

# **Commentary: Taking advantage of old folks**

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I know that is a terrible title for an article, but hopefully you will hang with me on this one.

A young pastor friend of mine recently complained of too many senior adults in his congregation. Since I am myself a senior adult, I wondered why that was a problem. It seemed to me that he was missing a great opportunity.

While it is obvious that each church has its own context, it has been my experience that senior adults have always been an incredible resource in the life and ministry of the church.

## **‘A huge blessing’**

The church I served as pastor was located in a coastal community at the end of the interstate highway. As a result, beginning in the 90s, we had an influx of retirees to our town. It continues even now as more and more ‘boomers’ head for the coast.

Of course, we already had a wonderful cadre of older members who had been a part of the fellowship for many years. All of this has proven to be a huge blessing for our church, all because we decided to ‘take advantage of the old folks.’

When my colleague in ministry, Jim Everette, joined our staff, I suggested that he should visit every non-profit ministry in town to learn what their needs were. While we both assumed that they could all use some extra

money, what we learned was that they needed help—volunteers.

## **‘The results were amazing’**

Another thing we learned was that all these retirees moving to town were looking for ways to connect and serve in the city that was to be their new home. We learned that many of them showed up with resources, expertise and time. So, every time a newly retired person or couple showed up at our church, Jim and I would engage them to learn their gifts and interests, and then we set about to connect them with one of the ministries in our city or our church.

The results were amazing for our congregation, for our non-profit partners, and for the newly retired residents of our city. We took advantage of the old folks . . . and they loved it.

## **‘Something good and important’**

Now that I am ‘sort of’ retired, I was looking for some place where I might be of help. One of the ministries our church supports is a ‘half-way house’ for people coming out of prison. I had always been impressed by how that non-profit was able to stretch a dollar. While having coffee one morning with their Executive Director, Frankie, I asked if there was anything he needed where I could be of help.

He said, “As a matter of fact, pastor, there is. One of our men has called on us to form a men’s group, not a prayer or Bible study group, but a men’s group, where men can talk about men’s stuff.”

I told him if that was what he needed, I would give it a try. While talking with one of the recently retired deacons in our church, I told him about the group and he volunteered to help me. We have been at it for several

months now, and I am not sure who is helping whom the most.

We meet at 6 p.m. every Monday evening. A different crowd shows up each week. The residents set the agenda and my friend, Don, and I are just members of the group. We don't lead any more than the rest of them. There is usually a topic for the evening: trust, honor, family, self-confidence, selfishness, prayer and honesty to name just a few. There has been laughter, and there have been tears. But something good and important is taking place. Friendships are being established.

## **'Take advantage'**

This is but one example of dozens of opportunities that exist in every community and every church for life-changing ministry. So, rather than bemoaning the fact that there are a lot of older folks in the church, take advantage of them. They are busy, but they have more time to serve than ever in their lives. They long to make connections and to make a difference. The church that pays attention to its older adults and gives them good and important ministry to do will be enriched by their work.

Finally, it is also important to celebrate their service and to let them know just how valuable they are in the community and in the church. Let them have a time and space to tell the stories of their ministry and the people they have met and the lives that have been changed.

The Bible is filled with stories of older folk whom God called upon to do amazing things. It still happens. Every minister and every church need to "take advantage of the older folks."

They are still changing the world.

*This article originally appeared at the [Center for Healthy Churches](#). Mike Queen is a consultant for CHC, the founder of Hopeful Imagination, and a*

*recently retired pastor.*