



Resources for Celebrating Older Adult Recognition Day May 2020

Compiled by
Rev. Dr. Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., Director
ENCORE Ministry of the TN Conference - UMC

The material in this resource will provide you with information on how your local congregation can celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day.

Resources for Celebrating Older Adult Recognition Day, May 2020 Copyright ©2020 Discipleship Ministries. Local churches have permission to use this material provided that they include this copyright notice.

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible (NRSV) copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Verses marked NIV are from [New International Version](#) (NIV) Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by [Biblica, Inc.®](#) Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Verses marked GNT are from the [Good News Translation](#) (GNT) Copyright © 1992 by [American Bible Society](#).

An Open Letter to Church Leaders in Older-Adult Ministry,

You don't need me to tell you that our churches, communities, nation, and world have been affected by the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This news is constantly in front of us. So, the question becomes, "*How do we celebrate Older Adult Recognition in May this year?*"

It may be helpful for us to think long-term in celebrating Older Adult Recognition Day beyond the month of May. The COVID-19 crisis has tested the resilience of church leaders and older adults in all parts of our country. The challenges and changes that have come about as a result of the coronavirus pandemic have made church leaders aware that they must rethink their ministry. Church leaders cannot keep doing what they did before the pandemic. In other words, the underlying assumptions that sustained ministry with older adults may no longer be true. Church leaders must set aside confidence in former plans for older-adult ministry and begin to develop new plans that honor intentional ministry by, with, and for older adults in new ways.

Today, it is more critical than ever that we continue our advocacy work as church leaders in older-adult ministry while ensuring that vital needs of older adults are being met in financial assistance, food and meal security, transportation, and spiritual well-being. We must help to make sure diverse and uniquely vulnerable older adults get the support they need. his list includes, but is not exclusive to:

- Older adults of color
- Older adults with disabilities
- Older adults who are caregivers
- Older adults who are immigrants and refugees
- Older adults experiencing loneliness and isolation
- Older adults living in rural and urban communities
- Older adults who identify themselves as LGBTQ.

The COVID-19 outbreak has shown that we are dependent on one another now more than ever. No matter where we come from, or what we look like, we know it's time to pull together to help one another navigate through the layers of uncertainty. It is important to recognize that the leaders who are best prepared to respond to a crisis are those who already know what resources and services are available in their community. The priority of church leaders must be to reimagine ministry with older adults with the knowledge learned and the wisdom gained. Let's use this situation, this crisis, this time, to make a real difference.

Churches wanting to be creative in ministry by, with, and for older adults can and should focus on:

- Prayer
- Over-communicating with church members, and especially with older adults who are homebound and caregivers
- Conducting worship services, study groups, online meetings, or telephone meetings with older adults who are unable to be online participants
- Having a visitation and care team available
- Safely transporting Communion packets and devotional materials
- Inviting prayer chains by phone, text, and emails
- Developing reassurance phone calls, texts, and emails
- Having an online giving strategy.

Now more than ever, older-adult members of our congregations need our care and support. They are some of the most vulnerable church members and they are hardest hit by the pandemic. Recognizing that we cannot help everyone, we believe that our faith involves caring for the widow and widower, the aged, and the orphan. Our ongoing ministry of support for older adults targets an area of holistic support in the name of Jesus to a community that is in great need.

Keep these helpful guidelines in mind as you and your church members work out new ways to care for older adult in your church and community.

1. First, do no harm! Safety first. Follow all health guidelines and procedures established by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC):
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>
2. Do all the good you can, but recognize that you can't do everything. Stay focused on the task at hand. Don't try to take on more than you can handle.
3. Stay flexible. The world is changing rapidly; what we know to be true today may not be so next week . . . or even tomorrow!
4. Take Care of Your Needs. Respond to the crisis, but pace yourself and take care of your own physical and spiritual health and personal safety.
5. Think long term. What we are experiencing within our churches and communities may indeed be the new normal.
6. Keep your congregation informed. Communication with members of your congregation is vital for the overall health and effectiveness of your ministry. Strategies for communication include:
 - a. One-to-one phone calls, emails, texts, [Zoom](#) conversations

- b.** Leadership team video meetings
- c.** Small-group video meetings for study and sharing
- d.** Large-group email blasts and texts
- e.** Social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram
- f.** Print media distribution such as newsletters and other mailings.

Get started by:

- 1.** Building a team. Gather people in your church who want to be in ministry with older adults.
- 2.** Gathering information. Identify the needs of older adults in your church and community. What do older adults need right now: groceries, financial assistance, emotional reassurance, spiritual encouragement?
- 3.** Identifying existing church ministries that already provide some form of care for older adults in your church. For example, United Methodist Women (or Men) or a senior Sunday school class may already have the means for reaching out to older adults in your church. Know what ministries are already in place and what is working well in meeting the needs of older adults.
- 4.** Assessing community resources and knowing what services are available to older adults. Contact an area agency on aging, a senior citizens center, or the council on aging office in your community for information.
- 5.** Developing a shared vision. Build on your strengths and assets. Explore options as a team to discern your response to the needs of older adults.
- 6.** Developing a ministry for your congregation that meets the needs of older adults. Identify resources and key personnel who can champion the ministry response of the church.
- 7.** Evaluating the effectiveness of your ministry. Find out from everyone involved in your ministry – older adults and leaders alike – how well you are doing. Identify needed changes and continue the areas of success.

COVID-19 will probably not be the last pandemic nor the last disaster. We recognize that we are more dependent on God and one another than we ever imagined. True leaders are those who understand the lesson of the pandemic and take this opportunity to be creative and innovative. True leaders devote themselves to others and are guided by a vision of community that is inclusive, compassionate, and just. May we act boldly, act wisely, and most importantly, act faithfully.

For more information about intentional older-adult ministry or the COVID-19 pandemic and older adults, visit the **ENCORE Ministry** website at

www.encoretnumc.org and Discipleship Ministries website at www.umcdiscipleship.org.

May Celebrates Older Americans

Every May, The United Methodist Church invites local churches to observe Older Americans Month. Church leaders are invited to provide opportunities during the month of May, whether on a Sunday morning during worship services or on other days and times, to recognize the unique gifts and challenges of older adults.

Led by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) each May, The United Methodist Church joins with the ACL and promotes Older Americans Month and provides resources to help church leaders plan for this special time in the life of the church and to develop intentional ministry by, with, and for older adults.

This year's Older Adult Recognition Day theme is ***Make Your Mark***. This theme was selected to encourage and celebrate countless contributions that older adults make each day. Around the nation, older adults make their marks every day as volunteers, employees, employers, parents, grandparents, caregivers, mentors, and advocates. They offer their time, talents, wisdom, and experience to the benefit of their churches and communities.

In the spirit of this year's theme, here are a few ways to make your mark this May and all year long:

Volunteer your time. Local shelters and food kitchens always need support. Help neighbors by preparing a meal, picking up groceries, or giving them a ride. Or, take time to pass on your faith and knowledge. Why not teach Sunday school or tutor a student who could use extra help in civics, math, music, or science?

Share your story. There are so many ways to do this, from showing your grandkids around your old neighborhood to writing a book. Take a class and learn how to express yourself with the arts! Or, assemble a photo album of important moments in your life.

Get involved in your neighborhood. Sign up for a class in your local community college or join a book club or other social group. Have a green thumb? Small projects like planting flowers in your yard or cleaning up the community park have a big impact.

Worship Service Suggestions

Congregations are invited to conduct a worship service to celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day, normally held during any Sunday in May, or perhaps on the second Sunday in September (Grandparents' Day).

The purpose of this worship service is to introduce the congregation to the cause of aging in an effective, inspiring, and informative way. As you plan for a worship service to celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day, involve older people in planning and leading the service. If you have a Sunday school class that is primarily made up of older people, or if your church has an active older-adult ministry team, you will want to meet with them for discussion and planning. Here are some ideas that you might consider in your planning:

We recognize that:

- God loves and blesses people of all ages.
- Aging is a natural progression in life.
- Every age and stage of life is full of unique potential.
- Birth, aging, and death are all part of divine providence and are to be regarded and taught as positive values.
- The older-adult population is a diverse group, and no two older adults are exactly alike.
- Older adults, no less than people at every age and stage of life, need to feel valued and respected. They need a life with meaning and purpose.
- Children, youth, adults, and older adults can all learn from one another.
- God calls people of all ages into Christian discipleship.

We celebrate!

- We are not only living longer, but people 65 years of age and older are healthier, wealthier, and more active than previous generations of older adults.
- The chronological age of 65 is no longer the benchmark signaling the onset of late life.
- As a result of medical advances, scientific discovery, better health care, nutrition, and job safety, more people are living into older adulthood.
- The experiences of older people bring wisdom and insight to our congregation.
- There are opportunities for all generations within our church to worship, study and learn, work, and play together.

- Mature years bring a special opportunity to redefine our goals.

Scripture for Sermon Ideas:

- Genesis 6:3: Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.”
- Genesis 12:4: So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.
- Exodus 7:7: Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.
- Joshua 14:10b-11, NIV: [And Caleb who said] So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then.
- Psalm 71:18: So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come.
- Psalm 92:12, 14: The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap.
- Proverbs 16:31: Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.
- Proverbs 20:29: The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their gray hair.
- Luke 2:36-37: There was also a prophet, Anna . . . She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.
- John 21:18: Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.
- II Corinthians 4:16: For this reason we never become discouraged. Even though our physical being is gradually decaying, yet our spiritual being is renewed day by day (GNT).
- Ephesians 6:2-3: “Honor your father and mother” – this is the first commandment with a promise: “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”
- I Timothy 5:1, 2: Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father . . . to older women as mothers . . .

Hymns: (*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

“O For a Thousand Tongues,” 57 “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” 140

“On Eagle’s Wings,” 143	“Jesus Loves Me,” 191
“My Hope Is Built,” 368	“Blessed Assurance,” 369
“There Is a Balm in Gilead,” 375	“Amazing Grace,” 378
“Lord, I Want to Be a Christian,” 402	“Every Time I Feel the Spirit,” 404
“I Am Thine, O Lord,” 419	“Be Thou My Vision,” 451
“Trust and Obey,” 467	“Sweet Hour of Prayer,” 496
“The Old Rugged Cross,” 504	“What a Friend We Have in Jesus,” 526
“Are You Able?” 530	“Blest Be the Tie That Binds,” 557

Prayers: (*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

- “Serenity Prayer,” 459
- “Prayer to the Holy Spirit,” 329
- “All Saints,” 713
- “The Prayer of Saint Francis,” 481

Psalter Readings: (*The United Methodist Hymnal*)

- Psalm 23 – page 754
- Psalm 27 – page 758
- Psalm 63 – page 788
- Psalm 71:1-12 – page 794
- Psalm 90 – page 809
- Psalm 92 – pages 811-812
- Psalm 103:1-18 – pages 824-825
- Psalm 105:1-11 – page 828

A Litany on Aging for Church Worship

Leader: Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be 120 years” (Genesis 6:3).

People: Dear Lord, we do need time to grow.

Leader: Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).

People: We pray that the long years will be good years.

Leader: The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their gray hair (Proverbs 20:29).

People: Give us strength and experience.

Leader: Remember the days of old, consider the years long past; ask your father, and he will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you (Deuteronomy 32:7).

People: Remind us to ask, and teach us to listen.

Leader: Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life (Proverbs 16:31).

People: Day by day, we strive to be more holy.

Leader: Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old (Proverbs 23:22).

People: We are grateful for parents who teach and nurture in love.

Leader: So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come (Psalm 71:18).

People: We love to tell the story of Jesus and his love.

Leader: In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap (Psalm 92:14).

People: Yes, we too will soon know and understand God's gift of growing older; give us wisdom so that we may serve others as we have been served. Amen.

Additional Ideas for Celebrating on Older Adult Recognition Day and at Other Times

As we celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day, reflect on the lives of older adults in your community.

- Who are the older adults in your church and community?
- What are past accomplishments of some of the older adults in your church?
- What are some disappointments and losses that older people in your church have experienced?
- What are some dreams and goals that they hold?
- What are ways your church reaches out to older adults in your community?

The primary characteristic of the older-adult population today is diversity. With nationwide mobility throughout their lives, varying life and health experiences, and socioeconomic differences, today's older adults are more diverse as a group than any other age group within the church. Older-adult ministry must be intentional in its vision and planning as a ministry by, with, and for older adults.

1. Arrange a meal to celebrate Older Adult Recognition Day and consider recognizing older members for their faith and service to the church.
2. Assign a younger person or family to each older person in your congregation. Ask the individual or family to pray for the older person throughout the week and to write a special note of appreciation to the older adult. The individual or family might also invite the older person into their home for a meal or to enjoy some community event together. Invite those people to sit together during the Older Adult Recognition Day Worship Service and/or a Recognition Dinner.
3. Interview older people in anticipation of Older Adult Recognition Sunday. A variety of media might be used for this interview: video, audio, printed, or pictures and stories on a bulletin board. In the interview, include ways that the person has been active in the church and community. Share parts of their stories with the congregation and on the Celebration Sunday.
4. Encourage older adults and other storytellers to share their experiences, perhaps around a certain theme (e.g., their faith journey, the history of their local church, etc.).
5. Make banners and posters to inform the congregation of the celebration. The posters need not be very large, but mount them at obvious places around the church building.
6. Involve older adults in planning and conducting a worship service. Invite older adults to serve as greeters, ushers, lay readers, and speakers on a Sunday designated as “Older Adult Recognition Day.”
7. Use live flowers and plants to decorate the sanctuary on the Sunday of celebration and give these to older adults. Some may need to be delivered to homebound and residents of long-term health-care facilities.

8. Pin a flower or special color of ribbon on each older person. Be sure to make a statement in your worship bulletin to inform the congregation of the significance of the ribbon or flower.
9. Send out special invitations to older adults for a Sunday of celebration. Make the invitations personal; arrange for rides, if necessary. If you plan to use ribbons to recognize older adults, send the ribbons and pins in the invitations. Hold a senior recognition dinner following the Sunday celebration.
10. Plan a “senior expo” or resource fair on Older Adult Recognition Day that provides services and resources available to older adults in your community.
11. Provide transportation for older adults so they are able to attend the Older Adult Recognition Day celebration. Provide respite care volunteers to stay with homebound people in their home so the primary caregivers can attend the Sunday celebration.
12. Host a workshop for older adults on key issues such as nutrition and wellness, safety, scams and frauds, advance directives, and personal finance.
13. Find out the number of years in church membership (in any church) of each older adult, and add these together. Announce or publish the total amount of years as a collective heritage that we receive from older people.
14. Plan a twenty-four-hour period of prayer. Ask individuals to sign up for thirty-minute increments and either come to the church at a specific place to pray or pray wherever they might be. Offer written suggestions about what to include in the prayers, such as: thanksgiving for the older adults and their contributions to Christ's ministry, concern for health problems, government policies that may be pending, and ways that your church can be more caring and alert to the needs of older adults.
15. Invite older adults to prepare and lead the children in a “children’s sermon” during the worship service on Sunday morning.
16. Check and correct accessibility problems in your church facilities. Consider these points: acoustics; large-print hymnals, bulletins, and curriculum; lighting and hearing enhancements; number of steps to the building or altar rail; handicap provisions, such as parking, restrooms, doorways, and pew space for wheelchairs; sidewalks clear of ice in cold weather or bird seed after a wedding;

uneven pavement or carpet; cushions on pews. Begin this assessment before your week of celebration so that the completion can be celebrated.

17. Learn how the needs of older adults are met in your community. Check on public transportation, adult day-care programs, assisted living and nursing facilities, meals on wheels, and accessibility of public places. Share what you learn with the congregation and search out ways to improve what the community offers.
18. Develop a garden plot for older adults who enjoy gardening. Have someone else do the heavy preparation of the garden, but provide tools for older people to use in planting and tending the garden. Use flowers from the garden in the sanctuary and use the produce from the garden for an intergenerational meal of celebration.
19. Begin a homebound Sunday school class. Contact your local telephone company and arrange for a conference call during the Sunday school hour. The teacher will use a church phone, and the homebound people will listen in and participate from home by phone. If they have speakerphones, a caregiver can also participate. If there is interest, arrange for the continuation of the class by conference call. Often, individual donations can be solicited to cover the cost.
20. Use social media to connect older adults with resources and one another.

Suggested Resources for Further Reading and Study

Books:

Aging and Ministry in the 21st Century by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. (Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN, 2008). An inquiry approach to individual or small-group study concerning aging issues and their impact on ministry.

An Age of Opportunity: Intentional Older Adult Ministry by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. (Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN 2018). An informative resource with a wealth of material to enable congregations to become intentional in ministry by, with, and for older adults.

Boomer Spirituality: Seven Values for the Second Half of Life by Craig Kennet Miller (Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN 2017). A valuable resource for clearly understanding the unique spirituality of the baby boom generation.

The Church Responds to Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of Older Adults by Joy Thornburg Melton (Discipleship Resources, Nashville, TN 2012). A thorough understanding of elder abuse and a helpful guide for church ministry.

Don't Write My Obituary Just Yet by Missy Buchanan (Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN, 2011). Using inspiring faith stories by older adults, the author invites the reader to learn and grow in faith.

Falling Upward: Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life by Richard Rohr (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, CA, 2011). The author contemplates how our failings can be the foundation for our ongoing spiritual growth.

Seasons of Caring: Meditations for Alzheimer's and Dementia Caregivers edited by Dr. Daniel C. Potts, Lynda Everman, Rabbi Steven M. Glazer, Dr. Richard L. Morgan, and Max Wallack (ClergyAgainstAlzheimer's Network, 2014). A resource for spiritual support and meditations for caregivers.

Talking with God in Old Age by Missy Buchanan (Upper Room Books, Nashville, TN 2010). Through meditations and the use of Psalms, the author sensitively addresses the worries, fears, and frustrations of older adults.

Third Calling: What Are You Doing the Rest of Your Life? by Richard and Leona Bergstrom (Church Health, Edmonds, Washington, 2016). The authors provide readers an excellent resource that can lead to a “third calling” in life filled with clarity, hope, faith, and meaning.

What Does the Bible Say About Old Age? by Ronald D. Witherup (New City Press, Hyde Park, NY, 2019) The author provides an insightful look at what the Bible says about growing old.

Web/Internet:

www.acl.gov – Resources from the Administration for Community Living.

www.agingcare.com – Resource information for caregivers.

www.umcdiscipleship.org – Resources for adult- and older-adult ministries.

www.encoretnumc.org – Resources for church leaders for older-adult ministries

ncea.acl.gov – Resources on elder abuse awareness.

<https://www.nia.nih.gov> – Research and resources on aging issues from the National Institute on Aging.

www.re-ignite.net – A division of ChurchHealth provides resources for church leaders for older-adult ministries.

www.prcli.org – Practical resources for churches.