

Romans 12

We who are many are one body in Christ.

Ministering to Older Adults with Music

Produced by the Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church to communicate effective principles and practices demonstrated by congregations that are actively making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

These congregations are marked by:

- Clarity around the mission and vision of the congregation.
- Practice of spiritual disciplines, both corporately and individually.
- Nurture in growth in discipleship through mutual support and accountability.
- Cultivation of intentional and mutual relationships with the most vulnerable—the poor, children, the imprisoned, the powerless.
- Consistent concern for inviting people into relationship with Jesus Christ, combined with wise practices for initiating them into the body of Christ.
- Connectional relationships that facilitate participation in God's mission of global transformation.
- Shared clergy and lay leadership.

The Mills River UMC in Mills River, North Carolina welcomes about 100 older adults to its weekly Mills River Life Enrichment Center (MRLEC) program every Thursday morning for an interesting, stimulating, entertaining, and educational time of fellowship and service. The church opened the MRLEC about six years ago with a mission “to minister to the mind, body, and spirit of seniors in our churches and community by establishing a Christian-based community center offering a place for fellowship, service, and enjoyment.”

The Mills River Life Enrichment Center is the senior adult outreach of the church. Ruth Williams, the center's director, works with church volunteers in this ministry “to reach senior citizens in Mills River who might need a place to meet friends and have a healthy meal in a Christ-centered environment.” Most of those who attend and participate are not members of the church.

For many who attend, MRLEC has become not only a community, but church. It is ecumenical, nondenominational, and strongly faith-based. The main program begins at 10:00 AM and is preceded each week with blood pressure checks, chair exercises, magazine swaps, and fellowship. The programs are varied and have included a local doctor speaking on hip and knee replacement, a Southern Gospel singer, “The History of Television” by a local cable employee, a scavenger hunt, a piano concert by a young teenaged pianist, and Bingo. Program participants are also able to enjoy lunch after the day's program.

The staff has discovered the important role music plays in the lives of these senior adults. When the MRLEC program is musical, attendance is strong. They enjoy both listening and participating. Participation includes singing, occasionally playing a hand or percussion instrument, listening to a concert, dancing, or welcoming a choir. Not only does music provide a sense of enjoyment and entertainment, but it often connects the seniors to moments and memories past and contributes to a sense of community among the group.

Questions for Discussion

1. The US population age 60 and over is projected to more than double between the years 2000 and 2030. How might this projected increase impact your church?
2. How might you use music to reach out to and minister to senior adults?
3. What effect would a substantial increase in your church's senior adults have on your worship, stewardship, education, congregational care, facilities, staffing, and church budget?

Dean McIntyre is Director of Music Resources at Discipleship Ministries. He can be reached at dmcintyre@umcdiscipleship.org