

## STEPPING STONES



# WALKING alongside

strengthening congregational community ministries

## » Step by Step: Older Adult Ministry «

### » GETTING STARTED

#### What is Older Adult Ministry?

Senior adults are an important part of our society, and they have unique physical and spiritual needs. After discovering the needs, concerns, gifts, and interests of older adults, congregations can tailor their ministry to serve older adults inside and outside of the church. These ministries should help meet the needs of senior adults by serving them but also be helping them to find a meaningful place of service in the church and in the community. Ministry to and with older adults may include serving meals, providing social activities, support groups, home visits, intergenerational mentoring, spiritual development, retirement services, and educational classes on resources for older adults in the community. Older adult ministry should provide senior adults with support during the aging process while recognizing the wonderful gifts and experience they have to offer.

#### Why is there a need?

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are:

- Over 36 million people over the age of 64,
- About 5 million people over the age of 84 and
- The number of people over the age of 64 is projected to increase by 147% by the year 2050.

This projected population increase can be attributed to the first baby boomer generation that will turn 65 in 2011. Another aspect that contributes to this dramatic increase involves the improvement of healthcare and the consequent prolonging of the American life span. Death rates for heart disease have declined, although it is still the leading cause of death followed by cancer and stroke.

Since older adults are living longer and healthier, they are in need of more assistance in their everyday chores and activities of daily living. Many are in need of visitation and companionship, whether they live independently or in a communal setting. As adults are aging, many look to the church to provide pastoral care that is appropriate to their situation. Congregations can offer substantial support to older adults as well as advocate for improved community services.

#### Stepping out in faith

Here are some "first steps" to consider before your congregation engages in an older adult ministry:

- Participate in an assessment to discover the number, needs, gifts, and interests of the older adults in your congregation and community. Find out what organizations in your community are already doing to serve older adults.
- Find out what gaps exist in service for senior adults.
- Determine how your congregation can be involved in addressing the needs you find.
- Recruit individuals from the church who are interested in serving older adults and identify those who might be interested in participating in your ministry.



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#### **What this ministry might look like in your church**

There are a number of ways your congregation can serve the older adult population, but here are a few suggestions:

- Form an intergenerational program with the children, youth and older adults.
- Provide workshops on different community resources that already exist for older adults.
- Create opportunities to have discussions on topics such as retirement, home health care, assisted living facilities, dealing with loss, medical power of attorney, etc.
- Create a support group for those who are dealing with personal loss or loss of friends, spouses, or other family members.
- Form a group of friendly visitors to create community with older adults wherever they may reside.
- Create care teams to help with needs that may include household chores, maintenance, errands, meals, transportation, respite care, etc.

#### **Backpacks**

*The Walking Alongside Web site provides a Backpack of additional resources and examples for this specific ministry. Included are published articles, Web sites, selected books, testimonials and existing ministries with contact information.*

#### **Pathways**

*Learn from the first-hand accounts of those already engaged in this specific ministry. Plus, develop networking contacts as go-to sources to explore solutions to challenges or celebrations of successes.*

#### **Food for the Journey**

*A short devotional based on scripture that can be used in church bulletins, as a Moment for Mission during worship or as an introduction to a Bible study.*

#### **Reference**

United States Census Bureau. (2006). *Appendix: Selected Highlights from 65+ in the United States: 2005*. (2006). <http://www.census.gov/Pres-Release/www/2006/65appendix>.