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Christian Education with Older Adults

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It's common knowledge that a Christian education program designed for adolescents won't go over well with older teenagers. Likewise, we are beginning to realize that all mature adults can't be lumped together as "seniors" - they don't all have exactly the same concerns or interests.

Older adults have interests that vary according to their age, their community and their individual personalities. Those who lead study groups with older adults need to be aware of the factors that affect the success of any program with senior members of their congregation.

Some factors to consider:

Intellectual growth continues to be an important part of an older adult's persona. Seniors may find that

their cognitive skills are slower than those of a younger adult, but this is offset by a great store of knowledge and experience. As a result, it is important to continue Bible and faith related studies for adults and to make them age specific. As with other age groups, Bible studies for those in their sixties should be separate and different from those in their eighties.

Teaching methods are an important consideration for older adults. In most cases these learners were taught in the Socratic Method, where the teacher asks and partici-

pants answer. However, many adults are flexible and will look forward to something new and interesting. The importance of meaning over memorization is a key part of any methodology. The study should be biblically as well as personally relevant for the age group. Combining good methodology with relevance will make a more meaningful study.

Recognize the **comfort level of the classroom**. Many of us cannot sit in hard, stiff-backed chairs whether we are 20 or 80 years old. Have a few comfortable seating options available, including chairs with arms that enable people to get up easily. The room should be well lit, comfortably warm and draft free. Restrooms should be close and accessible.

Be sure that noise and distractions are minimal in the area of the meeting room. Speak distinctly, in a low-pitched voice and at a reasonable pace. If someone asks you to repeat what you've said, rephrase it so that hard-to-hear sounds may be avoided.

There should always be accompanying visual resources as you speak. This may necessitate a board, screen or flip charts. Be sure to spend some time equipping a room so that it will be a good learning space.

Older adults prefer to meet in the daytime, but if an evening gathering is planned, a well-lit parking lot adds to a feeling of safety.

The course of study or curriculum is a key component for the class. Whether it is thematic or Bible passages, investigate various studies to see if they are suitable for your group. There are many options to choose from that will meet your needs.

Christian education with older adults can be very rewarding for you as the teacher and for the participants. Let us work together to encourage our churches to offer a program for our older adults.

Resources:

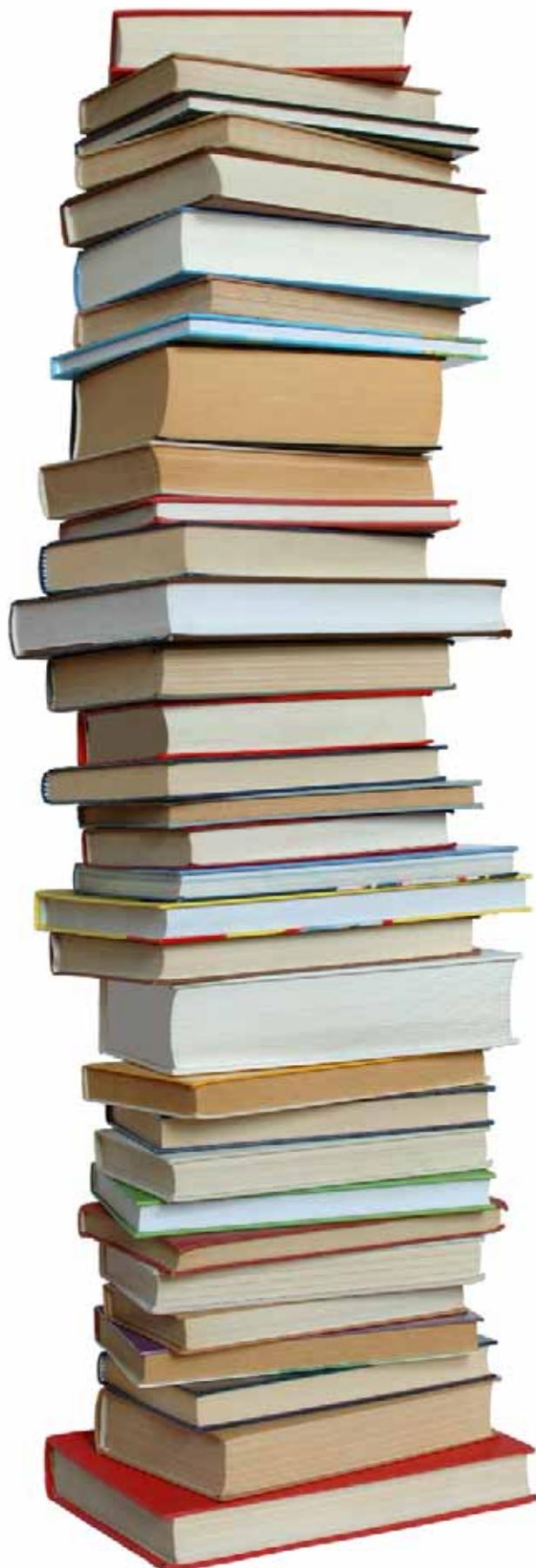
Several resources are suggested below for use with older adults. Some are for study groups and others for individual reading. In some cases, a book suggested for an individual may be used for a study and vice versa. All of the resources are available from The Book Room at The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Please contact them at 1-800-619-7301 or bookroom@presbyterian.ca.

Adult Study

Online Resource

The Thoughtful Christian

(www.thoughtfulchristian.com/New%20Site/main/Home.asp).



This website contains a variety of studies: some very short and others that are intended for use over the course of several weeks. Topics range from current affairs (H1N1) to books of the Bible (Galatians) to spirituality (Appreciating Spiritual Gifts), among others.

Other Resources

Word Alive (www.faithaliveresources.org/Adults/Word-Alive).

This website addresses a variety of topics, including Old Testament, New Testament and topical studies. Some examples are Daniel, Luke, and the Ten Commandments.

Carfagna, Rosemarie. **Contemplation and Midlife Crisis** (New York: Paulist Press, 2008).

This book has seven chapters and could form the basis of either individual reading or a good group study. An example of the chapters is "Crisis, Response and Resolution."

Chittister, Joan. **The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully** (BlueBridge Books, 2008).

A quote about the book will give you an idea of Joan Chittister's focus: "Through numerous insights, she invites us to realize that old age is not a drawing away from a fulfilling life, but a new life unto itself." - Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

Kok, James. **No Such Thing as Over the Hill** (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 2000).

This book encourages and advises the reader to embrace the unique opportunities Christians have as they reach their senior years. Each chapter ends with a series of questions.

McDonnell, Rea, and Rachel Callahan. **Harvest Us Home: Good News as We Age** (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2000).

Harvest Us Home is a reflection of God's good work in everyone. It offers a prayer pilgrimage and allows learning about the aspects of aging. Each chapter has several areas for reflection and prayer.

Morgan, Richard. **No Wrinkles on the Soul: A Book of Readings for Older Adults** (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1990).

Richard Morgan's book is a series of short meditations with reflection and prayer at the conclusion of each chapter.

Morgan, Richard. **Remembering Your Story: Creating Your Own Spiritual Autobiography** (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002).

Remembering Your Story is for small groups as well as individuals to enable them to create their own special autobiographies based on topics such as Life Stories, Family Relationships, and so on. There is a leader's guide as well as a workbook.

Rich, Phil, and Dorothy Madway Sampson and Dale Fetherling. **The Healing Journey Through Retirement** (Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 2000).

This is a workbook and journal that would be ideal for small-group participation. Each member could study and write in the journal prior to each gathering.

Weaver, Andrew, and Carolyn Stapleton. **Wells of Wisdom: Grandparents and Spiritual Journeys** (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2005).

Several authors have contributed to this book. Each section offers a different aspect of experiences from grandparenting in relation to their faith journeys.

Individual Reading

Aleshire, Daniel. *Faithcare: Ministering to All God's People Through the Ages of Life* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988).

The importance of paying attention to people is a source of knowledge about the congregation and a basis for ministry.

Bolton, Martha. *Didn't My Skin Used to Fit?: Living, Laughing, Loving Life After Forty* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2000).

Although this humorous book mentions the age 40, it is for everyone who is a little older. A book of everyday situations filled with fun and laughter.

Ieron, Julie-Allyson. *The Overwhelmed Woman's Guide to...Caring for Aging Parents* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008).

This book contains real-life situations that include topics such as independence, short- and long-term facilities, advocating for a parent and other topics.

Morse, Louise, and Robert Hitchings. *Could It Be Dementia?: Losing Your Mind Doesn't Mean Losing Your Soul* (Oxford UK: Monarch Books, 2008).

This book is one of hope, information and reassurance for every Christian who knows someone with dementia.

Rabior, William and Susan. *Grow Old Along With Me: Marriage in the Later Years* (Ligouri MO: Ligouri Publishers, 2003).

Spouses could read this book together and discuss the various topics. The book contains many elements that are important in a marriage.

Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Restless Heart: Finding Our Spiritual Home in Times of Loneliness* (New York: Image Books, Doubleday, 2004).

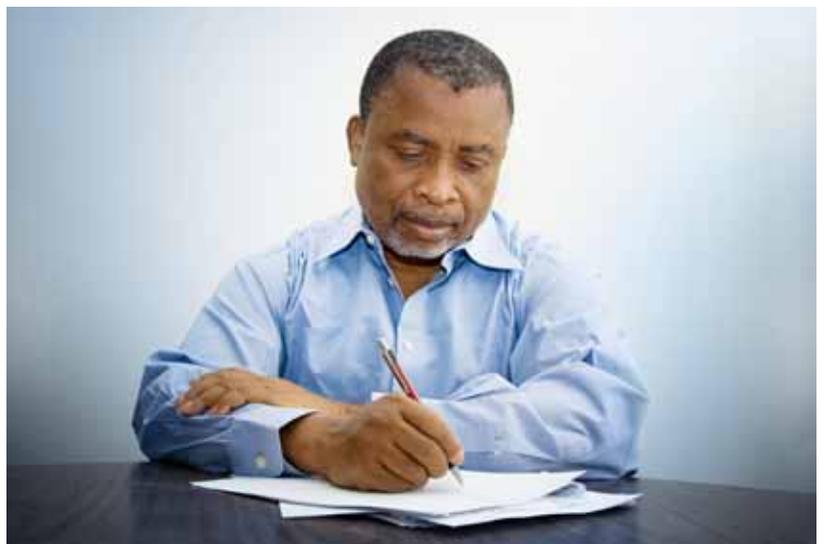
This book examines different types of loneliness and identifies the dangers and opportunities that can be part of life. Creative and valuable forces can be part of new growth.

Swinton, John, and Richard Payne.

Living Well and Dying Faithfully (Grand Rapids: Ederman Publishing Co., 2009)

The book explores how Christian practices - for example, love, prayer, lament, compassion - can contribute to the process of dying well.

The above books may be suitable for small-group study as well. Carefully examine them to determine if they could be used for such a study.



For further information, look in the next PC Pak
or contact the Book Room at 1-800-619-7301.