this example across the church, and with many community leaders.

I, myself, would not be who I am today without my grandmothers. My great-grandmother was a lay leader in the Episcopal Church who helped raise funds to build the Inestimable Gift Episcopal Church outside Allen, South Dakota. When my mother was no longer able to care for her children, it was my grandmothers who took us in and ensured we knew both Christianity and our traditional ways. It was my grandmother who taught me to be respectful and generous no matter what... and in all humility.

The responsibility of a grandparent never ends, as aging brings with it wisdom that is needed to raise the next generation. It is the love of Tunkasila and Unci who remind us where home is and that, as the Lakota say to end our prayers “MitakuyeOyasin”, we are all related. We are called to kinship to care for our people, just as our baptismal covenant calls us to heal a broken and wounded world...elders are called to share their wisdom to their grandchildren with love and open hearts. Today, we need each other more than ever.

MitakuyeOyasin.