

---

**PRESBYTERY of DES MOINES**  
**Older Adult Ministries (OAM) and Congregational Health Ministry**  
**MARCH '09 E-Newsletter**

---

**These e-mails go to each church in our Presbytery and are for your information to use if applicable by each of you and in your churches.**

**The e-mails are by, with and for Older Adult Ministries and healthy congregations. Please send ideas, articles, etc. that you would like included. In sending e-mails, lets all put in the subject line Presbytery OAM Email so none of it gets deleted as spam mail.**

**In faith,**

**Darlene Shepherd**  
**Older Adult Ministries Task Force Moderator**  
**Presbytery of Des Moines**  
[dshep@mahaska.org](mailto:dshep@mahaska.org)  
**641-673-5793**

---

**PCUSA Resources for Older Adult Ministries**

Membership in the Presbyterian Older Adult Ministries Network (**POAMN**) is open to anyone who is promoting, stimulating, developing and advocating for older adult ministry with congregations, presbyteries, synods or institutions and organizations related to older adult ministry. **Renew or become a member** at this website:  
[www.poamn.org](http://www.poamn.org).

---

**POAMN Network News (PNN)**

This quarterly newsletter gives an update on news concerning older adult ministry in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), program ideas, worship materials, articles on older adult issues and helpful resources for ministry with older adults. PNN is available as a free, printable Adobe Acrobat pdf file, or through POAMN. You will find this also at the website above [www.poamn.org](http://www.poamn.org)!

---

**2009 POAMN Conference Plans**

Are you thinking of sending someone from your church to the POAMN Annual Conference the end of Sept? One church I know of sent a representative from their Justice Advocacy and Caring Task Force. Look around with an open mind, and keep that person(s) in prayer.

---

## Lenten Practices Online

Looking for something to do daily in Lent? How about a daily devotional? Your Lenten journey can be assisted online. You can find a daily devotional that is easily accessible in your home and it is free. Here are a couple sites to check out for Lent:

- **The Upper Room:** [www.upperroom.org/daily](http://www.upperroom.org/daily)
  - **Christianity.com:** [www.christianity.com/devotionals](http://www.christianity.com/devotionals)
- 

## Older Adult Week – Why do we need it?

The purpose of Older Adult Week is to help congregations recognize aging as a natural part of living, involving life from birth to death, and to affirm the worth of persons in all stages of development and at all functional levels.

We dedicate this week to older adults because they are the backbone of our church, our nation, and the world.

Older adults are a walking library of information, direction, and encouragement for youthful adventurers. Even as our culture values youth over old age, the number of older adults is growing far faster than the number of children and youth.

Some churches plan week-long intergenerational activities that celebrate aging. Others plan special worship services on Older Adult Sunday. Especially appropriate are opportunities for younger members of the congregation to learn from the wisdom of those who are older.

Should there be few 'children' under age of 50 in your church – that would be all the more reason to affirm and celebrate the years of spiritual wisdom in your pews.

It is important to recognize the congregations that we think of as 'an older congregation', - it isn't an "old" church. Rather, it is a church blessed to have many older members.

The 2009 Older Adult Week guides will be sent out around the end of March - it isn't too early to do some preliminary planning.

---

## Resources

**HOME TOUCH** – For \$40 a year, you receive a two-page 'bulletin' that can be reproduced and sent to people unable to join us for church services. These offer daily Bible readings, Thought for the Day, an activity page, and a prayer. Quarterly, an additional page is sent that can also be reproduced. Best of all, it is a ministry that could be done by one or more people, and actively connect them to your church. Those who receive it also have a tangible connection. Contact HOME TOUCH: Phone 800-992-2144 or E-mail: [service\(S\)HomeTouchMinistry.com](mailto:service(S)HomeTouchMinistry.com)

**AgingCare.com** – Information on the many aspects of Alzheimers, including a driving test. Information on determining driving restrictions can also be found at: [www.AARP.com](http://www.AARP.com).

**ExperienceWorks.org** – has had its funding eliminated. The concept behind this program was to help low-income seniors, over the age of 55, with multiple barriers to

employment, get the training they need to find good jobs in their local communities. Due to the current financial situation across the country, funds will now be directed toward assisting the middle-aged workers in training for/finding employment.

---

## **The Spirit of Collaboration: Social Work / the Church / Older Adults**



Terry Tirrito, College of Social Work, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, United States

*Even to your old age and gray hairs, I am he who will sustain you.  
I have made you and I will carry you:  
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.  
– Isaiah 46:4 (IBS)*

*Older Adults Expectations from Their Religious Organizations*, a study by Tirrito and Spencer-Amado, (1996) found that older adults expected and desired social services from their religious organizations. A sample (n=106) randomly drawn from a population of 5,000 found that older adults would use social services if provided by their churches. The study found that older persons identified many services that they desired from their faith organizations such as: support groups, meals, transportation, nursing services, availability of social workers, help with medicines, housing, help with housing repairs, friendly visitors, companions, legal advice, family support groups, recreational activities, volunteer work, help to find paid work, educational programs, intergenerational programs, help with abusive family members, help with family members with mental illness, or developmental disabilities, or alcoholism and help with elderly parents.

Wilson & Netting (1988) suggested the church as a potential resource for bridging the gap between formal social service agencies and the informal services of churches. Essential public social programs are not being adequately handled by public social service agencies as evidenced by long waiting lists. These include meals on wheels, respite programs, volunteer chore programs, mental health screening, legal and financial planning, retirement planning, and support groups for families and for adult children. Tirrito and Euster(1994) report what one elderly parishioner wrote about her church:

"My church is not fulfilling this need, but I have found some senior centers that are church sponsored and are an alternative for activities and programs for those 55 and older. I believe that churches should recognize and support programs for older adults."

The roles of church leaders have changed from leaders in community affairs to primarily spiritual monitors. Historically, church leaders had teaching and leadership responsibilities in the community. They were not only spiritual leaders but teachers who offered guidance and help in all aspects of life. Ethical issues were debated and

decided by spiritual leaders. Life and death decisions were made with religious leaders. Today, the priest is called to administer the last rites at the time of impending death; the minister may visit in times of serious illness; the rabbi may be asked to help with the difficult decision of placing a family member in a nursing home. Religious leaders are no longer involved in making ethical and legal decisions in the community. The professions of medicine and law now have primary responsibility for the policy development regarding life and death issues. Medical personnel (physicians and nurses) make decisions regarding the use of life supports for dying patients, and the courts decide to remove life supports.

Individuals who are facing painful deaths need spiritual comfort but they also need help in dealing with psychosocial issues to make end of life decisions. Helping family members deal with the suicide of a loved one often becomes the religious leader's task. Bullis (1996) reports that ministers remain on the front line of mental health care provision (p.156). He cites studies that found that Americans use clergy as their primary source of mental health counseling but that most are ill equipped to provide this service. The spouse faced with a partner with Alzheimer's disease requires support, community assistance, and spiritual comfort. The parent whose adult child has AIDS needs consolation but also needs supportive services and/ or home health care services. The older person whose adult child is abusing or neglecting him or her may confide in the spiritual leader rather than report abuse to police or social agencies. The abused elder may also need legal help and a protective place to live. Religious leaders encounter changes in the mental and physical condition of older adults at early stages but are not gerontologically trained to provide essential information and referral to community service agencies.

Tirrito and Euster (1993) examined gerontological training of religious leaders, of whom more than 69% reported that they did not have any training in aging issues although memberships in some churches have from 30% to 80% elderly members. More than 74% of the church leaders (n=57) stated that the proportion of older adults in their churches/synagogues had increased in recent years and yet only 26% (n=22) of clergy were very interested in any gerontological training, 49% (n=41) were somewhat interested, and 25% (n=20) had very little or no interest at all in gerontological training. In a national study sponsored by the Association for Gerontology in Higher Education, Payne and Brewer (1989) examined accredited seminaries in the United States to detect the status of gerontology in theological education and found that only recently has gerontological content been taught in schools of theology.

(The complete article can be found at:  
[www.geragogia.net/editoriali/spirit\\_collaboration.html](http://www.geragogia.net/editoriali/spirit_collaboration.html).)

---

*Don't hoard your time, talents, treasure, touch... – Leviticus 19:9*