



## **"A GREAT PLACE TO GROW OLD"**

# **A Health Ministry Team Approach**

***The church is the most common and lasting connection in the community for those 65 years of age and older.***

**A great place to grow old...**

*"It sounds like this church is going to be a great place to grow old."* I have never heard it stated more clearly than this comment made during a presentation of the CHAMPS program to a Church Council. There was a sense of assurance that the church would be there for the full journey through life.

With 70 million plus baby boomers becoming "seniors", the need for information, support and a focus on healthy aging, is a given. The faith community should be a partner in providing this care. Why? Because 75% of those 65 and older remain connected to a church. By 2030, 50% of church members will be 65 years or older. Is the church ready for the changes, challenges and opportunities that this presents?

At the end of the day, that's what it's about, to be there through all of life's transitions and provide support in the spiritual, physical, social, emotional or financial areas of life.

***What will your church population look like in 5-10 years?***

## **What is the CHAMPS program?**

CHAMPS, the Center for Healthy Aging, Ministries, Programs and Services, is a non-profit program serving congregations that have a heart for their seniors, supporting healthy aging for all their members across the lifespan. Resource materials, assistance with programming, consultation and support of volunteers are some of the ways we assist each congregation to identify and meet their unique needs.

The CHAMPS program is funded by Immanuel Senior Living to provide assistance to churches in support of health aging for seniors through development of health ministry teams. CHAMPS serves churches of various denominations which seek to improve their congregational care efforts. Office space for the program is provided by St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Omaha, Nebraska.

***Surveys report that people rate the quality of their lives based on their health and their connections to others. If we purposefully connect those two areas with spiritual life we may well offer a great place to grow old.***



## **Consider this...**

The value of the older person and the life they have lived is an incredible resource. Through the abundance of life experience, in both work and a life of faith, every church has resources in their seniors. Throughout scripture we read of honoring those of advancing age and wisdom.

The impact of faith and church involvement is seen in studies of those who have forms of dementia and how the rituals, music and prayers from church are some of the last memories to fade for those in latter stages of Alzheimer's. Dr. Gene Cohen has researched this for 35 years and calls it the 'God spot' in us.

## **What we have learned:**

- Two-thirds of congregants seen in blood pressure clinics at churches are out of normal ranges.
- Most seniors have two or more chronic diseases.
- The number one category of abuse to seniors is financial.
- People want to know the church cares.
- Nutrition and exercise appear to be the most common links for prevention.
- Lack of hope and illness are often connected.
- 9 out of 10 cases of Type II Diabetes are preventable.
- 25% of falls in older adults are fatal.
- Churches can share resources.

## **The Influence of a Pastor:**

Our experience is that one committed person can begin a program that enhances the lives of seniors and the entire congregation. Almost every church we talk with say they have no budget for senior ministry. There's the building, the kids, supporting mission work and all of the other things that require attention. For a pastor to say, "This is important, we need to do this", appears to be all that is needed for some churches to get people involved.

***"One generation makes known your faithfulness to the next."***  
**-Isaiah 38:19**

## **How can we help?**

CHAMPS can assist with the start of your program and provide ongoing support for your volunteers, guiding them through resources and helping to find what is important to your congregation. We can provide, find or develop the resources you may need. As a nonprofit there is no cost for our assistance.

If in the process, people find a connection to a faith community by involving them in church efforts to care for members of the congregation and community we consider it gain. CHAMPS believes that churches are the experts in support of the spiritual life of their members so our focus is the physical, social, emotional and financial areas of living.

Our goal is to improve the health of seniors, supporting programs that can improve or prevent chronic illness and keep seniors in their churches and homes for as long as possible.

## **Choose a direction. Take small steps. Don't reinvent the wheel.**

A health ministry should be a ministry of the congregation for the congregation, using the passion and resources within the church, the faith community and the general community at large. As people get involved, the development of a health ministry team is the logical outcome to provide structure to the vision. Like any team, they need permission, support and a connection to church structure to report the activities they are involved in. The added support this team gives the pastoral staff and congregation benefits everyone.



## **Life Abundant**

***“I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly”***

**- John 10:10**

Most would agree that Jesus was talking about spiritual life. But what should our condition be in the physical, social, emotional and financial areas of life? These areas never go away and in some manner they are all addressed in scripture.



## Defining Health

***Choices based on good information and the support of people who care, are critical to healthy living.***

One way to look at “health” is to consider it the process of making good choices in the spiritual, physical, social, emotional and financial areas of life. It is easy to define illness because that is the focus of most of medicine and in general we tend to focus on the negative. The sources for defining what is wrong with us are endless. For people to define health for themselves might be more of a challenge.

In our ongoing survey of the hopes and concerns of seniors we ask;

- **What is your plan for healthy aging?**
  - People talk about exercise and eating better for their plan of health
- **What do you fear most about getting older?**
  - They list being alone and running out of money as the most common fears
- **What do you look forward to in getting older?**
  - They look forward to having time to do what they want, to learn and do new things and to be with the people they care about.

Someone once said, “the mark of a great society is how they take care of its elderly.” If this is true of a society, it has even more importance for the church. Our hope is the church will set the standard for the value seniors bring to the church along with supporting the needs of the aging process and transitions of life.

Mary Pipher in her book *Another Country* states, “In a few decades, our solutions to the dilemmas of caring for our elders will be applied to our own lives. The kindness, the indifference, the ignorance, and the wisdom will be passed on.”

How we respond now will become the future each of us will inherit. What are we willing to do? How can CHAMPS help?



***Even to your old age and gray hairs,  
I am he, I am he who will sustain you.  
I have made you and I will carry you;  
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.  
-Isaiah 46:4***

## Visit with us at:

[www.champsonline.info](http://www.champsonline.info) -- or at (402) 895-2224

CHAMPS would like to meet with you to discuss serving seniors and promoting healthy aging in your congregation.

Examples of CHAMPS online curriculum and resources you may find helpful:

- Theology of Aging
- Elder Abuse Curriculum
- Death and Dying: A Three Part Series
- Aging with Passion and Purpose: 2007 Conference on Aging
- Hypertension
- Safety in the Home
- Making the Most of Your Doctor's Visit



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