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Great EXPECTATIONS

A Newsletter on Expanding Ministry *With Older People*

Older Adults — Learning Thanksliving

Our Older Adult Ministry Team experiences over and over again how many of our congregation's seniors glow with warm and genuine gratitude. It's not whimsical or seasonal. It's bedrock. So, the big query for us is: How can we join them and help sustain and nurture thanksgiving in our Christian fellowship beyond the fourth Thursday of November each year? We can put some of these dimensions of ministry to work in practical ways:

- 1. Cultivate a respect for the elderly throughout your congregation.** That's part of God's plan for all of us who know Him as our Father in Christ Jesus. Part of His grace for us is that when we honor those who are older, we revere Him. He has counseled us, "You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:32, ESV).
- 2. Become more and more aware of the spiritual, emotional and feeling needs of older adults and then lovingly respond.** Of course, they need assurance from us that their beds will be comfortable, their easy chairs homey and their meals tasty and nutritious. But, sometimes even more, they need from us the bolstering that comes from the promises of God. They hunger to hear the guarantee that God cleanses and renews us through His forgiveness of all our sins. This pardon absolves us of the missteps of our youth, the arrogance of our middle age and our flimsy excuses about being too old for "church work." Aging persons also yearn for a hearty hug, a firm handshake, a timely and unhurried chat which reflects unfeigned care and concern. They long for our appreciation of them, our moments spent with them, our attestation of their worth. They count on our comfort especially when they grieve the death of a spouse or loved one.
- 3. Make certain that seniors feel embraced by all the appropriate activities and events of our families, including the big family of brothers and sisters in Christ, our congregations.** Identify the dates of anniversaries, reunions, church and national holidays and campaigns into which they can be integrated through invitation and transportation, whenever needed.
- 4. As followers of our Lord Jesus, discipline ourselves to mature in the skill encouraged by the apostle James, "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger..." (James 1:19).** Why listen quickly and closely to older Christians? Consider this from the inspired author of the Proverbs: "Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life." (16:31) The apostle Paul also understood the origins of a long life. He wrote to the Ephesian Christians, "Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land" (Eph. 6:1-3). God's mercy sustains older believers. That's why we are quick to listen and learn from them.

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