

Old Age Perception and Reality An Essay by Bob Chism



Today is the oldest you have ever been, yet the youngest you will ever be.

In *I'm Old*, a 2011 essay, Milton Crum writes about knowing old age:

There are two ways of knowing about old age: intellectual and firsthand knowledge. Knowledge about old age can serve valuable purposes, but it is not the same as a firsthand, experiential knowledge of old age. Experiential knowledge only can be gained through experiencing old age first-hand.

However, there is one thing that you can do to gain a bit of simulated experiential knowledge about old age. It will not only help you understand the old people with whom you relate they will give you some preparation for your own old age. The simulation require some effort, but simulating old age is much easier than being old, and unlike being old, you can stop simulating whenever you like. Texas A&M University offers an excellent do-it yourself workshop on simulating seven changes in sight, hearing, touch, dexterity, taste, smell, mobility and balance. The free website is http://fcs.tamu.edu/families/aging/aging_simulation/index.php.

In the mid-eighties for many, health issues and death are the two specters always in the room. The book *Life Beyond 85 Years* provides many examples. The authors, Colleen Johnson and Barbara M. Barer, interviewed 150 people who were 85 years old over a period of years. These 85+ year olds had to deal with persistent pain, problems with mobility, loss of vision and hearing, the recurrent death of contemporary-ies, and daily personal routine (that is, the everyday effort to just exist required more energy and time). These

firsthand accounts are eye opening to the reality of the fourth age (that is, completion/integration: polishing of, coming to terms with life, acceptance of eternity).

Based on forecasted sizeable growth for those in the 65 & over life expectancy category new sub-population classification have been coined:

Young old (65-74)

Middle Old (75-84)

Oldest Old (85+)

Most research is based on the first two categories, while 85+ is uncharted. The third age parallels the first two groupings, while fourth age parallels the last. The third age is about fulfillment (that is, a more caring time of life), while the fourth age is about completion/integration (that is, polishing of, coming to terms with life, acceptance of eternity).

The church has always ministered to older adults. However, for the 65-84 age group, longevity and baby boomer perspectives have made it quite different than in the past. Those local churches who wish to be effective with this age segment over the next 20 years must humble themselves to a few realities. Church as usual maybe detriment to accomplishing the Great Commandment and Great Commission:

Great Commandment (22:37-40)

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind... Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Great Commission (28:19-20)

“Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

There is a need to be better understood and use the following older adult categories:

Go-Go (Independent-Able)

The largest portion in the church

They'll either be going into Kingdom work or in secular work or personal goals

They can be challenged to pursue Kingdom goals and objectives

Slow-Go (Transition-Able)

They can do anything, slower

Health, economics, family commitments may slow them down

Kingdom work through the church's ministry can be adjusted to allow participation

Can't-Go (Dependent-Able)

Physical, economic, or family may prevent active engagement in Kingdom work

They want to be a part of the church's ministry

Creative planning can enable them to make contributions according to their available physical, emotional and relational resources

Won't-Go (Unchurched-Able)

They can, but choose not to be involved

The task is to discover their motivational blockage

Creative thinking and training can evangelize this group

Dr. Herb Shore of the Jewish Retirement Center in Dallas, Texas, is recognized as developing these **Go** categories. Since labeling the **Won't-Go (Unchurched-Able)** the number in this category has soared to 82 Million. The largest domestic missional opportunity ever in our nation's history.

There is a further need for better understand the following church growth research points on how older adults can be depended upon to respond:

Giving Contribute 70% of the average church budget

Stability Change their address 50% as often as the national average

Kingdom Building The fastest growing population segment through 2030

Volunteer Spend 2 to 3 times more hours on matters of significance

The dictionary defines "ism" as a distinctive cause (conviction, belief), doctrine (opinion, view point), or theory (rationale, hypothesis). Chism's Isms are both second

hand from my second half heroes and firsthand to the extent of a septuagenarian. Age can be defined by decade: Sexagenarian (60s), Septuagenarian (70s), Octogenarian (80s), Nonagenarian (90s), Centenarian (100s) and Supercentenarian (110s).

Based on seven years of research and Certification in Aging Ministries (CAM) from the Center of Christian Leadership, School of Theology, Anderson University, Indiana and Certification in Gerontology from McHenry County College in Illinois, the following ministry steps are held-up in my new book, *Basic Ministry for the Second Half of Life* as 21st century growth strategies:

Commitment to a self-study learning experience about the ageing process (body, mind and spirit)

Establishment of gifted volunteers working alongside gifted pastors together on second half ministry (“to” and “among”; and “by” and “with”)

Addition of second halfer services and expand small group relationship building opportunities with the unchurched to address issues that affect people in the second half of life: Addictive behavior, Estate planning, Family budgeting, Benevolent and generous lifestyle, Grandparenting, Grief share, Legacy planning, Generational mentoring, Second half planning, Stewardship, Wellness

Creation of new positions (volunteer, part-time, non-pastor): Estate and planned-gift design service, Development ministry, Church foundation, Second halfer ministry, Volunteer management (recruitment, development, placement) and Wellness

Establishment of a system to have meaningful contact with those leaving full-time employment and six months thereafter.

Complimentary steps for individual second halfers include preparation for the second half of life; practice stewardship and service; volunteer and work alongside gifted pastors; become a second half unchurched evangelist; develop your own benevolent and generous lifestyle; be an intergenerational mentor and help yourself and others finish extremely well.

There is a direct need for training of Aging Process & Gerontology; Discipleship (Service); Evangelism (Outreach); Stewardship (Time, Talent, & Gifts); and Inter-generational. New Beginnings (www.gonewbeginnings.com) is a website dedicated to seeking, sharing and serving second halfers. New Beginnings offers many free resources and has made a committed to work with any congregation without charge to help with local pastoral staff and congregation educational training by voice and email:

An Earning, Giving, Saving, & Balanced Spending Guide-An earthly budgeting plan.

Benevolence & Generosity Development-A capital funding method.

Church Health Review-A prudent businessman audit report.

Estate Planning-An eternal stewardship plan.

Intentional Adult Evangelism-A commitment to second half training & revival.

New Social Sector-Second half of life & legacy planning.

Second Half Ministry Reading Certification-A commitment to understanding the ageing process (body, mind, spirit) & ministry to, by, for and with second halfers.

What Second Half Ministry Can Be-A more progressive model.

The above services can be communicated with minimal voice and email no charge. If you are interested in pursuing help for your congregation, please contact:

New Beginnings
www.gonewbeginnings.org/
Serving, Sharing, Serving Second Halfers
Bob Chism CAM
1513 Eagle Ridge Drive
Antioch, IL 60002
chism.w.robert@comcast.net

Take Away Points

Commitment to Second Half Ministry Training
Cultivation of a 'We Serve' Culture
Early Second Half Preparation
New Beginnings Nurturing
Effective Disciple Making

"Do all the good you can
By all the means you can
In all the ways you can
In all the places you can
At all times you can
To all people you can
For as long as you can."
—John Wesley

