

ASIAN LUTHERAN DISCIPLESHIP RESOURCES



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Discipleship to Older Adults

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OLDER ADULTS TRACK

By Rev. Cora Aguilar, Rev. Szu-hsing Mao and Lily Wu

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Introduction

What does it mean to be an older Asian adult disciple? This booklet is about older adults discovering God's purposes and empowerment. Each session includes (A) Bible-based reflections for study, followed by (B) questions and exercises for personal or group growth.

What age group is this for? The primary audience is Asian Christian older adults who live in the United States and are over 50 years old. This is an extremely varied group from one decade to the next, so we cannot assume what older people are specifically needing or are capable of. It's good to ask them!

If you are younger, please use the ideas to build up your awareness and skills; encourage and enable someone older; and see what God reveals to you along the way for your own life. We are all on a journey together. Let us encourage one another in Christ's name!

How is this guide best used? Use it for personal devotion time, or with groups led by a leader. For groups, arrange a time and place that allows for comfortable discussion – perhaps an afternoon or evening potluck or weekend lunch event at church or in a home. Leaders, invite participants to prepare in advance before each session for a deeper experience. At least an hour will be needed for each session, and some may require more time to fully explore. It's up to you!

May this guide inspire you to:

- build up ministry with and among older adults;
- develop programs to support them (Session 8 and Appendix);
- include wisdom from your own culture or ethnic group in your programming.

All Bible passages are from the New Revised Standard Version. You can choose how many of them to study for each session. Sometimes even one will lead to a fruitful and meaningful discussion that is enough for one day.

The Selected Resources list at the end is included for further individual or group study. There are many gems in them also, waiting to be discovered! Perhaps your very last

session can include time to review the list, share additional resources any of you have found, pray for older adult ministry and each member of your study group; and give thanks in a festive way for how God has blessed your journeys so far.

Session 1: Discipleship Is A Lifelong Journey

Becoming older and reaching retirement age typically suggests withdrawing from the world to do what you like instead of work. Well-earned rest and restoration are indeed a blessing.

But after we turn 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 or any age in between, our Creator does not say “Surprise! No more spiritual gifts or opportunities for you.” No, of course not! Every morning we have a new day to give thanks for, along with people we love, and a chance to be God’s people in the world.

“The young have more potential,” people often say. Meanwhile, God values people of every age. Every day is a chance for us to grow closer to our Lord and improve in our outlook and abilities. Truly, being a disciple is an adventure that unfolds each day we live. In fact, this adventure keeps us in a positive mindset, which contributes to our well-being as we age. And as we travel on that road with knowledge, purpose and compassion for others, we will continue to grow as the disciples God wants us to be.

A. On Growing Old

People sometimes have funny concepts about growing old. We don’t want to become old, but neither do we want to die young. Yet how we live the life given to us is far more important than how “old” we grow.

First of all, old age is a natural process, and part of God’s purpose for a normal life. The Old Testament suggests wisdom of the aging, honor due, and service rendered. “Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people” (Genesis 25:8). ● “David son of Jesse... died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor...” (1 Chronicles 29:26, 28). ● “After this Job lived 140 years, and saw his children, and his children’s children, four generations. And Job died, old and full of days” (Job 42:16, 17).

How do you personally feel about growing old? Share as you feel comfortable. ● What do you think makes a life “full of days” (or in another Bible translation, “contented”)? What helps make this possible in our own day and age? What works against it, in your opinion? ● Name and give thanks for someone you know who blessed you with their life well lived. (If in a group, say why!) ● What reinvigorates you, and how can you plan for your next experience of it?

B. Finding Wholeness

Disciples know that cultivating spiritual life is important. Now, how can we measure and know that we are growing, in a balanced way? Consider the Board of Pensions, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America "Wholeness Wheel." This visual tool shows that spiritual well-being comes from a balance of six elements. It looks like a pie that has six "slices" -- social/interpersonal, emotional, physical, financial, vocational and intellectual. Spiritual well-being is the circle that encompasses all of these.

See the full color version at

<http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Vocation/Rostered-Leadership/Leadership-Support/Health/Wholeness-Wheel.aspx>

For free downloadable tools, see

https://www.elcabop.org/LiveWell/Wellness_logos.aspx

Martin Luther once said: "This life...is not godliness but the process of becoming godly, not health but getting well, not being but becoming, not rest but exercise. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on. This is not the goal but it is the right road. At present, everything does not gleam and sparkle, but everything is being cleansed."

When you look at the Wholeness Wheel, what do you think God is saying to you about each aspect of your life?

1. For **social/interpersonal** well-being, I wonder if...
2. For **emotional** well-being, I pray God will help me...
3. For **physical** well-being, I would like to find ways to...
4. For **financial** well-being, I need God to show me...
5. For **vocational** well-being, I hope to...
6. For **intellectual** well-being, I want to be a person who...
7. For **spiritual** well-being, my hope is that...

Now consider: Which ONE of the six areas do you most need to act on? What one small step will you take to begin? How will you make this happen?

Paying attention to well-being will strengthen us as older adult disciples, keeping us as healthy as possible for the years ahead.

The ELCA also offers an intensive one-year renewal program for ELCA primary health care leaders.

<https://www.elcabop.org/renewal.aspx>

Session 2: You Are Blessed And Gifted

A. Old Age as a Sign of Blessing

God wants us to live a long and abundant life. The Old Testament suggests that old age can be an outcome of living a godly life and finding God's favor. Growing day by day to be more like Christ is a worthy goal for disciples of every age.

"You must follow exactly the path that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you are to possess" (Deuteronomy 5:33). ● If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life" (1 Kings 3:14). ● Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life" (Proverbs 16:31).

What do you think Jesus would add about these Old Testament teachings? ● What would you say to a younger Christian who says "I think I am doomed then, because it is impossible to keep God's commandments and be a righteous person all the time"?
● How might we intentionally honor older adults ("gray hair as a crown of glory") in a world that does not?

Some Bible passages state that old age can be a reward that comes from honoring parents. "Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12). ● "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—this is the first commandment with a promise—'so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth'" (Ephesians 6:1).

The New Testament also points out the responsibility to care for older persons who need it, and not to break God's commandment for the sake of tradition. (Matthew 15:1-6)

How is "honoring your father and mother" expressed in your household? ● What makes it difficult for children to obey their parents, in your opinion? Share a lesson you've learned about how to good relationships can be cultivated between parents and children. ● Tell of an intergenerational church or community program that is successful and why. Or dream one up for your church, based on what your group wishes for!

B. Cultivating Gifts of the Spirit

Many of us in our Asian cultures do not talk about the gifts or strengths we possess, because we value humility. Yet talking about gifts can simply be a conversation in which you share what you are interested in and ask someone else what he/she enjoys. God can use such friendly initiatives to help disciples to connect with one another for friendship and joyful team service.

Name three skills or abilities that seem to come naturally to you. ● What three events or experiences in your life have brought you the greatest joy? ● What kinds of activities fascinate you so much that you lose track of time when you do them? ● How can your group invite and welcome more use of gifts and talents?

Your answers above most likely to point the way to your calling and passions – which are expressions of your unique identity as a child of God.

Session 3: Finding And Giving Support

Becoming older brings many new challenges. At some time or another, everyone needs support.

A. Trusting in God

God wants us to grow old trusting Him. “Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save” (Isaiah 46:4). ● “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long” (Psalm 23:6). ● “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body” (Proverbs 3:5-8).

Read one of these passages together as a simplified Lectio Divina Bible study. Lectio divina, “or holy reading,” is a slow, contemplative praying of the Scriptures. (1) Read the passage slowly. (2) What word or phrase catches your attention? (3) Read the passage a second time. (4) Where does the passage touch your life? (5) Read the passage a third time. (6) What does God want you to do or be this week? How is God inviting you to change?

B. Dealing with Loss and Change

As we age, changes occur in our bodies. We may lose mental abilities such as forgetting where we left things we use regularly, like eyeglasses or keys...forgetting appointments...walking into a room and forgetting why we entered. Our physical vitality changes: fading vision may stop us from driving at night, hearing loss makes us miss conversations, and we may be unable to do grocery shopping or cook meals as we used to.

We may feel sadness, wondering if it’s “downhill from here.” If 20 years remain, do we “coast” and hope for the best, or seek new dreams? Will we outlive our finances? Our role in society may change too. Without our role in the workplace, we are not as visible. We may wonder who needs us, or even sees us now.

There is loneliness too, as old friends die and children move away to live their own lives. Losing our independence becomes frustrated because we don’t want to depend on some one else.

Finding practical solutions to problems is one key to a positive outlook. Churches can provide support with small group discussions that create a space and time for good sharing of ideas

and resources. They can also invite knowledgeable speakers to come and share information.

1. When we are no longer working full time, how might we stay connected to others?
2. If we have children and they have moved away, how do we renew those relationships? And how do we meet people we can relate to and make new friendships?
3. How do we deal with loss and change? Not only with friends we have lost but also changes in our own youth, vitality, health? How can we find or build up groups that provide support?
4. How do we manage the physical challenges of eyesight, balance, muscle tone? How can we take good care physically? Wellness these days can mean more than absence of illness; it can mean exercising to build and maintain fitness.
5. How do we accept the reality of the end of life? What do we need to do to prepare ourselves for that day?

Sometimes fear prevents us from wanting to think too much about these issues. Sometimes there is so much to do, or think about, that it is hard to begin. Let us affirm that because God is with us, we always have goodness to look forward to. To open ourselves to goodness sometimes means preparing for it through concrete, measurable actions.

1. Try a new resource for personal devotions, or join a Bible study.
2. Invite a friend to go to an event or spend time with you to practice something you both want to do.
3. Read a book on older adult issues. (See Selected Resources list, for examples.) Do a presentation at an adult forum at church about what you've learned.
4. Visit your doctor regularly to know what activities you can safely do, and how to maintain good physical health.
5. Set up new and unexpected circumstances. Keep your mind and body active. Do crossword puzzles, number puzzles like Sudoku, join a crafts group, do volunteer work.

6. Develop habits to accomplish your goals. Get a calendar and mark down your progress as you go, to inspire yourself to stay on track.

7. How can you cultivate a positive outlook toward change? What favorite sayings can you collect (of your own or those of others) on growing older? Find a way to share them with others.

Whether you develop a plan of your own -- or join an existing program at a church, school, or community center -- a structure is important. It creates habits of showing up at a regular time and place to reach your goals. More will follow in Session 8.

Session 4: Christ And Our Callings

A. Christ Gives Us Purpose

The chance to grow in spiritual maturity throughout our lives is a blessing from God. We are not alone, but embraced by our Lord every day.

- “I am the true vine...” (John 15:1-8)

Share in your group something you have learned in your life about abiding in Christ.

- “So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16).

God has always called older people to minister and lead. How many can you find? Abraham, Noah, Moses, Joshua, Caleb...

- “It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 5:22).

How do you experience Christ living in you? How do you express this in your every day life?

B. What Is Your Calling?

Older years are a precious opportunity to look back on what we have learned so far, and to refocus on that for our future years. To walk with Jesus every day and ask “Is there something you want to show me about myself that I could not see before? What do you want me to do today with the people you bring before me? What do you want me to learn?”

In our Asian cultures, we may be more used to saying what our group or community or family does, rather than what we individually do. However, even in the larger picture, we each serve in particular roles. So being able to say what your purpose is helps you to know it more clearly, and act in the most focused way for good outcomes.

As a famous philosopher once said, “Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in

it.” A Christian interpretation of this might be “When you are committed to a purpose that God favors, God will lead you to accomplishments you never imagined.”

Look back at how you filled in the “Gifts of the Spirit” section above. If your life were a tapestry of life experiences woven together, what threads or themes seem to inspire and involve you again and again? Do they suggest to you what your purpose in life might be? (This may or may not be related to the kind of work you have done or are doing for a living!)

How would you fill in this blank? “From what I understand now, my purpose in life is to _____.”

If you cannot phrase it now, come back to it sometime later. Your purpose may also change over the years, because you may find multiple callings. Just keep traveling on God’s path to wisdom!

Session 5: The Road To Wisdom

In our Asian cultures, wisdom is a highly regarded trait. We value the wisdom of others, and tend not to describe ourselves as having it. But God wants us all to grow old wisely. Wisdom is a blessing for proclaiming the goodness of God.

In the intergenerational journey of the discipleship community, older adults have valuable learnings to share from their experiences of hardship, failure and success. Let us find ways to share and affirm that wisdom. Disciples of any age are also needed as encouragers of listening and understanding between the generations. Let us seek wisdom wherever God reveals it to us!

A. Biblical Teachings on Wisdom

“Is wisdom with the aged, and understanding in the length of days?” (Job 12:12). ● “O God, from my youth you have taught me; and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.” So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come” (Psalm 71:17-18). ● “My child, if you accept my words and treasure up my commandments within you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding...” (Proverbs 2:1-2).

Share a lesson of wisdom you have learned from God. Tell about a time God’s power was proclaimed through sharing of wisdom. How can a church assist God’s work so that older people do not feel forsaken? How can disciples as a group encourage ears attentive to wisdom and hearts inclined toward understanding?

B. What Makes People Wise?

Do you think that growing older makes us wise? On the one hand, living a mindful life – being intentional in our actions – tends to lead to wisdom. On the other hand, the passage of years itself does not automatically make us wise. As AAPI’s President Edmond Yee says, “by virtue of growing older, we have experienced a lot and learned plenty from what we experienced. That’s what makes us wise. Age in and of itself does not matter that much, but the accumulation of experiences does matter.”

Indeed, being mindful and aware is good for disciples of any age to practice. Some older disciples have learned to see past layers of complexity to the heart of situations and needs, so that their perspective and advice are highly valuable.

Ask yourself “What have I learned over the years that I did not know when I was younger? What are my skills, and

which of them have improved?" What would you like to learn in the coming years?

Session 6: Expanding Our Horizons

As we age, we may have had more experience with faith than some younger people. But there will always be more to learn. If we want to experience more of life, or certain aspects of it, God can make it happen – showing us new places to visit or belong to, with new friends and purposes.

A. Traveling Anew

We can have the same attitude toward serving the Lord as Caleb did. He never quit – or retired -- but asked God to continue giving him more challenges (“mountains”) to conquer and overcome with the Lord’s help (Joshua 14:12).

Also, the New Testament offers this teaching for disciples of any age: “No one tears a piece from a new garment and sews it on an old garment...No one puts new wine into old wineskins...New wine must be put into fresh wineskins” (Luke 5:36-38).

What mountains do you want overcome with the Lord’s help?

- Do you wonder what it means to be “new” at this point in your life? How “new” can we be as older adults?

B. Boosting our Life Skills

Many of us in Asian families grew up very responsibly. We did not want to trouble anyone with our private family issues, even when we needed help. So as older adults now, if you feel you have gaps in your learning, you are not alone. Many of us yearn to improve in life skills we did not have a chance to learn earlier.

For example: how to have happier home lives; how to relate to older or younger family members; how to manage finances; how to take better care of our health; how to prepare for retirement or older age. Then there are the newer ones, such as deciding what we want to learn in the ever-growing world of computers and the internet.

We can help one another and still respect privacy. For example, we can invite guest speakers to church to inform us on issues vital to the older adults in our congregation or community. After the presentation, we can have a question-and-answer time followed by a small group discussion session. This will allow for people to learn without getting into any personal names or situations.

God does not want people to live in isolation and struggle with problems alone. Disciples are God’s students, but also God’s leaders to organize groups of people for community and action. If

organizing is not your strength, you might plant the seed with someone who can organize...then you can join in to support the effort!

In fact, it is good for us to learn new skills in the world around us. "I have learned many valuable lessons over the years about how to manage life and relate well to other people," one man of God said. "Yet now because the world is changing, I often have to look again and adapt what I learned before, to get a good result."

What will you focus our energies on in the next week, month, year, and beyond? ● What has been effective for you in staying close to God? ● In what ways do you learn best? What helps you in learning new information and skills? ● What do you want to learn more about these days? ● How do you discover where God wants you to serve with both your old and new skills?

Leading, Mentoring, Role Modeling

Becoming older also opens up possibilities for leading, mentoring and role modeling. This is not limited to professional roles. It means younger people may seek you out to listen to them or give good counsel. They often want to talk with older persons who are not their parents.

Listening is a skill necessary for building trust and good communication. It is also a spiritual practice when we ask God to come into the connection, and bring illumination. We as listeners are not in control. We do not know the outcome of the talking. Instead, we invite the other persons to speak, and to know that we care to hear and provide feedback, if they wish. It is a way to show love to others and honor our Teacher.

Asian Disciples in a U.S. Context

Younger generations may have different problems than we did as Asians in the United States. Or sometimes they are confronted by challenges we also faced years ago. Older Asian disciples have much to offer to one another and to younger generations in this regard.

As one Christian leader said, "I only realized how important a deep awareness of Asian American legacy and identity was for discipleship, ministry in the church and for the common good when I engaged mainstream church and society. In these settings I learned that I had to define myself first or find myself defined by the prevailing stereotypes of Asians.

"I had a responsibility to help create Christian cultures that not only passionately minister to a hurting world, but also give Asian

Americans a sense of dignity and value whenever they are rendered invisible in church and society.” -- Timothy Tseng, ISAAC (Institute for the Study of Asian American Christianity) Insider Newsletter, December 2008.

Even if we are not experiencing the same realities, or in the same ways, older Asian adults are essential disciples in the body of Christ in the United States. We are needed to serve and be served in that body. In other words, it makes a difference that we are here!

1. What has it been like for you, being Asian in the United States? What lessons have you learned that you think God wants you to share for the good of others now?
2. “Why don’t you go to an Asian church?” the older Asian Christian asked the younger one. “Because I don’t feel I fit in there,” the younger English-speaking one replied. As an older disciple, how would you respond to the younger one’s statement? How might you encourage interaction and mutually affirming relationships between Asian-speaking and English-speaking disciples, whether they attend the same congregation or not?
3. Longstanding Asian cultural norms often favor boys over girls. Yet Jesus included women in his circle of friends and leaders. And we know from Galatians 3:28 “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” In what area of your life can you hear God calling you to encourage and empower girls and women?
4. A 90-year-old Asian widow, increasingly overwhelmed by health issues, received a tremendous gift she never expected: friends from her church helped her find a construction business nearby to renovate parts of her home. What church or community program can you support or create to give practical help to seniors who direly need it?

Session 7: Walking With Two Feet

A. The Power of Prayer

God wants us to grow old serving the Kingdom, in ways that take many different forms. Sometimes you hear church members say, “All we can do is pray.” All we can do? How we underestimate the power of prayer in our lives!

The prophetess Anna at the age of 84 “...never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:37). ● “Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayers and supplication” (Ephesians 6:18) ● The Parable of the Widow and the Judge (Luke 18:1-8) ● “Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer” (Romans 12:12) ● “Devote yourselves to prayer; keeping alert in it with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2).

How can you encourage regular prayer practices in your congregation? How can you strengthen prayer practices among those who already pray regularly?

B. The Power of Action

What does it take to become a disciple, walking with God every day? It takes two feet: one, to pay attention to faith (loving God), and to take caring actions (loving neighbor as yourself).

Prayer is a powerful action but also an internal kind (within ourselves, or within a circle of believers). Without caring actions that stem from prayer, how are others going to know the God in whom we believe? How can they see results from our faith and prayer? Will they think our church is just a social club that doesn't care about others?

Disciples seek to be as caring, accepting and loving as Christ. This can be easier said than done as we face new challenges in life. It is vital that we continue to bring ourselves and everything we do to our Teacher for guidance and wisdom.

What are three ways you enjoy taking action to help others?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Where do you feel God is calling you to take action, especially with/for older adults? What small steps can you take so it will happen?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Even as people who love being in our community, we will be in situations in which we are individuals who decide to act or not act, speak or not speak. Disciples always want to know how we can be God's "best ambassador" wherever we are placed.

Consider also the "Two Feet of Christian Service": (1) direct service, or works of charity/mercy; and (2) social change, or works of justice. Asian churches are best known for their devotion to acts of direct service and proclaiming the gospel. However, if some disciples feel called to works of justice, let that be encouraged as well, because both feet are needed for God's kingdom!

Direct service helps people survive their present crisis.

- Food pantries
- Food baskets
- Clothing centers
- Hospitality
- Meals on Heels/Wheels
- Transporting seniors to church, doctor,
grocery, drug stores
- Tutoring
- Visiting older adults, shut-ins, prisoners

Social change seeks to address root causes of problems, asking questions about inequalities and coming up with alternative solutions.

- Building relationships with legislators
- Education on vital issues
- Joining organizations that work for peace/justice
- Political action
- Speaking up for someone needing support
- Voter registration

Session 8: Developing Asian Older Adult Ministry

With the number of aging people is growing rapidly in the years ahead, challenges are going to increase. Meanwhile, senior centers are among those needing to stand up and fight to stay open, in the face of budget cuts in many cities nationwide. And many families are grappling with issues of older adults, elder care, assisted living, health concerns.

Will action increase in congregations, to help? Families and individuals will do their caregiving alone if they must. They will search for resources and hopefully find ones dedicated to excellent older adult or elder care.

But how wonderful it can be when a congregation offers practical support through an older adult ministry or services! This can include sharing news about elder-friendly community places, money-saving tips, educational opportunities, and free events that Asian seniors might enjoy. The word will spread that older adults are among those this church cares about. The intentionality is also a witness to the wider community that discipleship is real, and that older adults are valued as much as God's people of any other age group.

Most of the remarks here are for those starting to explore older adult ministry. But perhaps they may be helpful too to those who are revisiting or expanding their existing ministry.

A. Biblical Teachings on Older Persons

“Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters—with absolute purity. Honor widows who are really widows...” (1 Timothy 5:1-3). ● “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27).

What are the ministries offered by your church to the seniors at present? What kind of support may be needed to strengthen them? ● What ministries would you like your church to offer if it does not have any at this time? ● I Timothy 5 speaks of treating people of every age as family members. How does your congregation seek to build intergenerational relationships? Is it time for a brainstorming session to see how this interaction can be improved?

B. Older Adult Ministry Keys

1. Ask older adults for their insights. The Rev. Dr. Ramonia Lee at the Inter-Faith Chapel in a Silver Spring, MD retirement community got responses from residents such as:

+ wanting worship to address aging and later stages, social justice, forgiveness, God's promises and dealing with pain and suffering. They conduct weekday morning worship in six assisted living and independent care homes.

+ writing prayers and rituals of blessings for letting go of grief, driving, or painful memories; entering a nursing home or creating an ethical will; overcoming loneliness; caring for an elderly person; and asking to be channels of God's grace.

2. Survey the needs specific to your situation. The most effective in-reach or outreach will grow out of what is most important to your congregation. Be gentle with yourself in this discernment process, as you would with an old car! How might you do this?

● Revisit the five questions in Session 3B of this resource. Responses are likely to provide a broad range of needs.

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● Use questions from the Inter-Faith Chapel, Silver Spring, MD to start discussions:

1. What are you pouring into yourself? How are you passing on this message to other members in your congregation?
2. How often does your church challenge older adults to step up and give leadership, share values, and tell how faith has carried them along? Do you capture their testimonies in print or electronically?
3. How many of your church members are in nursing homes? How does your church remember them in worship, or worship with them?
4. In what ways do your sermons, prayers, liturgies, church education, or church outreach address the needs of older adults? Do you involve older adults in these efforts?

5. What are the similarities and differences in designing meaningful worship for young children, people with mental impairments, and aging adults?

● See www.LSSLiving.org/ETA. “Engaging the Aging” is a free newsletter of suggestions and solutions for congregations wanting to reach out to older adults. It is published by Lutheran Senior Services in St. Louis, MO.

The Fall 2011 issue offers 16 statements for “Taking the Pulse of Your Congregation: A Survey on Attitudes Toward Aging Parishioners.” For example:

- +There is someone in charge of our older adult ministry.
- +Our congregation provides inter- and intra-generational ministries.
- +Our older adult ministry is evaluated at least once a year.

3. Brainstorm with others. Invite a small group to identify needs of older adults in your congregation. The ELCA Wholeness Wheel mentioned earlier in this resource might be helpful for starters. Find out whether English-speaking community resources are helpful to some of your Asian older adult members, or if more is needed.

The Rev. Chung-Woo Kim, an ELCA pastor in Elk Grove, CA and Korean pastors in the Bay Area of California have noted that there may be senior programs in neighborhood community centers and churches, but, “such programs are rarely sensitive to the particular concerns of Asian elderly...diet, language, religion, cultural differences, social status and acceptance...”

They suggested daytime programs through local churches to offer classes, resources, and organized activities. These programs would be based on needs of the pre-existing Asian community, as well as available resources (such as transportation, meals, nursing, medical attention, recreational supplies).

“Asian seniors often live in the homes of their adult children; and when those adults are working, the seniors are left alone in the homes. Asian senior programming would give them an accepting and welcoming place to meet with others with similar needs, develop meaningful relationships and create a community that is consistent with the values and traditions they value,” says Pastor Kim.

“Ultimately, everyone just needs a place to belong,” he continues. “An Asian older adult program is a greatly needed social ministry. Conventional Sunday morning ministry is not enough. Further commitment during the week serves as a public example of God's love in the world. Older adult ministry reaches out to those who have been forgotten.”

4. Do some research on an area that seems prominent.

Invite help from others of any age who enjoy internet research.

Groups like Griefshare (<http://www.griefshare.org/>) suggest these programs. Do any of these stand out as possibilities for your congregation?

- Grief and loss support group
- Intentional visitation ministry
- Lunch partner ministry
- Multigenerational study groups
- Parish nurse ministry
- Programs of learning
- Service and faith sharing
- Telephone reassurance ministry

<http://helpguide.org/> offers expert, ad-free resources for resolving health challenges. See their articles on Aging Well, Dementia/Alzheimers, Caregiving and Housing. Share this information around your church as part of or even before you develop an older adult ministry.

<http://www.n4a.org/> connects you to the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging. This umbrella organization advocates for resources and support for older Americans. n4a administers the Eldercare Locator – a public service of the U.S. Administration on Aging. From 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. ET, specialists connect older adults and caregivers directly to local area agencies on aging. Call toll free 1-800-677-1116.

5. Design a pilot program. Sometimes people like to read about successful program models to see what they might adapt for their own setting. Researching existing Asian older adult ministries in the AAPI network was beyond the scope of this resource, but hopefully we will learn more to share at some future point. Meanwhile, remember that each congregation's situation is different, so what works well for someone else might not work for you anyway.

Why not come up with your own program? Use your regular decision-making channel such as your congregation council to choose one need to take action on. An effective program does not have to be large, but it is focused and based on the strengths of those who are willing to act. It could start for example, with a

plan to build up one set of skills – such as a cooking class at church. The basic question is, what do your Asian older adults need, and how can you help them find support?

If designing programs is new to you, essentially it means to set up a structure and a system of delivery. For example, for a transportation ministry, the structure could be for a congregation to set up schedule to transport the elderly to and from grocery or other stores once a week. The system of delivery could be to arrange for various church members to sign up for doing this as they are able.

Design a program that grows out of your strengths.

Imagine three rings brought together so that there is small middle section formed by the rings overlapping.

The first ring is the mission and values of your congregation. The second ring represents the many needs of Asian older adults. The third ring represents the strengths (or assets) and weaknesses within your congregation.

Look where these three intersect as you identify your pilot program for the older adults. There are so many possibilities and needs; this is a way to focus on what is doable.

Ask questions to shape your program:

1. What problem are you trying to solve?
2. How will your program address the problem?
3. What do you estimate the cost to be?
4. Where will the money come from? Is there a congregational budget line that can be used? Do you have members who enjoy organizing fundraising events? Or members who enjoy writing grant proposals or helping to identify grant sources? It should not be assumed or expected that volunteers who donate their time can financially support the program, especially if it grows.
5. What measurable goal/s do you have? How and when will you evaluate the program? For example, evaluate it in six months and again in a year, and see where God has led

you.

6. If organizing a new older adult program in your church is not feasible, what alternative programs or solutions might address the problem?

Also:

6. Support your pastor. Ask your pastor what kind of support he/she needs for older adult ministry. Lend a hand if you can. Or support your pastor in other ways, to free up more of his/her time for older adult ministry needs.

7. Think out of the box where age is concerned. Music, for example, does not have to be only the domain of the young. In one congregation, two members -- one 30 year old cellist, and one 60 year old flutist -- discovered their shared interest in music. They rehearse regularly and play at worship service once a month.

Conclusion

As Asian people, we value being able to adapt, to bend in the wind and survive through life's difficulties. As Asian disciples, we can also be a wind that brings refreshment. We can be a breath of fresh air to someone who is lonely, or different, or needs a listening ear. We can be a stronger wind when we speak up for people who are hurting. We can find joy in being like autumn breezes to refresh the lives of others. Thanks be to God, who has loved us all of our lives, and will continue to love us always!

Appendix: Program Models

Ritual of Blessing (For Entry Into a Care Home) From the Inter-Faith Chapel, Silver Spring, MD

“When health issues force a Chapel member to move into a care facility, Lee and (her co-pastor Judy) Birch go to the person’s new home to bless it. They bring flowers from the chapel altar and say ‘These flowers were part of our worship. They let you know you are part of us, even though you weren’t there.’ They light a Christ candle and say, ‘We are connecting to you even though you are no longer on our campus. You are loved as much here as you were loved in the retirement community.’ It takes only 20 or 30 minutes but has “profound influence” on the resident.

Dr. Lee also encourages tapping into deep memory, not discounting someone who is “impaired.” “It’s a myth that there’s no need to feed their spirit,” she says. “What can we do to trigger their response? They can seem lost and locked inside. Then you start singing ‘Jesus Loves Me” or recite the 23rd Psalm, and watch them come out from where they are and join in. For a moment, they are there with you.”

Organize an “Honor our Elders” Day

Choose a Sunday worship day for a special tribute to the elders. Or organize a celebration for another time. Create a small group to plan it. Make it intergenerational ; invite congregational members of every age to take part in ways they enjoy.

This can become an outreach day also, as family and friends who usually do not attend church services will want to come to honor their loved one. Make the most of opportunities to share elder wisdom, such as coming up with a significant question to ask them; setting up a way to gather responses; and sharing their replies in various ways (e.g. congregational newsletter, website).

Designate a volunteer to find out if the elders have family members (church affiliated or not) who would like to be invited or receive a printed or emailed copy of their loved one’s quotes.

Give the honorees a gift that is meaningful – a book, a magnifier, a flashlight, a coupon for a computer lesson/check up session with a volunteer, a coupon for volunteer help to wash their windows...Use your imagination, or better yet, find out from some

older people the kinds of gifts they find useful.

Worship Service “In Praise of Age”

Inter-Faith Chapel in Silver Spring, MD, highlights its oldest members during the annual “In Praise of Age” service. “We only celebrate you if you’re 90 years or older,” says the Rev. Dr. Ramonia Lee. “You get a corsage, and we make a fuss over you. One woman even missed a nephew’s graduation for this.”

The leader begins the call to worship litany saying “Smile, people of God! Let the wrinkles of joy baptize your face. Let us celebrate God’s presence and each other. It’s great to be alive!” The prayer of confession, read in unison, includes these three lines: “We yearn for your goodness and great mercy. We confess our inclination to focus on the frailties and losses of life. We ask for your help always to see our possibilities in your love.”

Selected Resources

Finding/Redefining Purpose

Healing the Purpose of Your Life. Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, Matthew Linn. Paulist Press: New York/Mahwah, New Jersey, 1999. How to create an environment of meaning and purpose; find your calling to give life to the world; and protect yourself from burnout.

Shaping A Life of Significance for Retirement. R. Jack Hansen. Upper Room Books: Nashville, Tenn., 2010. Goals and dreams, relating to family, making a transition to retired life, and dealing with mortality.

Journaling

Old Friend from Far Away: The Practice of Writing Memoir. Natalie Goldberg. Free Press, Simon & Shuster: New York, 2007. Timed, associative and meditative exercises for finding your unique voice and telling your story.

Remembering Your Story: A Guide to Spiritual Autobiography. Richard L. Morgan. Upper Room Books: Nashville, 1996. Leader guide, 2002. This life review workbook culminates in 100 questions for reflection.

Older Adult Ministry Program Design

<http://www.ntcumc.org/pages/detail/1122.html> leads to the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church's page on older adult ministry – specifically promoting “The Graying of the Church” by Richard H. Gentzler, Jr. This book identifies new ministry models, ways to motivate older adults, and general resources.

Storytelling

Don't Write My Obituary Just Yet: Inspiring Faith Stories for Older Adults. Missy Buchanan. Upper Room Books: Nashville, Tenn., 2011. This 108-page large print booklet includes 30 stories from seniors living their lives with purpose. Each story ends with a Bible reading and prayer.

Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal. Rachel Naomi Remen. Riverhead Books: New York, 1996. 10th Anniversary

Edition, 2006. Inspirational stories of cancer survivors and others reveal rich wisdom about living life to its fullest.

That Reminds Me: Family Story-Starters for Passing on the Faith. Jean Brown Eittem. Augsburg Fortress: Minneapolis, 1998. A 156-page book of 200 practical ideas for any time of year, to pass on faith, history and values to children.

Women

Autumn Gospel: Women in the Second Half of Life. Kathleen Fischer. Integration Books, Paulist Press: Mahwah, NJ, 1995. A spiritual guide with rituals and prayers for the middle years and beyond.

Jubilee Time: Celebrating Women, Spirit, and the Advent of Age. Maria Harris. Bantam: New York, 1996. This “passport to transformation” seeks to foster among women “ a refreshed spirituality, an increased freedom, and a richer sense of themselves.”

Smart Women Don't Retire —They Break Free: From Working Full-Time to Living Full-Time. Gail Rentsch. Springboard Press: New York, 2008. The author is a founding member of a national community of professional women in their late 40s to over 80 years old.

www.strongwomen.com. Fitness advocate Dr. Miriam Nelson offers a free newsletter; articles; recipes; and online programs for strong bones, staying slim, and vibrant aging. Most heartening is her discovery that bone loss can be reversed through weightlifting exercises.