



Resource
Center ^{on}
Aging

ACT III

Vol. 1 No. 2

Mission: To provide collaborative faith-based services that meet the health and wellness needs of the whole person.

Winter 2007

Is Your Church Ageist?

By Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., D.Min, CSA

Ageism is defined as prejudice or discrimination against older persons because of their age. In reality, we have not moved very far in overcoming the prejudice against older people since the 1960s when the term "ageism" was first coined by Dr. Robert Butler (the first director of the National Institute on Aging).

A recent article in a religious publication said: "All of us who are 65 and older have experienced some form of ageism - even though we perhaps have not been aware of it."

Ageism - and its personal impact - is a reality shared by almost every older adult, although many people are socialized not to recognize it. Based on a deeply ingrained, negative stereotype of what old people are really like, ageism is used to rationalize discrimination and to confuse our discussions about rights and privilege.

Unfortunately, ageism is widespread not only in the market-places but also in religious circles. We hear words like, "The church is dying because we have so many old people in the

church." "If old people would just get out of the way." "If older adults just accepted change." "Either older adults should get with the program or they should leave the church."

Negative images of older adults are often reflected by the stereotypic oldsters who are the butt of greeting cards and popular jokes. Like "racism" and "sexism," ageism demeans and devalues people. It is manifested in our society's worship of youth and our anxiety over wrinkles. It diminishes the church's witness and mission. Bishop Kenneth L. Carder, of the United Methodist church, said, "It hurts to be rejected on the basis of age as surely as it hurts to be rejected because of gender or race or any other unavoidable trait."

With ageism, the interests of one age cohort are pitted against another. Instead of synergizing people at various stages of the life course, ageism separates and divides people. Yet, in the Scriptures we read, "Young men and women alike, old and young together! Let them praise the name

of the Lord," (Psalm 148:12-13a).

How we age often depends on the way we internalize society's images of the old. When older adults see little interest directed at them by the church, they gradually lose their sense of themselves as having value and worth, which dampens and diminishes their faith development.

Ageism prevents many people of all ages from seeing that potentials are as bountiful as are problems among older adults. It is important for congregations to recognize that they aren't an "old" church; rather, they are blessed to have many older members.

What evidences of "ageism" have you become aware of in your church? Is your church reaching and inviting people of all ages to develop and grow as disciples of Jesus Christ? What are ways your church can use the giftedness of older adults for meaningful and productive service to others?

Reprinted by Permission, *Center Sage*, Issue 12, Fall 2006
Edited
Editor's Note: Rick Gentzler is a member of our Resource Center Advisory Group

"How we age often depends on the way we internalize society's images of the old."

Van Cluck Added To Resource Center Advisory Group

Van Cluck is Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of the Blakeford in Green Hills. He has a bachelor's degree in Accounting and an MBA with a concentration in Non-Profit Management, both from Lipscomb University.

He currently serves as Chairman of the Board for the West Area Business Council of the Nashville Chamber of Commerce and, as such, holds a seat on the Chamber's Board of Governors. He also maintains membership with the Young Health Care Leaders Association and the Healthcare Financial Managers Association.

Prior to the Blakeford, Van was with Park Manor, an independent living community in Nashville, and with Mariner Healthcare.

Already a Certified Aging Services Professional (CASP), recognized in the senior housing industry as a prestigious distinction of excellence, Van is currently pursuing additional certificates in Leadership, Finance and Marketing from the Erickson School of Aging Studies at the University of Maryland.

He and his wife, Janet, have two children, Elizabeth and Walker. They are members of the College Hills Church of Christ in Lebanon, TN.

"Van brings a passion for this ministry and a unique background that adds new dimensions to our advisory leadership already in place," says James Vandiver.

Please join us in welcoming Van to the Harpeth Hills Resource Center Advisory Board.

The next Family Conversations class will be offered March 4 - May 27, 2007.

Family Conversations a Must

In our humanness, there are many conversations that we try to avoid. Conversations about death and aging often top that list, especially in regards to people we love. But if we avoid difficult conversations, we find ourselves ill-prepared to face the realities of our own families. To ease the tensions regarding conversations that should be a "must" in each family, James Vandiver offers a Sunday morning class each fall and spring entitled Family Conversations.

This class helps people of all ages understand the necessity of having conversations about illnesses, aging issues, legal issues and death before a crisis arises. If a family member becomes seriously ill tomorrow, what plans have you already discussed? Do you have a living will? Does your family know your wishes regarding life support and organ donation? Are your wishes about your legacy you wish to leave memorialized? What are the wishes of your parents?

It's too easy to put off these conversations. We are much more comfortable talking about lighter subjects. The problem arises, however, that if your wishes are not clear and legally documented, the court system may be forced to step in and make choices for you or your family.

This course also allows class members to look carefully at the physical, mental and spiritual needs of the aging. As family members close to us age, we must honestly work to make sure all of their needs are being met. We must rely upon more than a medical doctor to examine the well-being of the individual as a whole.

Vandiver brings in experts from medical and legal fields to discuss ways to make sure we are prepared for our own aging and the aging of those close to us. Family Conversations is a must for adults of all ages. Check the Harpeth Hills Bible class schedule to see when a new class will begin.

"...if we avoid difficult conversations, we find ourselves ill-prepared to face the realities of our own families."

A Design Full of Meaning

When the Resource Center on Aging began actively hosting programs and publishing newsletters, the center needed a logo. Notice the skillfully designed symbol on this newsletter? Tim Kovick, Corporate Design partner and Harpeth Hills coordinating deacon over technology, heard what leaders of the Resource Center were hoping to bring about through their new work. He helped design the logo that illustrates the many resources available through the center.

The center's resources work together in harmony to assist individuals and families in a caring way as we all embrace our aging population. All people as a whole are respected as they move through the stages of the life cycle. The five points of spiritual, intellectual, physical, emotional and social aspects of life are interrelated and do not diminish in importance. All people in all walks of life are embraced by the center's logo.

Lipscomb encourages lifelong learning

"The Lifelong Learning Program at Lipscomb University is an opportunity for all people of retirement or semiretirement age to engage in the ongoing work of learning," says Patty Dugger, program director. "Our courses cover a variety of topics, and our courses are open to anyone in the community."

Interested in courses such as Basics of Family Research and Genealogy, Murder She Wrote, Beethoven's Hair and Mozart's Letters, The Victorians or Computer I and II? Now is the time to sign up. Twelve courses will be offered this spring. The program offers two sessions each fall and two sessions each spring as well as week-long courses and new travel courses. A brown bag "lunch and learn" session will also be offered March 8. All course teachers have a doctoral degree and teach in their field of expertise. The spring 2007 sessions run from February 12 through March 16 and from March 26 through April 27. With the exception of the luncheon and the travel courses, each course has five afternoon sessions.

The cost is \$50 per person for each class. Individuals may take two classes during the same session for \$75. For two people living at the same address enrolled for classes in the same five-week session, the cost is \$75 for the two. Some classes may require the purchase of a textbook. All suggested and required textbooks may be purchased in the university bookstore or at registration. To learn more about the program visit lifelonglearning.lipscomb.edu or call the program office at 966.5733 or toll-free at 800.333.4358.

Program brochures are available in our Welcome Center.

Community Resources Awareness

Senior Transport Partners (STP)

Graceworks Ministries, Inc. partners with United Way of Williamson County, Cool Springs Christian Ministries and Senior Citizens, Inc. to provide transportation to medical services for seniors in need.

The goal is to provide the same kind of thoughtful attention a senior would receive from his or her own family members. Senior Transport Partners recognizes that in some cases clients have no family, so they become an "extended family" in many ways.

What you need to know about STP:

- ◆ Volunteer drivers provide a caring, safe, efficient, friendly, and FREE way to and from doctor or other medical service appointments.
- ◆ Seniors utilizing this service must be mobile.
- ◆ This service is for non-emergency transportation.
- ◆ 72-hour notice is required.
- ◆ For more information contact: Senior Transport Partners, 615-794-9055 ext. 12

Tindell celebrates the lives of nursing home residents he serves as chaplain. Their stories are a glimpse into our future.

Seeing Beyond the Wrinkles is a Look Into the Future

A book review by Marie Byers

Seeing Beyond the Wrinkles
By Charles Tindell

"It will be an easy read," I thought when first scanning the pages of this book of reminiscences about elderly people in a nursing home. Not so. Each brief portrait served to clarify fears of old age, to break down stereotypical ideas about aged persons, to charm with humor and friendship, and to bring tears for their hopelessness, loneliness, and losses.

These stories are about everyman and everywoman who has reached retirement age, collected Social Security, faced severe health problems and, at last, has become the resident of assisted living, or rehab facility, or nursing home. These are everyone's grandparent, aged aunt or uncle, mother, father, friend, spouse, or neighbor. These are us. As Rose declared when disappointed about a slow response for help, "Their turn is coming."

Vivienne, who had faced life as a young widow with five children, continued to face the disappointments of declining years with the philosophy that, "You got to be patient with life." Conversely, Maybelle remembered that her grandfather had always asserted that, "it's heck to get old."

Esther perhaps voiced the sentiment of many older folks with her summation that "they simply don't listen," when her request for assistance with getting into a more comfortable sitting position was confused with complaining about the chair.

The author, who served as chaplain for the home, focuses not on the illnesses, the pains, the complaints of the elderly, the wrinkles, but rather celebrates their enthusiasm for life, their courage in facing deteriorating health and decreased ability to perform daily activities. In the words of Frank, an amputee who often left his leg on the bed and moved about in his wheelchair, "You can't control most of the stuff happening to you when you get old, so you might as well laugh about it."

A quick read, yes. An easily forgotten book—no.

NOTE: This book is available in the Harpeth Hills library, donated by Jo Wright, member of the HH Resource Committee.

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