

Senior adult recreation more than dominoes

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TEMPLE—As Randy Dale searched for a subject for his doctoral dissertation, he discovered a seldom-used tool for Texas Baptist churches to minister to senior adults.



Randy Dale, a former recreation minister, says churches need to encourage seniors to exercise, have good nutrition, stay connected with life. (George Henson Photo) Dale found [Successful Aging](#) by John Rowe and Robert Kahn, which explores how aging Baby Boomers might get the most out of life as they age.

“Out of all the millions of dollars spent and hours of research, it came down to three things: Seniors need to exercise regularly, need good diet and nutrition, and need to stay connected with life,” Dale said.

The topic hit home because his previously robust father’s health declined rapidly following back surgery. His small West Texas community had no

organized recreation for senior adults, and Dale began to wonder if it might have made a difference.

Dale, an attorney who worships at [First Baptist Church in Temple](#), once served Anderson Mill Baptist Church in Austin as minister of recreation.

“As I thought back on my days as a rec minister, all I did for our senior adults was game nights where we played 42 or cards, and once or twice a year, I’d take them to Houston to watch the Astros play. That was it for seniors,” he said.



(Buckner Retirement Services Photo) “Turns out, I should have been encouraging them to be on the treadmill and attending exercise classes just like I was the flat-bellied, 30-something crowd.”

After surveying 30 Texas Baptist churches, he found most employed the same strategy he had years ago.

He found three churches that do senior adult recreation ministry well—First Baptist Church in Amarillo, Columbus Avenue Baptist Church in Waco and First Baptist Church in Houston. He not only watched the ministries in action, but also spoke with many of the participants.

“Talking to those folks, they echoed what *Successful Aging* had told us to expect. They all had stories of what they could do now that they couldn’t do

before and how they had stayed engaged with not just their church but with their families and community organizations. They all attributed it to their regular working out, which led to them watching what they ate,” Dale reported.



(Buckner Retirement

Services Photo)That coincided with research that indicates exercising as little as 20 to 30 minutes a day reverses a wide variety of ailments, such as cardiovascular disease, cancer and possibly Alzheimer’s. Dale spoke with people who had knee and hip replacements, heart bypass surgery and even brain surgery who reported dramatically improved health.

“To hear these folks tell what a difference in their lives their physical activity was making was incredible,” he said.

Dale, a self-identified Baby Boomer “on the cusp of being a senior adult,” said churches need to respond to this largely missed opportunity.

“As a church, God has given us a prescription to help senior adults live longer, fuller, more meaningful lives, and we’re not doing anything with it,” he said.



(Buckner Retirement

Services Photo) While senior adult recreation programs primarily are limited to large churches, that need not be the case, he asserted.

“The financial outlay would be next to zero. The costs of the rubber bands for stretching and the hand weights are minimal. This could be done anywhere. The home church I grew up in—First Baptist Church in Memphis, Texas—could do it in their fellowship hall. Any church could do this,” he said.

Senior adult recreation programs also would benefit the churches as an outreach tool.

“Recreation is a tool to undergird the other ministries of the church, because you can get people to come to a stretch-and-tone class who might not come to a Bible study,” Dale noted.

Churches should make the effort because senior adults deserve it, he said.

“We’re not helping our senior adults in their later years be all they can be physically, mentally and emotionally if we’re not offering something like this for them, he said.

“These folks have been the leaders of our churches. They’ve been our tithers, our Sunday school teachers, our Vacation Bible School teachers, And we’re saying, ‘OK, just enjoy your time in the pasture now.’ We could be doing so much more.”