

## **An Aging & Development Ministry Guide**



There is no single second half of life population group. Rather, there are multiple population group clusters. And each cluster is very different. No one ministry type reaches all the clusters in a congregation or community. Not only are there many clusters, from say 50 to 100, but there are married couples, widows, divorced, never married, healthy-active, frail-elderly, homebound, and residents of continuing care retirement communities, etc. As people age, they become less alike, not more. Therefore, their needs and talents and their likes and dislikes are all often vastly different.

New Beginnings is a website for second-halfers. For New Beginnings it is all about helping to create basic second-half ministry to effectively meet concerns and mobilize the potential of those 50-plus and to help every second-half live out God's plan for them.

The U. S. Census Bureau provides national, state, county, and city/village population statistics over the internet. For example (Using Lake & McHenry counties in Illinois for illustrative purposes) the following demographics were obtained by a simple web search:

USA: 312 million  
142 million are second-halfers (50-plus)  
101 million are between 50 & 64

41 million are 65 & over

LAKE COUNTY: 706 thousand  
208 thousand are second-halfers (50-plus)  
135 thousand are between 50 & 64  
73 thousand are 65 & over

MCHENRY COUNTY: 309 thousand  
91 thousand are second-halfers (50-plus)  
60 thousand are between 50 & 64  
31 thousand are 65 & over

Within a 15-25 mile radius of GURNEE:

GURNEE (60031): 31,295  
8,905 are second-halfers (50-plus)  
6,150 are between 50 & 64  
2,755 are 65 & over

LAKE VILLA/LINDENHURST: 23,263  
6,034 are second-halfers (50-plus)  
4,146 are between 50 & 64  
1,888 are 65 & over

GRAYSLAKE: 21,042  
5,351 are second-halfers (50-plus)  
3,661 are between 50 & 64  
1,690 are 65 & over

COMBINED TOTAL: 75,600  
20,290 are second-halfers (50-plus)  
13,957 are between 50 & 64  
6,333 are 65 & over

Any church with a membership count of 20% or greater in the 50-plus category should evaluate a second-half ministry growth strategy using a side doors approach.

A personality profile for each member and regular attender is basic for any effective ministry strategy by design. A laudable congregational survey which contains all the critical questions can be found in Appendix A of *Heartbeat!* (2011) by Charles Arn.

*Heartbeat!* is a road map to evangelize second-halfers. In *Heartbeat!* Charles Arn introduces side

doors. This missional approach is a proven way to reach and involve greater numbers by enlisting individual's "passion", "sweet spots", and high motivators.

Side doors are a church-sponsored program, group or activity in which unchurched people connect with Christians before they become active church participants or even Christ-followers. The side doors approach requires a shift to an individual lay ministry philosophy and a 75/25 to 50/50 church/unchurched ratio. The major difference between side doors and front doors is that side doors swing out and front doors swing in (that is, one is an outward focus while the traditional front door approach is an inward focus). Another way to say it would be the focus is on the unchurched, not on the church. Side doors establish natural people clusters in the neighborhood, workplace, gym, fitness center, sports arena, personal interests, things in common or of importance (age, cultural or ethnic identity, family status, interest or hobby, marital status, need, concern or problem, religious background or attitude) and deeper human needs (place to belong, sense of balance, authentic relationships, spiritual answers, help through transition).

The side doors approach in certain respects is very similar to The Go! Initiatives pioneered by Christ Together along with eleven Gurnee churches. In my book *Basic Ministry for the Second Half of Life* The Go! Initiatives are listed as a basic second-half ministry tool.

Another basic second-half ministry tool is *The Launch* (a study for 50-plus intentional and purposeful mobilization). It is a standalone Sunday school class, group study, and seminar/ workshop presenting pertinent equipping second-half information composed of five sessions: A Personal Journey; A Biblical View of Aging and Retirement; The Example of Paul; Staying Positive and Flexible; and What's Your Journey.

A fourth basic second-half ministry tool is aging simulation. It is a method of sensitizing people to sensory changes that older adults may experience during the aging process. It is highly recommended in helping to relate to some 85-plus frail elderly and possibly helpful preparation for one's own very old age. 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.

Still another tool is guiding leading-edge Boomers in discovering purpose and passion in life and ministry through weekend retreats by Amy Hanson, author, speaker and encore consultant and/or by re-ignite Leona Bergstrom, ChurchHealth Director.

Based on the lack of seminary training about the ageing process (body, mind and spirit); a lack personal exposure to ageism by senior pastors (median age 50); and a lack of experienced in second-half ministry (predominately first-half congregation experience), this has led to a need for training.

Pastors, elected leaders and interested laypersons need to consider a threefold initiative: to obtain aging ministry, basic gerontology and saging & development ministry reading certification.

In addition, the societal hierarchy (every theological educational institution, corporate church body, local congregation, nonprofit and private enterprise and governmental legislative body) needs education about the reality of a new life stage:

Establish a self-study learning experience about the aging process and ministry ("to" and "among" and "by" and "with").

Encourage gifted volunteers to work alongside gifted pastors.

Add second-half 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, budgeting, benevolent and generous lifestyle, grand parenting, grief share, legacy planning, intergenerational mentoring, second-half planning, stewardship, and wellness.

Create new positions (volunteer, part-time, non-pastor): estate and planned-gift design service; development ministry; church foundation; elderhood ministry (65-84); Volunteer management (recruitment, development, placement); and wellness. Develop a system to celebrate and have meaningful contact with those graduating from full-time employment and six months thereafter.

Last those in the second half of life need to have education on their choices of building a better society:

- Prepare for the second half of life.
- Practice stewardship and service.
- Volunteer and work alongside gifted pastors.
- Become second-half unchurched evangelist.
- Develop a benevolent and generous lifestyle.
- Be an inter-generational mentor.
- Help others and self-finish extremely well.