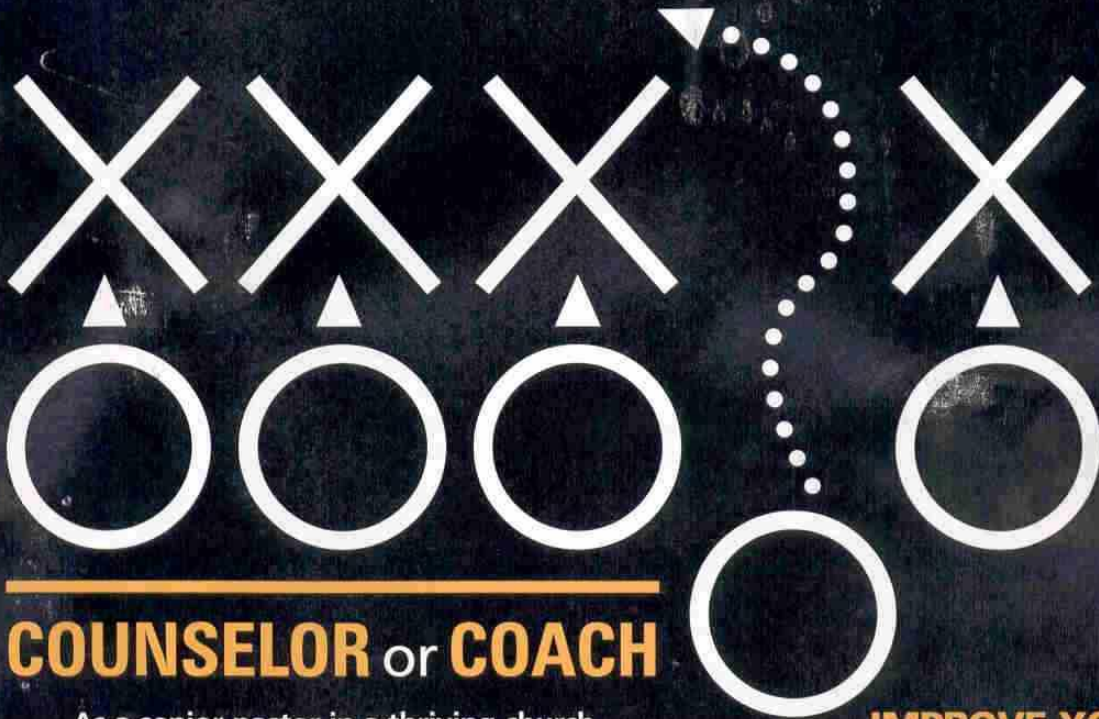


SHED SOME LIGHT ON YOUR DARK SIDE • GEN X TURNS 40 • DON'T WORRY, LIVE HAPPY

SEPTEMBER / OCTOBER 2003

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COUNSELOR or COACH

As a senior pastor in a thriving church for more than 10 years, there were many aspects of ministry that Todd enjoyed.

And there were several that he didn't enjoy. One that fit squarely into the "not" category was being asked...

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IMPROVE YOUR PEOPLE SKILLS

by James T. Draper Jr. [78]

CONNECT REALITY AND TECHNOLOGY IN WORSHIP

by Joseph Castleberry [62]

REACH OUR AGING CULTURE

by David Gallagher [88]

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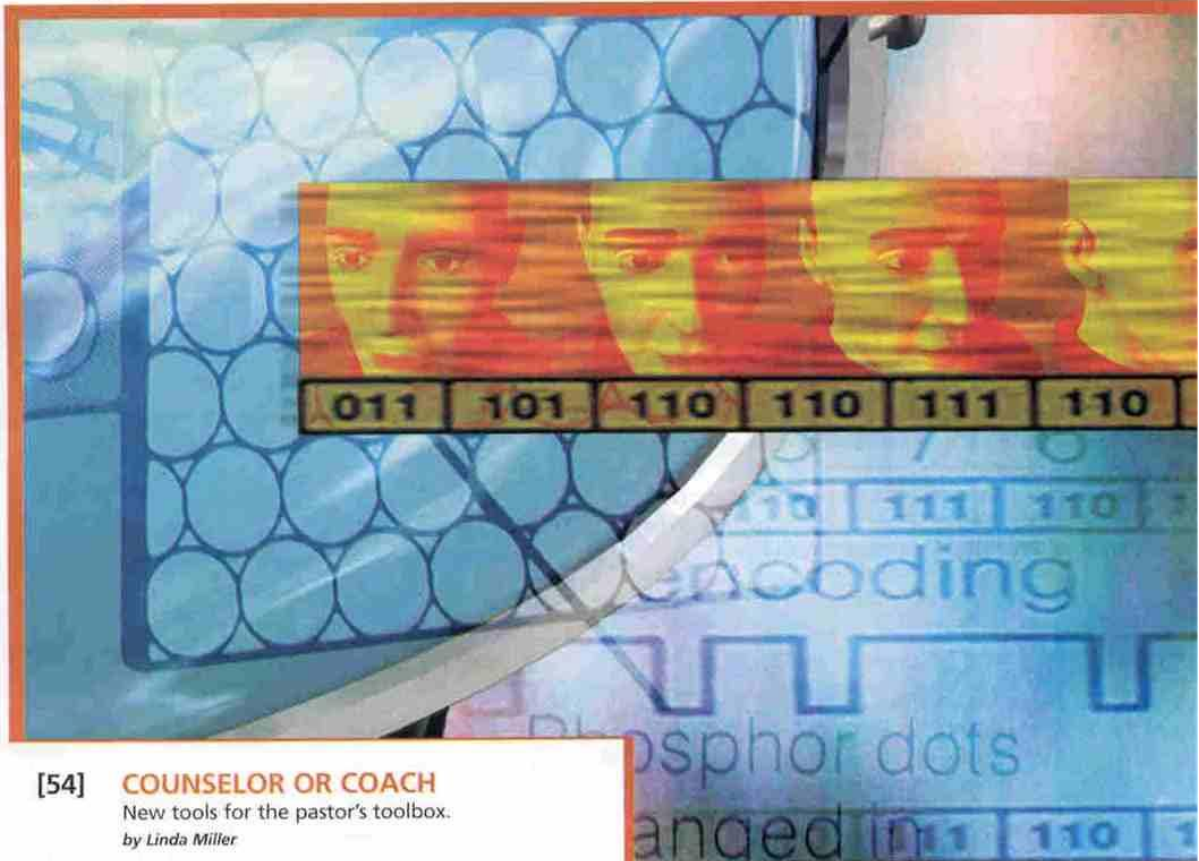
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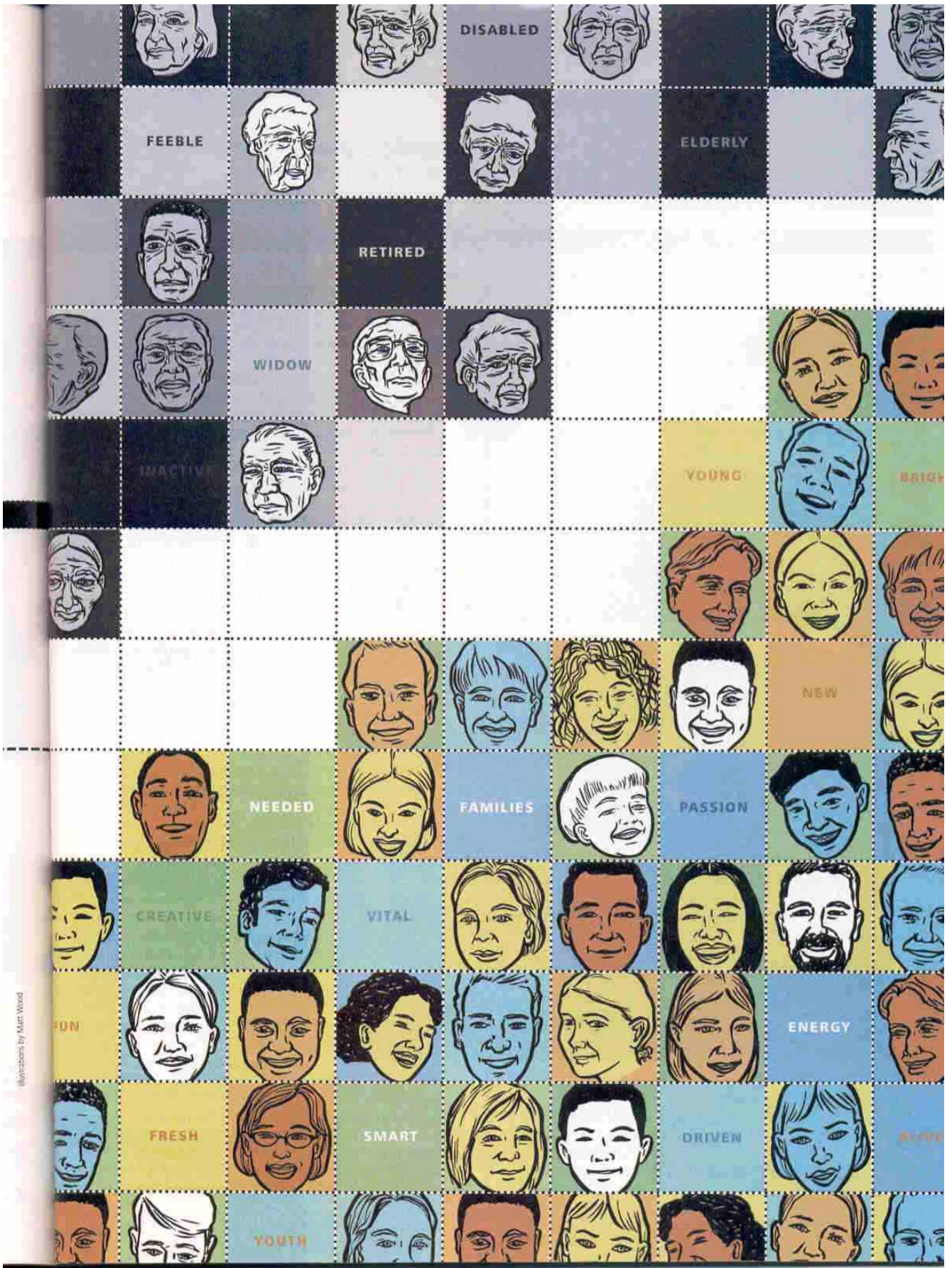
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OUR AGING CULTURE

Aren't we still called to reach every generation?

by David Gallagher

The question of aging is an important one for pastors to consider. In the next eight years, the first Baby Boomers in our churches will turn 65. Many denominations have small churches filled with older people, and many other churches have changed their focus to reach today's younger culture. ▼



Illustrations by Matt Wood

DISABLED

FEEBLE

ELDERLY

RETIRED

WIDOW

INACTIVE

YOUNG

BRIGHT

NEW

NEEDED

FAMILIES

PASSION

CREATIVE

VITAL

FUN

ENERGY

FRESH

SMART

DRIVEN

YOUTH

ALIVE



* Their church has become a foreign place where once they felt at home. Now they feel unwanted, unneeded, and perhaps even unwelcome.

Some pastors are confused and frustrated by this change, and many longtime church members find the shift frustrating. Older pastors find it difficult to understand contemporary styles of worship, and younger pastors sometimes move very quickly in creating what they understand to be necessary changes within the congregation. The results can often cause frustration and even hurt for many.

Dealing with change—in particular the aging process—has become a major concern to families, to economic structures, to communities, to health care professionals, to welfare agencies, to the scientific community, and to the entire nation. So why not to the religious

neglected to explore the question of aging. It's an important question for the church because of the shift in the composition of populations taking place today. While the general populations are growing relatively slowly, the aged populations are growing rapidly—in number and in percentage.

Along with their growth in number, today's senior adults are a much more definable and unique group with very specialized needs. They're living much longer than in years past. With improved health care and health maintenance, our seniors will continue to live much longer and have a much healthier lifestyle.

Today's senior adults are also quite different from those of the past because they see themselves as a unique group with great potential. Today's seniors know who they are and desire to contribute to the local church

through their time, energy, talent, and financial resources.

The church has some serious catch-up work to do in the area of meeting the needs of senior adults in today's changing culture. In many ways the church has fallen down on the job because of their sense of urgency to reach children, youth, young adults—all members of the emerging generation. But in the process of ministering to everyone, let's not forget that "everyone" includes those who are aging.

ministry challenges

In the past the aged were an integral part of family and community life. A substantial pattern of social disengagement and isolation emerged during the middle part of the 20th century. The farm and agricultural culture were replaced with urban renewal, and the family unit was changed. Grandma and grandpa no longer had children close by to help during times of need. Social workers began to

take the place of children, and family and care centers replaced home.

Because of these factors, isolation has become a major issue for elderly people. With family gone, the church becomes even more important in providing loving and caring support. Imagine how a senior would feel if he or she began to see their church changing dramatically and found



community and, in particular, the local pastor and the local church?

I can't help but wonder why so much of the attention of such a broad spectrum of the world has been drawn to the subject of aging in such a relatively short period of time and, perhaps even more interesting, why the overall church has

they're being passed by or excluded. The issue of isolation becomes even more intensified.

Some seniors are going through major losses in physical and mental functioning as well. Many have lost their spouses, many have seen their children move away, and many have felt that their church has become very different. Their church has become a foreign place where once they felt at home. Now they feel unwanted, unneeded, and perhaps even unwelcome.

It's important to have empathy for and with seniors who are also facing the reality that they're experiencing economic losses. They may have worked all their lives and saved for their retirement days only to experience economic disaster.

We live in a society that's quick to label people and groups. As attention has been drawn to aging, the idea has developed to label seniors as "old" and sometimes even to label them as "unneeded" or "in the way."

There are traditionally two opposite thoughts of old age in cultures around the world—a sort of continuum. At one end of the continuum, cultures place a positive regard on aging. To be old is to be wise, to have high social influence, and to be deeply respected. At the other end of the cultural continuum is a negative view of aging. Old age is inherently filled with irreversible losses. To be old is to be physically incapacitated, to suffer the loss of mental capabilities, to become economically dependent, to experience social isolation, and to lose social status. Unfortunately, not only has much of America fallen into that pattern of thinking, but sadly, the church has often joined with this train of thought as well.

For a pastor or congregation to buy into this pattern of thinking is foolish at best, and unbiblical at worse. My concern as a pastor is that we as shepherds of the flock have the responsibility to minister to everyone.

reversing the thought process

Six years ago I was asked to help plant a new congregation designed specifically to reach senior adults (www.palmwestchurch.org). The congregation was made up totally of those over the age of 50—by design! I was asked to be their first full-time senior pastor, and it didn't take me very long to learn that my stereotype of older adults was totally wrong.

Now in my sixth year of ministry with seniors, I understand the tremendous importance of seniors ministry.

the aging of our culture

We're truly seeing the aging of a nation. As a result, churches of all sizes are facing the needs of maturing



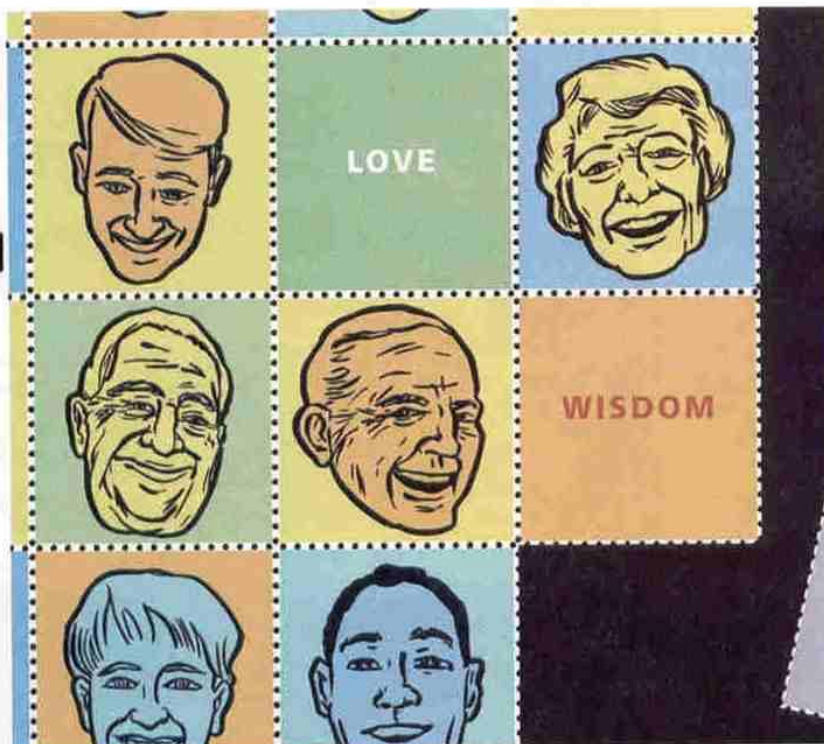
adults. The challenge has reached both rural and inner city congregations among all ethnic groups. It impacts all denominations, all professions, and all states.

Today's society shatters Webster's traditional definition of retirement as a time of withdrawal or retreat. Myths and stereotypes associated with our maturing population are being exposed as false and misleading. More and more active adults, 55 and older, are embracing the trend toward a more healthy and active lifestyle, which extends beyond mere physical well-being.

It's time for pastors across America to explore the feelings and emotions of mature adults and demonstrate to seniors in our congregations that we really do care. Senior adults are more than simply another group whose needs must be met. Many of these new senior adults, with their experiences and expertise, offer congregations incredible resources. We must encourage them to be vitally involved in ministry. Local church ministry needs the experience and wisdom of mature adults.

Perspective is an important word. To a 10-year-old, someone 16 is "old." To a 60-year-old person, someone 50 is "young." Age is really not a numerical value but a mind-set, an attitude, a lifestyle, and an outlook.

Today's seniors are dramatically different from those of years past. Senior adults today aren't so much a numerical age or category. A 21st-century



are "care givers." Step back, take a new look, and re-evaluate how you're ministering to people. Are you including seniors in your ministry? Do they feel at home and welcome in their church family?

the benefits of senior adult ministry

There are so many benefits to ministering to seniors. A church that ministers to senior adults expands its ministry to their entire family. Seniors have children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, and our communities are filled with seniors looking for a caring church family.

Ministering to senior adults builds up Sunday school, small groups, worship, and Bible study groups. Ministering to senior adults provides mature adults an opportunity to serve, and it gives an opportunity for younger people to help those who may have some special needs. Of course, there's nothing like intergenerational fellowship, which is really what the local church is all about.

beginning a senior adult ministry

When you realize that a senior adult ministry is something that your church needs to begin or strengthen, start

▶ senior adult has more to do with attitude and lifestyle. Senior adults don't think of themselves as old, older, or declining. They view themselves as alive, vibrant, active, and moving forward to accomplish things they've always wanted but never had the time to do. They love creative teaching. We have a worship team, sing worship and praise songs, and I use PowerPoint presentations in my preaching and teaching. They have loyalty and faithfulness that's an example to every age group. In the past they were thought of as "care receivers" but today's active seniors

knowing your seniors QUIZ

Try taking a little quiz to see what you know about seniors in today's culture

- | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| 1. The number of adults over age 50 in the United States today is:
a) 15 million
b) 77 million
c) 40 million
d) No way to know because they won't give you their age. | 2. The number of adults in the United States represents what percent of the total population?
a) 5%
b) 14%
c) 20%
d) 27% | 3. By 2040, when the last Baby Boomers reach retirement age, what percent of the American population will be over 65 years of age?
a) 100%
b) 50%
c) 25%
d) 15%
e) No one knows because the IRS keeps that a big secret. | 4. Fifteen years ago the #1 selling magazine in the United States became:
a) Time magazine
b) Reader's Digest
c) AARP Modern Maturity
d) TV Guide
e) Rolling Stone magazine | 5. More than half of the disposable income in the United States is in the hands of those:
a) Between the ages of 13-19
b) Between the ages of 20-35
c) Between ages 35-50
d) Ages 55 and older |
|---|--|---|--|--|

Answers to questions in quiz: 1) b; 2) d; 3) c; 4) c; 5) d

* **Senior adults don't think of themselves as old, older, or declining.** They view themselves as alive, vibrant, active, and moving forward to accomplish things they've always wanted but never had the time to do.

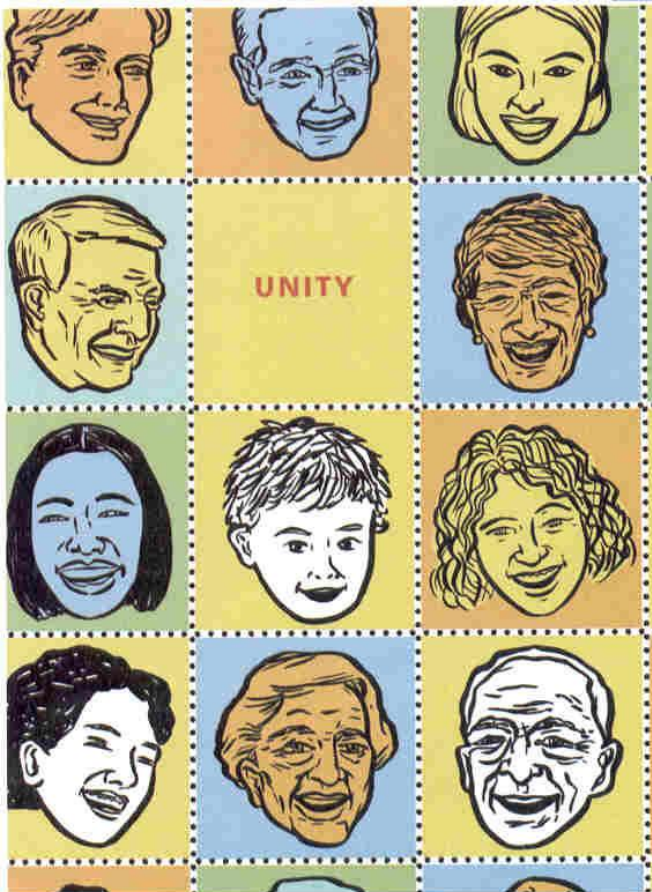


with a few people, share your vision, and begin praying. Set a timeline and begin recruiting others to help in the ministry. Publicize well and keep evaluating constantly. Be sure every part of the planning is bathed in prayer. Choose biblical curriculum and stay focused.

My plea is that you not forget the senior adults in your congregation as you minister in this postmodern age. Allow your ministry to reach across all age groups. For anyone wanting to reach out to seniors, my suggestion is found in three key words—love, listen, and learn. Don't underestimate seniors—love them, listen to them, and learn from them.

Questions to think about

- What does it mean to grow older, especially within the local church?
- What happens to us physically as we age, and how



5 helpful keys for starting a senior adult ministry:

1. Pray
2. Count the cost
3. Develop a mission statement
4. Set goals that are practical, achievable, and measurable
5. Dream big but live in reality

does the church respond to those changes?

- How does aging change our relationships with others in the church?
- How does aging affect how we feel about ourselves, about our friends, about our church, and about our pastor?
- What happens to us financially as a result of getting older, and how does that affect our church relationships?
- How are families and other social institutions affected by the aging process?
- What happens to the political and economic priorities of nations as their populations become older?
- What happens to the church as our members grow older? **R**

David Gallagher is the pastor of Palm West Community Church in Sun City West, Arizona, a congregation designed specifically to reach senior adults, and the author of *Senior Adult Ministry in the 21st Century: Step-by-Step Strategies for Reaching People Over 50* (Group Publishing, Inc.). (drdavog@cox.net)