



*A Tool Kit
for Creating
Older Adult
Ministries*

Written and compiled by Jan Aerie

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Welcome to

A Tool Kit for Creating Older Adult Ministries

How do we plan a ministry with older adults?

Time and time again, this question has been asked of me – more than any other. This tool kit is the answer to the question. You have already recognized a need, and taken your first step. Each tool in this kit offers help for deepening understanding, finding some keys to priorities, and locating the door to open. Study and discussion about older adults will lead to discernment. Commitment and tenacity will manifest in meaningful service. Prayer and faithfulness will be your guide. But, we cannot just talk about it, we must act.

This tool kit will take your church group through a step-by-step process for beginning or advancing in ministry with older adults. The process focuses on four *A* words: building *awareness*, assessing *assets*, exploring *alternatives* and taking *action*. Spending time on each step will help your church better understand your mission, your community and its needs. Using these tools will lead to a more vital, growing and active congregation. So, let's get started!

Blessings, on your journey.

Jan Aerie, MS, Gerontologist and Family Counselor
Older Adult Ministries Consultant

Now is the time. This is the place. You are the one.

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1 BIBLE STUDY SUGGESTIONS: for Individuals and Groups*

Start with one or some of these Bible passages for study and discussion:

Growing into the fullness of age: Psalm 90

A purpose and role of older adults: Ephesians 4:4-7, 11-16

Aging choices: II Samuel 19:31-40

Adapting to change: Ecclesiastes 12:1-8.

Hope in wishes - the story of Simeon and Anna: Luke 2:21-40

Laughter in old age - the story of Abraham and Sarah: Genesis 18:1-15; 21:1-7

Sharing wisdom: Job chapter 32

Prayer and action: James 2:14-19

Ministry in community: 1 Timothy 5:1-22

Resisting stereotypes: John 4:1-30

The extended family: Genesis 47:1-12

Moses' leadership and the Promised Land: Deuteronomy 31:1-8

*To enhance your study, consider: *Biblical and Spiritual Perspectives on Aging*, a 12- part curriculum: <https://www.mid-america-disciples.org/older-adult-min-curriculum-series>

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A CHURCH SURVEY: A Demographic Overview*

1. The number in your congregation who are ages:

_____ 1-19 _____ 20-29 _____ 30-45 _____ 46-59 _____ 60-75 _____ 76-90 _____ over 90

2. The number of older adults (age 65 +) in your congregation:

_____ living alone
_____ living with a spouse
_____ living with relatives
_____ living with non-relatives

3. The number of older adults (age 65 +) in your congregation who are:

_____ employed
_____ seeking employment
_____ retired

4. The number of older adults (age 65 +) in your congregation who are:

_____ married
_____ separated or divorced
_____ widowed

5. The number of older adults (age 65 +) in your congregation who are:

_____ able to do what they choose in the community
_____ do not have use of a car
_____ do not have access to transportation

6. The number of older adults (age 65 +) in your congregation who are:

_____ able to go out only with help
_____ housebound
_____ bedfast

7. The number of older adults (age 65 +) in your congregation who have:

_____ no relatives nearby
_____ no children
_____ no living relatives

8. List the organizations in your community to which older adults belong:

9. What activities do older adults attend which are part of your church program?

10. What are the perceived unmet needs of the older adults in your congregation?

11. Is there a committee of the church with responsibility for older adults? Which one(s)?

*Access to the church records may be helpful. It is important to carefully count the number of people on the rolls of the church rather than estimating them. Accuracy is key to obtaining a true picture. Guesswork in this case is often misleading.

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QUESTIONS FOR BEGINNING: Cultivating Meaning

How can we find meaningful ways for our older adults to live as faithful disciples through liturgy, study, service, witness and community?

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

How can we make ministry of and for this population easy?

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 and families?

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?

First we talk, then we must act.

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REACHING OUT: Our Deeper Purpose

What role in God's mission is our congregation being called to enact and embody in Christ's beloved community?

How has our congregation partnered with other congregations or local non-profits to care for others?

How has our congregation collectively provided services for others in need?

How has our congregation stood alongside those needing support and resources?

How has our congregation utilized its physical resources for the flourishing of the wider community?

How has our congregation been involved in mission?

Look deeply, consider with confidence.

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INTERGENERATIONAL MINISTRIES: Mining Opportunities

Ferrying Faith Across Generations*

We accompany one another across generations by acting across borders of age and stage in life, through:

Mutual decision-making – What are examples of generations working together toward deeper relationships?

Sharing resources – How do various generations and programs share space within the church building?

Recognizing expertise – How is “everyone is a learner and everyone is a teacher” practiced in our congregation?

Storytelling – How do the faith stories of various generations shape the story of our congregation?

Building networks – Does each adult know the name of at least five others of a different generation in the congregation other than relatives, and vice versa? What examples do we have of mentoring across generations?

A viable and vital program continues to grow.

*coined by Kenda Creasy Dean

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ACTIVITY ALTERNATIVES: Issues to Consider

What activities could you provide or do you already offer to your congregation and community?

Spiritual growth:

Caregiving:

Resources:

Visits and meals:

Prayer chain and card mailing:

Housing options:

In-home support:

Educational and social programs:

Transportation:

Medical access:

Grief support:

Other:

To touch the life of another is to transform life – ours and theirs.

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ASSESSMENT OF ASSETS AND LIMITATIONS: Places to strengthen

1 Building space

Asset:

Limitation:

2 Worship and study materials, resources

Asset:

Limitation:

3 Visitation and support of needs

Asset:

Limitation:

4 Transportation and communication

Asset:

Limitation:

5 Program activities and participation by older adults

Asset:

Limitation:

6 Connections to community, resources

Asset:

Limitation:

To focus and become devoted to a path is putting substance and shape to an idea that becomes a ministry.

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PLANNING FOR ACTION: Deeper Exploration

Work with a group of clergy and laity in your church to discuss and respond to these questions:

1. What is our mission as a church?
2. What are the specific issues that we need to work on to prepare for a ministry with and for older adults?
3. What is our purpose in developing a ministry with and for older adults?
4. What resources are there in our church? Are there specialists in our congregation who could help?
5. What resources are available in the community?
6. What is one specific goal we want to attain to address an issue?
7. What is our mission as a church?
8. What are the specific issues that we need to work on to prepare for a ministry with and for older adults?
9. What is our purpose in developing a ministry with and for older adults?
10. What resources are there in our church? Are there specialists in our congregation who could help?
11. What resources are available in the community?
12. What is one specific goal we want to attain to address an issue?
13. What needs to be done in order to reach this goal? What kind of help is needed?

14. These three specific tasks will get us to our goal: (Write task 1,2,3)

15. When will each task be accomplished?

16. How will we evaluate the project? How will we know when we have finished? How do we define success?

Trust and the way will become clear.

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MINISTRY ALTERNATIVES: Options and Priorities

Wishes, ideas and possibilities:

Top 5 options:

1

2

3

4

5

Prioritization of options:

First

Second

Third

Be open and believe.

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SUGGESTIONS FOR AREAS OF FOCUS: What Calls to You?*

Social – We are all social beings who need the companionship of others. Give older adults the opportunity to build new friendships to help make up for the loss of loved ones and friends.

For example: birthday parties, anniversary celebrations, dance parties, each one take one, potluck meals, holiday get-togethers, library services, friendly visitor programs, volunteer care and transportation services.

Health and well-being – Aging is thought of as a process of deterioration of the physical body. Maintaining a positive outlook, physical, mental and spiritual health prolong life.

Such as: health seminars, body stretching, exercise classes, lunch programs, sunshine committees, health fairs, nutrition classes, study clubs, volunteer service programs, visitation and card mailing to shut-ins.

Education – Learning is lifelong and an ongoing process. Older adults should be challenged and motivated to keep acquiring new learning, experiences and skills to enrich their spirit, mind and body.

For example: book clubs, discussion groups, creative writing classes, educational tours, current event discussions, spiritual retreats, days of remembrance, Bible study, poetry readings, devotions, and hobbies.

Cultural activities – Appreciating the finer things in life comes later for many who have been focused on work their entire adult lives. Older adults often enjoy performing for others, perhaps for the sick, shut-ins or at senior centers.

Opportunities could include: concerts, trips, tours, teas, plays, glee clubs, choral groups, drama groups, role plays.

Leisure time, recreation – Filling leisure time ensures continuing meaning in life. Service to others is proven to extend a healthy life and positive outlook.

Choices could be: dancing, singing, knitting, painting, card playing, arts and crafts, sewing, woodcraft, travel, games, service to others.

Civic action – The American social structure has few places for older adults, yet there are positive and constructive civic and non-partisan political avenues for involvement. Older adults can pool their experiences and resources for the welfare of the elderly in particular, and for other age groups in need of advocacy.

Options are: letter writing, roles in advocacy, acting as watchdog or spokesperson, being involved in community and other public affairs.

Thoughts to ponder:

Many agencies provide services to meet some of the needs of older adults, as does the church - but secular agencies cannot emphasize religious values. The most important job of the church is to attend to the spiritual needs of all age groups including older adults. Spiritual needs involve physical and emotional needs as well.

Uncover and encourage the use of talents. Sharing talents will strengthen and revitalize the life of your church.

Concentrate on inclusion of those older adults who are not directly involved.

Enable older adults to become their own advocates.

Include older adults in leadership roles.

Establish opportunities for intergenerational activities.

Consciously cooperate with community service groups, other churches and synagogues.

Practice a holistic approach to the needs of the homebound and bedridden.

*You might also explore the resource: “Age-Friendly Congregations” for more ideas and resources. <https://www.uccresources.com/search?q=age+frendly&search-button=>

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ACTION PLANNING STEPS: Your Aim and Timing

GOAL 1: _____

OBJECTIVE 1: _____

_____ Completion date _____

OBJECTIVE 2: _____

_____ Completion date _____

OBJECTIVE 3: _____

_____ Completion date _____

GOAL 2: _____

OBJECTIVE 1: _____

_____ Completion date _____

OBJECTIVE 2: _____

_____ Completion date _____

OBJECTIVE 3: _____

_____ Completion date _____

GOAL 3: _____

OBJECTIVE 1: _____

_____ Completion date _____

OBJECTIVE 2: _____

_____ Completion date _____

OBJECTIVE 3 _____

_____ Completion date _____

Remember, all that is needed will be supplied, and support is present to you.

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SHARING YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Who Needs to Hear Your Story?

You have so much to share. Expanding your reach means telling others about your experiences, successes and fall-backs. Others can learn from you, and more importantly, be inspired by you! Be creative in imagining how to tell others about your church's ministry and outreach.

For instance:

Celebrate what you have done in worship and tell your stories.

Write an article for your church newsletter, city newspaper, or regional church news.

Create a video or recording of your ministry.

Contact area officials to visit your program.

Teach another group about how you created your ministry.

You are a blessing. Bless us with your story.

We love to know how ministries with older adults are expanding.
Write to aeriej@gmail.com