

SUNDAYS AT SIX: a participative worship model for those unable to attend services

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Purpose: Provide older and disabled adults as well as caregivers the opportunity to worship with their congregations and network with one another to provide and receive spiritual nurturing and support.
(Note: The word “elders” refers to the participants. It is a more respectful term than “shut-in”.)

Design: Participants access a toll free number, calling into a weekly worship service on Sunday evenings at six pm. A shortened version of the morning worship is offered by one or two worship leaders including the collect of the day, lessons, and sermon or devotion. At Ascension, Landover Hills MD, the pastor participated for several years. Now the service is coordinated by volunteer worship leaders. A hymn led by one of the elders provides reinforcement to the theme of the service. Each participant is invited to share prayer needs/concerns for that day and for the week. The benediction ends the worship time, and participants enjoy informal networking following the worship.

Participants are empowered to lead parts of the service.

Participants are encouraged to network and pray for one another through the week.

Participants are identified to “remind” others about the call.

- Benefits:**
- Very affordable; conference calls can be free or a low cost; a conferencing service can be used so there is no charge to participants’ phone bill
 - Links those unable to leave their homes with the congregation
 - Reduces isolation and loneliness
 - Can be done from anywhere (i.e., worship leaders can call in from home or while at another engagement.)
 - Links elders with their worship leaders and with one another
 - Provides opportunity for elders to minister to one another
 - Some elders participate even when they attend worship because they want to network and hear the sermon a second time
 - Another opportunity to share God’s love
 - It is fun and educational as participants share information about aging in place

Lessons Learned:

- 35 minutes maximum for worship time
- Elders may need to be taught how to do a conference call
- Singing is best done by one person to avoid confusion
- The informal time communicating is as important as the formal worship time
- Occasional letters from the call leaders help link the participants to the life of the congregation and remind them of the call phone numbers
- Best if homebound, isolated elders are engaged in leading the program (i.e., one elder calls participants on Sunday afternoons to remind them about the call; one elder chooses the hymn and does the singing; the prayer time is led by one participant after each participant shares their prayer concerns; a volunteer leads a devotion if the pastor is unavailable.)