

PART 5



ORGANIZING THE CHURCH FOR MINISTRY

While the major thrust of this manual is to help Christians in a nursing home ministry, this final part enlarges the scope a bit to help churches organize to meet the needs of elderly people both inside and outside of nursing homes.

This part is adapted from “*Developing Programs for Senior Citizens—A Handbook for Churches*”, produced by the Delaware County of (PA) Services for the Aging, and is included here with their permission. We gratefully acknowledge the editors: Judy Oerkvitz, Louis Colbert, Norma Thomas and Verne Dalton.



INTRODUCTION

Churches have historically sought to minister to the special needs of widows, orphans and the aged. Today many churches are reexamining their efforts along these lines in light of the changing cultural and social situation. As concern for the plight of the aged has increased, so too have the resources available to the church. Health systems, social agencies and informational services all stand ready to provide support to churches taking on new projects or otherwise strengthening their ministry with the aging.

The purpose of this section is threefold:

1. To provide general guidelines as to how a church can plan a program to serve and involve the older adult.
2. To offer some suggestions about how to plan, organize and maintain an effective volunteer program.
3. To suggest ideas for the kinds of programs that churches can undertake to help alleviate problems faced by senior citizens.

This section has been designed to provide an overview of the major elements of program development. Detailed instructions have necessarily been omitted due to the fact that program development and implementation will vary according to the particular situation of a given church.

HOW TO PLAN YOUR PROGRAM

DEVELOP A PLANNING COMMITTEE

Organize a committee responsible for looking into program ideas and developing a plan to extend the church's ministry to/with the aging. Ideally, this committee should consist of the pastor, one or more members of the church's governing body and several members of the congregation. It is recommended that older people themselves be recruited for this committee. The responsibility of the committee will be to survey the needs and resources, define the problems, develop plans for problem resolution, work to initiate programs, review the problems in light of program impact and make appropriate program adjustments.

SURVEY THE NEEDS

Before a program can be developed, the church must have a clear idea of the unmet needs of elderly people in the church and surrounding community. It may be useful to develop a questionnaire which can be used in talking with elderly members of the church, relatives of church members and community residents. Statistics from the local municipality may be helpful. Interviews with local elected officials, staff from neighborhood health and welfare organizations and other health care delivery systems, and the area agency on aging should be able to help the planning committee discover the problem areas of elderly people in the community. Prioritize the unmet needs and service gaps.

GATHER SUGGESTIONS FOR PROGRAMS

The sky is the limit when it comes to ideas for possible programs. Plan a way to involve as many of the congregation as possible in brainstorming ideas and discussing alternative approaches to the problems that have been uncovered. From this you should also be able to determine where people's interests lie, as well as generate enthusiasm.

CHOOSE A STRATEGY

There are two basic strategies which might be used. The first is for the church to develop linkages with existing programs serving senior citizens, such as Meals on Wheels or the Retired Senior Volunteer Program. The church could recruit volunteers of all ages from within the congregation to help extend these services to additional elderly people. Older people who have unmet needs could be referred to these and other agencies for services.

The second strategy is to establish a new program, such as a Senior Club or Friendly Visiting Program, using the church as a base. This kind of approach will probably involve greater expenditures of time, personnel and resources, but might also bring greater satisfaction to all concerned. Programs can be a "one-shot" operation or an ongoing activity.

When deciding which approach to take, the planning committee will need to consider the following factors:

- What is the mission of the church? How would this program fit in?
- What are the unmet needs of the elderly in the church and surrounding community?
- What are the church's resources?
 - a. What are the facilities of the church building (kitchen, lounge, gym, library)? Would a program conflict with other activities currently taking place in the church building? Is the church accessible by public transportation?
 - b. What equipment and supplies are available (bus, mimeograph, tables, chairs, games)?
 - c. What is the financial situation of the church? How would it be possible to raise funds needed for the program?
 - d. Who belongs to the congregation? What skills and interests do they have? What groups within the church might be interested in working on a program for senior citizens? When are they available? Are there other groups that use church facilities which might want to become involved? (For example: Scout troops, community groups)

DRAW UP A PLAN

After considering these factors and deciding on an approach, the committee should draw up a plan for each specific program. The plan should include the following components:

Statement of the goal(s) of the program, and the specific objectives to be achieved during a target period. Objectives are specific ends to be reached and should be stated in a concrete way. (For example, an objective might read: To develop a volunteer shopping-assistance program to serve at least five older people each week...)

A discussion of how the program will be organized and implemented. Consider how many volunteers and/or staff members will be needed. For what tasks? Who will coordinate their efforts? How will it be done? What population will receive this service? By what means will they be recruited/invited/referred? What will the costs be, if any? What records will need to be kept, if any? To whom will the program be accountable? How will the senior citizens served be involved in the planning and decision-making processes?

A plan for evaluating the progress of the program. What will be the timetable for developing this program? How will you know if your goals and objectives have been met? Plan to review the program annually and to plan ahead for the future on a regular basis.

Plan a program to begin on a small scale but leave room for growth. Increase the size gradually as strengths and weaknesses become evident and as more people become interested. Once the plan has been written, solicit comments and suggestions from the entire congregation and modify the plan as needed to obtain majority support.

IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

In order to implement the plan, it is helpful to develop a detailed list of the steps involved and a timetable specifying when they will be accomplished. Identify members of the congregation to be responsible for such steps as purchasing supplies and equipment, developing linkages with community resources, raising funds and recruiting volunteers. Make sure that somebody is responsible for coordinating this process.

It is important at this point to set up periodic checkpoints for evaluating how the program is functioning. These periodic reviews will enable you to make modifications to the plan based on experience, to make sure that all aspects of the program are being implemented in proper sequence and to make sure that the plan is accomplishing what it has set out to do.

HOW TO GET A VOLUNTEER PROGRAM STARTED... AND KEEP IT GOING

COORDINATION AND SUPERVISION

For any program, someone must take responsibility for delegating tasks, coordinating activities, keeping records and accounts, etc. Depending on the program, these functions may be handled by a small committee or a single individual, by volunteers or paid staff. Supervision is also a crucial function in volunteer programs. Each group of six to twelve volunteers should be supervised by a person who can provide ongoing support, recognize the need for further training and help when troubles arise.

RECRUITING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers can be recruited through announcements in newsletters and newspapers, via notices on bulletin boards and through personal contacts. When a person is asked to volunteer, he or she should be told what tasks are involved, approximately how much time they will take and what benefits will be provided to the volunteer him/herself. An effort should be made to allow each volunteer some choice of activities and to tailor tasks to meet the individual's skills and interests.

Some thought should be given to the circumstances of potential volunteers. Are they mostly mothers with young children at home? Maybe more volunteers would be forthcoming if a baby sitting program were set up to care for their children while they work on the program. If the volunteers are elderly, they may need transportation to enable them to become involved. If youth groups are involved, activities will need to be scheduled in the late afternoon and early evening hours.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING

Once a volunteer pool has been established, training should be provided. Be sure to include a discussion of issues relating to aging, an orientation to the overall program being offered, information about specific tasks which volunteers will be doing and notice of problems which may arise and how to handle them. It is useful to do some role-playing so that volunteers can participate in simulated situations similar to those they may actually encounter. Each volunteer should receive a written description of what he/she is expected to do, and a contact person should be designated for future reference. A volunteer contract can be a useful tool for specifying basic standards of performance and lines of accountability.

It should be expected that a certain percentage of volunteers will drop out of the program shortly after it starts. There are many reasons for this: a change in one's personal situation which makes volunteering inconvenient, a misunderstanding of what is required, or anxiety about one's performance. Plan to follow up with all new volunteers, particularly those whose

enthusiasm seems to be lagging. Sometimes a bit of personal support is all that is needed. In other cases the volunteer may be more comfortable if he/she is assigned to a different task.

ONGOING SUPPORT FOR VOLUNTEERS

After a person has begun work as a volunteer, he or she cannot be forgotten or taken for granted. Continuing supervision and support are needed to deal with problems and questions as they arise, to help maintain the individual's enthusiasm, and to give the volunteer recognition for the valuable work he/she is doing.

Support activities might include a monthly meeting for all Friendly Visitors to share their feelings and experiences, an in-service training session for drivers to teach safe-driving tips for winter road conditions, or a friendly phone call from the supervisor to each volunteer to help keep things running smoothly and answer questions. Be sure to plan these support and in-service training sessions for times which are convenient and provide transportation, baby-sitting or other services as needed. Remember to evaluate volunteers regularly to make sure that they are living up to the standards of their contract.

New volunteers will probably need to be recruited and trained periodically. Take steps to help them become integrated with the "old" volunteers.

VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

Very few people will do something for nothing. Although most volunteers will derive a sense of personal satisfaction from their work, a volunteer recognition program is important in keeping them going. Besides personal feedback, volunteers can be recognized through newsletter and newspaper articles, bulletin board displays, special luncheons and dinners, and community or church programs. Use photographs and awards to recognize one or two individuals each month. An annual recognition event is often scheduled. Praise people for work well done, but above all be sincere.

IDEAS FOR PROGRAMS

SPOTLIGHT ON THE CHURCH ITSELF

Before a church contemplates starting new service projects to help the aging, it might be advisable to look at how well existing church programs are serving the elderly and to explore ways to increase the involvement of senior citizens in church affairs. In this section, we suggest a number of questions to help a church conduct a self-evaluation and some ideas for improvement:

Do older members of the church attend services and activities regularly? If not, why not? Do they lack transportation that could be provided by other church members?

How are older members of the church made to feel wanted? Are they encouraged to serve on church boards and committees?

Do church activities appear to be age-segregated? Is this desirable? How can you help church members of all ages interact with one another in a meaningful way?

Is the church accessible to older people, especially those with disabilities? Can the building be entered without climbing steps? Perhaps a ramp could be built. Are bathroom facilities accessible? Perhaps support bars could be installed.

Could someone with a hearing defect hear the pastor deliver the sermon? Maybe it would be helpful to install a public address system, or headphones in one or more pews. Could a person with failing eyesight read the prayer book or hymnal? If large-print editions are not available, this might become a project for the congregation.

Are topics of interest to the elderly included in church programming? Maybe the church could sponsor an educational seminar on how to write a will and invite an attorney in to assist individuals. How about a discussion series on planning for retirement? A program explaining how to make funeral arrangements might include a chance for parents and adult children to discuss these important plans with one another.

Old age is a time of losses: physical, mental, personal and social. Clergy members have traditionally been, and continue to be, an important source of counseling and support for older people. New techniques such as “life review” may help a minister to extend his counseling skills. Workshops and courses on death and dying may enable a minister to better understand the mourning process and thus provide more support to members of the congregation.

Every church has important resources to offer to older adults, but sometimes nobody knows about them. If you think this might be the case in your situation, you could increase the visibility of the church’s ministry to the aging by including a special column in the church newsletter, submitting articles to local newspapers and giving special recognition to senior citizens in church announcements.

FRIENDLY VISITING PROGRAM

A Friendly Visiting Program is a way of arranging regular visits between a volunteer and an older person, in his or her home. The objectives of the program are to relieve loneliness; to bring friendship, interests and reasonable activities to the elderly; and to assist them in utilizing

community resources. A Friendly Visitor makes a commitment to be a friend on a long-term basis, and usually visits once a week or every other week. An active senior citizen can become a Friendly Visitor for a less mobile person.

To arrange a Friendly Visiting Program, you will need: a supervisor or coordinator, a group of older people who desire to have Friendly Visitors and a group of volunteer visitors.

The supervisor is responsible for training, matching clients with Visitors, preparing the Visitor by sharing important information about the client, accompanying the Visitor on the initial visit, and providing follow-up support to the Visitor. This person will need to devote several hours or days each week. Although much of the coordination can be done by telephone, the supervisor will probably need to have personal transportation readily available. The supervisor is also responsible for arranging support activities such as a monthly meeting for all Friendly Visitors, further training and volunteer recognition.

A group of clients can be developed by the church in coordination with local social service agencies. As a result of outreach efforts, the church may learn of older people who would like to have a Friendly Visitor. Social service agencies may also locate potential clients and refer them to this program. An alternative approach is to arrange a Friendly Visiting Program between the church and a nearby nursing home or institution for the elderly.

The Friendly Visitors volunteer an hour or two each week. When visiting their friends, they may spend time talking, reading, assisting with letter writing, playing games, etc. The Friendly Visitor is also expected to report situations of stress or need to his or her supervisor so that a referral can be made to obtain needed help. Friendly Visitors will need to have transportation or to walk to their friend's home.

A Friendly Visiting Program involves only a moderate amount of time, coordination and money, yet it can bring a great deal of happiness both to older people and to volunteers. It is in harmony with the humanitarian principles of all religious groups and fits easily into most people's weekly schedules. For this reason, it is an ideal way for a church to extend its ministry to the aging.

TELEPHONE REASSURANCE PROGRAM

A Telephone Reassurance Program is also a way of linking volunteers with older adults to relieve loneliness and to develop friendships. In addition, a Telephone Reassurance Program is a way of checking on the health and safety of older adults who live alone. To arrange a Telephone Reassurance Program, you will also need a supervisor, a client group and a group of volunteer callers who will make a commitment to be a friend on a long-term basis. The roles of the supervisor and client group are similar to those described for the Friendly Visiting Program.

The caller volunteers to telephone his or her partner daily on the basis of a prearranged schedule. The daily conversation need not be long, although it is expected that as the individuals become friends, they will have more to talk about and may want to visit one another occasionally. If the older adult does not answer the telephone, however, the caller will take steps to make sure that the older adult is all right. The caller will follow a specified procedure developed by the Telephone Reassurance Program. (This might include calling the person every fifteen minutes for the next hour and—if the phone remains unanswered—calling a neighbor, the police or fire

rescue squad to investigate.) In this way, the older adult is reassured by knowing that if he or she should become hurt or ill, and unable to call for assistance, he or she will be discovered and cared for within a reasonable period of time.

Like Friendly Visiting, a Telephone Reassurance Program does not involve complicated equipment or a great amount of time, but it is a small way to bring peace of mind to older people.

PERSONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

A Personal Assistance Program for older people is simply what it says: a way of arranging for volunteers to help older people with difficult tasks, either on a regular basis or once in a while.

Some examples of assistance that might be provided are:

- Someone to help an older person with failing eyesight write checks, pay bills and go to the bank, once or twice a month.
- Someone to offer shopping assistance to an older person once a week.
- Someone to prepare meals and assist in personal hygiene for a few days if an older person becomes ill.
- Someone to assist an older person in occasional heavy cleaning, such as spring-cleaning the attic, garage or cellar.
- Someone to rake leaves in the fall.
- Someone to cut grass once a week during the spring and summer.
- Someone to fix a broken appliance and do other minor repairs.
- Someone to assist in light cleaning on a regular basis, once a week.

To arrange a Personal Assistance Program requires the following:

Detective work, to find out what needs to be done and to offer helpful assistance to older people who might be reticent about asking.

Some imagination in recruiting volunteers for each task. Maybe a Scout troop that meets in the church could do yard maintenance over the summer or a youth group could do spring-cleaning for several individuals. A retired man might be happy to provide Handy-Andy assistance to several older women. An older woman might be happy to use her cooking skills to help another in need. Think about all the people and groups affiliated with the church and attempt to involve as many as possible.

A coordinator, responsible for matching requests for assistance with volunteers willing and able to provide it.

Publicity to make the service known to all church and community members. It might be helpful to publicize a phone number in the church newsletter and local newspapers and to remind church members whenever announcements are made.

Remember to update the files of volunteers periodically, as people's skills and availability may change over a period of time.

Although a Personal Assistance Program might begin as a way of helping older people, it might end up as a Talent Exchange involving all members of the church in helping *one another*, using older persons as both clients and resource people.

ADOPT-A-GRANDPARENT

An Adopt-A-Grandparent Program is based on the idea that younger people and older people need one another, and that each role in a traditional family system (children, parents, grandparents) is important for the growth and development of other family members. In modern society, many families live in different parts of the country, too far to interact with one another on a regular basis. In other families, significant family members have died, leaving gaps in the family system. Under an Adopt-A-Grandparent Program, younger families and older adults are matched up with one another and establish a relationship similar to that between grandparents and natural families. Such a relationship might include interaction including frequent telephone contacts and visits, shared holiday and birthday celebrations, and a pattern of reciprocal services that family members perform for one another (e.g., transportation, child care, cooking, home repairs, etc.).

To set up an Adopt-A-Grandparent Program, the following steps need to be taken:

Identify older adults and younger families who wish to participate in the program.

Match them up and arrange for them to meet one another. Make sure that people are compatible and share significant interests and values. Make sure both have a chance to decide whether or not they wish to “adopt” each other.

Assist them in developing a mutually satisfying relationship. Remember that not all older adults have been parents or natural grandparents. Some churches have assisted older adults in becoming grandparents by sponsoring a series of discussions about “how to be a creative grandparent,” and offering suggestions for ways to relate to young children.

It might also be possible to institute an Adopt-A-Grandparent relationship with older people in a nursing home or extended care facility. Be sure to discuss the nature of the program with the administrator and work out details of transportation, meals, visiting, etc. Both families and potential grandparents must share common expectations for the program.

Although we have discussed Adopt-A-Grandparent as a formally established program, we must point out that this kind of “adoption” often occurs naturally when older adults and younger people come to know each other through participation in other kinds of programs, such as Friendly Visiting or through informal interaction within the framework of a common church or neighborhood.

ADOPT-A-HOME

Nursing homes, institutions for the aging, and long-term care facilities are all institutions out of the mainstream of thought and activity of the regular community. Because the residents of these facilities are unable to get out to participate in normal activities, many suffer from enforced social and cultural isolation.

Life does not have to be this way. We have the option of bringing the outside world in through cooperation between a church and an institution. This type of commitment should be a long-term commitment, not just a seasonal one, although special seasonal activities are always appropriate.

The nature, style and frequency of involvement of a church with a nursing home or extended care facility would vary according to the particular needs of the facility and the resources of the providers. Programs could vary from a monthly sing-along provided by church choir and organist, to an arts and crafts program, to a church-sponsored picnic for residents, to an ongoing Friendly Visiting Program for individual residents.

Programs should be set up well in advance with the facility administrator. Consistency of commitment is a key ingredient to program success.

GUARDIANSHIP

If an older person becomes mentally incompetent, unable to handle his or her day-to-day affairs, and seems to have no family or relatives available to make decisions for his care, he may be in need of a legally established guardian.

There are two forms of guardianship. A “Guardian of the Person” is an individual responsible for making decisions regarding the personal well-being of another: e.g., where the person will live, whether he should be institutionalized, etc. A “Guardian of the Estate” is an individual responsible for making decisions regarding the estate and financial situation of another to further that person’s well-being. Because a guardian of the estate can receive a certain percentage of the estate in return for providing management, it is often possible to arrange for a bank, lawyer or insurance firm to take on this responsibility, if there are significant assets involved. However, many older people have little more than a few pieces of furniture and their monthly social security check, and it is very difficult to find persons willing to take on responsibility for managing these assets. It is possible for one person to assume guardianship of both the person and the estate.

There is a great need for caring, responsible adults to serve as guardians for older people no longer able to make decisions for themselves. Members of your church might be competent and willing to assume this role. To be a guardian, one must accept a permanent relationship of responsibility for another; one must keep accurate records of financial and interpersonal transactions; one must be able to weigh the needs of the other when making decisions; and one must be accountable to the court. The guardian thus functions as both advocate and caretaker.

TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

A Transportation Assistance Program is another means of linking volunteers with older adults to provide a variety of transportation services, such as trips to doctors, hospitals, therapists, churches, stores, friends, etc. To establish a Transportation Assistance Program you will need a coordinator, a client group and volunteer drivers with cars.

The program can operate several ways, depending on the coordinator’s style, the needs of the client group and the number of volunteers. A system to request rides several days in advance

usually works well, with provisions for a small number of emergency trips. Coordinators can arrange trips according to days people want to go or according to geographic locations desired. Generally, volunteers drive persons closest to their homes. No-fault insurance, as required by law, covers both passengers and drivers in case of accidents.

Volunteers would register with the coordinator, specifying the day and/or days they wish to volunteer and the hours each day. Older adults needing transportation would call a predetermined number to make reservations in advance. The coordinator would then match a volunteer with a client and confirm reservations with both parties.

Churches that wish to provide transportation specifically for Sunday services can develop a program similar to car pooling. You would need someone to coordinate this activity. Persons attending services regularly who have additional space in their cars would be potential volunteers. Volunteers would register with the coordinator along with older persons desiring transportation to church. The coordinator would then match volunteers with riders according to geographic locations. Of course, the coordinator would have to set up procedures to follow when one of the two parties cannot make it.

A Transportation Assistance Program can be a tremendous asset to your community; it can provide a means to keep people happy and productive during their later years.

SENIOR CITIZEN CLUBS

A Senior Citizen Club is a group of people who get together to perform some tasks and/or for social-emotional reasons. In most cases, these clubs' first function is to provide a setting for interaction, social supports and just plain fun. It is important to note that both locally and nationally it has been found that Senior Groups can be an effective means of preventing and resolving isolation and its attendant problems. In addition to providing a place for social contacts and friendships, it functions in a variety of other ways. These clubs also provide a way for re-involving the elderly in society, demonstrating and developing skills and talents of older people, providing a locus for advocacy and linking older people in need with services.

A church that is concerned about the associational needs of its senior citizens should examine these clubs to determine whether the church could support or revitalize an existing club or whether it would be appropriate to establish a church-sponsored group. It is likely that some people would be inclined to join a club simply because it is church-related. On the other hand, of course, if a club is too closely associated with its church sponsor, it might hamper an open membership policy.

The following steps are appropriate in order to establish a Senior Club:

Determine the number of older adults in your congregation and community and examine their needs. Is there a need for a Senior Citizen Club?

Form a steering committee of senior citizens:

- a. to provide the initial leadership to educate the group,
- b. to recruit members,
- c. to set up the initial meeting.

Set up an initial club meeting:

- a. Choose an appropriate and convenient setting.
 - b. Set up the agenda to include a speaker or film or other event of general interest.
 - c. Plan for the election of officers (at least temporary ones).
 - d. Allow for a general discussion on the direction of the club for the future.
 - e. Include a time for socialization. Refreshments and name-tags help people feel comfortable with a new group of people.
 - f. When setting up an initial meeting one should remember that a luncheon is an extremely good way of getting people to turn out.
 - g. People are generally willing to pay for this. However, a luncheon meeting will take more planning, even if it is catered. To get an accurate meal count, reservations need to be taken in advance.
1. Recruit participants.
 - a. A public relations officer could be appointed from the steering committee to see that local papers carry advance notice of the meeting. Invitations will need to be sent out. Personal contacts and phone contacts are the most effective way to get people to commit themselves. It may take several meetings before a core group of interested persons is developed to form the nucleus of a club.
 2. Provide transportation or make arrangements for car-pooling. Attention should be given to transportation and escort services. Some people do not like to arrive alone. Others may be unable to participate unless they have transportation provided.
 3. Assist in club and program development. After the club is established it may be necessary to provide continued support to assist in the institution of a permanent structure, developing volunteer or staff skills and the establishing of a sound financial base.

ROTATING FUND

It is inevitable, given our busy pace of life, that not all members of a church will be willing or able to volunteer time to extend the church's ministry to the aging. However, there may be some individuals who are willing to contribute funds, and others who will work on fund raising projects. These funds may be used to support programs described above by paying for salaries, rent, equipment or volunteer expenses; or they may be combined to form a *Rotating Fund* to meet special needs of elderly citizens. Here are some ideas for how the money could be used:

- To install a telephone and pay the monthly bills for a senior citizen to allow him or her to participate in the Telephone Reassurance Program.
- To extend low-interest loans to older people for home repairs.
- To assist older people in paying fuel bills incurred during extremely cold winters.

- To assist an older person in paying for dialysis needed on a regular basis.
- To build a ramp or install a chair-lift for a person who becomes disabled (to allow him or her to continue living at home).
- To provide glasses, a hearing aid or dentures for a needy person.
- To stock an emergency food closet.

