

STEWARDSHIP FOR Retirees

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“Let the young people do it!”

This is a recommendation given quite often to members of a congregational committee who are doing their best to fill a slate. And of course the people giving this and similar responses have already filled most of the available offices and served on many committees and boards at least once during their younger years.

While begging off for the sake of involving younger members can be a “cop out,” there is some truth to the oft-repeated phrase. One could make a pretty strong case for the fact that those who have borne the task for a long time are entitled to step back a bit. But in the following section, we would like to emphasize the fact that retirees, even the oldest members of the congregation, can be excellent examples of every aspect of stewardship to younger generations as they continue to involve themselves appropriately.

Retirement? What’s that?

- › For centuries, there was no such stage of life. People worked until they died.
- › With the beginning of Social Security, retirement became a new phenomenon.
- › By the 1970s, society talked about the golden years with an emphasis on “you retire to play.”
- › By the 1990s, the mood changed. You retire not just to play, but to learn, volunteer, travel or work part-time.

Demographic changes that impact retirees

1. TODAY, not someday, there are more older adults than teenagers. In the next 10 years, there will be a 74 percent increase of people over the age of 50 and only a 1 percent increase of people under 50.
2. We now have multi-generation, older adult families, i.e. seniors caring for their parents.
3. We will be seeing Baby Boomers spending one-third of their lives in retirement.
4. As a result of these things, we are facing what we might call a “longevity revolution.”

Observations related to retired stewards

Here are some things to keep in mind as we approach the topic of stewardship of retirees.

1. Retirees can serve as models of mature stewardship for the next generation(s) to emulate. These “seasoned citizens” have been blessed to be a blessing but their involvement in all aspects of stewardship needs to match their personal situations.
2. Retirees have spent their lifetime developing skills and learning trades that can benefit other organizations but especially their own and neighboring congregations.
3. Retirees are on “fixed incomes.” That can be good news in terms of stewardship of treasure. Financial challenges mark all of our days. Seniors living on a fixed amount may be some of the few that sleep soundly as the market rises and falls.
4. Retirees are to be stewards of their own bodies and minds as the years take their toll. These years can be a blessing as seniors work at staying active and enjoy the extended years that come through God’s blessing and the benefits of living in a nation especially blessed by Him.
5. Retirees have the opportunity and the unique privilege of “picking and choosing” activities and types of involvement. They can adjust their “work load” since they are normally volunteers.
6. Retirees deal with a decreasing amount of time (that makes things sweeter in many ways). Each moment is precious and needs to be used under the loving view of our God.
7. Retirees, as Scripture points out, need to be prized by their families, their congregations and their communities, especially in our “throw-away” culture that worships youth and frenetic levels of activity as opposed to the often slow but steady pace of the aging.
8. Retirees with families and especially those who are married need to practice good stewardship of their family and marital relationships. They should take time to smell the roses with those they love and those who love them.
9. Retired pastors and other church workers can be of particular value as congregations and schools discover unmet needs and explore special tasks that could be filled by these stewards who express the desire to continue to serve.

10. Retirees may need to be invited by their congregations to serve according to their gifts. Many retirees will quietly sit on the sidelines until invited to serve.
11. Retirees who deal with declining abilities can still serve the Lord and need to be encouraged to do so. In many cases, it is a real service of love to offer the oldest members unique opportunities to use whatever abilities they still have. They rejoice in being able to serve the Lord as valuable parts of the body of Christ.

Programmatic suggestions for stewardship leaders

In terms of specific recommendations, we offer the following to those who want to provide opportunities within the ministry of the congregation for retirees to consider how they might be valuable stewards in unique ways.

- › Staying healthy relates to good stewardship of the time God entrusts to us.
 - Consider age-appropriate exercise classes, mall walks, etc., with Bible studies focused on health issues and serving God in every stage of life.
 - Consider senior field trips to local gyms that might trade a day in their facilities for the opportunity to seek the patronage of their guests. Consider volunteering for activities or volunteer opportunities that fill the hours and encourage hearts.
- › Determine and catalogue retirees' skills and areas of interest for a programmed approach to how you can best use their time and service. (NOTE: Contact the LCMS Indiana District for sample materials.)
 - Conduct a workshop focused on the retired such as, "Inviting the Next Generation to Benefit from Things You Learned over the Years." Deal with ways the aging can share their knowledge with younger generations.
 - Meet with retirees separately prior to a "fall campaign" to discuss "Mature Stewardship: What You've Learned about Balanced Giving over the Years." Receive their commitment but also learn about their involvement in the work of the congregation and their support of its ministries. Get their input on the direction things are going and their suggestions for the future.
 - Consider a Bible study on "Widow's Mite and Fixed-Income Giving." During the study, invite seniors to share stories of how God "stretched" their income in the past.

Dealing appropriately with retirees

Here are some suggestions for "care and feeding" mature members.

- › The stewardship of retired stewards
 - Consider a "Seniors Recognition Sunday" with a meal and awards for service in the congregation and the community. This could be similar to lifetime achievement events that we see on TV.
 - Brainstorm with congregational leaders about opportunities for involving older seniors who are more limited in their abilities:
 - Form prayer partners with specific prayer assignments
 - Share stories about "When I was a Kid" with parochial school and Sunday School students
 - Call three or four shut-ins to ask how things are going, etc.
- › Finally, there is a time to serve and a time to give up serving
 - Consider agreeing on a specific time frame when asking retirees to serve. Renewal would be at the discretion of the retiree and the pastor. There may well be a good time "for the youngsters to take over!" And "mature" retirees shouldn't be touchy about stepping aside. After all, how long has the next king of England been waiting in the wings?
 - In accord with this, retirees can be encouraged to carefully gauge their own usefulness or to seek honest input from those around them. Scripture is full of examples for older stewards related to the importance of passing the baton.
 - 2 Samuel 19:32: Barzillai steps back so his son can accompany King David on his return to Jerusalem.
 - 2 Kings 2:1-18: Elijah opens the way for God to use Elisha as his successor.
 - 1 Kings 1: We see that when David was slow to give up the throne by selecting a successor, turmoil began that led to the eventual division of God's people into two nations, Israel and Judah.

Closing observations by the retired author

Having served in the parish and in an administrative position about an equal number of years each, let me suggest that service on the local level is the most rewarding. As I work with retirees in the congregation where I now serve on a part-time basis, I discover this to be true for laity and clergy alike. In our congregation we have several retired pastors. ALL are delighted when they are given the opportunity to serve. This is also the case with laity. People are generally happiest when they are busily at work, proving that service is its own greatest reward.

This even extends to the stewardship of dollars. Retirees are happy to be part of supporting the work of the Lord in the local setting. Few complain about their financial situation and give in proportion to the blessings they receive. They are examples for their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren (for God seems to bless these stewards with more and more years).

How blessed we are to have these older stewards in our midst. May God continue to bless them with zeal and support of every aspect of His work!

Resources

- › Richard Gentzler Jr., *Aging & Ministry in the 21st Century*, Discipleship Resources, 2008, Nashville, Tenn., ISBN 978-0-88177-540-2.
- › *The “Why” and “How” of Older Adult Ministry*, Adult Lutherans Organized for Action, Clearwater, Fla.
- › Joan Chittister, *The Gift of Years*, 2008, ISBN 978-1-93334-610-6.
- › Harold G. Koenig, *Purpose and Power in Retirement*, 2006, ISBN 1-932031-33-2.
- › “Engaging the Aging” quarterly newsletter, Lutheran Senior Services, info@LSSLiving.org or www.EngagingTheAging.org.