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Older Adult Ministries Planning Guide Introduction
By Michele Hendrix, POAMN President

The Older Adult Ministries (OAM) Planning Guide is published in early spring and suggests ministry program ideas and resources for the work of older adult ministry in small, medium, and large congregations and organizations in PC(USA) and beyond including our ecumenical partners. Our POAMN 2019 National Conference held in Louisville, KY this year focused on the small church and Our Calling with the Generations: Intergenerational Engagement. As multiple generations now comprise what we often refer to as “older adult ministry” connecting the generations that span 30 – 40 years in OAM is vital to the church and the denomination.

The OAM Planning Guide provides a variety of models for ministry to develop, evaluate, and build up programs, services, and ministry opportunities to, for, and with aging adults in your congregation or organization. It is also a valuable tool and resource for planning an Older Adult Sunday Service. The first Sunday in May (May 3, 2020) is designated by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) as Older Adult Sunday. But is not limited to this date! An Older Adult Sunday worship service is one that truly celebrates the contributions that all aging adults have made and are currently making in the life of your congregation or organization. It is also a way to honor the work and contributions of the “saints” that came before us. Other suggestions for Older Adult Sunday are available online at www.poamn.org, in past and archived OAM Planning Guide publications. These ideas can assist you in planning an Older Adult Sunday Worship Service.

Presbyterian Older Adult Ministries Network (POAMN) is a network of people engaged in ministry with aging and older adults. For nearly 40 years POAMN has been a trendsetter in advocating for the church to examine and evaluate the place of aging members in its congregations, to connect the generations, honor the journey of aging, and be present in developing ministry opportunities for all ages. The purpose of POAMN includes providing leadership for programmatic efforts of presbyteries and congregations through events that educate presbytery representatives, pastors, staff, volunteers, chaplains, and others who work with and serve with older adults. POAMN does this by providing leadership development, continuing education, resources, and networking support for members and those who attend our yearly National Conference, Regional Conference, or Older Adult Ministry Certification in partnership with Columbia Theological Seminary. These are courses designed for those involved and offering Older Adult Ministry. We have a unique role and an important challenge to address the issues of aging positively and proactively to meet the needs of our aging denomination, congregations, and nation.
Older adults are the largest group in our society, denomination, and congregations; and more are coming each year. While some senior/older adult ministries reflect a culture of bygone years, yours can be a model for invigorating new life and growth. More and more churches are realizing that the graying of America presents new possibilities to influence and reach adults who truly are receptive to the good news. Why not join the excitement? I urge you to invite, ask and encourage your older members into ministry, and to look for opportunities to connect the generations! I believe you will be surprised and overjoyed!

This guide is made possible through the support and sponsorship of our ministry partners. Their contributions make it possible for this valuable tool to be offered each year and we are grateful for their support. These organizations are listed on pages 38-40. If you are interested in becoming a sponsor for future OAM Planning Guides, please contact Rev. Doug Kurtz at dkurtz@uam.org. We would love to partner with you!

Ms. Michele Hendrix is serving her second term as the President of POAMN. She has worked for over 25 years to advocate, educate, involve, and motivate people in the process of aging and self-care; and to recognize the connections among church, health care, non-profit, community, state, federal, and local agencies while encouraging adults of all ages in managing their self-care, chronic conditions, respite, and caregiving roles. Michele has focused her work on intergenerational and interfaith programs for adults, evidence-based health promotion, ministry programming and development, respite for caregivers, and fall-prevention programs. She is a Deacon, Stephen Leader, Caregiver Specialist, Speaker and Trainer with expertise in Older Adult Ministry, Intergenerational Ministry, and Caregiving for all ages.
Worship Outline for Older Adult Sunday: May 3, 2020

By Rev. June Begany

For those using the common lectionary, this Sunday offers an opportunity to look at Psalm 23 outside of the context of a funeral service. It offers the possibility of having older members of the congregation reflect on the times God has cared for, guided and provided for them. Joined with John 10: 1-10 members can focus on how God cares for us.

For those using the Narrative Lectionary, the texts are: Acts 17: 1-9; 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10 with Mark 13: 9-11 as the alternative. While much of the liturgy may be used, the worship planner may want to use other hymns.

For those working with Worship Design Studio, you will want to check the hymns as well as the bulletin cover and words of the liturgy to make sure that your worship theme for Eastertide is fully incorporated into the material. Since the focus of this Sunday is on Older Adults, you may wish to incorporate some expressions related to this Sunday done by senior members of your community.

Prayer Before Worship
God of all power, you called from death our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep. Send us as shepherds to rescue the lost, heal the injured, and to feed one another with love through your Son, our Savior. Amen.

Announcements

Prelude

* Call to Worship
  One: Jesus said: “I am the good shepherd. My sheep know my voice and follow me.”
  All: We come together because we have heard your call and respond to your voice.
  One: O come let us worship the Lord, and acknowledge the God of our salvation.
  All: The Lord is our God. We are God’s people and the flock that God shepherds. All who respond to this Good Shepherd are welcome here.

* Passing of the Peace or Extended Welcome

* Opening Hymn  G2G #393 O Day of Rest and Gladness; or G2G #401 Here in This Place
PH #470 O Day of Radiant Gladness
Prayer of Confession (unison)
Creator God, you have given us new life, but in our busyness we often do not see those possibilities. You have given many of us years and wisdom but we ignore those gifts of life and age, seeking our own wisdom not yours. Forgive us for ignoring the gifts you offer, for thinking we know best and going our own ways without listening for your voice. Send your Holy Spirit upon us that we might be refreshed, restored and open to the paths you set for us. Thank you for this opportunity to be renewed and given another chance to be your faithful disciples.

Time of Silent Confession

Assurance of Pardon
One: Because of God’s great love for us, all that keeps us away, all that blinds us to God has been removed. New life through Christ is offered to us if we choose to accept. Sung response, verse1 G2G #515, PH #507 I Come with Joy;

Time with Children
(Suggestion: Might talk about Care of Pets or animals)

Choir or Music offering

Call for the Offering

Offertory

*Doxology

*Prayer of Thanksgiving (unison)
Generous God, you renew us and renew the earth. As you continue to watch over us, use us and use these gifts to reach out with care and concern for others and for this earth our home. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Scripture
John 10: 1 – 10
Psalm 23
Consider having the congregation say this in unison. Or, perhaps read this in a variety of translations.
Sermon
Instead of a traditional sermon, several senior members of the congregation might share their faith journeys or at least tell of particular incidents where they experienced God’s care and presence.

Prayers of the People and Lord’s Prayer
*Hymn    G2G #803, PH #172 My Shepherd Will Supply My Need

*Creed    Apostles’ Creed or lines 1-2, 51-80 of the New Brief Statement

Sung invitation verse 1 G2G #187, PH #387 Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us

Communion
Invitation
Prayer of Thanksgiving
Words of Institution
Distribution of the Elements

Prayer after communion (unison)
You have spread a table before us, O God. You have invited all of us to join together in sharing this meal. You invite us now to go forth, to show the world the power of love and the possibility of becoming a beloved communion. Help us to reach out to enemies and to offer all the hope you give us to others in need. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

*Hymn    G2G #526, PH #514 Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ; or G2G #506 Look Who Gathers at Christ’s Table

*Benediction

Postlude

G2G refers to Glory to God
PH refers to Presbyterian Hymnal
Daily Reflections on the Scriptures for Older Adult
Sunday “Was Blind but Now I See”
By Rev. June Begany

Monday, April 27, 2020
Scripture: Acts 9:1-6

SEEING CLEARLY
Now as he (Saul) was … approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him.
Acts 9:3

In John Newton’s hymn *Amazing Grace* we read these words: “... I once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.” Newton had been blind to the evils he participated in as captain of a slave ship. But God’s grace broke through and helped him see that in Christ all are equal.

Saul literally experienced blindness. Setting off from Jerusalem, Saul saw his duty clearly: Go capture those followers of The Way. They were corrupting Judaism with talk that Jesus was God’s promised Messiah.

Saul believed he was doing God’s will in rooting out this heresy. But God knew that Paul did not see clearly, did not understand God’ message of grace. Three day’s blindness housed with a follower of The Way opened the eyes of Saul’s heart.

*God of grace, keep our eyes open to new expressions of your grace for the world. Amen.*

Tuesday, April 28, 2020
Scripture: Acts 9:1-6 (7-20)

LIVING UNAWARE
*He (Saul) asked, “Who are you Lord?”*
Acts 9:5

After completing my time of student teaching in inner city Cleveland, I returned to campus. During my final history course I read a book on African-American history. It opened my eyes to the injustice rampant in our society, our unwillingness to see all people as God’s children equally, and the need for change.
Saul /Paul believed he was doing God’s will. He was unaware that God has moved beyond the Law to grace. His training as a Pharisee oriented him to the Law and the codes of holiness and purity. He was not expecting God to break into the world in a new way.

On that road to Damascus, God began to open Saul’s eyes to a new world around him. God also opened the eyes of those in Damascus. Now a former enemy of The Way was becoming an instrument of God.

Lord, show us who you are and who you want us to be. Amen.

Wednesday, April 29, 2020

Scripture: Psalm 30

A REVERSAL
You have turned my mourning into dancing…”
Psalm 30:11a

Grief comes to all of us. Yet we can be surprised by the roller coaster of emotions it produces or the sense of despair that can come. The psalmist had known grief, yet had somehow come through that experience to again find joy.

One of the challenges for those trying to respond to people who are grieving is to know when to allow them space and when to gently help them begin the process of moving on. We know that it can take a while to get over the initial shock of grief. But it is also not good for an individual to continue grieving as a way of life. Granger Westberg’s book Good Grief offers suggestions for ways to help move mourning towards joy if not dancing in oneself and others. Our challenge is to trust God to bring us through all the days.

Lord, walk with us in our grief. Return us to joy of your salvation. Amen.

Thursday, April 30, 2020

Scripture: Psalm 30

A WIDER VISION
Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.
Psalm 30:5b

During the summer after my first year of teaching two friends and I set out on a cross country trip. During the trip I saw for the first time the Pacific Ocean, the redwoods and sequoias, the snow capped Rockies, magnificent canyons and the oldest continuously occupied dwelling, Taos Pueblo.
This was a much vaster, grander and diverse country than I knew.

The psalmist, in the midst of distress, had lost sight of the greatness of God’s creation. Being so certain of God’s favor, the writer was dismayed by illness and an unwanted change in life circumstance. But then a greater vision of God’s grace came. The sweep of God’s care granted the writer a wider vision of how God may be at work and that God would always be present.

Gracious God, grant to each of us a larger vision of your love and grace. Amen.

Friday, May 1, 2020
Scripture: Revelation 5:11-14

HEARING MORE THAN SEEING
Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne…and singing.
Revelation 5:1-2a

Some of the challenges many face as they age are the challenges associated with vision. A person begins to rely on sound to guide them rather than their sight. Reading can make worship a challenge. Familiar hymns help those with dimmed vision continue to join in praise.

In John’s vision the angels and myriad of others are singing around the throne. Sometimes in our sightedness we forget to listen for the voice of God and the voices of praise. Do we truly hear the bird’s morning hymns? Is the laugh of a child lost, because we are looking rather than hearing? Do we sometimes not hear the other voices joining with us? Sometimes sight blinds us to God in our midst. Let us open our ears as well as our eyes.

Creator God, tune our hearts to sing your praise. Open all our senses to your presence around us. Amen.

Saturday, May 2, 2020
Scripture: John 21:1-10

TRUSTING MORE THAN SEEING

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach, but the disciples did not know it was Jesus.
John 21:4

Tired. Discouraged. The disciples had seen the risen Lord in Jerusalem, but are unsure of the next steps. Now they are back to the familiar task of fishing. They’ve caught nothing all night. In the
dawn they see a figure on the shore. They recognize the voice that calls them. They hurry to obey Jesus’ directions, then come to shore.

As some age, reverting to familiar behaviors and patterns may be a comfort. It is a challenge to move in a new direction, even as it is difficult to move from one’s home of many years. But Jesus calls us forward, into the future, even as we age. Jesus uses our past to prepare us for a new day. We trust Jesus to guide us into the future.

O God, may your Spirit fill us with grace and courage as we move into your future. Amen.

Sunday, May 3, 2020
Scripture: John 21:9 -19

PREPARATION FOR TOMORROW
“when you grow old you will stretch out your hands…..”
John 21:18b

Sunday, May 3 is designated Older Adult Sunday. It is also communion Sunday for many. At communion we all hold out our hands to receive bread and wine or juice. It reminds us that we all need to receive God’s help for our lives.

One of the challenges of aging is to know when to ask for help – hold out our hands - and when to try to remain independent. That becomes a challenge for helpers, too. To know when to step in, when to offer help and when to allow another to be independent, even if slower than before, takes discernment and grace. We prepare for tomorrow through communion and through the practice of learning to adjust to changes rather than resisting them. We receive help from others and God as we continue to share our gifts.

God of all our years, remind us that you are always with us, guiding and sustaining. Amen.

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Rev. June Begany served as an Associate Pastor for 24 years at a downtown Cleveland church, as an interim pastor for 2 years and is now retired. She is also a licensed social worker, has taught history in the Cleveland school district, and is certified to administer the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. She completed her capstone project for certification in the Older Adult Ministry program in 2014. She has recently served as secretary to the POAMN Executive Committee.
Interwoven Generations: Living Faith Intergenerationally
By Michele Hendrix, POAMN President

Remember the surge in a generation of young people in the late 40’s through the mid 60’s? History has shown the enormous effect of this generation known as Baby Boomers on social services, education, the labor market, the culture, and the church for the past 72 years. Baby Boomers number about 74.1 million. Millennials (1981-1996) now surpass the Boomers at 75 million. Many churches are finding they are more effective in fulfilling their mission by engaging the generations. By making this connection, taking on a new focus, adding new purpose, and becoming more outreach oriented, churches are consequently finding those of all ages that were previously unreached in the church and community AND welcoming them into the community of faith. All ages are involved in working, serving, learning, and sharing their gifts in every aspect of ministry and in all ministry areas.

In this new decade of 2020 and for many past years we have recognized that leaders in OAM and older adults are trailblazers in today’s culture - advocating for themselves, their families, their peers, and their communities - paving the way for future generations and the church to promote and engage in activity, wellness, care and social involvement. As one of the five Age and Stage Covenant Partners in Presbyterian Mission Agency’s (PMA), Christian Formation, our focus in 2020 is on Older Adult Ministry with Intergenerational engagement and the value of such a ministry within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The five Age to Stage Covenant Partners in Christian Formation are POAMN, APCE (Association of Presbyterian Christian Educators), UKirk (Collegiate Ministries), PCCCA (Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association), and PYWA (Presbyterian Youth Workers’ Association).

For almost 40 years POAMN, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, has been providing the framework for recognizing the gifts and challenges of growing older in the life of the church. We are a resource for all who are aging and the multiple generations working and serving in congregations, presbyteries, synods, care facilities, senior centers, hospitals, non-profit organizations, or veteran facilities. Our denomination and our congregations are well into the fastest growing segment of our population and congregations - the 65+ and the 85+
generations. Yet, how many of our churches see older adult ministry as peripheral, perfunctory, or even optional?

Congregations need to think through the issues of ministering to a new aging group that is increasingly disillusioned with the traditional church, yet longs for community, meaning, and deep spirituality. Multiple generations are facing issues unique to their generation, from parenting grandchildren, parenting their parents, to dealing with the effects of chronic illness in their lives or the lives of loved ones or friends, and a multitude of other concerns such as caregiving, isolation, loneliness, and depression. For a number of years Builders then Boomer’s were known as the Sandwich Generation,” but now it is the Builders, Boomers, GenX’ers, and Millennials! They share the responsibilities for the care of parents and grandparents while still having parenting roles themselves. They need the church more than ever! It is important that we never underestimate the power of ministry to aging adults in our society. It presents potential for church growth! This group is the largest group in membership in our denomination and in our congregations.

The largest age group in PC(U.S.A.) continues to be 65 and older, while young people, 25 and younger, make up the smallest group. Only 4 percent of our churches are 600 members or more. Approximately 24 percent of PC(U.S.A.) churches are running 600 or less, while 72 percent of our churches are running 150 or less. We need to look at the 150-member church as a good size church, but we have a hard time doing that. Susan Barnett compiled this information in the fall of 2019 for our GA offices. Were you aware that churches have access to their own statistics and can look back at the last ten years to see where they have been and where they are going? The biggest challenge is looking within, but not in a negative way. Look at the good things. For specific information about your congregation contact Susan Barnett in Research at PMA for the information, at susan.barnett@pcusa.org.

Last May 2019 and again in October 2019 the PMA Covenant Partners from the five “ages and stages” ministry associations gathered to work with Christian Formation and in collaboration with one another. We were all in the same room, at the same time, with the same goal, to figure out how we might more collaboratively work together with the Presbyterian Mission Agency. These were very productive meetings and have brought us closer together in relationship to vision and dream about the possibilities that lie ahead for each group. We are looking forward as we continue building on these relationships and collaborate on ways we can bring the generations together as a family of faith.
The past five decades spanning from the time when the Silent Generation (today in their 70’s & 80’s) was entering adulthood to the adulthood of today’s Millennials we have seen large shifts in US society and culture. It has been a period during which Americans, especially Millennials, have become more detached from major institutions such as political parties, religion, the military and marriage. At the same time, the racial and ethnic make-up of the country has changed, college attainment has spiked and women have greatly increased their participation in the nation’s work force. These are just some of the realities we face and why it is so important to focus and find ways to connect the generations! That means a shift in thinking away from a senior group mentality and toward an intergenerational “maturing adult ministry” mentality that honors diversity of age, stage, personality, ethnicity, and spirituality.

This is an opportunity for the church to become missional focused and develop consistent relationships and partnerships with a compassionate response to reach out to its members, families, neighbors, and communities and address the needs for all ages in a variety of ways. It is also an opportunity for the church to come up with a compassionate response to reach out to its members and families who are caring for the chronically ill of all ages. By developing a comprehensive Older Adult Ministry that engages with the different generations your ministry can provide a comprehensive plan to raise awareness, connect the generations, and address the emerging crisis in loneliness, health, caregiving, and faith issues that will cross generational and economic lines with emphasis on support of congregational programs for all generations.

POAMN endeavors to tackle the challenges of aging with expert solutions, and to redefine aging as a journey of spirituality, strength, growth, care and compassion. Our objective is to provide opportunities and services to meet the physical, intellectual, social, emotional, vocational and spiritual needs of an aging society with the tools, education, experience, wisdom, expertise, and knowledge to help all individuals - regardless of age - to thrive in the church and communities of their choice for as long as possible. We recognize that leaders and older adults are trailblazers in today’s culture - advocating for themselves, their families, their peers, and their communities - paving the way for future generations and the church to promote and engage in activity, wellness, care and social involvement. All of us have a unique role and an important challenge to address the issues of growing older positively and proactively in today’s vast and rapidly aging society.
Prepare, Plan, Stay Posted.
By Beth M. Snyder

In the October 2019, AARP magazine posted information on a recent University of Michigan National Poll on Healthy Aging which asked 2,200 adults ages 50 to 80 how prepared they were for a severe emergency such as a forced evacuation, the need to shelter in place or a long-term power outage. The article highlighted some low percentages; such as 55% didn’t have a portable battery or solar cellphone charger, to illustrate that older adults are not well prepared for a disaster.

The reality of a disaster situation is that you will likely not have access to everyday conveniences. To prepare in advance think through the details of your everyday life. The first place to start is to develop a communication plan. Make a list of family, friends and others who will be part of your plan. Talk to these people and ask them to be part of your support system. Share your plan with these people. Post this plan where EMS/law enforcement will look for it, usually on or in your refrigerator. Most pharmacies and county health departments provide “vials of life;” containers where you list your medications, medical needs and contacts. These can be placed in your refrigerator’s butter compartment or on a shelf in your refrigerator door. It is important to keep your information updated.

Being prepared and having a plan allows all of us to be less anxious. There are Emergency Supply list basics (www.ready.gov) that everyone needs; such as a first aid kit, water (one gallon per person per day) and a three to five day supply of food, but older adults need to consider other items. Add to the basics a seven-day supply of medications, hearing aids and batteries, wheelchair batteries, oxygen, copies of important documents including medical insurance, Medicare and Medicaid cards. If you don’t have a generator you can’t shelter in place if your needs include oxygen, CPAP mask or you are on home dialysis.

Every county in this country has an emergency management office and most of the local offices maintain a register of older adults so they can be located and get assistance quickly in case of a disaster. If you live alone, have mobility or other special needs, please contact this office and provide them with your information. Also contact your utility companies and they will put you on their list for immediate restoration of services.
Whether you decide to stay put in an emergency or evacuate to a safer location, you will need to make plans in advance for your pets or service animals. If you must evacuate take your pets with you. If that is not possible, work out a plan with family, friends or neighbors who will take care of your pets in an emergency.

Finally, stay informed, stay calm, be patient and think before you act. Follow instructions you receive from your local authorities. With basic preparations, you will be ready for the unexpected.

**Beth Mary Snyder** has worked on the PC(USA) staff in Louisville, KY for 18 years, four years as PW program assistant and for the past 14 years serving with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA). Beth’s title is Associate for Program Administration. She is in contact with mid-council leadership following natural and human-caused disasters offering financial and volunteer support. She administers national and refugee grants. She caters to the needs of over 100 national PDA volunteers. In 2015, she initiated the collaboration between Presbyterian Women and PDA training in disaster preparedness. Four years later, 115 PW-DP trainers are serving their congregations and presbyteries.

Since 1988, Beth has served on the Presbytery of Ohio Valley PW coordinating team, currently as moderator. As an active elder she serves as clerk of session at First Presbyterian Church in Jeffersonville, IN. She has four exceptional children, two excellent sons-in-law and five amazing grandchildren.
Caregiving on the Receiving End
By Pat Baker

It is often very easy for us to give of ourselves to others but we all know that person who gives and gives but when they need help, they refuse to receive it. Being able to receive graciously is a gift. I facilitate three caregiver support groups. I hear from lots of caregivers from the caregiver point of view. In this article I’d like for us to think about the point of view of the person who is receiving the care.

One of my favorite books is Wendy Lustbader’s book *What’s Worth Knowing*. She uses the format of interviewing several older adults and asking them “what is worth knowing” about a certain topic. I’m going to use that same format about what is worth knowing from someone who is receiving the care.

60 IS DIFFERENT THAN 90, YOU CAN’T LUMP EVERYONE TOGETHER
Often as a caregiver we get sucked into the stereotypes of older persons and if we know a disabled 60 year old or a frisky 90 year old then we expect the person we are caring for to be the same. That can lead to resentment or unmet expectations. We need to realize, for the sake of the person receiving care, that each person ages differently. We need to treat that person as who they are, not as who we want them to be or expect them to be.

OLD AGE IS NOT FOR SISSIES
A care receiver’s life can be very humbling and very hard to take. They find themselves outliving friends, family, spouses, children or grandchildren. Also, the losses of an older person go beyond the obvious loss of death. Other losses include independence, health, home, income, and security to name a few.

Problems arise and the caregiver and care receiver find that they arrive at two very different solutions; one grounded by what the older person’s life experience is saying to them, the other on what the caregiver thinks is the right thing to do. Someone once said that a caregiver and care receiver should have one ground rule; there is no single “right” answer. When they accept that, they stop resisting any opinion except their own and they become open to seeing where someone else is coming from. That’s the beginning of a constructive dialogue and an easier life for both parties.

LISTENING IS REALLY IMPORTANT
I often think when problems arise in a caregiving situation one of the main reasons is that people stop listening, both the caregiver and care receiver. The caregiver gets wrapped up in all the
challenges they are dealing with and stops listening to the care receiver. Often times that is all they need to do to solve a problem - just let the care receiver have their say. Even a person with dementia needs to be listened to.

The care receiver gets so bogged down with their loss of independence that they never ask what the caregiver is thinking or how they are dealing with a certain situation. We need to remember that care receivers are not “less than” because they need care and caregivers are not “better than” because they give care.

PERSONS WHO FIND SUCCESS IN OLD AGE HAVE LEARNED TO LIKE THEIR OWN COMPANY

Many times I have heard a caregiver complain “mother just doesn’t want to do anything…she just sits there all day…why can’t I get her to do anything?” I believe that it is important for a caregiver to give the person they are caring for as many options as possible, then live with what they choose. Too often the caregiver wears themselves out feeling that the person they are caring for wants and needs to stay active/busy all the time. Sometimes they might just want to sit still and contemplate. This does not preclude suggesting that staying active is healthy, but being active doesn’t have to be all consuming.

MAKE LEMONADE OUT OF LEMONS

None of us look into our futures and see ourselves as being dependent on another. We dream of independence and dread the thought of anything else. When we lose our dependence then problems arise. We can decide to make those problems into challenges and face them or we can continually hit our heads against a brick wall and say “poor me.” Your life can never be the same as it was before you needed care, but your capacity to be cared for and to be loved is still yours to choose and to treasure.

Pat Baker’s career in the field of aging spans over 45 years in both the private and public sector. Most of her career has been directing government programs funded under the Older Americans Act in Texas, Oklahoma and Georgia. She served as a lay leader of older adult ministry in Texas in the 80’s. She recently retired as the Director of Health and Human Services/Senior Services for Gwinnett County, GA. Her dream in retirement was to return to Older Adult Ministry, so in early 2019 she took a position at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church in Tucker, GA where she is the Director of Older Adult and Caregiver Ministries. Pat has been involved with POAMN since its inception, has served in numerous positions on the Executive Committee, and now holds the role of President Elect, preparing to begin her term as President in October 2020. She is currently participating in the Older Adult Ministry Certificate Program at Columbia Presbyterian Theological Seminary. One of her passions is working with family caregivers and she currently facilitates three caregiver support groups. She laughingly says that she “has failed at retirement!”
Rituals for the Last Third of Life
By Mary Miller Currie

When I was baptized as a child, the church gathered to celebrate the beginning of my life in the church and prayed about the hopes and possibilities and calls God would set before me.

When I die, my baptism will be fulfilled and the church will gather to celebrate the hope of resurrection and life in the church triumphant - what will be said on that day?

When I was young my parents had to carry me, there were first steps, first words, first teeth and first days of school. There were pictures and celebrations of everything.

When I became old others had to help me get around, I wondered about walking and last steps, losing my words, losing my teeth, losing the things I had learned. I thought of last days and last times of doing things and going places - but no one wants to know these fears and ponderings, no one celebrates last steps and last teeth.

When I was 16 or 17 or 18 my parents finally trusted me to drive and allowed me to have the keys to the car - and there was a celebration. I felt empowered, I was an adult, I had freedom, I had possibilities.

When I was 66 or 77 or 88 my children no longer trusted me to drive and did not allow me to have the keys to the car - they took them away and hid them. I lost my freedom, there were tears and anger and frustration and I felt a certain worthlessness, I could do nothing on my own.

When I was 18 or 21 or so I moved into my own place and began to acquire the stuff of life - and others celebrated with me. My first apartment, my first home, my first art, my first big dinner party.
When I was 68 or 81 or so I had to downsize and move in with my children, move into an older adult community, move into assisted living or skilled care. I gave away the stuff of life, the memories, the things that meant something - I threw away the things no one wanted and no one cared about, and I mourned their passing - and still no one seemed to care. I invited friends and family to come see me, but visitors are few.

When I was young, I stood in front of the church and said my marriage vows - until death do us part we promised one another. Friends and family gathered around us and congratulated us and celebrated our love and the years we had ahead of us.

When my beloved died, I sat at the front of the church, the oldest of the family generations. Almost alone among family surrounding me, I said my good-byes. We were gathered to celebrate a life well lived - and so it was. So now I am widowed, I should take off this wedding ring - the vows it symbolizes no longer bind us together for death has us parted. Must I take off this ring alone with no one else to remember what our life together meant?

When I graduated at 18 or 22 or 26 we moved away from our parents for jobs and opportunities and the adventures of life. The church blessed me and commissioned me to go to find the church in a new place to continue to grow in faith - we celebrated the opportunities and adventures ahead.

When I turned 68 or 72 or 86 I moved to be closer to my children who had moved away for jobs and opportunities and adventures - the church said nothing except they were sad to see us go after so many years. Our last Sunday we just sort of walked away…

When I was 78 or 82 or 86, my family could care for me no longer. I ended up in a nursing home, and little by little people quit coming to see me. The church quit coming to see me. I think they all forgot me. I think they thought I would not remember if they had been here or not.

In Matthew Jesus separated the sheep and goats - and those goats were not the greatest of all time. Part of what he said was: “I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.” (Matthew 25:36). Yet studies show we help the sick and shut in at home for several weeks to several months - then we tend to taper off and forget their need continues. We
visit those who enter skilled nursing facilities and memory care facilities less and less often - and sometimes lose touch with them because of HIPPA requirements.  If a Skilled Nursing Facility or Rehab Center moves a member, they cannot tell us where they were sent for privacy rights.  Are we sheep or goats?

In my first church, Louise Ekstrand - who had a room in a local senior living facility - had me read the same passage to her over and over and over, every week when I visited on Thursday:  John 10:22 -30.  I was young, and wondered why she wanted to hear about Jesus walking on Solomon’s portico and arguing with the Jews.  Now I know she did not care about that at all.  What she wanted to hear over and over was that assurance Jesus still knew her name - she was still his and knew his voice calling her.  He would never forget her, even if the rest of us did.

How can the fullness of Scripture, liturgy and prayer speak to the transitions of life?  What are the opportunities in the events of life as we grow older?  What are the rituals and passages of life where the church could stand with its older members - and be there with them in care and prayer?  What does your church do - or not do - about these rites of passage in the final third of life?

Mary Miller Currie has been an ordained minister since 1979, serving most of her ministry in smaller congregations rebuilding after conflict situations.  Her volunteer work developing CLP/CRE training for New Covenant and Missouri Union Presbyteries in the early 1990’s eventually led to her doing research and writing the first national resource used by the PCUSA concerning training for Commissioned Lay Pastors.  Since 2013 she has focused on the growing area of older adult ministry, serving as the Director of Older Adult Ministry at Clear Lake Presbyterian Church in the Houston area.
Sheep Don’t Count! Tips & Tricks for Better Sleep
By Jan McGilliard

As the Psalmist says, “I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety.” How awesome it would be if we could simply climb into bed, adjust our pillows, close our eyes, and before we know it, we are off to dreamland in the sure knowledge that God is in charge of the night. Most of us have early childhood memories of the darkness looming large as soon as our parents tucked us in and left us to (hopefully) fall asleep. I imagined snakes under the bed, the bogey-man lurking, ghosts appearing as the moon created shadows on the wall, sounds of the night on a farm…cats fighting, cows mooing, a young rooster crowing, confused about his job description.

Nearly half of Americans report poor or insufficient sleep, affecting their daily activities, their health, well-being, and productivity. Women are more likely diagnosed with insomnia and men with sleep apnea. (National Health Institute) Believe it or not, sleeping a solid eight hours without interruption is a relatively recent phenomenon. Before electricity lit up the world, our ancestors typically retired when it got dark, slept a few hours, then got up for awhile to have a snack, read, complete a task or two, or just enjoy one another. Then it was back to bed and to sleep until daylight. The industrial revolution and the lighting up of the world changed everything. Many in the population worked shifts (and still do), and everyone began making more decisions about when and how much to sleep (less and less). It doesn’t take long to throw off our circadian rhythm.

Poor sleep habits, traveling through time zones, anxiety, long work hours, a noisy and bright sleep environment, illness, are some of the demons that rob us of needed rest. Some even feel it’s a badge of honor to get by on a minimum of sleep, as though it’s a colossal waste of time. I’m going to assume you, along with me, want to sleep well and find it a challenge.

Common indicators of insomnia include
- Difficulty falling asleep at night
- Waking up during the night
- Waking up too early
- Not feeling well-rested after a night's sleep
- Daytime tiredness or sleepiness
- Irritability, depression or anxiety
- Difficulty paying attention, focusing, or remembering
- Increased errors or accidents
- Ongoing worries about sleep
Common causes of sleeplessness include:
- Stress
- Travel or work schedule
- Poor sleep habits
- Eating too much late in the evening
- Mental health disorders
- Medications
- Medical conditions
- Sleep-related disorders
- Caffeine, nicotine and alcohol

Age Brings Change
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in activity
- Changes in health
- More medications

Preventing Insomnia
- Keep bedtime and wake time consistent from day to day, including weekends.
- Stay active — regular activity helps promote a good night's sleep.
- Check your medications to see if they may contribute to insomnia.
- Avoid or limit naps.
- Avoid or limit caffeine and alcohol, and don't use nicotine.
- Avoid large meals and beverages before bedtime.
- Make your bedroom comfortable for sleep and only use it for sex or sleep.
- Create a relaxing bedtime ritual, such as taking a warm bath, reading or listening to soft music.
- No screens or reading in bed.

Things to try: I am a firm believer that we need to consider both eastern and western practices when trying to solve the slippery slope that is sleep. Whatever you try, give yourself whole-heartedly to the practice to see if it is helpful. As is always recommended, check in with your doctor to rule out medical reasons for insomnia.

Sleep Specialist: A sleep specialist will help you determine if you need a sleep study. Ruling out sleep apnea is very important, since this is such a health risk. A sleep practitioner will help you with goal-setting, achieving a healthy frame of mind related to your ability to sleep (or not!), and will likely suggest things like developing a mindfulness practice and practicing good sleep habits.

Mindfulness/Meditation: Mindfulness is about paying attention and living in the moment. A meditation practice is an extension of mindfulness, and serves to slow down the central nervous system so the mind/body connection is strengthened. It promotes relaxation, lowers blood pressure, slows heart rate, reduces anxiety, and more. Begin with just five minutes, sitting quietly but attentively, and over time, work up to 20-30 minutes. Use a short mantra. My favorite is “Be still and know that I am God.”
Breathing exercises: Never underestimate the benefit of focusing on your breath. It’s a perfect way to begin meditation, and is very useful when you first get into bed ready for sleep. Many people fall asleep by the time they’ve done a few breathing techniques, like breathing in 4 counts through the nose and breathing out 8 counts (slowly) through the mouth. These go hand-in-hand with meditation.

Yoga Nidra (muscle relaxation): Practice Yoga Nidra by lying down, closing your eyes, and begin focusing on one muscle group at a time, alternately tensing and relaxing each one.

Passage Meditation: This is a very effective practice. Ecknath Easwaran says: “The secret of meditation is simple: you become what you meditate on. When you use an inspirational passage every day in meditation, you are driving the words deep into your consciousness. Eventually they become an integral part of your personality, which means they will find constant expression in what you do, what you say, and what you think.” Choose a passage, scripture, or prayer that is meaningful for you. Memorize it and, while sitting in a relaxed posture, repeat it over and over again, slowly, for 20-30 minutes.

Reiki: Rei means “God’s Wisdom or the Higher Power” and Ki means “life force energy.” So Reiki is spiritually guided life force energy. Find a Reiki Master and give it a try. A treatment feels like a wonderful glowing radiance that flows through and around you, treating the whole person including body, emotions, mind, and spirit. It creates feelings of peace, security, and well-being. It is simple, safe, and natural. For me, Reiki has been one of the most effective ways of slowing down my central nervous system.

Acupuncture: is a complementary medical practice that entails stimulating certain points on the body, most often with a needle penetrating the skin, to alleviate pain or to help treat various health conditions. There is a sleep protocol that may help….but if after a few sessions there is no improvement, it is not likely to help. It definitely helps some people!

Naturopathic medicine: is a distinct primary health care profession emphasizing prevention, treatment, and optimal health through the use of therapeutic methods and substances. It is a slow, subtle process, but can be very beneficial.

To see the complete Power Point presentation, go to www.poamn.org. There are some helpful web resources there. There is much research being done on the benefits of medical marijuana and hemp products (like CBD oil). While I am not equipped to write about these in any professional way, I believe they can be helpful to some people in their quest for sleep.

“He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep...The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.”  
- Psalm 121:4-6

Jan McGilliard lives in Blacksburg, VA, with husband Mike who is retired from VA Tech. Both are active at Blacksburg Presbyterian Church, and Jan spends about half-time preaching in area churches. She is a past president of POAMN and worked many years for the Synod of the Mid-Atlantic in Older Adult Ministries. Jan loves being active, especially cycling long distances, hiking, and camping. Jan and Mike love grand-parenting Connor and Emma Claire.
Creating Intergenerational Ministry Opportunities
By Barbara Price (Patton) Rolph

One way in which I incorporate older adults with youth is to have them do a children’s sermon. They may create one or read a story. One year for Vacation Bible School, this was done for each day and was well received.

Another event was “Cabin Fever” day when a Saturday in January was set aside for board games. Folks came to church fellowship hall and mixed up with youth in playing board games.

Another time a group of church seniors went to a local foster group home to play games with the youth. It was billed as Grandparent mentoring. One young teen thought he could beat an old man at cards. He was surprised to find that “Grandpa” was a card shark who taught him a thing or two. The resident counselor commented that was the best interaction ever witnessed with that child.

Another year my youth group went Halloween caroling at a nursing home. Christmas carol tunes had Halloween themes. The source of the songs I garnered from the Mission Year book of Prayer.

During a dialogue sermon the Sunday school children were asked by adults how they would solve a personal problem. For instance, one woman stated when she was a child her sister would borrow her things without asking. The children gave suggestions on how she could have dealt with it.

Incorporating older adults need not be complicated – ordinary events can help.

Now that I am a senior citizen I enjoy visiting with youth and asking them about things going on in their lives.

Barbara Price (Patton) Rolph is honorably retired and currently lives in the Idaho Panhandle. She has served pastorates and interims in Iowa and Kansas. She has also served as hospital chaplain, hospice volunteer chaplain, grief support group leader, and 5th step listening for Addiction Treatment Centers. Recently she has conducted Pet Blessings at a local grooming business.
The Barnabas Pal Project

By Alan Winkenhofer

The Barnabas Pal Project is a way to have two different age groups become more involved with one another. It connects adults with youth via a “secret pal” program. With the Barnabas Pal program, each Adult Pal makes a difference in the life of one youth. The following is how the project got started and is still being used in Kentucky.

About 25 years ago, Dr. David Byrd of Louisville, KY, an interim minister at Valley View Baptist Church (VVBC), spoke of Barnabas as being the Great Encourager of the Bible. Dr. Byrd described Barnabas’ work with Paul and his words to encourage Paul in his journeys as an illuminating example of Christian friendship. A few years later and as a follow-up to the sermon, Judge Winkenhofer Shumate started a program at VVBC called the Barnabas Project. The idea was to encourage VVBC youth by pairing each youth with one adult, similar to a “secret pal” program. Since that time, the Barnabas Pal Project has been adopted at other churches in our local area... Baptist, Methodist, Church of Christ, and Presbyterian. In January, 2020, we at First Presbyterian Church in Elizabethtown, KY, will begin our ninth cycle of Barnabas Pals.

As Barnabas was an encourager to Paul, we strive to encourage our youth in their walk with Christ. Our youth face struggles every day in their schools and in their activities to be strong in the Lord and to show Christ’s light to the world. Barnabas Pals work to give the youth outside, positive influences in wholesome settings.

Adult Pals leave cards, notes, and small gifts for the youth on Wednesdays and Sundays. A simple note of encouragement goes a long way when the going gets tough. Sometimes, an Adult Pal leaves clues to his/her identity. The youth especially enjoy trying to guess who their Pals are. Special, lasting friendships are often created through these acts of caring and encouragement.

The Barnabas Pal Project involves four groups of people:

- Project Managers are the only ones who know the adult/youth pairings. They help facilitate the program by recruiting adults and youth and by standing in for Adult Pals when needed;
- Parents, who grant permission for their youth to participate;
- The youth themselves;
- The Adult Pals.
There are required forms that must be completed and returned to the Project Managers. The Adult Pal form specifies participation standards and lists do’s and don’ts in compliance with the Presbytery Boundary Policy. Sample forms are available via email to winkenhofer@gmail.com.

Usually, each Barnabas Pal Project is a six-month cycle. It concludes with a dinner for church members during which the youth try to guess their Adult Pals before identities are revealed. We’ve used dates like Pentecost and Epiphany to make the dinners more attractive and meaningful.

Each Barnabas Pal Project concludes with a Dinner – and the Youth trying to guess the identity of their Barnabus Pal

Alan Winkenhofer is the leader of Presbyterian Older Adult Ministry (POAM) at First Presbyterian Church in Elizabethtown, Kentucky. Alan serves on the Board of Directors of Presbyterian Homes & Services of Kentucky. He was a key part of the planning committee for POAMN’s 2019 National Conference in Louisville, Kentucky.
No Time at All*

When you are as old as I, my dear
And I hope that you never are
You will woefully wonder why, my dear
Through your cataracts and catarrh
You could squander away or sequester
A drop of a precious year
For when your best days are yester
The rest'er twice as dear....

What good is a field on a fine summer night
When you sit all alone with the weeds?
Or a succulent pear if with each juicy bite
You spit out your teeth with the seeds?
Before it's too late stop trying to wait
For fortune and fame you're secure of
For there's one thing to be sure of, mate:
There's nothing to be sure of!

Oh, it's time to start livin'
Time to take a little from this world we're given
Time to take time, cause spring will turn to fall
In just no time at all....

I've never wondered if I was afraid
When there was a challenge to take
I never thought about how much I weighed
When there was still one piece of cake
Maybe it's meant the hours I've spent
Feeling broken and bent and unwell
But there's still no cure more heaven-sent
As the chance to raise some hell.

Chorus.

Sages tweet that age is sweet
Good deeds and good work earn you laurels
But what could make you feel more obsolete
Than being noted for your morals?
Give me a man who is handsome and strong
Someone who's stalwart and steady
Give me a night that's romantic and long.

And give me a month to get ready
Now I could waylay some aging roue
And persuade him to play in some cranny
But it's hard to believe I'm being led astray
By a man who calls me granny.

Here is a secret I never have told
Maybe you'll understand why
I believe if I refuse to grow old
I can stay young till I die
Now, I've known the fears of sixty-six years
I've had troubles and tears by the score
But the only thing I'd trade them for
Is sixty-seven more...

*Pippin | 1972 | Lyrics by Stephen Schwartz

It's Time to Start Living
By Mary Patricia Voell

In 2018 I was invited to create an opening presentation for the POAMN Saving the Journey Conference in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. The final product, Voices: An Imagination Celebration of Aging, celebrated and honored older adults and combined the outstanding talents of POAMN members: Lynn & Mike Fonfara, Michele Hendrix, Anne Jenkins, Judy & Ray Jones, Ginny Nyhuis, Lillian Rhudy, Debra Palmer, Chris Pomfret, Annie Tarbutton, Bryce Wiebe. They set an energetic tone for the upcoming talks, meetings and conversations.

Literature and research reinforce the positive impact on the health and well-being of participants involved in interactive and participatory arts programs. Music and art, theater, puppetry and storytelling provide opportunities for creative self-expression, healthy aging, life-long learning, a sense of accomplishment, control, choice, self-esteem and fun. Nurturing mind, body and spirit, by conducting holistic arts programming for senior care, and at the same time engaging families, staff and community turns passive seniors into active and involved seniors.

The song, No Time At All sung by Martha Raye in the musical Pippin was one number we used at the Lake Tahoe conference to share the older adult journey. The chorus, “Oh, it's time to start living” says it all. Aging is not the end but the beginning of yet another life-filled chapter.
Performing arts programming that feature music, song, dance recitation and acting tap the evident and hidden talents of those in your care ministry. Various formats help to bring these talents forward.

**Cabaret Theater** can give celebratory voice to individual stories working with resident, family and staff ensembles and invites an audience to open their hearts to a new definition of aging and creative engagement.

**Reader’s Theater** introduces individuals to theater concepts in ways that are easy to grasp and enjoy. With no memory work involved, anyone can be a skilled performer in quick order using ready made scripts, poetry and radio plays.

**Sing Out Seniors.** Inspired by the Young @Heart performers, Sing Out Seniors attacks aging head on. In an era where the elderly are seen as people who need to be looked after and entertained, Sing Out Seniors introduces contemporary music to participants and audiences alike, turning the old age formula upside down.

Let their light shine, and remember to have fun!

**Mary Patricia Voell** is founder and owner of Legacies, LLC | Personal, Family & Organizational Historians, whose sole mission is to help others capture and preserve their stories. Since 2001, “before it’s too late” became a mantra and inheritance to develop vehicles of storytelling and preservation as a writer, trainer, speaker, and producer using over 40 professional chapters in fundraising and development, marketing and public relations, theater and music as the tools of trade. As a personal historian, Mary’s education includes advanced degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, in Interpersonal Communication and Adult Education, having taught at the Milwaukee School of Engineering and Marquette University, coursework in Life Review and Reminiscence from the University of Wisconsin-Superior, and Guided Autobiography.
Need Washing???
received from Leon Boley of Salem, Oregon in September, 2009

A little girl had been shopping with her Mom in Target. She must have been 6 years old, this beautiful red haired, freckle faced image of innocence. It was pouring outside. The kind of rain that gushes over the top of rain gutters, so much in a hurry to hit the earth it has no time to flow down the spout. We all stood there under the awning and just inside the door of the Target.

We waited, some patiently, others irritated because nature messed up their hurried day. I am always mesmerized by rainfall. I got lost in the sound and sight of the heavens washing away the dirt and dust of the world. Memories of running, splashing so carefree as a child came pouring in as a welcome reprieve from the worries of my day.

The little voice was so sweet as it broke the hypnotic trance we were all caught in. 'Mom let's run through the rain,' she said.

'What?' Mom asked.

'Let's run through the rain!' She repeated.

'No, honey, we'll wait until it slows down a bit,' Mom replied.

This young child waited about another minute and repeated, 'Mom, let's run through the rain,'

'We'll get soaked if we do,' Mom said.

'No, we won't, Mom. That's not what you said this morning,' the young girl said as she tugged at her Mom's arm.

'This morning? When did I say we could run through the rain and not get wet?'

'Don't you remember? When you were talking to Daddy about his cancer, you said, 'If God can get us through this, he can get us through anything!'

The entire crowd stopped dead silent. I swear you couldn't hear anything but the rain. We all stood silently. No one came or left in the next few minutes.

Mom paused and thought for a moment about what she would say. Now some would laugh it off and scold her for being silly. Some might even ignore what was said. But this was a moment of
affirmation in a young child's life. A time when innocent trust can be nurtured so that it will bloom into faith.

'Honey, you are absolutely right. Let's run through the rain. If GOD let's us get wet, well maybe we just needed washing,' Mom said.

Then off they ran. We all stood watching, smiling and laughing as they darted past the cars and yes, through the puddles. They held their shopping bags over their heads just in case. They got soaked. But they were followed by a few who screamed and laughed like children all the way to their cars.

And yes, I did. I ran. I got wet. I needed washing.

Circumstances or people can take away your material possessions, they can take away your money, and they can take away your health. But no one can ever take away your precious memories... So, don't forget to make time and take the opportunities to make memories everyday. To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under heaven.

I HOPE YOU STILL TAKE THE TIME TO RUN THROUGH THE RAIN!
Becoming a WISE Congregation for Mental Health
By Amy Petré Hill

An All Too Common Story of Mental Health Stigma for Older Adults
Desmond, a long-serving, beloved ruling elder, has shared his gifts of vitality, love for children, sharp mind, and knowledge of accounting with his congregation every year. However, after his retirement at age 72 from a successful career as a CPA, Desmond has transformed. His vitality has dimmed, he comes to church less often, struggles to complete his volunteer tasks for the church, and is less available to meet with church friends. When Desmond and his spouse, Jackie, are kindly asked about their increasing absence from church and Desmond’s noticeable change by the pastor, the couple provides vague answers. They explain Desmond is “just adjusting to retirement, and it is taking time,” and he has “some health issues he’s working on, but he’ll be fine.” Unaware that Desmond may be dealing with a mental health challenge, the pastor and elders don’t push as they respect the couple’s privacy.

Nine months after his retirement, Jackie confidentially shares with her best friend that Desmond is receiving care for major depression. Desmond didn’t want to admit there was a problem, arguing that he was “just over the hill, and it’s all downhill from here.” Jackie realized something was seriously wrong when Desmond stopped eating regularly and couldn’t get out of bed for a week due to exhaustion and low mood. She became frightened when Desmond began saying, “we’d all be better off if I were gone.” and called her family’s Primary Care Physician (PCP). The PCP ensured Desmond was not an immediate danger to himself or others and convinced him to come in for a check-up the next day. The check-up confirmed that Desmond’s physical health was good. Still, a simple depression screening revealed that Desmond was struggling with major depression. After some resistance, Desmond started seeing a counselor and meets with his PCP regularly to monitor his anti-depression medication. His mood is improving, and he is beginning to re-engage with activities he enjoys, like playing golf and participating in a men’s book club. He has also started planning for the future vacations he and Jackie have always dreamed of taking.

Jackie is grateful Desmond is recovering, but she feels worn out and alone. She misses attending church and feeling support from the congregation. She wishes she could ask for prayers from her women’s bible study group or talk to her pastor. However, mental illness is not an issue spoken about in her church, and Desmond has sworn her to silence. He fears church leaders will find him an unfit member, lacking faith and willpower, if they know about his depression diagnosis. So he is staying away from church until he feels he is “back to his old self.” Unfortunately, even if Jackie and Desmond return, their fear of judgment will keep them from bringing their selves and their stories into the love and support of their congregation.
The Mental Health Crisis In Our County
According to the US Centers for Disease Control, happiness typically increases with age: older adults tend to have higher rates of life satisfaction than younger adults. However, the American Psychological Association finds that one in four adults aged 65 and older deal with mental health and cognitive challenges that negatively impact their lives. People age 85 and older have the highest suicide rate of any group in the United States: older white men die by suicide at a rate nearly six times that of the general population. Because suicide is the second leading cause of death for Americans between 10 and 34, even if older adults are not struggling with a mental health challenge, their children and grandchildren may.

Depression, the most prevalent mental health challenge among older adults, often goes unrecognized because of the mistaken assumption that sadness is just a part of getting older. Depression is not mere sadness. Depression is a medical condition in which a person experiences ongoing symptoms like persistent sadness, withdrawal from previously enjoyed activities, difficulty sleeping, physical discomforts, and low energy. Anxiety, the second most common mental health challenge in the United States, is more than being worried. Anxiety is a mental health challenge where feelings of fear, worry, apprehension, or dread that is excessive or disproportional to the problems or situations that are feared. The two conditions often go together, and close to half of the older adults who are diagnosed with major depression also meet the criteria for anxiety. Fortunately, depression and anxiety are two of the most successfully treated illnesses, and there are numerous effective treatments for adults of any age. Most older adults with depression or anxiety can improve dramatically with treatment.

The tragedy is that the Centers for Disease Control report less than 50% of older adults suffering from a mental health challenge seek professional help. Fear of marginalization by community members, including fellow church members, keeps many older adults from seeking care that could significantly improve their quality of life. Because PCPs are now better trained, older adults can often receive appropriate medications and referrals to counselors in respectful partnership with their PCP.

Being WISE Saves Lives
Churches are vital in promoting the mental health of older adults by fighting the stigma around mental health challenges. Recent research demonstrates that individuals who are a part of a faith community are more likely to first reach out to clergy for help with a mental health problem. Thus, clergy and congregations have unique opportunities to positively impact the physical, mental, and spiritual well-being of older adult members by creating an atmosphere of acceptance and encouraging everyone to seek appropriate care from mental health professionals when needed.
Becoming a WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, and Engaged) for Mental Health certified congregation is one way churches can create faith communities of radical belonging. WISE Congregations reduce the stigma around mental illness and welcome everyone into the life, leadership, and saving work of the Body of Christ. WISE certification is a ten-step process available at no cost to from the UCC Mental Health Network at www.mhn-ucc.org to any church, presbytery, or synod. You can also download the “Becoming a WISE Congregation for Mental Health” guide for from this MHN website for free.

Becoming a WISE Congregation is a process, but any congregation can begin where they are by taking a few simple steps:

- Speaking of mental health challenges in the pulpit and praying for those living with both physical and mental illnesses during community prayer times.
- Inviting an older adult speaker from a local National Alliance on Mental Health (NAMI) chapter to speak about mental health and their mental health journey. NAMI (www.nami.org) is the most extensive grassroots education and advocacy group for individuals and families living with mental health challenges in the USA. It provides classes and support groups across the USA.
- Hosting a Mental Health First Aid Training (www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org) for church members and the broader community. Mental Health First Aid is an internationally recognized, skills-based training course that teaches anyone how to help someone experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Offering a Mental Health Sunday Worship in May to provide comfort and education to everyone in the congregation and the community impacted by mental illness. For sample services, go to http://mhn-ucc.blogspot.com/p/mental-health-sunday.html.
- Starting a mental health book reading group or bible study. Blessed are the Crazy by Rev. Dr. Sarah Griffith Lund and The Lifesaving Church: Faith Communities and Suicide Prevention by Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe are two excellent books for group discussion.
- Reaching out to Mental Health Network consultants to discuss how your congregation can become a more informed and radically inclusive faith community. I welcome congregations to contact me with questions at revamy@mhministries.org

Taking any of the above steps will strengthen the ministry of the church by creating a safe place where anyone - including older adults like Desmond and Jackie - can experience Christ’s love and feel genuinely welcome no matter where they are on their life’s journey.
Ten Steps to Becoming a WISE Congregation for Mental Health

1. **Consult with your minister(s).** Consulting with your lead clergy at the beginning allows them to educate themselves and resolve any concerns they may have early in the WISE process.

2. **Form a WISE Team.** Gather a team of at least three and up to twelve people who share a passion for mental health, including individuals living with mental health challenges.

3. **Connect with the UCC Mental Health Network and examine available resources.** No faith community needs to travel their WISE journey alone. Mental Health Network consultants and WISE Congregations are ready to support you with help, cheering, and prayers.

4. **Develop an approach that leads to the congregation’s vote to become a WISE Congregation for Mental Health.** This includes education sessions, partnerships with other mental health organizations, using language around mental health in sermons, and pastoral prayers.

5. **Draft a WISE Covenant.** You can find samples of WISE Covenants already adopted by congregations around the country at www.mhn-ucc.org. Every WISE covenant is grounded in radical inclusion.

6. **Involve your church’s leadership in engaging the WISE covenant.** Ask session members, committees, and other leadership teams to read and discuss the proposed WISE covenant. People must have the opportunity to talk about the covenant before a congregational vote.

7. **Vote on your WISE Covenant.** Voting empowers your congregation to “own” your WISE covenant.

8. **Certify and celebrate becoming WISE.** Once the UCC Mental Health Network confirms your WISE process and covenant, your congregation will be nationally recognized as a WISE congregation.

9. **Publicize.** Share your WISE commitment via local media, your presbytery, your synod, and local community organizations. You are now community leaders who can offer a welcoming place for worship and spiritual growth for often-marginalized members of the community seeking a faith home.

10. **Turn to the future.** As you live into your WISE covenant, new opportunities for mission and ministry will emerge. Your experience will inspire the next faith community to become WISE for Mental Health.

**Rev. Amy Petré Hill** is the Minister of Mental Health and Inclusion at Mountain View United Church in Aurora, Colorado. Mountain View was the first WISE certified ecumenical church (Presbyterian USA, United Methodist, and United Church of Christ) and offers education and support to any faith community seeking to become WISE. She previously worked as a disability rights attorney, spiritual advisor to the Voices for Veterans Mental Health Council of Eastern Colorado, and a chaplain intern at a Colorado state psychiatric hospital. She is a member of POAMN, a certified Mental Health First Aid instructor, NAMI Group Facilitator, Soul Shop for Congregations trainer, and currently serves on the UCC Mental Health Network Board.
POAMN Membership Form

Name _________________________________________________________________________

Mailing Address __________________________________________________________________

City/State/Zip ____________________________________________________________________

Preferred Phone - Indicate Type (i.e. cell, home, work) ________________________________

E-Mail __________________________________________________________________________

Synod ____________________________  Presbytery _____________________________

Church __________________________________________________________________________

Other Organization _________________________________________________________________

I wish to become a member of the Presbyterian Older Adult Ministries Network (POAMN)
  □ New Member       □ Renewal

Membership Type:
  □ $50 Individual        □ $75 Couple
  □ $35 Affiliate (non-voting) □ $125 Institutional, Church & Judicatory Membership

To continue POAMN’s ministry to older adults and those engaged in ministries for older adults, ad-
ditional gifts are welcome including those in honor or memory of someone. All extra gifts are tax
deductible. Gifts can also be given through the PC(USA) Extra Commitment Opportunity (ECO),
to account E048101.

Extra gift of $____________ to POAMN a 501(c)3 organization

Extra gift of $____________ enclosed to the Miriam Dunson Legacy Fund

Gift of $____________ enclosed in honor / memory of: _________________________________

(include address if you would like family notified of gift): _______________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

Gift to support membership of another person or church: ________________________________

(include all contact information of that person/church) _________________________________

Make checks payable to:

POAMN

c/o Lynne Trout, Treasurer

410 Richard Avenue, Delanco, NJ 08075
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April 30-May 1, 2020
At Montreat Conference Center

A regional, day and a half conference sponsored by POAMN

Stronger Together: Faith in Action Across Generations
An Older Adult Ministry Regional Conference not to be missed!

Featuring outstanding leadership

Dr. Eileen Lindner  Rev. Jon Brown  Rev. Cindy Kohlmann  Carla Karst

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This conference is for you if:
• You work with older adults in your congregation (lay or clergy)
• You want to build relationships across generations
• You seek to thrive after 55 in body, mind, and spirit
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Don’t delay! Register on-line at www.montreat.org/POAMN
October 27-29, 2020

POAMN’S NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Vibrant and Faithful Aging:
Legacies Across Generations

Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you.

Isaiah 46:4a

Presbyterian Mo-Ranch Assembly
2229 FM 1340, Hunt, TX 78024

Watch for more details & registration to open soon at www.poamn.org
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Orlando, FL 32801
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Please show your appreciation for this support to POAMN and if you, or someone you know, are seeking senior care, consider one of these fine Presbyterian-related retirement community organizations.

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