

Senior Adult Ministry in Congregational Practice

Compiled by
the Task Team
for Senior Adult Ministry

Northern Synod
DR Church

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1.) Foreword: Rev. Paul Grobler

(Director Northern Synod)

Dear Reader,

The Northern Synod does her work by means of task teams. A task team is only established if the SSC has identified a clear need. A task team therefore has a clear-cut instruction, a specific starting time, and a time to be terminated.

The Task Team Senior Adult Ministry's instruction was to report within 12 months on the following: **'To work with the SCMM to reflect about caring for the aged in congregations and to formulate possible action plans.'**

The task team was initially called the Task Team for Caring for the Aged, but already at the first meeting the task team asked the SSC to change the name to the Task Team Senior Adult Ministry. With this request for the change in name the task team also clearly pointed the direction in which they would approach the work.

The task team's point of departure was that the church must make a paradigm shift away from an approach that the elderly should be served to an approach where the gifts of senior adults must be put to use to serve the congregation and, and more, to serve the Kingdom.

The product that you, the reader, have in hand here, has been accepted by the SCMM with much thanks and appreciation. It has the potential to help congregations in PRACTICAL ways to live meaningfully, with renewed energy and enthusiasm, the Northern Synod's vocational statement of BRING HOPE, MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Read it with attention and apply it with dedication!

Paul Grobler

Director Northern Synod.

2.) Introductory remarks on behalf of the Task Team

The Task Team, of which all its members are involved with senior adult ministry, was very aware, from the very beginning, that Senior Adulthood is an integral part of the functioning of a congregation. This is first apparent in the suggestion that we should move away from an approach which solely focuses on 'service to', and towards 'service by and with senior adults.' Senior Adults, with their lived experience, skills, and empathetic involvement can make a great contribution to the functioning and growth of a congregation.

Therefore, the task team is glad to present this document as a useful guideline for the practical implementation of a senior adult ministry.
We hope that the rings, congregations and small groups will use it and apply it within the functioning structures and needs that are unique to each group.

At this juncture, the task team wishes to highlight a number of suggestions that arose during their debate:

- It makes much sense to identify in congregations a leader figure ('champion'), someone who has enough enthusiasm and experience to help ensure the continuity of a senior adult ministry.
- Even though the focus must be on growth and on significant, full lives, great care should also be given to senior adults who have to care for fellow senior adults. The pastoral-koinonial care for caregivers (also persons who are not necessarily caregivers for spouses) should be an integral part of the process.
- As the Task Team, we will constantly apply ourselves to live, read, and learn more about and in senior adult ministry. Therefore, the Task Team invites Rings and Congregations to contact us for training, advice, conversations, and support: for practical reasons at the beginning of the implementation of the process, but also in the time it is developed and executed.
- The Task Team also requests the Synod that, when the proposed Table Discussion on senior adult ministry in 2025 takes place, feedback from the Rings and Congregations about its implementation will also be part of the discussion.

3) Report to the Synod:

Senior Adult Ministry

NG Church Northern Synod

1. Introduction

Rev. Karel Albrecht

Many congregations experience an increasing number of older members. Also, retirement villages and care centres as creating great concentrations of aging communities that offer new challenges and opportunities to congregations.

The mandate to the task team reads as follows:

To discuss, in collaboration with the SCSM, about care for the aged in congregations, and to prepare possible action plans.

The task team met once as a whole, and then in sub-groups.

Each group had its own directive, and each group's input is rendered as it stands in the report. It may happen that some things are repeated.

Because of work pressure, the SCSM did not contribute to the report, but Dr. Botha van Aarde was part of the planning

In the very first meeting it was decided to change the term 'care for the aged' to senior adult ministry.

(See also the explanation in the report.). The task team's point of departure was to open up the discussion, and together to think about new research as well as to develop practical guidelines.

All the task team members are involved in senior adult ministry every day and from their experience also attempted to give practical guidelines. This is how we learn from each other.

2. What is senior adult ministry?

Dr Petrus Moolman

In the second half of the previous century there were the beginnings of dramatic changes in the world of the aged and in our views on the natural aging of people. In 1987, a well-known

social gerontologist said about the term 'successful aging' that a study of aging was transformed from a study that *focuses on illness and deterioration* to a discipline *that focuses on health and growth in the later years of life.* In addition to the understanding advocated by this gerontologist, new research and different ways of looking at this new, positive and fresh approach evolved, such as positive aging, healthy aging, active aging, and optimal aging. More recent literature studies and research generally prefer the thought of 'meaningful' aging (in line with Viktor Frankl's celebrated book). Meaningful aging is more comprehensive and inclusive of all the aspects of the innovative language about aging. It is possible to aspire towards meaning to the very end.

Unfortunately, the approach to aging is often still embraced as a problem, rather than as a meaningful, challenging journey towards the end. We often find it in modern retirement villages where the 'old age home' concept is applied, with its emphasis on care in the final, specialised, terminal phase instead of pursuing, for as long as possible, an independent and community-oriented lifestyle.

This choice we unfortunately still often find in the church as faith community's handling of the great increase in the number of aging members. Many churches approach it as a problem in their planning, rather than as a challenging mobilisation of a greying church with plenty of potential for living in and building the Kingdom.

New approaches to our senior adult ministry

The task team in the main agreed that the faith community must take note of the present reflection on and approaches to aging people in our midst:

- Retirees and aging people should not primarily be objects of ministry (aging and retirement is not equal to obsolete and useless). The senior adults in the community must be mobilised, trained, accompanied and empowered, until it becomes physically and cognitively impossible, to keep on serving and ministering.
- Retirees and older persons are not a homogenous group to be defined by one single term such as the aged, seniors, or old people. American literature on gerontology uses the term 'senior adult ministry'. The term implies that aging members of a congregation are in a specific phase of life (because everyone grows older)—just like toddlers, children, young, young adults, and adults of middle-age—and an inseparable

part of the total course of life. The term ‘senior adulthood’ is therefore quite fitting when we refer to the greying group in the faith community.

- Because senior adults are not a homogenous group, there is a clear resistance among the younger members of the group towards activities for ‘the aged’ or ‘seniors’. At the same time, it is important that the life group prior to retirement (and at least 10 years prior), should be included in the focus group with an eye to holistic preparation for retirement. The senior adult group must therefore be named, and the programmes must be offered in terms of the members’ functional age (not chronological age) but in terms of their functional status, e.g.:
    - Pre-retirement group (normally 10 years before retirement—but they themselves decide when they fall into this group)
    - Retired, but still psychosocially and economically active
    - Retired and settled
    - Home- and bed-bound persons

These distinctions are not rigid, because programmes can often also include other groups.

- The faith community must therefore constantly *be wary of ageist behaviour* towards senior adults (such as stereotyping and patronising language). Fresh approaches to senior adult ministry should also lead to new ‘language’, such as:
    - *Senior adults* rather than *the elderly, old people, and seniors*
    - *Aging persons* and perhaps especially in later years: *senior adults* (depending on the garget group) rather than as *old people.*
    - The term senior adult MINISTRY we must in our approach never primarily regard as a ministry TO senior adults, for it is also a ministry that involves aging persons and makes them aware of how much they still can SERVE their fellow believers and the missional field around us—therefore *a ministry together with and by senior adults.*
- The whole person ages—physically, psycho-socially, and religiously. The full scope of growing older should be part of our senior adult ministry.
    - Let the emphasis be on the proven worth of being involved in and part of a faith community in the handling of typical challenges in the aging process. (This is proved by research.)

- The pastor should *among other things* take note of the following:

- pastorate with aging people with regard to, for instance, grief, or loss, or emotional baggage from the past, can be very complicated and can hamper the growth towards meaningful aging;
- to identify skills in aging people and to involve them in the broad ministry of the congregation;
- especially in the field of dementia, and in particular, Alzheimer dementia, attention must be paid to the carer (especially when it is a spouse).
- *The task team earnestly requests that pastors make themselves available for more Continued Ministry Development (CMD) and personal study.*

Definition of Senior Adult ministry

The task team could relate to the following delineation of a comprehensive senior adult ministry

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The aim of a comprehensive senior adult ministry, in the context of the local church's pastorate and mission, is to accompany and equip aging persons, by involving and motivating them holistically, to manage their age-related life challenges in such a way that they will experience meaning as long as they live.

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3. Psychosocial aspects of senior adulthood.

~ Pieter Jooste

Introduction

The humanities, especially psychology and social work, increasingly stress a growth-oriented pursuit of meaningfulness in senior adulthood. These disciplines also emphasise a holistic approach in which senior adults must be understood from a multiprofessional viewpoint (which includes, but is not limited to, religious, medical, and psycho-social perspectives). It therefore offers meaningful guidelines for a model for senior adult ministry model.

The role of meaningfulness in senior adulthood

Gerontology has moved away from a negative, stagnating view of aging toward a positive, growth-oriented perspective.

The Pursuit of Meaningfulness, born from Victor Frankl's thought, is a central element in this search. Some aspects from this research which are applicable to a senior adult ministry, are listed here':

- Meaningful aspects from the past are (re)discovered.
- The past is reflected on (in one's own thought, but also in conversations with others) and made part of a person's way of life in the present.
- The past is also orientated towards the future.

In connection with the above, Frankl says that the pursuit of meaning will often be challenging. He describes the dynamics of the process as a push-pull interaction. The challenges 'push' one forward, and the expected goals, in the future that one is pursuing also 'pull' you forward.

In this field of tension, growth takes places. Creativity, service to others, flipping negative situations into positive ones, and the use of Faith as an incentive to win through in challenging circumstances, are examples of this.

Senior Adult 'Living in Meaningfulness' also has far-reaching life outcomes / life-enriching

- One's value system is weighed anew and expanded.
- One's self-worth, and worth-for-others, develops.
- A deeper understanding of one's place in the greater whole of everything is established.
- There is an increase in overall health.
- One builds up an emotional reserve that allows one to live out existential values, including community work, conserving nature, and deepening one's relationship with God.

Psychological-psychiatric problems

In spite of a positive approach to life, senior adulthood still contains psychological-psychiatric challenges. Although one cannot too randomly make comparisons with South-

African circumstances, one should take note of recent research about his issue in the Americas.

- At least 1 out of every 4 senior adults experiences a mental disturbance, especially depression, anxiety or dementia, with depression being the most common.
- Suicide (in the Americas) is higher among people older than 85 than in any other age group.
- Two thirds of the people suffering from mental disorders do not get sufficient psychological-psychiatric treatment.

The challenges of **dementia**, especially **Alzheimer's dementia**, in senior adulthood get more comprehensive attention in the chapter on the **process of dying, death and grief.**
The holistic nature of a ministry pattern for senior adults, as also of that of growth-in-meaningfulness, must be part of the continued training of pastors, small groups and individuals who work in senior adulthood.
It is also important to be sensitive to the problems mentioned and, when necessary, to refer the senior adults for specialised aid.

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4. Aging, faith, and faith community:

~ Rev. Stanwin Street

Aging is experienced by many as a crisis that causes great strain. It reminds us that life is short and transient. It also makes one think of all that you have not yet achieved in life. Yet one also knows that in our time people live longer than a few decades ago—and this requires that one should think differently about aging and one's approach to it. For too long faith

communities have focused on preparing for death rather than on being guided toward the end of life via a comprehensive, meaningful, hopeful existence

The church's take on a growing number of aging members can mainly be characterised as problem-centred rather than as an opportunity for life fulfilment in a widening segment of the faith community. The question should not be how we can serve them, but rather on how we can equip them to serve. Of course, it will also sustain their faith-life if they are aware that their faith still plays a strong part in their trust in God, and that he will use them with the gifts they have.

A number of places in the New Testament describe life as a foot race. In Hebrews 12:1-2 we read, ' … let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus.'

Paul uses the same image when he reasons with the undisciplined Corinthians (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). In applying his image, Paul points to four ideas:

- Clear orientation towards a goal—one runs to finish the race.
- Purposeful planning—one thinks about how one must run, the pace one should maintain, and the final spurt.
- Concentration—everything is secondary to one's training, and then one runs the race to win it.
- Intense effort – one runs as fast as one can and gives it one's all.

This is how Paul views the life of a faithful Christian.

Perseverance is also important to Paul. He writes in Colossians 2:6-7, 'So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him.'

Nothing must distract our attention. The image of a foot race is central to Paul's own estimation of his life. It must also be the main focus in the thoughts and heart of a senior adult Christian. The fact that one's physical body no longer moves fast does not mean that one should move slowly spiritually. What keeps us going?

Zeal is not a word that is in general use in our time. Nehemiah 3-6 tells us that the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt in 52 days in spite of opposition. This is zeal in action. Zeal means priority, passion and exertion in God's cause. It is a burning desire to please God, to do his will, and to glorify him here on earth. Of course, our memory and our ability to concentrate

may diminish, as may our energy levels, but we can keep on living our days with zeal. Zeal must be fed by hope.

To conclude, it is important to mention that faith communities have a tremendous role to play when it comes to growth in faith. They should be attentive to the needs of the aging community and use the technology available to them. In scientific circles it is assumed that gatherings of faith communities have great therapeutic value for the aging person. That is why events such as Bible studies, discussion groups, and worship services are very important. By distancing oneself from them, people often impoverish themselves spiritually and emotionally.

Sources

1. Ons word oud – God se pad vir ouer gelowiges. www.bybelkennis.co.za
2. Moolman, P. 2022. ***Leef!*** – 'n Vars kyk op Seniorvolwassenebediening in die Geloofsgemeenskap.

5. Senior adulthood and loneliness

~ Rev. Abraham Viviers; Rev. Karel Albrecht

What is loneliness?

In general, loneliness can be described as a state of being alone. Yet loneliness is not necessarily just about being alone but is connected with an individuals' perceptions that they are alone and isolated from the people and things that matter most. So, loneliness is also about a way of thinking and a state of mind, e.g. feelings of uselessness and isolation. And although loneliness is part of all phases of people's lives, the fact remains that feelings of loneliness are found more in teenagers (in the process of self-discovery) and in people in the senior adult phase of their lives. It is also important to note that people often feel lonely even if they are surrounded by others.

Different forms or states of loneliness and their causes:

Loneliness can assume different forms. During the **Covid-19 pandemic**, many people experienced intense loneliness when their contact with children, grandchildren, and other family members and friends were broken off. And many senior adults today experience

‘**emigration isolation**’ because children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren have moved abroad. Some senior adults experience ‘**phantasy loneliness**’. This is related to a loss of status after retiring, and that in their minds they still feel like doctors, pastors, artisans, etc.—while hard realities often harshly remind them that they are so no longer. Further, we find **disability loneliness** due to withdrawal from society after the loss of senses or physical abilities and functions.

Another type of loneliness results from the senior adult’s **loss of a network of friends and companions (social isolation)**. Friends die, and often it also means that the senior adult’s support network weakens of even falls away completely.

There is also **loneliness in sexuality**. When a spouse dies, senior adults are often isolated with regard to sexuality, because many of them do not feel equal to starting new relationships and to marry.

Senior adults often also become lonely due to **the decrease in physical abilities and powers (weakening)**. The public idea of a senior adult also sometimes leads to isolation because it easily labels senior adults in a negative way as ‘people who no longer really have something great and valuable to offer society’.

Some senior adults quickly become lonely when they move to a new resort or home where the present residents have already formed their networks and do not easily allow **newcomers** to their circle. Closely connected with this is the loneliness experienced by a senior adult after a **change in the living environment**. Often, they have to exchange a neighbourhood with many acquaintances for a new living environment where they know nobody.

Some people also become lonely because they **retire and detach** themselves from all kinds of duties and responsibilities. A shocking thing is that some people become lonely because they **feel redundant** and feel that they do not want to be a burden to others. They prefer to struggle in silence rather than to approach others for help.

There is also **family loneliness**, due to all the demands life makes of younger people, so that children and grandchildren often neglect the aging persons—or never even come to see them.

There is also loneliness due to the **rapid development of new technology**. It sometimes complicates senior adults’ contact with significant people in their lives if they cannot keep up with new technological developments. Furthermore, the **lack of transport and decrease in mobility** also contribute to loneliness in senior adults.

What congregations can do to counteract senior adult isolation

- By streaming worship services, housebound members can still experience a feeling of contact with the congregation. The online streaming of funeral services can also have great value for senior adult members and family members of the deceased.
- Technology can also be harnessed to involve senior adult members in the life of the congregation, for instance Zoom Bible study groups.
- Technology can also be used to maintain contact with family and friends abroad.
- Regarding the above three points, congregations can approach volunteers to empower senior adults in the use of new technology.
- Lonely senior adults often experience evenings and weekends as the worst. Churches can encourage their members to invite senior adults for lunch or a braai, specifically on weekends. For this, transport and assistance can be organised.
- Congregations can start interest groups where senior adults can regularly gather and support one another (e.g. senior adults who have lost a spouse or a child, or even people who play bridge or engage in similar joint activities).
- Congregations can consider presenting a course for senior adults to help them to hone their social skills again.
- Congregations can recruit and train volunteers to visit housebound senior adults regularly in a structured way.
- Congregations can consider recruiting volunteers to give lifts to senior adults who have difficulties with transport, and to support them when they go shopping or have to do business.
- Loneliness can also be countered by equipping senior adults with new skills—things they have never done before.
- Congregations can also consider a system in which younger church members (even young people and children) 'adopt' a senior adult or senior couple. They pray for them, visit them regularly, and give support when needed.
- It is also good to try to start a ministry of senior adults by senior adults (younger and more independent senior adults offer care and support to older and frail senior adults). In the process, one also prevents them from feeling that they are a burden to everybody.

- Congregations can also do much to encourage people who live in old age homes and care centres within the congregational borders to look out for newcomers and to take trouble to reach out to them, to make them feel welcome and special, and to help them to make friends quicker.

6. Three-generation families

Rev. Tienie de Bruyn

Definition/Description

Three-generation families are families where a family of at least three generations live in the same structure or on the same premises. It consists of at least grandparent(s), parent(s), and grandchildren.

One parent (or both) may move in with the children of grandchildren, or that, due to circumstances, children with their families still live with the first generation.

These families can be composed in different ways:

- Biological parent(s) (first generation), plus second and third generation.
- A composite family where some biological parent(s) or child(ren) are no longer involved.

Reasons for three-generation families

Some **close-knit families** prefer to live in this way, with no problems.

- Financial reasons:

The parents' funds (older generation) have been eaten away, and they can no longer function independently. Children (second generation) are forced by financial crises to move back in with their parents.

- Health reasons

The first generation can no longer live on their own and cannot afford to go to a place of care. The same can also be true of the second and/or third generation.

Practical outcome

This arrangement can be quite normal and healthy, without undue stress. It is also the ideal. The arrangement can also be stressful and only be tolerated due to inevitable circumstances. It can lead to conflict, interference, and unhealthy relationships.

Challenges for the Church and congregation:

- identifying such families that live together in a healthy structure;
- discussion, to learn what works and why it works. This can lead to the compilation of guidelines (not rules) for a plan by the congregation / community;
- motivating families where things are not going well to become part of the discussion;
- helping pastors to attend to this issue in the pastorate;
- using networks to get the different families together to support one another, to offer practical help, and to learn from one another.

Sources

1. Moolman, P. *Leef!* – 'n Vars kyk op Seniorvolwassenebediening in die Geloofsgemeenskap". 2022.
2. Gesprekke met individue

7. Support

Dr. Petrus Moolman; Dr. Eddy Harvey;

Rev. Ewald Schmidt and Hannetjie Harvey

Introduction

There are demographically growing numbers of aging persons in the DR Church. Several disciplines are involved in support services, such as the pastorate, social work, psychology and gerontology.

The approach to a support service

The following approach is followed:

- Support is comprehensive and takes the whole life of an aging person into account.
- It makes use of the existing services in the congregation's surroundings.
- The focus is not on serving the aging person, but to equip and motivate him/her to take part in the support activities.
- Support varies from general support actions/endeavours to pastoral-therapeutic support.

Support in practice

The following guideline can help to establish a support service:

- **Leadership in the support service**. The leader must be capable of lead the congregation and the action committee to establish and manage a meaningful support service in the congregation.
- **Action committee / task team:** The action committee does the following:
    - It determines what the needs of aging persons in the congregation are.
    - It determines what resources and skills are available in the congregation and in the area.

The role of the pastor

The pastor is an integral part of the team. The pastor and church council identify members who need help and services to be utilised.

Clinical pastorate has specific areas that need specialised attention.

Support services

Support is an overarching term covering a range of services. These services **include general and therapeutic support**.

- **General support**: General support can be offered by senior adults themselves as well as other volunteers. The following are examples of general support:
    - **Information groups**: These groups cover the total range of being human: the *physical, psycho-social, and religious aspects*. Examples of groups are: Aae-related illnesses; age-related decisions; religious aspects such as grief.
    - **Support groups**: small groups like cell groups and Bible study groups.
    - **Service groups** such as outreach groups to houses and bedbound persons; for visiting the sick at hospitals and homes.
    - **Interest groups** such as Bible study groups, book clubs, reading groups, colouring therapy, trim gym, and card playing
    - **Walking**: The social interaction of walking together, even for short distances, has great benefits.

- **Therapeutic and specialised support:**
    - Pastoral-therapeutic support groups such as dementia care and grief support

- Exercise group (similar to a gym group) with a bio kineticist/physio/reflexologist

Resources and reading

1. Petrus Moolman. 2022. Leef! 'n Vars kyk op Seniorvolwassenebediening in die Geloofsgemeenskap: Pretoria: Groep 7 Drukkers en Uitgewers.
2. Inligtingstuk, Huis Herfsblaar, Queenswood, Pretoria.
3. Onderhoud met James Black, bestuurder, en Ina Delport, senior maatskaplike werker, Huis Herfsblaar, Queenswood, Pretoria.
4. Dr. Shane o' Mara se boek "Science of Walking".
5. Youtube-onderhoud met dr. Shane o' Mara deur Mel Robbins.
6. Youtube- Mel Robbins, Science of Walking.

8. Financial challenges:

Dr. Bettie Wagner-Ferreira;

Rev. Petro Jonker and Rev. Stanwin Street

Introduction

From our pastoral care to senior adult members in our congregations, we identified the following financial challenges:

- In our area there is a shortage of affordable housing for our senior adult members, especially for those who only get a SASSA grant.
- Cost increases in old age homes and care centres put financial stress on our senior adult members and/or their families.
- Many of our senior adult members find that their monthly pension is no longer enough to sustain them. They also do not know how to supplement their income. Also, quite a number of our senior adult members do not have any savings or investments.
- Many of our senior adult members receive little to no help from family/children/organisations and sometimes they have to care for more than one person with only their pension.

- Our senior adult members see their health problems and the rise in living costs as two of the main reasons why their pension money is no longer enough.
- Circumstances have changed so much that many of our senior adult members can no longer afford their medical aid contributions.
- Quite a number of our senior adult members also have transport problems when they have to visit state hospitals / clinics.

How congregations can help

Figures show that only about 6% of South Africans will one day be able to retire with ease. The international asset manager of the Allianz Group stated in the latest Global Pension Report that South African pensioners are among the poorest. This leads to growing concern not only for retirees but also for active workers. It is therefore important for people to know the options available to them where retirement is concerned. The above percentage shows us that most pensioners are going to end up living with their children or other family members. Rising inflation and interest rates also make it difficult to plan for one's retirement. Therefore, one's retirement may be a joy or a disaster. The main obstacle is that many people do not know enough about managing their finances in order to save for their old age. Dawie Roodt, economist at Efficient Group, believes that many financial retirement disasters can be avoided if from the very first day on the job one starts saving for one's retirement. Congregations can play an enormous role by acting proactively by creating events where people can receive valuable financial advice. These events can be led by knowledgeable persons in the congregation/community. Congregations also find that everywhere housing for retirees is becoming unaffordable. Yet, if congregations begin to be proactive, it can make a great difference in the long run.

The session can also help people to think about things such as:

- Planning in time for housing—many people do not plan for housing when they get older, and the older one gets, the more difficult it becomes to make such decisions.
- Weigh the pros and cons of retirement villages and an ordinary house—many people underestimate the cost of maintaining a large house. Retirement villages are not necessarily cheap, but they have quite a number of advantages.
- Do not put your children above your retirement plan. Many parents move to be near their children, and then the children decide to emigrate, and then one is stuck in a strange town without friends or family. Many parents also believe that when they die,

they should leave an inheritance for their children, or else they lend their savings to their children, which causes them not to retire comfortably.

- Take possible health problems into account and take precautions. We live longer, but at a price. Be certain that a retirement village has a care centre or home care available. Study medical aid options and what they cost.
- Stay within your budget but buy quality. It is wise to buy within one's budget but also try to buy quality. Do some research before you buy.
- Retirement is not a mountain to be scaled—it is the start of a new chapter, not the end of the book.
- Use the knowledge that you have acquired—many think that after retirement they must sit on the veranda and do nothing. Yet there are so many retirees that feel up to working. This is a good time to harness the knowledge that one has built up over the years to still earn an income.

Financial advisors can help one with the options available.to prioritise savings for retirement. They can inform people and also guide them in their financial decisions. This will definitely have an impact on how people think about retirement and on how they plan for it.

Affordable housing for senior adult members

Affordable housing for senior adults is a very serious problem and much more than a challenge. In many places retirement villages and lifestyle centres are built where only people with an above average or high income can afford to live. According to Ronel Fourie, a social worker who was manager of Silwerkroon Service Centre for 18 years, people who get only a state pension struggle to find decent housing. She also believes that a person should get about R12 000 per month to afford a fairly decent place to stay. Some senior adult members live in garden flats or even in one room under the same roof as children or family. Yet, when their health fails, it is very difficult to find affordable care. There are a number of private persons who adapt their houses to accommodate older persons needing care, but the quality of care is not always up to scratch. Even places registered at the Department of Social Development are not necessarily of high quality. Below is a list of fairly affordable places in Pretoria, though we do not have firsthand knowledge of the quality of care at all of them.

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Ebenhaeser Tuiste vir Bejaardes	012 333 6040	info@ebenhaeser.com
Eden Care Centre	012 332 0599	management@edencarecentres.co.za
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9. Guidance during the process of dying, death, and grief:

~ Pieter Jooste

Introduction

Although the process of grief is painful and disruptive, it is a natural and essential process that needs to be worked through.

Here we focus on the uniqueness of senior adults' process of grief.

The process of grief

Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's views on the phases of mourning grief are still basic to the guidance in dying and grief counselling, also in senior adulthood.

- The initial phases of Denial, Anger and Negotiation are actually preparatory phases. The dying or grieving person is for a relatively short time in a haze of unreality. In senior adults this also includes confusion and unreality.

This is a preparatory process and it is essential. It forms a buffer that protects the psyche until the grieving person is able to start working through the effects of loss. For senior adults, especially in the case of the loss of a spouse, there are often collateral losses. One's spouse is

also one's friend, the sounding board of, and witness to, one's life, often over a many years. One's spouse's income probably had a great effect on the quality of both lives; shortly one might have to go through the trauma of moving house, and then also have to leave friends and social structures behind. The literature's term for this is compacted grief. It has an intensely negative impact, especially here, during the preparatory phases of grief: unavoidable, intensely intrusive emotions, especially anxiety (and concomitant paralysing, ineffectual helplessness), prevents these preparatory phases from forming the essential buffer that has to give the psyche time to ready itself for working through the loss.

The guidance during this period, with its muddled and rapidly alternating emotions, is primarily supportive and in the background. Offer your availability for potential emotional support, but initially it is better to supply practical help. Do not make promises of continued support that you are unable to keep.

- The so-called growth phases Kübler-Ross describes as **Depression**, **Acceptance, and Isolation/Introspection**. Depression is not a clinical depression, but rather a deep sadness when the reality and inevitability of the loss begin to sink in. Acceptance implies that the rollercoaster ride of heartache and painful longing is slowly levelling out. This phase can then lead to one of the most precious sections of the dying/grieving process in believing senior adults: The isolation Kübler-Ross speaks of is a period of time with God in which the last things are worked through in his Loving Presence.

  Guidance during these phases is more active. A trust relationship is established, and the grieving person is accompanied on the way.
- Dementia, especially Alzheimer's dementia, has its own challenges when guiding a person diagnosed with it, but especially also in guiding the primary caregiver who is often the spouse. The process of support and care is so demanding that the expected process with which the loved one should be occupied is not sufficient, and then it has to be repeated only after the loved one has died.

The role of the pastor, small group, and individual guide is to accompany the senior adult on this challenging journey while clad and equipped with everything mentioned in Colossians 3:12, and doing so prayerfully, lovingly, and empathetically. The church, as a community of faith, also needs to reflect on the training and the supervisory responsibility of this work of guidance.

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10. Summary

Pieter Jooste; Rev. Karel Albrecht

Because of the growing percentage of Senior Adult members, it has become crucial for the church as faith community to reflect on a pattern of ministry that is in step with worldwide innovative ideas on aging.

We have to move away from an approach in which senior adults are objects of service to one of a guiding ministry alongside, with, and by senior adults.

Recent research has emphasised how valuable a lifestyle is if fixed on growth and the (re)discovery of meaning in senior adulthood. The church must continue to nurture it. Although it became quite apparent in the task team deliberations that the emphasis on this positive, growth-oriented model of ministry should be with and by senior adults, it remains

vital to take the senior adults' unique challenges into account. In the discussion on this we highlight the following:

- Faith: Changing life circumstances, losses, isolation, impoverishment, and aging ca lead to crises in faith, and pastorally speaking these have to be handled with patience and with sensitivity. In this way a crisis may be changed into an experience of growth and a deepening of faith.
- Loneliness: Lonely., isolated senior adults can slip away, out of the mainstream model of ministry, and not have the emotional energy to reach out. Congregations must be sensitive to this and try to prevent it.
- The challenges of 3-generation families: Congregations must identify families where this structure is succeeding and then empower them to reach out to families who struggle with it.
- Support: Skilled persons in the congregation and surrounding area must be involved, with senior adults, in developing action plans for support ministries. These support ministries must keep the holistic person in mind.
- Financial challenges: Considering the diversity of financial circumstances in as well as among congregations in the synodal region, an interactive work programme can be very valuable. Expert members, also from the senior adult group, can give valuable advice on financial management. Practical aid, in the tradition of the early Church, as described in Acts 2:42-47, must be considered anew if there are impoverished senior adults who have to bear this heavy burden alone.
- Guidance during the processes of dying and grief. We take note of the compacted grief often found among senior adults. Perhaps the faith community can receive more training in this regard. **Psychological-psychiatric issues**: The signs of depression, anxiety, and the risk of suicide, especially in the context of challenging circumstances, must be spotted in time, and professional help should be called in.

11. Recommendations

1. The SSC takes note of the report.

2. The members of the SSC are requested to pass on the report to the different rings.

3. The SSC takes note of the request to rather use the term 'senior adult ministry' rather than 'care for the aged'.

4. The task team requests that a table discussion on the subject of senior adult ministry should be held a year from now.

4) Comprehensive Senior Adult Ministry in Congregational Practice

(With the writer's permission, selectively quoted from chapters 5 and 6 of: Moolman, Petrus. 2022. Lééf – 'n Vars kyk op Seniorvolwassenbediening in die Geloofsgemeenskap. Pretoria: Groep 7 Drukkers en Uitgewers)

This publication is not meant to be a manual for a specific method. It aims at being a guide to making possible a new and fresh, practical approach to senior adult ministry. Every faith community should, while considering its demography and identity, develop and apply this approach practically, making it its own.

The framework summarised

Prof. Danie Louw expressed the following idea, which can well serve as an ongoing guideline where congregational programmes for senior adult ministry are concerned:

It is very important that church programmes should not try merely to keep older people busy or to fill their time. There should be 'fulfilment' of life, a developing spiritual realisation of God's faithfulness and presence, and growth in their vision of the resurrection of hope within them.

Definition of a comprehensive senior adult ministry

The task team could relate to the definition of a comprehensive senior adult ministry as given below:

The aim of a <u>comprehensive</u> senior adult ministry, in the context of the <u>local church's</u> pastorate and <u>mission</u>, is to <u>accompany and equip</u> aging persons, by <u>involving and motivating them holistically</u>, to manage their age-related life challenges in such a way that they will <u>experience meaning as long as they live</u>.

The underlined phrases above emphasise the important elements of this approach:

- The ministry is comprehensive for aging people, and the totality of their existence is taken into consideration.
- The congregational pastorate focuses on this as an independent ministry and not as a part of a ministry. The senior adult ministry is therefore not an object of service of,

say, the ministry of mercy, but could be regarded as its active, participating and supporting partner.

- The ministry is not separate from the congregational context and its surroundings. It utilises, and is involved in, related organisations and activities in the congregation's environment and wider context. It therefore does not involve only members of a specific congregation of denomination.
- The focus is not on ministering to aging persons, but on empowering and motivating them to become part of the ministry and to serve.
- The ministry activities focus throughout on the total person: physically, psychologically, socially, and religiously.
- It motivates the person to lead a meaningful life right up to the very end.
- It pastorally guides the person to a meaningful life.
- It supports the person and provides skills for life with which the person can manage - comprehensive challenges.
- It helps the person to focus on life as a whole—to the very end—the focus is not on death but on life.
- …and to live and experience it all as meaningful.

Structure of the senior adult ministry

Of course, the senior adult ministry remains the responsibility of the church council or the church leadership. They outline the whole of the ministry to match the character of the faith community. However, it is important that a leadership group is appointed to initiate, mobilise, plan and manage the senior adult ministry.

In summary, the following tips are important:

Ministry leader ('Champion')

It is advisable to use a skilled and enthusiastic person that can get the whole ministry going. However, it is extremely important that the ministry does not centre on the one single person, but that the Action Committee is responsible for the initiative, planning, coordination and management of the ministry.

The person who acts as the ministry leader (coordinator)

- must have a personal passion for meaningful life and is capable of communicating with enthusiasm the idea of meaningful aging to the senior adult groups in the congregation;
- is someone with a good, scientific gerontological knowledge so that the ministry can be a holistic, comprehensive one that does not solely focus on the spiritual aspect of aging;
- can be an emeritus, but not necessarily. It is essential that the person has a good scientific knowledge of gerontology as a science of aging. The position of ministry leader is an excellent opportunity for retired professionals such as social workers, psychologists, persons in the medical field, and teachers, to keep on playing a great

role in the faith community on the basis of their academic and professional experience.

The Action Committee

The action committee consists of persons with an interest in and passion for senior adult ministry. They must have an interest in getting the ministry to function according to new guidelines and not to fall back into obsolete practices and approaches.

The Action Committee could fulfil the following functions:

- They plan activities of the senior adult ministry based on the definition given at the beginning of this chapter.
- An important challenge for the Action Committee is the mobilisation of the faith community to become part of the senior adult ministry. Concepts such as 'meaningful life' and 'meaningful aging' must become part of the senior adult ministry's vocabulary and must be used regularly when communicating with the congregation.

Focus groups in senior adult ministry

One of the greatest challenges in senior adult ministry is the unwillingness of aging persons to become involved in aging-related services or activities. In the pastorate we must *guard against lumping the ministry under one overarching term as if we are dealing with a homogenous group*. The congregation's senior adult ministry must therefore find other ways of distinguishing between the diversity of groups in the later-year focus group. They must make those in the group feel part of the ministry without fear of negative labelling. *Differentiation by chronological age is not ideal.*

In naming groups, the reference to naming groups according to life transitions (such as retirement) very important. People identify more easily with retirement than with a chronological age. Research indicates different possible groupings. In research based on this approach, the following groupings of phases in which people find themselves have been found to be practical and workable.

- The pre-retirement group: These are persons who plan to retire within a span of ten years. If, then, a person plans to retire at 65, he or she can get involved at 55. It is a well-known experience among retirees that they have not planned properly for, and have not given enough thought to, the non-material challenges of retirement.
- Already retired, but still economically active. This group has not yet experienced the independent retirement in depth. Many work because they did not or could not make advance provision. The members of this group are, of course, very busy, and have full diaries because there are certain aspects of retirement that they do want to experience. An example of this is their role as grandparents. They are often away from home and not available.
- The retired and settled group. They have become settled to a great extent. They live independently without the need for additional income. They spend lots of time with

their children and grandchildren , often travel locally or abroad, and are comfortable in the context in which they find themselves.

- The house- or bedbound group. The term is self-explanatory. They are bound to a house or a bed due to age-related challenges among other things. They easily feel isolated, experience little of the bond with the congregation, and they are the only relational group that actually should be served. They often have needs that the pastorate can supply by giving specific aid and supportively guiding them.

Examples of groups

General Information groups and meetings

- Such groups can be organised on a quarterly basis in order to disseminate knowledge and information about a wide range of currant topics. Experts are invited to supply the information and to empower the listeners to take decisions and manage challenges. (A good example is a seminar on Alzheimer's dementia.)

Therapeutic-pastoral support groups

- These groups grow from among other things the general information gatherings where people can apply for group support with regard to the situation or the emotional problems they have to cope with.
- Examples of such groups are dementia care groups, groups for people who have children overseas and have difficulty with the situation, as well as grief support groups.
- The groups provide an opportunity to retired professional persons to facilitate them, and the pastor plays a key role in some of them.

Service groups

- Outreach groups to house- or bedbound persons. This group's members get monthly training also, and mutual support to encourage and equip them. This group can, for instance, bring the pastoral holy communion to persons who are home- and bedbound, and then according to the faith community's leadership arrangements.
- Service group for hospital and home visits to senior adults who are ill. This members of this group, too, need to be equipped and to have opportunities to share their work in a group context.
- Service group for celebrating and congratulating senior adults when the attain certain milestones in life.
- Providing meals to persons who need them. The help of a retired dietitian can be of great value.
- Providing services like basic maintenance to senior adults who cannot do such tasks for themselves.
- Providing transport to worship services and activities.

- Social service group. This group takes responsibility for the social side of the ministry and can include monthly get-togethers, tours, field trips, theatre and art trips. The possibilities are unlimited and a wonderful challenge for people with innovative spirit.
- Service group for cognitive stimulation. This group develops events to stimulate and equip people, such as teaching music or forming music ensembles, language courses, or the development of academic interests and study. A Bible school or astronomy group can serve as examples.
- Physical fitness. Opportunities for exercise for senior adults and walking groups.

Interest groups

- There is an unlimited number of possibilities such as book clubs and reading groups, music appreciation, poetry and writer's groups, needlework and knitting groups, photography, cooking and baking, flower arrangement, skills development, digital games and competitions.
- It is important that these groups must preferably develop out of needs and should not be established simply for the sake of having groups.

The role of the pastor(s)

The *comprehensive senior adult ministry never excludes the pastors of the congregation*. As has been pointed out, the pastors are academically, theologically, and pastorally equipped to carry out the specialist ministry for senior adults. Their interest, empathy, and support of the work continue to be an important substructure of a ministry that wants to expand, support and strengthen their personal ministry.

Useful topics for general information- or stimulation gatherings.

Physical wellbeing

- Why do we age physically and can we prevent it? Do anti-aging cures work?
- The secrets of physical wellbeing in aging.
- Typical aging-related illnesses or ailments.
- Healthy eating habits to aid meaningful aging.
- Physical exercise, pains, and health: My body—God's gift to me.
- Aging and sexuality.

Emotional wellbeing

- Handling grief in the later years.
- Discovering yourself: my identity in the later years.
- Our brain in the later years: Can it still develop in the later years?
- Dementia and Alzheimer-dementia: What happens to one?

- Substance-dependency in aging persons.
- Handle problems from the past, make peace with the present, and dream about the future.
- To heal relationships from my past.
- What do I do with things that block meaning in my life?
- They are cutting down trees in my forest: the role of relationships
- Typical aging-related mental conditions.
- Loneliness and being alone.
- The healing brought about by forgiveness.
- How does one manage life transitions in the later years?

Social wellbeing

- The value of an extended family for the aging person.
- Friendship.
- Marrying again and late-year relationships.
- How to adapt in a changing world.
- Empowering widowed peopled for tasks previously solely handled by their spouses.
- Grandparenting—how to be the best grandparents.
- Retirement: What does it actually imply?
- My children have emigrated. What now?
- Housing options in the later years: How do I choose?
- Successful aging or meaningful aging?

Religious wellbeing?

- The importance of faith in my old age.
- The role of my life—future expectations in emotional healing.
- The reality of death: Taboo subject?
- Forgiveness and deliverance in my later years.
- God shall make everything right— in one's old age one must just believe sincerely.
- Guilt, guilt feelings, and forgiveness.
- Is there a heaven?
- Quiet time, meditation, and growing in faith in the later years.
- The therapeutic role of faith and faith community in my old age.
- Can one's faith still grow in the later years?

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