

Support for Those Living in Retirement

Retirement today has put a new “spin” on a time once devoted to “riding off into the sunset.” In fact, many seniors are “puttin’ their feet up” just long enough to change into their jeans and jogging shoes!

Seniors are living longer, staying healthier and more active than any other generation. They are keenly aware of the “inevitable” realities of aging, but their visions for living life to its fullest are inspiring them to stand the test of time.

Many congregations are in need of updating their impressions and expectations of seniors as the “been-there and done-that” generation. In honor of their active service while their kids were involved in congregational life, sometimes congregations “free them” from any further obligation to leadership and service. But, contrary to popular opinion, many people are actually looking forward to retirement as a time for finally tending to their passions for travel, continuing education, volunteerism, service, faith life, and family time.

How Congregations Can Support this Stage of Life

Embrace Philippians 1:6, “being confident of this very thing, that the one who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” as we find ways to affirm, empower and engage seniors in meaningful ministry and service.

- Offer a formal blessing for those who are entering into retirement. It might include a time of recognition, followed by a prayer for God’s lead and discernment as they establish new patterns for living.
- Organize small groups for people moving into retirement. Encourage fellowship and support, along with some devotional thoughts. Many people see retirement as a whole new world and may experience the same anxieties they did when they were young adults, struggling to embrace new freedoms to shape the quality of their lives.
- Honor their wisdom and experience. Invite them to use their personal/professional gifts to mentor and support others, such as youth, young adults, and first-time parents.
- Offer a wide variety of ways to engage seniors in leadership and service. Ask them to consider being involved in tutoring young children in school and after-school programs.
- Identify snowbirds or folks who maintain a residence in warmer places during the winter months. Consider sending them regular e-mails, cards, and care packages (as you might for any young adults and college students who are off on their own). Keep them connected by sending your congregation newsletter.
- Establish a weekly “Do-Drop-Inn” for coffee and informal conversation and support.
- Hold a consultation for seniors in your congregation to affirm the significant roles they play in your congregation and community. Ask them to identify their needs and strengths for ministry and daily living, and talk about how they would like to serve and be served. Agree to act accordingly, and encourage them to assist you using their own gifts.
- *Lutheran Partners*, a periodical for pastors and other rostered leaders, featured several articles on ‘Retirement and Transition’ in its July/August 2004 issue. You can read it on the Web at www.elca.org/lp/0407_04.html
- Use stories of people who encounter and cope with the realities of this stage of life as sermon illustrations.
- Check out www.aarp.org for a wealth of resources on a variety of topics related to Americans over 50 years of age.

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