

Ready for Tomorrow's Seniors?

How can the Church prepare now to be ready for the growing senior population in America?

If you've kept up with recent census statistics, you know that in the next 20 to 25 years as the last Baby Boomers reach retirement age, 25% of the American population will be over the age of 65. We truly are seeing the aging of a nation.

As a result, your congregation is likely to include more senior adults than ever before. And more seniors will make up the unchurched population. How can the Church prepare for this upcoming change?

I believe the first step is building a strong seniors ministry now that will be ready to respond in the future. That starts with putting aside our stereotypes of senior adults as sedentary people who play bridge and sit home alone. In the past, seniors were thought of as "care receivers," but I've seen how people over 65 can actually be "care givers." A recent survey reports that 71% of seniors today believe the key to being retired is "keeping busy."

The key word is *active*. Consider some of the initiatives our church has tackled with the goal of becoming a church where seniors—Christians and non-Christians—feel welcome and are valued:

- Make senior outreach a top priority for your whole congregation. Examine your area's demographics and encourage your various ministries to engage seniors in the community.
- Provide meaningful outreach training using a variety of new and different ways for "seniors to reach other seniors." Our

church has a "telecare" ministry that uses senior volunteers to call and welcome other seniors new to the community or the church.

- Offer short-term missions projects locally and abroad. Select a major community project that can be accomplished in four workdays. Or take a group to

Mexico to build a house. Like most of us, senior adults want to make a difference.

I can think of no greater age group for outreach and ministry opportunity than senior adults—both currently and in the future. Start today to build a church that can respond to the seniors of tomorrow.



David Gallagher is the senior pastor of Palm West Community Church in Sun City West, Ariz. (palmwestchurch.org), a church designed specifically to reach senior adults. Gallagher is the author of *Senior Adult Ministry in the 21st Century (Group)*. He is a popular speaker and writer of children's youth and adult curriculum.

YOUR TURN

OUTREACH readers share: U.S. Census reports indicate that the number of senior adults in America will soon be at an all-time high. How effective is your church's current ministry and outreach to seniors? (*Readers chose all that applied.*)

Survey Results:

45% Our senior ministry is either non-existent, or so small as to be ineffective in outreach.

10% Our senior ministry is small but effective in outreach.

14% Our senior ministry is healthy and growing.

38% Our senior adult ministry is vital, but somewhat ingrown. It doesn't really attract those outside our church.

4% Our church attracts senior, unchurched adults because of the strength of our senior ministry.

Reader comments:

"We've recently realized we've been letting down our seniors and those we could be attracting. Our outreach committee is now talking about helping our seniors groups revitalize."

"This is a totally neglected population at our church."

"Our senior ministry started with a senior lunch Monday through Friday. Now we offer three bible studies, a monthly seminar and take a busload of seniors on occasional trips to special events."

"Seniors' is a fluid term. Those aged 55 to 65 are still too busy and difficult to engage. They don't see themselves as 'seniors.' Those 65 and older are unable to carry the group's leadership and seem to be looking to the younger seniors for help."

"Our senior adult ministry is very active with a choir that performs in the community, a monthly dinner that serves as an opportunity to invite guests and a missions group that has purchased goats to help villages overseas. We even have a VBS for senior adults."

"At least one roadblock to an effective senior ministry is the lack of energetic and committed leadership. We certainly have enough seniors for an active ministry but need the leadership."

"We are a young church plant and seniors have been the most difficult group to attract and retain."

Next Issue: When and how should you add new worship services?