

Beginning an Older Adult Ministry? Here are some quick, easy, and inexpensive winners
By Donald Koepke, CSA Director

Here are a number of low-cost, easy things to do to develop or enhance an older adult ministry:

No-Cost Care Manager for your staff. There is an increasing need/desire for older adults to be able to remain within their own home. Identifying needs and resources to fill those needs is a task of a care manager, a person skilled in needs assessment and knowledgeable about community resources. Contact a local care manager (see www.caremanager.org) and ask if they would be willing to be placed on the masthead of your Sunday bulletin as a staff member of your congregation. The care manager received free advertising and referral and the congregation received a qualified staff person to meet congregational needs.

Pull Bars in Restrooms. A simple thing like having pull bars in the restroom stalls can signal and open-ness to older adults even if they never have the need to use them!

Use 14 Point Font for Bulletins. People won't tell you directly, but many have difficulty reading bulletins because they are either too cluttered or use type face that is too small. The time used to 'reformat' Sunday bulletins would be well spent. It is another sign of welcome. If the congregation doesn't want to change their bulletin, what about printing a second issue of 8 1/2 X 11 paper using a 14 point font? Just the availability of a resource speaks volumes.

Order Devotional Material in Large Print Format. Devotional booklets are conveniently small and concise. But they are also hard to read as one gets older. Just about every devotional booklet service has large print alternatives. What about making those available as well.

Use "Autumn Wisdom" for Small Group Devotions. *Autumn Wisdom* (see book review below) is a resource of profound spiritual perspectives on later life. These very short 'chapters' can be used as devotions for any group within your congregation: church council, vestry, board of directors, scripture study groups, support groups, choirs.

Remove Some Pews. Many congregations have more seating in their worship centers than they have worshippers. Yet the seating, often pews bolted to the floor, are spaced in such a way that persons particularly in walkers or with canes, have a difficult time sitting down. At the same time, in many congregations, if a person sits at the end of a pew, no one else can enter that pew without the person seated having to stand and move out of the way. What about removing a number of pews and providing more space between them. Worshippers would experience greater comfort. And if, in large congregations with large worship space, if only those pews in the front half of the worship center were spaced more generously perhaps worshippers would self-select sitting in front rather than the rear.

Adjust Equalizer on Speaker System. It is a fact that for many people increased years causes a loss of the high pitched ranges of hearing. In long-term care, I have found it to be an advantage to sing bass rather than tenor. I would guess that most speaker systems are

equalized for persons without any hearing impairment. What about gathering the older adults in a congregation, people who may have hearing aids, etc., to sit in the worship center while the speakers are adjusted? A simple variation of either bass or treble can make a vast difference in the ability of a person to understand what is being said. Most hearing problems have nothing to do with volume but rather clarity.

Remove pews to allow for wheelchairs. What about removing a couple of pews from the *middle* of the worship space to allow for persons with wheel chairs? Folding chairs can be made available so family members and friends could sit along side of a person in a wheelchair. Removing pews from the middle of the worship space also says that persons with disabilities are not relegated to the back pew alone. Having the same space in the back of the worship center can provide persons in wheelchairs the option of sitting in back (where they might be more comfortable) or sitting in the middle, among the other worshippers.

Have Advent/Lenten Worship in the Morning and not just at night. Many older persons do not like to be out at night. Many congregations have found success in providing a time for worship in the daytime to accompany any service that might be held at night. Wouldn't it be wonderful if more people attended worship?