

Older Adult Ministry Staff Position Recommendations

Faith formation is a life-long process in which people claim their identity as beloved children of God and their call to participate in God's purposes for the world. This process involves **information** (what we know), **formation** (who we are and who we are becoming), and **transformation** (how the world is changed because of who we are and how we live). A life of faith, then, includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. The effectiveness of this process has an impact on how well a local church fulfills its mission "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world" (§120, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*).

Older-adult ministry is never simply ministry *to* or *for* older adults; rather, it is ministry *with* older adults. Older-adult staff persons work within existing ministry structures, programs, and opportunities to minister to the unique gifts and needs of older adults. They also work to expand older-adult ministry opportunities and are advocates for older adult themselves in disciple making, intergenerational ministry, caregiving support, and legacy ministry of the church. Older-adult staff concentrate upon individual older adults as they grow older in life, not just on older-adult programs.

Titles for staff in older-adult ministry may vary: Director or Coordinator of/for Older Adults, Plus 50 Ministry, Faith Formation Pastor or Minister of Christian Education, and so on.

Minimum Older-Adult Staff Person Qualifications

1. Passion for older adults and older-adult ministry.
2. Some knowledge of aging (psychological, spiritual, social, and physical).
3. Experience with group formation and group dynamics theory.
4. Training in older-adult faith sharing and spiritual formation.
5. Able to demonstrate strong communication skills, especially speaking, writing, and listening,
6. Completion of older-adult safe sanctuary training or other training in elder abuse prevention.

Additional Qualifications

1. Appreciation of The United Methodist Church, history, doctrine, and theology.
2. Knowledge of generational theory and intergenerational ministry.
3. Experience working with those with Alzheimer's, dementia, and other disorders.
4. Understanding of baby boomers, cultural change, and the changing face of aging.

Some churches seek job candidates for this position who are older adults themselves, including retired clergy. While this does draw on a wealth of experience and sometimes provides older adults someone with whom they can easily relate, this is not always the best scenario. Some younger staff personnel may relate well to older adults and provide an unmatched quality of service.

Some potential staff will already possess many of these skills. Other skills will be developed as a person works in a particular position. Since each congregation is different, the staffing needs will also vary. However, there are a number of factors that will have an impact on the successful employment of a staff person. Factors to be considered include realistic job expectations, adequate salary and benefits, continuing education and development, healthy staff relationships, and regular feedback.

The Staff-Parish Relations Committee will find a description of its responsibilities related to staff in ¶258.2g of *The Book of Discipline*. These responsibilities apply to both ordained and lay employees. This document provides additional help for congregations in the process of hiring a staff person in older-adult ministry and/or discipleship or in evaluating their current staff configuration.

Recommendations for Hiring Staff in Older Adult Ministry

Screening Process

Each church needs a screening process for potential staff. This process should include a reference check, a criminal background check, a psychological assessment, and a review of the candidate's social media.

Job Description

The staff-parish relations committee should provide a written job description. The job description should be used in annual performance reviews. It should also be updated whenever a person's responsibilities are altered.

Job Responsibilities

- Get to know the current older-adult members in the church. Listen to their ideas, suggestions, hopes, and dreams.
- Use spiritual gift assessments, interests talent surveys, and best practices catalogs to develop learning and service opportunities for older adults. Whenever possible, meet with other staff or volunteers to coordinate these options and to make them intergenerational.
- Form an older-adult ministry council of older-adult leaders even if it is a council of only a few people. Train older-adult ministry council members. Develop an ad hoc event committee.

- Know how older-adult ministry fits within congregational life and the mission of the church. Advocate and represent older-adult ministry with the leadership of the church.
- Work with older adults to develop faith recording and sharing groups. Empower this group to share their faith with others within and outside the church.
- Build networks with community organizations and people to connect your congregation with the community for a strong program. Look for needs that are not currently met for new ministry opportunities.
- Work with older adults to develop a strong sense of community through study, fellowship, worship, and service. Help determine what curriculum and learning sources are to be chosen for lifelong learning opportunities.
- Review current programs for older-adult content. Determine what programs directly or indirectly minister to, for, and with older adults. Analyze past older-adult programs to determine which ones should be revived, continued, or discarded.
- Propose, schedule, and celebrate an Older-Adult Recognition Day Worship Service.
- Seek feedback from older adults and others after each ministry opportunity. Take time to review successes and failures, new opportunities, and what you are learning together with your older-adult council or committee. Work through problems, challenges, and difficulties.
- Pray regularly as part of a partnership with God. Pray for success and guidance.
- Learn by spending time in reading, webinars, and training in older-adult ministry.
- Meet in person or via technology with other older-adult ministry volunteers, staff, and professionals for objective suggestions and support.

Compensation

Churches should pay equitably, demonstrating the importance of older=adult ministry and considering the local economy and the resources of the congregation.

Additional factors to consider include:

- Educational background
- Previous experience
- Full-time vs. part-time
- Scope of responsibility
- Local cost of living

Benefits

Benefits should include health insurance, continuing education, retirement benefits, and reimbursement of work-related expenses, such as mileage.

Clergy

When an ordained clergy person is chosen for this position, the congregation needs to follow the appointment process as described in the appropriate sections of *The Book of Discipline*.

Supervision and Retention

Supervision

The staff person in older-adult ministry serves as a member of a team. The person's supervisor should be clearly identified, and the two should meet on a regular basis for prayer, planning, and conversation about older-adult ministry. Supervisors should be trustworthy, respectful, and collegial.

At a minimum, the staff-parish relations committee should conduct an annual evaluation of the older-adult ministry staff person. The evaluation should be based on the staff person's written job description and include documentation of effectiveness and any need for improvement. It can be helpful to schedule quarterly or midyear evaluations for new staff persons.

Communication

Consistent communication between the older-adult ministry staff person and supervisor should be the norm. In addition, the staff person will need to communicate regularly with members of the older-adult ministry team, other staff, and members of the congregation.

Additionally, older-adult ministry staff should be added to mailing lists for district and conference news (print and electronic). They should be encouraged to join appropriate social media groups.

Spiritual, Physical, and Emotional Health

Part of supervision is working to ensure that staff take care of their spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being. Effective staff nurture their relationship with God. They schedule days off, vacation, and time with friends and family.

When special events (e.g., retreats, professional development opportunities, or Holy Week services) require additional work time significantly beyond the staff person's prescribed hours of work per week, the staff person should take additional time off.

Professional Development

Older-adult ministry staff should continue to build knowledge and skills for ministry. Participation in workshops, conferences, online courses, and professional networks are a part of staff work. Congregations should provide time and financial assistance for staff participation in ongoing development.

Churches can check with their district or annual conference offices to receive information about district- or conference-sponsored learning opportunities. Other professional development organizations include Christians Engaged in Faith Formation (www.cefumc.org), seminaries, and Discipleship Ministries (<http://www.umcdiscipleship.org>).

Termination of Professional Relationship

Termination of employment should occur only after adequate measures have been taken to improve performance, resolve conflict, or address other issues. When termination becomes necessary, all involved should demonstrate grace in the process.