

# **“Unleashing The Power Of Age In Your Congregation”**

**Sponsored by the Rocky Mountain Baptist Conference  
2<sup>nd</sup> Half for Him Ministry of the BGC**

**Cherry Creek Community Church  
Denver, Colorado  
April 23, 2005**

## **A Ministry Report**

### **Purpose of the Seminar:**

The purpose of the seminar was to convene pastors, church leaders, older adult ministry leaders, and persons interested in older adult ministries representing many churches to:

- Define the challenges and opportunities facing the church as a result of radical demographic changes in the next several decades,
- Discuss the issues,
- Determine resolutions and
- Derive strategies for effective ministry.

### **Summary:**

The “Unleashing The Power of Age In Your Congregation” seminar was held at Cherry Creek Community Church on Saturday, April 23, 2005, from 9 am to 4 pm. 55 persons attended, plus four corporate sponsors, representing twelve churches in the Rocky Mountain Baptist Conference of the BGC. Most participants were leaders and active volunteers in Older Adult Ministries in their churches. Cherry Creek Community Church hosted the seminar. Bill Dalmberg of Galilee Baptist Church of Loveland served as the primary convener and chairperson of the Senior Adult Task Force.

**Celebration of Life:**

A worship team led all participants in an opening worship session called a Celebration of Life.

**Keynote Lecture:**

The keynote lecture, delivered by Dr. Richard Bergstrom, was entitled “Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation.” The lecture discussed the radically changing demographics in our country and in the world as the numbers of people living longer increases dramatically. These changes call for a defined response on the part of church leadership. We must conclude whether the vast amounts of older adults in our society and church will be viewed as an “obstacle or an opportunity.” As churches look at the coming age wave, it would behoove them to recognize the needs of older adults and acknowledge the contributions they can continue to make. Dr. Bergstrom challenged participants to discover four biblical principles in order to unleash the power of age in congregations. Taken from Mark 2, the story of the paralytic who was carried to Jesus by his friends, Dr. Bergstrom suggested the following characteristics required by a church to be effective in ministering to and with older adults:

- Compassionate fellowship
- Creative freedom
- Corporate faith
- Leading to complete forgiveness!

## **Small Workgroups:**

Participants were divided into small workgroups to brainstorm and discuss the needs and issues facing three groups of aging adults: Midlife (ages 50-65), Retired life (ages 65-80) and Senior Life (ages 80+). The following are the lists of needs that were generated:

### **Mid-Life (Ages 50-65)**

#### **Physical Needs:**

- Aging parents
- Grandchildren and teenage children
- Facing retirement
- Eye/ear changes and challenges
- Menopause
- mid-life crisis
- parenting grandchildren
- beginning energy loss
- empty nest
- onset of chronic illness
- paying for insurance, medical care
- starting bodily decline
- work habits slowing down
- reduced production results

#### **Social/Emotional Needs:**

- grand-parenting issues
- sandwich generation
- employment issues
- relocation
- entertainment, leisure time
- how can we serve?
- Put on a shelf? Over the hill?
- Change issues
- What am I going to do with the rest of my life? New goals?
- How do we keep up with all the changes around us?
- Retraining for other employment
- More need for social groups.
- Re-fire, don't retire
- Redefine romance
- Beginning to travel more
- Loss of friends, family
- Needing to be a caretaker

- Keeping contact with children, grandchildren
- Stress relieving techniques
- Depression management
- Fear – illness, financial, death of a loved one
- Companionship
- Identity, purpose
- Suicide
- Support
  - Death of a spouse
  - Empty nest
  - Divorce, abandonment
  - Parenting, grand-parenting
  - Revolving door (older children)
  - Physical crisis
- Financial concerns
- Future care needs
- Lack of respect
- Distance from family
- Sandwich generation
- Approaching retirement
- Financing retirement
- Kids in college
- Sandwich generation
- Changing values
- Empty house syndrome
- Mobility
- Dreams not materialized
- Need more toys
- Care of parents responsibility
- Blended families

Spiritual Needs:

- Forgiveness
- Grace
- Hope for the future
- Encouragement
- Perseverance
- Consistency
- Validation of my faith walk
- In the word
- Assurance of God's love
- Salvation issues/awareness
- Turn it over to the Lord
- Fellowship of a church family

- Servants heart
- Be a learner, to be fed.
- Mode of communication adaptation
- Opportunity to exercise faith in different ways
- Mission opportunities
- New fears of sickness, death
- Fears of being forgotten
- Bible study, meditation, learning
- Adjusting to mid-life challenges
- Needing our pastors to be shepherds
- Facing end of life issues.

## Retired Life (65-80)

### Physical Needs:

- Beginning of limitations
- Need more help from others
- Transportation needs
- Lower energy
- 20% diabetes – awareness
- chronic illness and limitations
- visual needs
- physical needs
- change residence – physical needs
- need for friendship
- health insurance
- silver sneakers
- sleep disorders
- mobility
- homebound
- medical prescriptions
- meals
- chores

### Social/Emotional Needs:

- loneliness
- depression
- friends
- small group need
- dependability
- friendship
- plan to connect
- lunches and tea times
- tee time
- people to talk to

- peace with the past
- mentor those younger
- need to leave a legacy
- financial security
- to be near family
- loss of spouse – readjusting
- facing adjustments – where do I fit it?
- Losing power, not in leadership anymore
- Marriages suffer
- Family relationships change

### Spiritual Needs:

- Need to discover spiritual opportunities
- Hard to accept new forms of worship
- Need interaction with others
- Facing complaints from others
- Prayer
- Knowledge of bible references
- Counseling
- Encouragement
- Discouragement
- No retirement
- Renewal of first love – evangelism
- Bible studies for growth
- Prayer group
- Keeping accounts short
- Modeling spiritual maturity
- Keeping priorities
- Avoid self-centered lifestyle
- Corporate worship
- Exercise fruit of the spirit
- Financial stewardship
- “golf is a sin unto death” 😊

### Senior Life (80+)

#### Physical Needs:

- ambulation
- transportation – need of
- handicap accessibility
- assisted living
- home health care
- hearing difficulty / eyesight
- degrees of dementia

- physical deterioration
- lots of medications
- nutritional needs
- time to get places
- arthritis
- medication – expense / dispensing of
- cleanliness
- shopping needs energy level, fatigue
- hip and knee replacement
- stamina
- resources – walkers, wheelers
- hearing aids
- finances
- meals
- safety – alarm system
- medical alarm system
- mobility assist

#### Social/Emotional Needs:

- mobility assist
- resources – community
- home visits
- widows club
- life meaning
- we need to be needed
- respect
- family contact
- pass on your history
- hospice
- safety / financial security (guidance)
- loneliness (loss of friends, family)
- discouragement
- depression
- abandonment
- activities
- sense of:
  - belonging
  - productivity
  - being loved / safe
- outreach towards them / any act of kindness
- touch / hug / word of encouragement
- loneliness
- financial
- loss of loved ones
- loss of companionship

- depression, discouragement
- life choices
- moving out of home, neighborhood
- accepting different living environments
- outliving resources
- people get paranoid
- telephone scam artists
- need to establish younger friends
- be flexible
- give up – hard to do acts of daily living
- destruction of dignity

### Spiritual Needs:

- leaving home church, pastors support groups
- depression / encouragement
- home bound, communion
- attacks of Satan
- unable to read Bible / hear
- no Sunday School class
- be prayer warrior
- be open to new ministries
- extra money? Be a sender!
- End-of-life decisions
- Prayer / for and by
- Gospel presented to them
- Invited to special church events
- Inclusion
- Opportunity to grow spiritually
- Worship mentors
- Availability of music, books
- Pastoral visits, care
- Bible study
- Talking books
- Fellowship
- Small groups
- Be a minister to others in homes, day care centers
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## **Top Priorities Identified:**

Through a process of combining similar suggestions and multi-voting (each participant was allowed to vote for their three “top” needs per category), the following needs were identified as priorities:

### **Midlife (50-65)**

#### **Physical**

1. exercise, heart disease
2. aging parents
3. facing retirement

#### **Social/Emotional**

1. financing retirement
2. new goals. What are we going to do with the rest of our lives?
3. Approaching retirement.

#### **Spiritual**

1. self-sufficiency, don't need God
2. not interested in organized religion
3. worship practices questioned.

### **Retired Life (65-80)**

#### **Physical**

1. mobility
2. physical needs
3. lower energy

#### **Social/Emotional**

1. family relationship changes
2. financial security
3. need to leave a legacy
4. loneliness (tied for 3<sup>rd</sup>)

#### **Spiritual**

1. Hard to accept new forms of worship
2. Modeling spiritual maturity
3. Avoid self-centered lifestyle

## Senior Life (80+)

### Physical:

1. home health care
2. transportation
3. medication – expense / dispensing (tied for 2<sup>nd</sup>)
4. assisted living

### Social/Emotional

1. accepting different living situations
2. loss of loved ones, companions
3. abandonment
4. life meaning

### Spiritual

1. fellowship
2. pastoral visits / care
3. opportunities to grow spiritually
4. depression (close runner up)
5. prayer (close runner up)

## **The Times, They are A-Changin':**

A second lecture, delivered by Richard and Leona Bergstrom, was entitled “The Times, They Are A-Changin’: How the Age Boom Will Transform the Church.” This lecture discussed some of the social implications of the “longevity revolution.”

The question was also asked, “How will the new re-defined attitudes toward retirement impact and transform the church?” The Bergstroms outlined 8 things that can be expected in the next few decades:

1. Increased longevity will drastically impact the composition of the church.
2. Today’s concept of “retirement” will be re-defined.
3. Expectations in retirement and old age will change.
4. Lives will be characterized as “cyclical” rather than “linear.”
5. The age boom will redefine “old age”
6. Ministry infrastructures that are sensitive to changing demographics will change.
7. There will be greater degree of diversity in values, lifestyle and population mix.
8. New retirees and baby boomers won’t fit into traditional categories.

What is the essential message to the church?

1. If we expect to reach the emerging generation of retirees and attract their interest in the church and kingdom ministries, then we must recognize the uniqueness of this new generation of retirees.
2. We have the opportunity to provide them with significant and meaningful involvements around purposeful relationships to replace those lost from career and family.
3. The involvements offered must be tailored to the goals and desires of this population group.
4. We need to be sensitive to the kind of language that we use in seeking to reach out to them and involve them:
  - a. Many of the traditional labels, with which a current generation of 70-100 year olds may in fact be comfortable,

- are not acceptable to the newly emerging generation of retirees;
- b. By using words that build upon their potential or their contribution, we may open doors that would otherwise be closed.
5. We need to create a completely new infrastructure that will capture the imaginations of new retirees, motivate them to live lives of purpose and direction, and release them to meaningful and significant service.
  6. We need to thoroughly understand and teach that God has a purpose for long life

### **Designing Our Future**

The final lecture/discussion was focused on how to develop powerful and effective ministries for middle and older adults. It was concluded that ministries must reflect the following:

- Middle and older adults represent a rich source of wisdom, service and giving. Ideas were shared on how an older adult ministry group can equip members to pass on a heritage of faith, be involved in service, and be encouraged to give.
- Middle and older adults need the opportunity to hear the gospel and respond to its life-changing message of forgiveness and renewal. Ideas were shared regarding evangelistic outreach targeting middle and older adults.
- Middle and older adults need communities of faith surrounding them as they face unprecedented transitions, changes and loss. Ideas were shared regarding activities, caring ministries, lifelong learning opportunities, and purposeful planning.

Helpful resources can be found! One suggestion is obtaining the Bergstroms' book, Amazing Grays: Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation, available online at [www.chonline.org](http://www.chonline.org)

## **Let's Get Going**

### Workgroups:

The final workgroup session placed participants at new tables to develop a basic plan for their area of ministry. They were challenged to come up with a name for their ministry, a mission statement, and three programming ideas based upon priority needs identified earlier in the day.

### Strategic Plan for Midlife (50-65) Ministry

- Name: Life's Peak
- Mission Statement: to grow our mid-lifers to find sufficiency in God
- Ministry Plan:
  - Physical: support groups for caring for aging parents
  - Social/Emotional seminars and retirement financial planner
  - Spiritual: building bridges of fellowship to those seeking the true purpose of life

### Strategic Plan for Retired Life (65-80) Ministry:

- Name: XYZ Club (Extra Years of Zest)
- Mission Statement: Building satisfying lives through service and fellowship.
- Ministry Plan:
  - Physical: walking program
  - Social/ emotional Need to build a legacy. Tech. interviewing audio / visual teens + XYZ.
  - Spiritual: Modeling spiritual maturity: modeling/mentoring.

### Strategic Plan for Senior Life (80+) Ministry:

- Name: The Next Chapter
- Mission Statement: Caring for those around us.
- Ministry Plan:
  - Physical: keeping in touch
    - Cards
    - Phone calls
  - Emotional: Social/service projects
    - Grandparenting
    - Serve at soup kitchen
  - Spiritual: mentoring
    - Faith stories
    - Prayer
    - Bible study

## **Strategic Planning**

Participants were encouraged to begin to think strategically about purposeful and effective older adult ministries. In a session entitled “Let’s Get Going” participants were challenged to discuss the following:

Define our purpose. Why does our ministry exist?

1. What is our church’s purpose (mission statement)?
2. What is the purpose or mission of our 50’s+ adult ministry?

Discover Our Passion: What are the core values of our ministry?

1. What are the values that we can affirm within our ministry to older adults?
2. Write out 3-7 core values as a part of your plan for ministry.

Determine Our Potential: Where do we want to be in 2-5 years?

1. What vision do you have for your Senior Adult ministry?
2. What are the major objectives for your ministry?

Develop Our Plan. How will we accomplish our vision?

1. What goals do we have for our Senior Adult ministry?
2. What programs and ministries can we undertake to accomplish your vision?

Deploy our Personnel. Who will carry out this ministry?

## **Reflection and Evaluation:**

Copies of the evaluations are enclosed with this report. All evaluations reflected a high degree of satisfaction with the presenters, facilities, and workgroups. Participants overwhelmingly appreciated the day and reported being challenged to think differently about aging and the potential of older people in congregations and community.

The following are some of the comments made when asked: “*What did you like best about the seminar?*”

- *Good food for thought*
- *Everything (2x)*
- *The sense of God’s spirit present*
- *Input from the Bergstroms. Excellent 😊*
- *The presentations by both Richard and Leona*
- *The ideas, the fellowship*
- *Brainstorming with others*
- *Suggestions for creative ways to teach seniors*
- *Interaction*
- *Enthusiasm in presentation*
- *I loved the opening worship – what a way to begin 😊*
- *Workshop sessions with other attendees*
- *Worship time*
- *Lecture presentations*
- *Working towards the common goal of serving and using our mature generation.*
- *Awareness of many issues related to ministering to midlife, retired life, senior life.*
- *Exposure to demographics and the changing dynamics of ministry to the 60+.*
- *Upbeat emphasis on 2<sup>nd</sup> ½ for Him Ministries*
- *The breakout times*
- *A lot of information in a short time*
- *Information covered all areas of life.*
- *The interaction between others and discussion groups*

The following are answers to the questions: *“What is one thing that you will add or change in your ministry with older adults as a result of attending this seminar?”*

- *Keep seeking ways to be a servant to those in need.*
- *Will spend more time getting to know our individual seniors.*
- *Have a bigger group.*
- *Willing to be more vocal*
- *Not thinking they are limited because of age, can learn and do different ministries.*
- *Terminology*
- *Be more in touch with older people*
- *Outreach among older groups vs. ingrown groups*
- *Consider putting together a “Dream Team”*
- *Keeping in touch and serving (helping w/transportation, prayer, errands, etc).*
- *May begin some outreach*
- *Sensitivity to needs of people in this age group.*
- *Brief history about evolution of mature adult awareness.*
- *Don't have adult ministry (older than 65)*
- *Respect, sensitivity, compassion*
- *To have a balanced program and not get into a rut.*

Other comments:

- *Contents:*
  - *Much new information I wouldn't get elsewhere*
  - *My eyes were opened to the possibilities of this ministry.*
- *Presenters:*
  - *thorough, enthusiastic*
  - *You guys know your stuff!*
- *Food: delicious, abundant*
- *Relevance:*
  - *Personally good, but not very relevant to our Hispanic church.*
  - *does not apply to my personal ministry at this time.*
  - *Many suggestions to implement*
  - *We have very few older adults at present, but this may be a good area of outreach*
  - *Don't have a ministry.*
- *Accommodations:*
  - *Everything was great!*

**Thank you.**

We wish to thank the 2<sup>nd</sup> Half for Him Ministry of the RMBC for inviting us to facilitate the “Unleashing the Power of Age in Your Congregation” seminar. Thank you to the planning committee and to Cherry Creek Community Church for your wonderful hospitality!

We hope that the insights shared during this day will inspire the churches involved to continue to develop powerful and effective ministries to and by older adults in the future. If we can be of further assistance in helping you fulfill that mission, we would be honored to do so. May God richly bless you as you follow His leading.

Richard L. Bergstrom  
President, ChurchHealth

Leona D. Bergstrom  
Director, Lifetime Ministries

**Co-Directors, BGC 2<sup>nd</sup> Half for Him Ministries**  
**<http://www.chonline.org/bgc>**



P.O. Box 1493  
Edmonds, WA 98020-1493  
(425) 774-8252  
[www.chonline.org](http://www.chonline.org)