



EncourAGING and Equipping Congregations for Older Adult Ministry

An inter-Lutheran ministry by, with, and for adults age 65 and up

November 2019

Aging with Resilience

In this issue, we continue our walk through the five key ministry areas identified as ALOA's focus for providing practical resources for congregations. This time we explore on Independence to Interdependence. Dr. Lydia K. Manning, Professor of Gerontology at Concordia University Chicago and a member of ALOA's Board of Directors, shares insights on how to best navigate the changes aging often requires.

Resilience and Aging

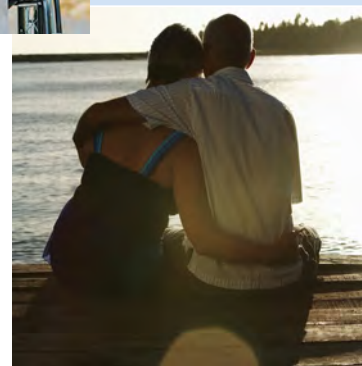
By Dr. Lydia K. Manning

Traversing a life course promises that an individual will encounter a multitude of life events, and for some individuals these life events will be sources of hardship, adversity, or even trauma. What determines whether people thrive or survive when encountering these events? What circumstances increase the likelihood of having resilience, or the capacity to maneuver through adversity in a manner that protects health and well-being? Inner strength? Motivation? Luck?

Resilience is the result of an individual's ability to recover from distressing events while persisting through extreme adversities. Resilience is manifest in how a person successfully negotiates everyday challenges

in life. Although aging affords many opportunities for growth and transformation, **growing older also presents inherent challenges and complexities associated with adversity and hardship. Resilient individuals are those who effectively and efficiently navigate these challenges.**

The concept of resilience emerged from what gerontologists call the "paradox of old age." This paradox suggests that while older adults experience more loss and decline as they age compared to their younger counterparts they also experience the highest levels of life satisfaction and overall well-being. Researchers



ALOA's purpose:
Equipping persons in the second half of life as disciples of Jesus Christ for their service to family, church, community and world.

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Let Me Introduce Myself



Carolyn Ross
ALOA President

I am honored to have served as the ALOA Board President since March. I would like to take this opportunity to more formally introduce myself and also to update you on some important ALOA news.

I am grateful for the opportunity to share my time and talents with ALOA and am privileged to work alongside an amazing group of board members. Outside of ALOA, I serve as the Executive Director of Care Connections Network, a faith-based, nonprofit organization that connects older adults to the community, programming and expertise they need to continue living lives of purpose and promise. I am dedicated to older adult ministry, and have a passion for harnessing the wisdom of older adults to help change how we all experience this journey of aging. Working with ALOA is an excellent fit for me!

ALOA News

The ALOA Board of Directors met for our annual meeting in October. It was a dynamic meeting, and we engaged in generative and productive conversations focused on planning. This future is bright for ALOA, and the board is working to grow our organizations to be an even more vital resource for congregations around the country.

At the end of September, the ALOA board accepted the resignation of Executive Director, Mark Schoepp. Mark decided to take advantage of a new opportunity. We thank him for his work during his time with us, and for the energy and dedication he brought to the mission of ALOA. We wish him great success in this next chapter! The ALOA board has begun the search for a new Executive Director to guide us in furthering our mission of encouraging and equipping older adults as disciples of Jesus Christ for their service to family, church, community and world.

In closing, I would like to thank each of you for your partnership and support. I know that God's hand is on our work and am excited to see where He leads us!

New Webinar: Faith Story™

More than one billion stories are shared everyday across Facebook or Instagram, but a Faith Story™ isn't about big numbers. A Faith Story™ is the opposite: a personal sharing of your journey with Jesus. As we grow older, we place a higher value on our legacy, or what we leave behind. ALOA has resources to help you tell your Faith Story™. Find out more about recording or writing your personal history by joining us for a free webinar on January 9, 2020. Faith

Story™ project creators, Dr. Mary Manz Simon and Rev. Ken Holdorf will share their experiences

and some "how to's" for congregations interested in helping members share their Faith Story™. Click on the [Webinar](#) button on our website to learn more or to register.



Faith Story™ shared on Facebook

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have argued that resilience is fundamental to older adults having high levels of life satisfaction, contentment, and well-being. According to researchers there are **three hallmarks of resilience: recovery** (bouncing back from stress and returning to balance), **sustained purpose** (move forward and finding meaning through engagement), and **growth** (merging stronger from dealing with stresses and hardships).

In my own work as a gerontologist, I suggest that enduring hardship and adversity is largely influenced by self-perceived emotional strength and resilience. This notion of self-perceived strength is an underlying component of resilience. I've explored how older adults manage hardship and adversity as they age and examine the key factors of resilience in later life. My findings indicate that **resilient elders engage in five key behaviors when navigating hardship: adversity confrontation, problem re-framing, resource mapping, self-preservation, and embracing uncertainty**. Older adults have discussed their management strategies for confronting adversity with me, and talked openly about how they see adversity as an opportunity for growth and expansion.

Older adults revealed how they intentionally mapped their life resources, mining for social support and tapping into the benefits of human connection. They know the importance of practicing radical self-care and compassion, especially in the face of uncertainty. I have been struck by how comfortable elders are with ambiguity, lack of control, and vulnerability. They have articulated that, for them, being strong and having resilience meant being able to dwell com-

Characteristics and Behaviors that Lead to Resilience

- **Optimism and effective coping styles** — Responses to crises are more often seen from the "silver lining" point of view, rather than from despair. These factors are more important to obtaining happiness in aging than perfect health.
- **Personal connections** — Happily engaged with family and friends, close-knit communities, or at paid or unpaid work.
- **Sense of purpose** — Involved in an activity or a function that gives life meaning. This factor affects optimism and how one looks to the future.
- **Self-efficacy** — Ability to handle one's own problems; flexibility; adaptability.
- **Healthy diet/active lifestyle** — The healthier and more active older adults are, the more factors of resilience they possess and vice versa. The relationship is bi-directional.

Source: Resilience Solutions Group.

<http://resilience.asu.edu/>

fortably and peacefully with the uncertainty embedded in their lives and to embrace their vulnerability as people, particularly as they grow older. **An overarching theme linking these behaviors was the magnitude and frequency in how participants conceptualized themselves as having emotional strength, exhibiting resilience, and being survivors:** "Of course I am resilient, I am here aren't I? If I weren't a survivor, I would have given up a long time ago. The older I get, the more I see myself as being resilient." This "resilience thinking" is an important component of individual aging. All humans have the capacity for resilience and the resilience process is something in which we can all engage.

ON THE FRONT LINES: An Interview with Rich Bimler

A continuing series of interviews with leaders in senior adult ministry.

By Mary Manz Simon, ALOA Board

Rich Bimler has served the church-at-large in various positions, including 15 years as President/CEO of Wheat Ridge Ministries.



Rich Bimler

An expert on humor and aging, he adds spiritual insights and reflections that make him a popular speaker, consultant and encourager.

You began church service as a DCE/Youth Minister. Now, you are

a spokesperson for ministry to older adults. That's quite a change!

Bimler: I find myself celebrating and serving with those same “youth,” only we are all fifty years older! I think the Lord is giving me a “second chance.” All people, whatever their age, need a place to belong, a “Holy Huddle” like the church, to listen to them, encourage them, support them, and celebrate life in the Lord with them!

Viewing the lifelong continuum of ministry, what catches your attention?

Bimler: Part of our challenge is to enable young people as well as older adults to better understand other age groups. We tend to compartmentalize age groups into their peer groups, with little opportunity to better connect and relate to people of other ages. For example, in my youth ministry days, we focused on “asset building”: enable young people to find and develop their gifts, talents, interests. Help them develop their strengths rather than focusing on their weaknesses.

In older adult ministries, we too often focus on “deficits” - what needs do they have, what help can we give them, how can we serve

them better, rather than on encouraging older adults to continue to use and develop their own assets to share with others.

You continue to visit congregations. What do you see happening in older adult ministry?

Bimler: Too often I hear church leaders bemoan the fact that their members are growing older and the white hair, no hair, blue hair folks outnumbering the younger crowd. Without saying it, some congregations appear to downplay the importance of older adults in congregations as they strategize on how to bring more children and youth into the fold. Good for them I say, but not at the expense of the older!

How does the future look for ministry to older adults?

Bimler: Our churches better have more and more older adults involved – because there continues to be more and more of us! I figure that the Lord must really love older people because he’s making so many more of us! More congregations are becoming involved and aware of the need for intentional older adult ministries. New models are popping up in many parishes. A stronger awareness of the needs for, with, and to older adults is an encourAGING sign, for sure!

As a humorist, you are known for your positive attitude. How did you develop that?

Bimler: My focus on celebrating life comes from Psalm 126:3 –*The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy!* I need to be reminded each day that we all live on “this side of the Resurrection” – that we are all Easter people and alleluia is our song!

The gifts of laughter and humor are so important in the life of God’s people, young

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From On the Front Lines...

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and old. The Scriptures are full of joy, laughter and celebration as God’s people served and celebrated their faith, with people of all ages.

“Lighten Up!” is a grand theme of mine, not because everything is going well, but because Christ is our “Light” to the world, even when things are not going well! We often take ourselves too seriously, and the Lord not seriously enough. “Let there be Light!” says our Lord, and so many of us still do not catch the significance of the joy we have in Him!

What are practical ways to add these “AH-HA” moments to our lives?

Bimler: Try these for starters: Hang around “happy” people” as much as you can; remember the “good old days” but also remember these “good new days”; laugh out loud, whenever you can, and make people wonder what you are up to; talk and spend time with younger children; stick cartoons and comics on your refrigerator regularly, just to help you laugh; Laugh at yourself before others do; look in the mirror – and laugh out loud; watch the evening news as little as possible and read the Scriptures as much as possible; repeat every day, to yourself and others, “ ‘Joy to the world – the Lord has come’ and I’m glad, even when I don’t look like it or feel like it or act like it!”

At age 79 you maintain an active schedule. Why did you say, “Yes,” to serving on the ALOA Board?

Bimler: ALOA is a surging and re-awakened ministry that provides older adults opportunities to celebrate and serve as well as encourAGING and supporting people of all ages in congregations and communities. I want to continue to be an encourAGER to the younger and the older, since I have been blessed by so many younger and older people in my life.

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Models of Independence to Interdependence as Ministry

Heard of the Village movement?

Villages are nonprofit, grassroots membership organizations that improve quality of life and expand choices as we age. Village members and supporters come together to imagine and build the best experience of aging possible. Villages are led by older adults who share their skills and support each other to navigate the challenges and opportunities of aging. A better experience is possible when we can grow with and rely on each other. Every day, village members come together to provide support services and create new possibilities for what’s next as we age. Faith-based villages are becoming more common as faith communities use the village model to organize their work with and for older adults.

The Florida Region's LIV-UP project

(Lutheran Intentional Village - Upper Pinellas) began with volunteers from Lutheran congregations in a small geographic area. It concentrates on helpful services that enable older adults to continue to live at home, plus social and educational events that help them stay engaged in the life of the community. Find out more at liv-up.org

Care Connections Network (CCN) is a village in Huntington Beach, CA that is a social ministry of Lutheran Church of the Resurrection. Members, from both congregation and the community, enjoy educational opportunities to help them age with confidence, social and cultural events to keep them connected, referrals to vetted service providers to help them live independently and volunteer assistance. Find out more at CareConnectionsNetwork.org

COMING EVENTS

Senior Fest February 1, 2020

The 15th Annual Austin & Central Texas Senior Fest will take place at Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Austin on Saturday, Feb. 1, 2020. Texas District President Mike Newman will be the keynote speaker, and his theme will be *Getting Through It: Facing an Uphill Life with God's Gifts*. The day will include multiple opportunities to attend workshops, plus a catered lunch. Get more information and register online by clicking on the Events tab at aloaserves.org

Coming Events in Florida Living Forward - January 14-16, 2020 Luther Springs, near Gainesville

Explore your passions and calling in the second half of life.

**Grands Camp Weekend - March 6-8, 2020
Luther Springs, near Gainesville**
Grandparents & grandchildren enjoy faith-filled activities together.

More information at aloaserves.org/events/
Register online at LutherSprings.org or call 828-209-6301.



Ironwood Springs Lutherhostel
Our fall Lutherhostel took place September 23-27 in southern Minnesota with 46 participants. Dr. Paul Schwartzkopf focused on storytelling and the scriptures, while Pastor Frank and Deaconess Jan Janzow provided meaningful devotions and music. In addition

Experience Italy & the Oberammergau Passion Play

September 22 - October 2, 2020

Only a couple of spots remain! 11-day tour of Italy, plus the Oberammergau Passion Play.

Join ALOA to take in the sights in Italy meaningful to many Christians, including Christian Rome, Vatican City and the tomb of the Apostle Paul, the Sistine Chapel and treasured



masterpieces of Michelangelo, Giotto and more. Then it's off to Bavaria for the once-a-decade experience of the Passion Play.

Cost: \$4,722 per person/dbl occupancy from Tampa. Includes airfare, lodging, two meals daily, transfers and tours, along with tickets to experience the 2020 Passion Play.

For more information go to aloaserves.org/events/oberammergau-passion-play
Questions? Call us or email George Algozzina at georgea@aloaserves.org

to presentations on topics of local interest, attendees could also choose to take in outdoor activities at Ironwood Springs Christian Camp and Retreat including a zip line, cornhole tournament and hiking.

We'll be back at Ironwood Springs in 2020 on October 5-9. Presenters and cost information will be available in early Spring.

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Your faithful giving makes everything we do possible. We are grateful for the support of these individuals for donations received August - October, 2019

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BOARD NEWS

ALOA's Board of Directors met in Minneapolis in early October for their annual two-day meeting. While not all of our board members could be present in person, several of them were able to participate



anyway via video conference. The board values this time together for learning, planning and goal setting, along with strengthening relationships among board members.

Support ALOA

Your support helps ALOA provide more consultation & resources for older adult ministry. Use the enclosed envelope or click the blue [Donate Now](#) button on our website to donate online.

Passion Play & Trip through the Holy Land

June 18-30, 2020

Follow the footsteps of Jesus in the Holy Land, then fly to Germany for the Passion Play. 13-day trip led by ALOA Board member Rev. Dr. David Maack. Contact dmaack@lutheranmissionsociety.org for more information and to book your reservation.



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They are leaders in their mission for adult ministry!

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ALOA is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the LCMS and an affiliated Social Ministry Organization of the ELCA.



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 God's work. Our hands.