[EQUIPPING]

Creating Service Opportunities for Older Adults

BY AMY HANSON

Many older people looking for significance and purpose are finding it through service in mainstream and faith-based organizations—close to home and around the world.

Bobbie Baxter always wanted to go on a mission trip but didn't have the opportunity until she was 80 years old. When other retired women might be baking cookies or watching television, Bobbie joined the 2nd Half Ministries team from Northshore Baptist Church in Bothell, Washington, on a short-term mission trip to Nicaragua. As impressive as this may sound, she's not the only older adult to invest her time and energy in the lives of these poverty-stricken people. In fact 45 to 50 percent of all the volunteers from Northshore who do short-term mission work in Nicaragua are 50 years of age or older.

Older Adults Serving Overseas

In 2004 Northshore Baptist adopted the small Nicaraguan town of Los Cedros. According to Richard Bergstrom, pastor of 2nd Half Ministries, "We wanted to make missions real to the entire church, rather than something general. The leadership looked for a place where ministry work was currently happening and we could simply come alongside. Los Cedros was that place."

More than 400 people have visited the town as a part of Northshore's involvement in construction projects, medical clinics, food programs, vacation Bible school, and economic development. Many of these teams have included people who are more than 50 years old.

Sometimes retirees from Northshore go back and spend more time ministering in the Nicaraguan community on their own. Many have found ways to share their business expertise and life experience in order to strengthen the community's ability to sustain itself.

> **A one-size-fits-all approach to ministry has been replaced with a variety of fresh ideas that recognize the multiple needs, interests, and abilities of older adults.**

Older Adult Interests

Adults age 50-70 who are considering working in retirement report the following interests:

78% working to help the poor, elderly, and others in need

56% working in a hospital or with an organization fighting a particular disease

55% teaching or other educational positions

45% working in a youth program

Source: Civic Ventures New Face of Work Survey, 2005

Older Adults Serving Locally

Still another way older adults are serving is by integrating into their local communities.

Rod Toews, the 77-year-old pastor of PLUS, the 50-plus ministry at Peninsula Covenant Church in Redwood City, California, hopes that each of the church's adults who are over 50 will belong to one of the social clubs in the seven cities that surround their church in Northern California. Toews is a member of the Redwood City Rotary Club. He says, "It's more than just membership but rather being actively involved." Toews had the opportunity to do the funeral for one of the women in the club. "Her husband knew that I was a pastor and asked me to conduct the service. Since then he's started regularly attending the church." Toews also says, "I've been more involved in one-on-one evangelism through this club than I've ever been in my life."

Churches leading the way in older adult ministry have discovered that older adults need to be exposed to ministry opportunities and encouraged to give their time and resources for kingdom expansion. These churches create service opportunities by using a variety of methods that include intentionally emphasizing service for older adults, forming intergenerational ministry teams, and partnering with other churches in utilizing retirees.

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[RESOURCES]

50+ MINISTRY

Older adult ministry isn't the same today as it was 30 years ago. A one-size-fits-all approach to ministry has been replaced with a variety of fresh ideas that recognize the multiple needs, interests, and abilities of older adults. Go to **www.leadnet.org** to access additional information. Under "Resources," select "Downloads." Then under the "Community" drop-down menu, select "Encore Generation" and then "Go." You'll find the following articles: "Creating New Opportunities for Older Adults to Serve," "50+ Age Adults Reaching Outside the Walls of the Church," and "Churches Responding to the Age Wave."

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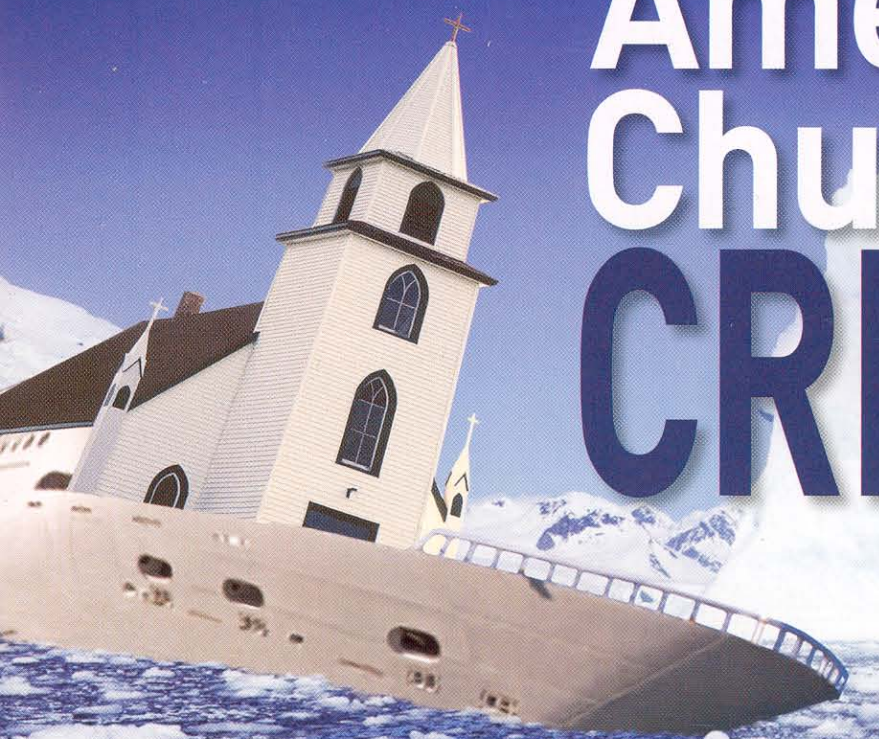

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