



EncourAGING and Equipping Congregations for Older Adult Ministry

CELEBRATING
30
years of ministry

March 2022

Are You a Part of a New Cultural Phenomena?

Recent research by Rev. Dr. Carl P. Greene is the focus in this continuing series of interviews with leaders in older adult ministry for ALOA. Dr. Greene, who has a passion for ministry with overlooked demographics, also serves as the Executive Director of a network of churches.

By Dr. Mary Manz Simon, ALOA Board

You introduce “early old age” (EOA) as a new cultural phenomena. How is EOA defined?

Greene: Early old age (EOA) refers to the “young-old” age category. This currently applies to baby boomers, the postretirement period stretching from age 65 to 80. Given changes in mortality, plus the health and functionality of this age bracket compared to 100 years ago, there is a new “robust elderly” age class. However, the specific study of this ministry has been minimal.

What is unique about this demographic?

Greene: Those in this young-old category are spiritually sensitive. While there are a number of gains, from retirement blessings to the possibility of grandchildren, the acute losses bring a greater focus on spiritual needs. Losses might include personal health changes, loss of loved ones, loss of key relationships, change in identity

with retirement and caregiving. In addition, mortality is more real than earlier in life.

Why should congregations pay attention to “early old age”?

Greene: There are “pull factors” that can be specifically offered to this age group. However, few studies examine how religious organizations draw older people to congregations. Ask yourself, “Does my church provide ministry opportunity specifically for the early old age?”

Generally, churches offer ministry to older adults who need assistance, yet have not been as quick to provide ministry with the EOA group. EOA individuals have life experiences, talents, and skills that can bless others. If your church provides these ministry opportunities, you are in a select group!



Rev. Dr. Carl P. Greene reports on his research into Early Old Age and what that means for ministry in our churches.

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.

Continued on page 4



Hans Springer

BEST PRACTICES

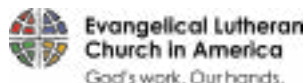
In mid-February I attended the *Best Practices in Ministry* conference, at which I had a chance to lead a workshop and ALOA had an exhibit.

This annual conference (10 plus years)

was a dream of Pastor Jeffery Schrank and Christ Church Lutheran in Phoenix. It grew out of a concern that there was not a place where pastors, other church workers and congregations could share best practices for ministry. Starting with a small attendance the first year, it has grown to the point where 3,000 people from all over the country gather for three days to share what are some of the BEST ministry practices out there.

When thinking of BEST PRACTICES, I automatically think of one of ALOA's current projects, The Toolkit for Older Adult Ministry, which will include BEST PRACTICES for congregations to use as a ministry resource.

Finally, as we are in the penitential season of Lent I would encourage us in our own personal lives, that we remember that through God's BEST PRACTICE of sending his Son to redeem us as sinners we can put forth our own BEST PRACTICES in our prayer and worship life as we move toward that momentous day of resurrection and remembrance, Easter Sunday morning.



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

ALOA Page on the SED Ministry Library

The Southeastern District LCMS recently launched a Ministry Library and ALOA is taking part with a page. Originally planned as an ongoing resource to congregations, the Ministry Library was launched to host exhibitors for the District's Annual Convention, but has developed into a resource hub that can be utilized by any congregation anywhere. Check out ALOA's page at library.se.lcms.org/ministry_partner/aloa/

Do you shop on Amazon?

Each purchase can benefit ALOA if you shop through **amazon smile**

Go to smile.amazon.com and use your Amazon log-in. Then designate Adult Lutherans Organized for Action as your charity. Amazon will donate .5% of each purchase you make to ALOA....at no cost to you!

Upcoming Webinar

Register for webinars and view our library of more than 25 previous topics at aloaserves.org/webinars/

Thursday, June 23, 2022 – Noon ET Panel on Engaging Older Adults in Ministry

Sue Lennartson, Director of Adult Ministry at St. Andrew's Lutheran Church in Mahtomedi, Minnesota will lead a panel of individuals involved in older adult ministry in congregations. They will discuss keys to engaging the older adults in ministry to each other, their families, their church and in their community. Join in the conversation as they share ideas and experiences on what has and has not worked for their congregations and in their communities. There will be an opportunity for questions.

The AH-HA Experience of Aging GRATEfully & GRACEfully

By Rich Bimler, ALOA Board

I like being older! As each of us grows older, together, we have so much to share and to offer those younger (and older) than we are. The Lord continues to give us each day as a gift to celebrate and to serve other people. We need to enable one another to deal both with aging and with dying. As Parker Palmer states, "One is a privilege and the other one is not up for negotiation!"

You and I no doubt have met older people who are not enjoying the aging process. "Old age is for Sissies," goes one quote. We live in a culture that celebrates youth, disparages old age, and discourages us to face our mortality. How do we go about reframing aging to be seen as a passage of discovery and engagement in life, rather than seeing aging as a decline in action and significance?

One significant way is to continue to focus on the AH-HA's of living a life in the Lord! We live on "this side" of the Resurrection, so we know how it all turns out! The Lord lives – in us! We are His, because of what He has done for us! This means that for us, aging is all about knowing that even when there seems to be little or no hope in this world, we know, in faith, that there is hope...and His name is Jesus!

We can seek ways to "Grow B/Old Gratefully and Gracefully daily! We can see the gift of humor all around us if we only look and listen – in ourselves and in our "Holy Huddles" called families, churches, and communities.

The Lord has given us yet another day to share the joys and the hopes that are ours, because of His life, death, and resurrection!

Looking for that "perfect" medicine to heal our

aches and breaks? Look no further – it's called "AH-HA" living a life in the Lord! This "medicine":

1. Helps us maintain a positive perspective on life
2. Gives us a sense of Resurrection power
3. Helps us to cope with the "oh-oh's" of life
4. Helps to establish communication and rapport with others
5. Relieves tension
6. Increases learning and retention
7. Helps to make us take our lives "not so seriously" because the Lord has already done it all for us
8. Shows us that Laughter is another way of "crossing ourselves" to remind one another that we ARE His!



When we age GRATEfully and GRACEfully, we learn that aging well (and also dying well) takes practice, like everything else worth doing. Let's join together, the younger and the older, to learn the AH-HA's of living and dying well, in the Lord!

1. What makes you "happy" and brings you "AH-HA's" in life?
2. What prevents you from seeing and sensing those "AH-HA's"?
3. What do you need to do or change in your own life to bring more AH-HA's into life each day?
4. Who can you talk to about making these adjustments in both your mind and in your actions?
5. What can you do to encourAGE others around you to share more of the AH-HA's of life, both with you and with others?

COVER STORY: The Cultural Phenomena of Early Old Age

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How does this narrow perspective impact a congregation?

Greene: Outreach focuses on younger people. After all, **we have older people figured out because that's who tends to be in our churches!** We fail to maximize the potential of the young-old.

We also are inclined to forget those young-old who are "dones" -- people who left the church earlier in life due to dissatisfaction but are now reconsidering their faith.

What are practical ways to introduce "early old age" to congregation leaders?

Greene: Story Telling. Some of the most innovative approaches to blending small groups and deepening faith commitment involve storytelling.

The vast majority of EOA adults attended church at least sporadically. Most grew up and retained identification as a Christian—even if they were not practicing that faith most of their lives.



Successful churches take personal stories seriously, including a person's backstory. Rather than acting as though someone

in their 60s has never heard a Bible story or has never had some sort of faith experience, effective churches invite people to tell their story. Even before someone has publicly professed faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, these churches provide opportunities for people to tell their faith story.

Where do they sense God leading them on their journey? Where have they witnessed

God's hand in their lives? Through processing their own story in community, many recognize their desire for an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ.

How do silver mission churches (those serving predominantly older adults) support this storytelling?

Greene: They provide training or technological tools to help individuals record their story digitally. As a result, EOA individuals who experience a new sense of belonging share their life journey with family and friends. They express why their lives are different now. One of the most often mentioned goals for EOA individuals is that their grandchildren will hear their story.

What are other characteristics of effective silver mission churches?

Greene: Congregations provide a place to belong. Most EOA adults now coming to faith have left church at some point across their youth or adult years. They need a compelling reason to return—but promoting Christian beliefs and Christian behavior are insufficient on their own.

Congregations focus on loss not gain. Losses are more important than gains. To explain: as people age, they are naturally going to try to maximize their gains in life, such as extra time in retirement, connecting with grandchildren, or savoring the afterglow of a great career. At the same time, they will compensate for losses: death of loved ones, health declines, loss of relationships at retirement, along with hushed losses such as sex drive.

Churches don't compete well when it comes to gains. A lakefront summer home near grandchildren vs. a Bible Study is not naturally going to yield to increased belonging at church. Losses are more likely to yield belonging.

Congregations offer small groups. From per-

sonal perspective, many entering EOA have been burned by a church in their past. There is another factor, too. After living through the 1960s, the Watergate era, and their own corporate experience, many in this age bracket are wary of any organizational structure.

The most welcoming small groups are clearly faith based, but not an explicit ministry of the church. This is not a bait and switch approach—the Christian foundation is explicit.

These small groups have an informal feel without business meetings, officers or committees. Organizational structure is not obvious.



Small groups must be emotionally safe. As participants process their losses, they want to know

that others are authentic and mutually vulnerable. There is a need for ministry *with*, and not ministry *to* through this context.

What are common mistakes a congregation makes when trying to serve this population?

Greene: Approaching EOA with traditional old age ministries. An easy trap is to use the model that worked in previous generations of having meetings, officers, and structure.

Today's EOA respond to service oriented, nimble, ministry-oriented activities.

Those in the 65-80 segment yearn to impact others. The small group design needs to bridge beyond a self-help group and offer opportunities to make a difference. If the only focus is on getting people to belong with others facing similar losses, the engagement is short-term or an individual remains at a surface level of belonging.

Does your congregation effectively maximize the talents and gifts of those in the young-old population segment?

Tell us about your ministry. Contact us via *our website* or send us an email at aloa4u@gmail.com

So how do congregations support deeper belonging?

Greene:

Through service projects.

Service projects are great equalizers and bridgers. Whether a long-term church goer or a small group attendee, each person is on equal footing when it comes to sweating through a short-term project.

Individuals can “try out” skills, talents, and abilities for a greater purpose. When someone feels like they are no longer merely a recipient of chaplaincy, their sense of belonging increases with the challenge. A community-oriented project engages with purpose and meaning, even amidst loss.

Are there online examples of effective EOA ministries?

Greene: While I do not have personal connections with Live Oaks Church, note their specific focus on EOA baby boomers: liveoakchurch.org/efca-article-on-live-oaks-church/.

What other resources offer additional information on EOA?

Greene: While not EOA specific, look at ALOA's *Faith Stories*. Resources here are well suited for adapting to engage EOA adults.

A number of podcasts and blogs are beginning to wrestle with this subject. An interesting one is: careynieuwhof.com/shut-down-the-bus-tours-what-older-church-members-should-be-doing/



COMING THIS FALL

Ironwood Springs Lutherhostel October 3-7, 2022 Stewartville, Minnesota

Join us for a week of learning, worship, outdoor activities and fellowship at Ironwood Springs Christian Ranch near Stewartville, Minnesota.



Rev. David Buegler returns to lead our spiritual study, sharing **The Rest of the Story** about bible stories we think we know. He is a retired pastor who motivates through entertaining and inspirational bible study. Pastor Frank and Deaconess Jan Janzow will once again lead devotions and music, exploring **The Lost Parables of Luke**. The



Janzows served Ascension Lutheran in Waukesha, Wis. for 37 years.

Each day will include topics of local interest and optional outdoor activities. Try the zip line or the cornhole tournament, hiking and more. Lodging is in comfortable hotel-style rooms in the camp's Miracle Lodge.



Cost: \$600 per person/dbl occupancy includes program, lodging and meals. Bring your camper: \$550 per person. Commuters: \$375 per person (no lodging or breakfast). For information or to register: aloaserves.org/events/ironwood-springs-lutherhostel/

TRAVEL WITH ALOA

Experience Italy & the Oberammergau Passion Play September 20 - 30, 2022



11-day tour of Italy, followed by the Oberammergau Passion Play.

We'll take in Christian Rome, Vatican City, the tomb of Paul and the Sistine Chapel. Then travel to Assisi, Florence, Padua and Venice to marvel at cathedrals and the masterworks of Michelangelo & Giotto. Finally, it's off to Bavaria for the remarkable Oberammergau Passion Play.

Cost: \$4,872 per person/double occupancy from Tampa. Includes airfare, lodging, two meals daily, transfers and tours, along with tickets to experience the 2022 Passion Play.

Find information, videos and how to register under the Events tab on our website.

Questions? Call us or email George Algozzina at georgia@aloaserves.org

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Your donation helps ALOA provide more support & resources for older adult ministry. Use the enclosed envelope or go to the blue **Donate Now** button on our website.

Our faithful supporters makes everything we do possible!

We are grateful for every one of our donors, and would like to note the following who made donations from November, 2021 thru February, 2022

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Holy Land & Passion Play Trip

June 18-30, 2022

ALOA Board member Rev. Dr. David Maack will lead a trip to the Holy Land, followed by travel to Germany for the Passion Play. The 13-day trip will include sites from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and to the Dead Sea Scrolls, then on to Innsbruck, Salzburg and Oberammergau. Cost from \$4,998 per person/dbl occupancy from Newark. Contact dmaack@lutheranmissionsociety.org for more information and a complete brochure.

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You can provide financial support to ALOA in several ways thru Thrivent.

1. Direct Choice® Dollars
If you are eligible for Choice Dollars® direct them to ALOA. It's easy:
 - Go to thrivent.com/thriventchoice/
 - Or, call 1-800-847-4836
2. Anyone Can Make a Personal Donation
Use a credit card or direct it from your bank account. Either way, make a donation to ALOA thru Thrivent and Thrivent will pay all fees.



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