

# Senior Moments

Celebrating the Gifts of Mature Christians

Fall 2021

## Older Adult Ministry in the Small Rural Congregation

By Rev. Dennis L. Fangmeyer, Pastor of Saint John in Nashville, KS, and Trinity in Medicine Lodge, KS

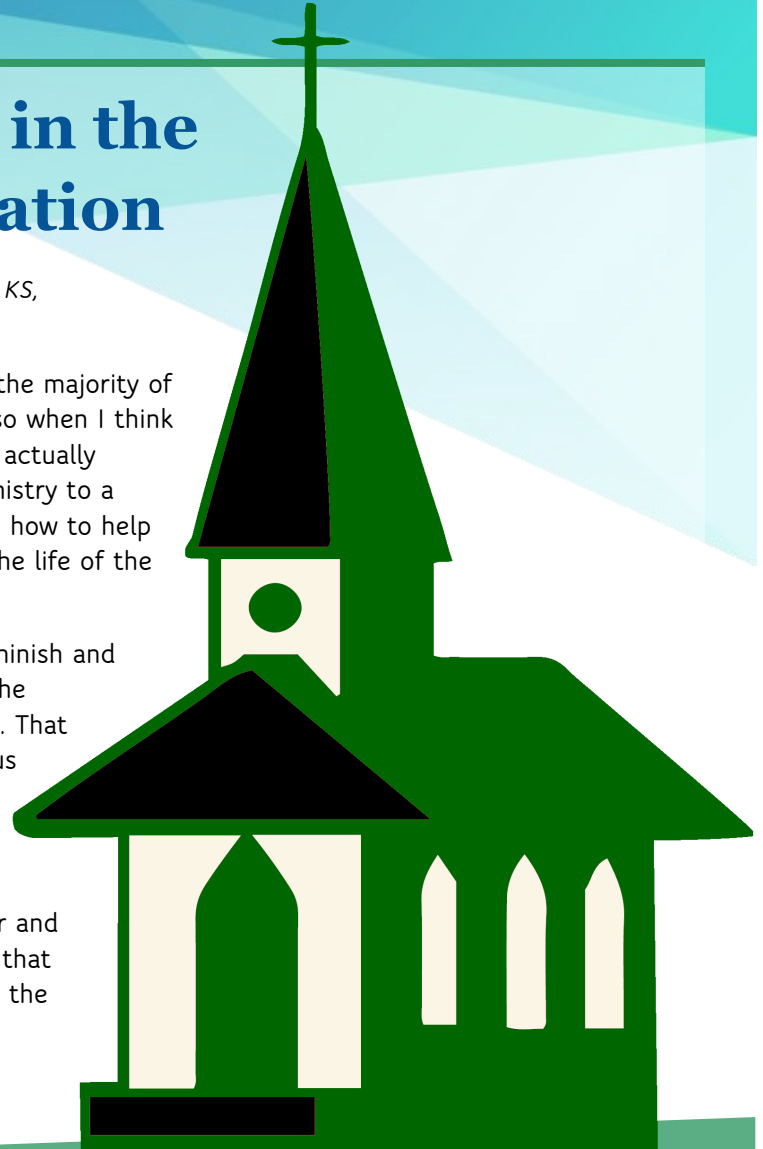


I serve two rural congregations where the majority of the members are middle-age or older, so when I think of providing an older adult ministry I am actually thinking of how to provide meaningful ministry to a significant portion of the congregation and how to help them still see they have a vital purpose in the life of the church.

It is true that as we age some of our abilities seem to diminish and older adults often question their ability to contribute to the activities they once found so easy in which to be involved. That is disheartening because, regardless of age, each one of us is a vital part of the body of Christ. Just imagine a congregation without older members, church life would be totally different, and not for the better.

There are many areas where age does not create a barrier and actually is very helpful. Solomon was the only one I know that was blessed by God with wisdom at a very young age. For the

*(Continued on page 4)*



## Synodical Perspective

By Rev. Bob Zagore, Executive Director, LCMS Office of National Mission



I was happy to receive an invitation from the Kansas District to talk about older adult ministry in the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. Statistically, older adult ministry impacts much of our ongoing mission work since around 55% of LCMS members are over sixty. Some see this as a disadvantage – it is not.

The age and experience of our membership helped in these disrupted days. No one alive has ever had to deal with an international pandemic on this scale. However, wars, epidemics, death, and cultural challenges are all part of the experience of the over sixty crowd. There is stability and faithfulness that comes to congregations, districts, and our synod from those who have been through it before.

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# Getting Started

## Fellowship, Food, and Fun!



*By Tom Perry, Kansas District Older Adult Ministry Committee Chairman  
and Senior Ministry Leader of Trinity Lutheran Church*

In our first two issues when suggesting ways to get started with an enhanced Older Adult Program in your congregations, we talked about three important focuses. These were spiritual wellbeing, life issues, and health. Let's now talk about important ingredients that are part of these focuses, that of fellowship, food, and fun.

### Fellowship

I believe that every older adult ministry event should offer a chance for members to interact with each other in meaningful fellowship. This can, but does not need to be, a special time set aside for people to catch up with friends and make new ones. When working with older adults, I have found the most lasting benefit comes from the relationships that are made and enhanced. For example, we have a teacher at one of our Bible classes who is very inspiring and knowledgeable. People always enjoy and receive spiritual insight from his classes. Though they retain knowledge, what they remember most is getting together with their friends. They share concerns over what is happening in their friends' lives and receive comfort knowing others will be praying for and caring for them. Often these events or classes are one of the few chances for them to be with other people.



## Food

Another important ingredient to focus on is food. In the epistle of Thomas the Less (not real), it is written, "wherever two or more Lutherans are gathered together there will be food, or at least coffee." Treats or even meals can add to the fellowship and success of an event. It can also help someone who is has difficulty financing meals and is too embarrassed to make that known. Though I do not know of specific cases in my congregation where people are going hungry, I do not assume. Periodically we will have large meals and celebrations. These are normally around Oktoberfest, Christmas, Valentine's Day and in late April or May. Sometimes we will invite people to bring a dish, but that is becoming less frequent. I usually take care of the food and it is either catered or something I can easily produce. We have been blessed to have been provided with funds from differing sources. That is the reason we never ask for money for the meals. Instead, we may offer the opportunity to contribute to an agreed upon outreach endeavor. When

planning meals, it is important to have alternatives for those with special dietary needs such as being gluten-free. Salads normally an effective way to take care of that.



## Fun

Fun is the last ingredient I will mention today. Sometimes it is good to just have fun events. They often are combined with food. So much good comes out of these times. An example is the "Meet and Greet" we had recently. We decided to invite people to our local arboretum and provided box lunches for them. Surprisingly 40 older adults joined in. It was simply a time to enjoy God's great outdoors with friends. In the past we also have had mystery dinners, a one-man play, and Christmas caroling every year.

Through all the events and classes you have, it is good to remember that the number of people attending is not the important thing. The fact that you are getting together, whether it be two or fifty-two, God will still be there and is sure to bless your ministry.





# OAM in the Small Rural Congregation

rest of us wisdom comes as we grow older and are exposed to many of life's experiences and hardships. And yes, older adults are still loved by our Savior, and they are also loved and needed by their fellow members. That tells me there is a need for Older Adult Ministry and especially a need for Older Adults *in* ministry. One significant area older members can be actively involved is prayer. It is the older member who can bring wisdom to the needs of others through their prayers, whether they are still actively attending worship or living in an assisted living facility. We need only provide them with the names and needs of others. The best method is to encourage those with needs to contact the older member and ask them to pray for them. It shows the older member they are valued and vital to the congregation.

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Another area is in teaching, whether it is an adult Bible class, children's Sunday school class, or Vacation Bible School. The older adults have a wealth of Biblical knowledge and experience they can pass on by teaching or sharing a comment during a class. One area that I would encourage is a midweek after-school class where the older member can teach the children Bible stories and begin to build their knowledge and understanding **of our loving God.**

Are the two congregations I serve successful with our older adult ministry efforts? Yes, to some degree, but there is much room for us to improve in keeping our older members engaged in the life of the church as either a recipient of our love for them or as a provider of our Lord's love to others in church and in our respective communities.



# Special Older Adult Events in 2022

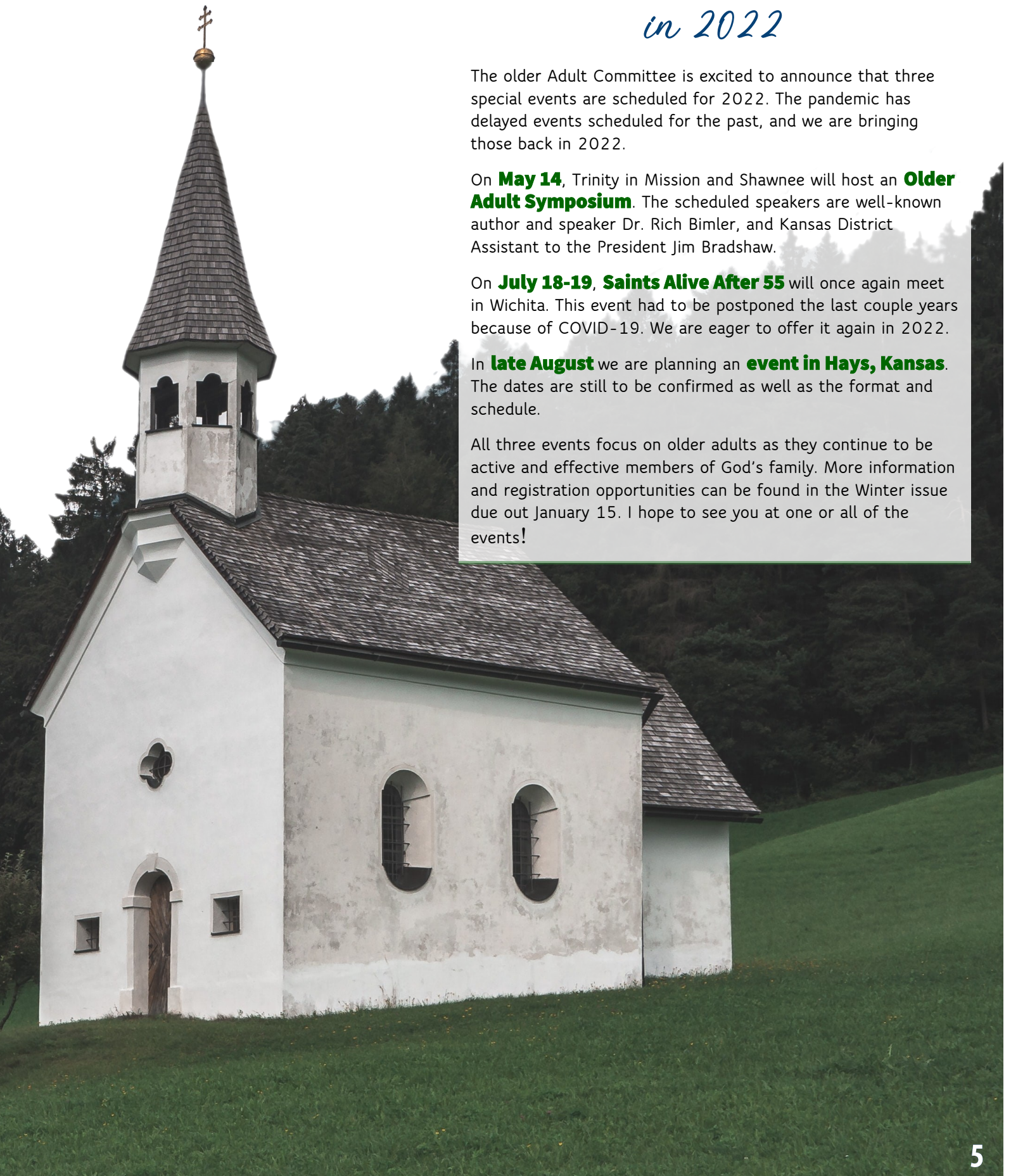
The older Adult Committee is excited to announce that three special events are scheduled for 2022. The pandemic has delayed events scheduled for the past, and we are bringing those back in 2022.

On **May 14**, Trinity in Mission and Shawnee will host an **Older Adult Symposium**. The scheduled speakers are well-known author and speaker Dr. Rich Bimler, and Kansas District Assistant to the President Jim Bradshaw.

On **July 18-19**, **Saints Alive After 55** will once again meet in Wichita. This event had to be postponed the last couple years because of COVID-19. We are eager to offer it again in 2022.

In **late August** we are planning an **event in Hays, Kansas**. The dates are still to be confirmed as well as the format and schedule.

All three events focus on older adults as they continue to be active and effective members of God's family. More information and registration opportunities can be found in the Winter issue due out January 15. I hope to see you at one or all of the events!



# Adult Lutherans Organized for Action

## Celebrating

# 30 Years of Ministry

September marked the beginning of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ALOA (Adult Lutherans Organized for Action). Started by the impetus of Wheatridge Ministries and original funding from that organization, ALOA was first named the Association of Lutheran Older Adults. In its first ten years, Rev. Karl Lutze served as executive director and was based on the campus of Valparaiso University. Originally it put together a network of volunteers and congregational associates in several regions of the country. ALOA has always sought to be of service to all Lutherans in the USA, with primary focus on the ELCA and LCMS. In its early history it conducted regional events and several Elderhostels and brought many resources for seniors to congregations as well consultations for adult ministry in congregations.

In this anniversary year ALOA will continue its mission of EncourAGING and Equipping Congregations for Older Adult Ministry. To that end ALOA is involved in a

multiyear project called *ALOA Congregational Centers for Vital and Resilient Aging*.

During the first year, ALOA has been designing and compiling an ALOA Older Adult Ministry Toolkit. No such toolkit exists. The goal of such a toolkit is to provide congregations with tools that support older adults in navigating the challenges and opportunities of aging in four focus areas: Spiritual, Educational, Social and Community, and Intergenerational.

Subsequent years of this project will involve building a network of congregational contact persons. During the final year direct consultations with parishes involved with adult ministry are envisioned.

ALOA is also working with Concordia University-Chicago in helping the university connect their Specialist in Adult Ministry (SAM) certification program.

ALOA will continue its monthly webinars, periodic blog broadcasts, and its newsletter. Support of regional events will continue.

ALOA is appreciative of those congregations and individuals that continue to support its ministry with their financial gifts.



*Hans G. Springer  
Executive Director,  
Adult Lutherans Organized for Action*



# What Is a Connector?

Our Kansas District Older Adult Ministry Committee is seeking a lay person from each congregation: 1) to advocate for older adult activities in their own congregation, 2) to receive and distribute this newsletter in their congregation, and 3) to publicize the annual Saints Alive gatherings.

We call these important people "Connectors." Their "connections" with their congregation's seniors, pastors, church staff, and with the District's gatherings and communications will glorify God as fellowship, service, and education for and by seniors flourish.

Tell your pastor you'll serve as a "Connector." Then inform Pastor Cliff Winter of your commitment at [cliffwinter@yahoo.com](mailto:cliffwinter@yahoo.com).

Send name and email address of  
Congregation Connector to  
[CliffWinter@yahoo.com](mailto:CliffWinter@yahoo.com).

## Synodical Perspective

(Continued from page 1)

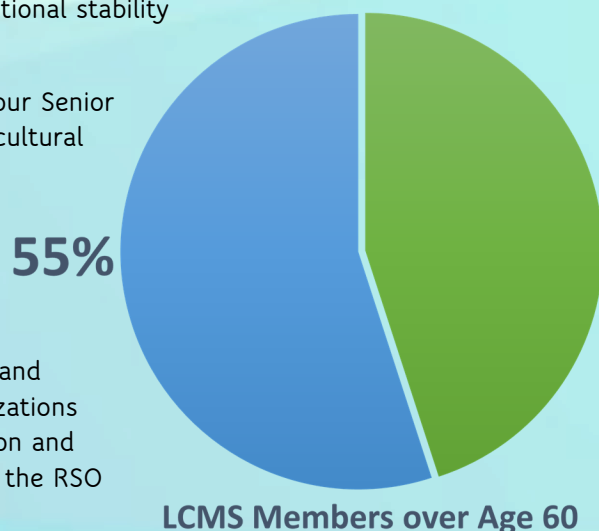
Recent surveys attest that older Americans feel less isolation, stress, and economic disruption than younger people. They are more likely to turn to faith and prayer, more likely to return to in-person worship, and more likely to take a supportive role in reaching out to at-risk neighbors. Every member of the body of Christ has a role to play. And it is unwise to place too much trust in surveys and demographic studies. Still, it seems clear that the Lord used the steadiness and faithfulness of over-age-sixty members to aid congregational stability during COVID.

Our Synod has many resources available that can help further engage our Senior members in active service to the Lord and be aided during health and cultural issues that challenge us during the last decades of life. The resources associated with our triennial emphasis *Making Disciples for Life* (MDFL) include Bible studies, theological papers, videos, conference topics, and more. A growing collection of these resources are available in the MDFL resource center ([www.makingdisciples.lcms.org](http://www.makingdisciples.lcms.org)).

Many local, national, and international opportunities for training, help, and other resources are available through LCMS-recognized service organizations (RSOs). These are Synodically endorsed groups that enhance the mission and ministry of the LCMS. You can find a listing and description of them in the RSO directory ([www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/mercy/recognized-service-organizations/directory](http://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/mercy/recognized-service-organizations/directory)).

LCMS Life Ministry ([www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/mercy/life-ministry](http://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/mercy/life-ministry)) has many opportunities for seniors and others to join the work of supporting life causes from procreation to natural death. Although the pandemic has played with the timeline, the LCMS also plans to call a Family and Health Ministry director to provide further resources and aids.

I welcome questions. Even more, I encourage everyone to share those resources and ideas that have helped in your area of ministry and may prove helpful to others.





# Older Adult Ministry Resources

The following is a small list of resources that may be helpful when building an enhanced older adult ministry. As the year progresses, we will add more to the list. If you have recommendations or needs, please feel free to contact us.

## **ALOA**

[aloaserves.org](http://aloaserves.org)

Adult Lutherans Organized for Action is a national Lutheran older adult organization with helpful resources.

## **Hope-Full Living**

[hopefulliving.org](http://hopefulliving.org)

This is a company which provides written devotions and resources.

## **Kansas District Website**

[kslcms.org/caring-ministry/older-adult-ministry](http://kslcms.org/caring-ministry/older-adult-ministry)

This is a webpage on the Kansas District website.

## **Older Adult Task Force Comprehensive Report**

Find it at: [kslcms.org/caring-ministry/older-adult-ministry](http://kslcms.org/caring-ministry/older-adult-ministry)

## **Tom Perry**

[Tom@TLCMS.org](mailto:Tom@TLCMS.org)

Contact me with any questions, suggestions, or helpful tips.

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## **Celebrating the Gifts of Mature Christians**

A publication of the Older Adult Ministry Committee of the  
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