

A Study of the relationship
and responsibility of the local
church to the older person

— 中 Chapter 2 발췌

< Needs, problems and
characteristics of the aged 中 >

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NEEDS

All adults have certain basic needs, and these needs will manifest themselves. The needs are God-given; each man must find his way to satisfaction. What is the relation between interests and needs?

Zeigler has answered this question as follows:

An interest may be described as anything that produces a feeling of wanting to know more about a thing, or wanting to see it; or do something about it; or own it, or share it; or take part in it. A need is simply a useful or desired thing that is lacking.¹⁾

When Christ saw the multitudes, He saw them as needy people. In one place it is said that He looked on the multitude, saw them as sheep without a shepherd, had compassion on them, and taught them (Matt. 9:36). On another occasion He healed their sick (Matt. 14:14; 20:34). A third incident makes note of His compassion as He saw the hungry people and fed them (Mark 6:34-42). These instances merely serve to illustrate His ministry to individual needs.

¹ Earl F. Zeigler, Christian Education of Adults (Philadelphia: Cooperative Publishing Association by the Westminster Press, 1958), p.33.

Each individual knows need. According to Abraham Maslow, man is a perpetually wanting organism.²⁾ His wants stem from five basic human needs-- physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization.³⁾ Maslow's belief is that when a lower need is satisfied, it disappears and is replaced by a higher-order need.

The needs of older people are real. There are certain needs in the life of older age that must be met and certain things done in order to enable them to rise and overcome those conditions that are discouraging and destructive. Christianity is capable of meeting life situations in all periods of human development. The greatest single outlet for adults seeking to find meaning to their lives is the church. The church provides opportunities to work together in teaching, visiting, worshiping and socializing. Even small churches with inadequate programs offer opportunities for service and self-giving.

Older people not only need a cause to live for, but also need to play together. Play is something that is done for sheer fun. It has been defined as "something which is nobody's business."⁴⁾ Shiller, the German poet, said, "Man is perfectly human only when he plays."⁵⁾ It is said that "between 80 and 90 per cent of the sick marriages are made up of couples who have almost no wholesome, regular play life together."⁶⁾

Various groups have studied the needs of older people. Some have done it from the medical and physical point of view. Others have been moved by social interests. Psychologists have been primarily concerned with emotions, feelings, and the adjustments of older people to life. But the studies that have grown from religious interest, while valuing all the others, have sought something more. They seek a significance for life itself.

2 Kenneth O. Gangel, *Competent to Lead* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), p.92.

3 Ibid.

4 R. Lofton Hudson, *Marital Counseling* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p.94.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., p. 95.

The needs of older people presented in this chapter include: physical needs, financial needs, social needs, psychological needs, and spiritual needs.

Physical needs. As we look at the similarities in needs among older people, we find that physical health ranks among the highest necessities. The physical needs of the old for food, clothing, and shelter are basic and must be provided for. Any concern about the health of older people must take into account the many accidents which incapacitate them. The responsibility of individuals for their own health is emphasized by Dr. Stieglitz, who feels that "health is not a fundamental human right but instead is a privilege which requires responsibility on the part of the individual."⁷⁾ He suggests that there should be preparation by education of youth on how to use the endowment of healthy bodies.

Numerous proposals concerning health care have been offered.

Among them good nutrition and adequate income are the most important. Figures compiled by the National Health Survey show that "two out of five older persons are limited by chronic conditions, in contrast to one in twenty under age 45."⁸⁾

The clergyman should be well informed of the medical facilities for older people in his community. These may involve hospital extension services which provide medical visits, nursing service, instruction of family members, and social work services, as well as suitable hospital accommodation for the chronically ill.

Every effort should be made to keep older people in their own homes as long as possible. Older people need privacy and a space they can call their own. They need more than a mere bedroom if that is possible-- a sitting room, or perhaps a den or workshop. They need a place unencumbered by stairs or heights that demand extra energy or create hazards. A low bathtub with safety handles, freedom from heights and steps, a comfortable living space, and an electric stove rather than a gas range are all required for safety and comfort.

7 Ibid., p.39.

8 Bert Frugger Smith, *Aging in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), p.36.

Sometimes these facilities are to be found in the home of a son or daughter, and sometimes in other places. At times the rates are paid by the social agency when neither the elderly person nor his family is able to meet the cost. Institutions for the aged, such as the church-sponsored homes, have long stood as the traditional solution for the lonely aged. Many of them are located in beautiful surroundings and are supervised carefully for the highest standards. In addition to these, there are nursing homes for the ill. New units for older people are provided in public housing and the public-sponsored institutions. The great number of older persons, however, live alone or with their families.

Financial needs. The physical needs of the elderly are most easily observed and understood. Such needs are common to all, but they are heightened during the later years. Another obvious need of the aged person is money. With the retirement age set at sixty-five (sixty-two for women), many years may be left to live with limited financial resources. The elderly poor usually feel that they are neglected because of their poverty and too often they are right. Of course, they are wrong when they believe that money can buy health. When he suffers, he knows the pain has nothing to do with money.

Society in general measures a person by the property he has accumulated. A steady and adequate income is a source of comfort to all human beings, old or young, sick and well. It has been estimated that "only one out of four people over sixty-five is entirely self-supporting; the remaining seventy-five per cent need either family or public assistance."⁹⁾ Even a strengthened Social Security program cannot be expected to provide sufficient income for all needs.

It is, however, the responsibility of children to guarantee that the elderly have proper care. With already high medical costs continuing to increase, it becomes essential to have some kind of health insurance covering all members of the family. It is, on the other hand, increasingly difficult for children to assume financial obligation for aging parents, and public programs must provide some help. However, a lessening of the family obligation should be avoided. It must be acknowledged that there is a higher moral responsibility than mere legality. If older people do not have an adequate income, a fixed amount should

⁹William D. Poe, M.D., *The Old Person in Your Home* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), p.120.

be given to them by each of their children. The money that they give should be given gladly and regularly.

A majority of older people believe that adult sons and daughters must assume responsibilities toward their aged parents. These responsibilities of children to parents are largely in the area of interpersonal relationships. Older people want to be financially independent. What older people seem to want most from their children is love and affection. Many older people apparently feel that to ask their children for financial help would threaten the affectional relationship between the generations.¹⁰⁾

Economic security for the aging is best obtained by maintaining income at a level commensurate with the level of living they had previously enjoyed. This is attained by keeping their jobs. It has been reported that "only about 40 per cent of the men over 65 are gainfully employed, and that only about 7 per cent of the women over this age are."¹¹⁾ Those who are not working must rely upon savings, pensions, social security, old-age assistance, or gifts. The average pension, or unearned income in retirement is often not sufficiently large to enable a person to live in any degree of economic security. To be free of money cares is perhaps the best medicine an old person can have. Older people ask for economic security, but more than that they should ask for work to do and people with whom to relate.

Social needs. In any discussion of the social needs of the elderly it is well to remember that these needs vary almost as greatly as people in general. Both individual and social need must be understood, and every possible effort made to meet them satisfactorily. The social needs of the elderly, as well as other needs, are the same as for all populations. They need satisfying relationships with their peer groups. With rare exceptions, people of any age need the companionship of others with whom they can converse and exchange ideas. Old people do not enjoy people less because they are old. On the contrary, they are likely to enjoy them all the more. For happiness they must have people about them who understand their special pro-

¹⁰ Ethel Shangs, *The Health of Older People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962), p.141.

¹¹ Joseph T. Drake, *The Aged in American Society* (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1958), p.314.

blems and are sympathetic to them.

Generally, the aging process is also an isolating process. As people grow old and retire from work, their environment shrinks drastically until, in many instances, the individual withdraws into isolation. In this situation he becomes highly ego-oriented, selfish, and preoccupied with himself and his bodily functions to the point of becoming hypochondriacal. If the social needs of the individual continually fail to be fulfilled, this psychological and physiological deterioration will continue.¹²⁾

Adult needs companionship, someone who cares and for whom they may care. Loneliness lays waste life. Living alone can be a depressing routine, going through the daily hours without the companionship of a spouse now gone and missed. Rollo May says, "Loneliness and its stepchild, alienation, can become forms of demon possession."¹³⁾ The need for someone to talk to, to play games with, or just to "sit with" is one that does not require a professional competence, but rather a congenial human being with some time. It can be met by an organized program of volunteer visitors. D. Leon Eisenberg said at a meeting of the World Federation for Mental Health in London, "Song-birds cannot sing in isolation. No bird can; nor can any human being."¹⁴⁾ There is a growing loneliness through the years as death claims an increasing number of relatives and friends. This tends to weaken the sense of personal security. There is a commonly accepted proverb in our society that "if you are discouraged or lonely the best way to overcome this is to go out and help someone who needs you."¹⁵⁾

The relationship between parents and children has greatly changed in recent years, and change will undoubtedly continue. However, it will always be the primary responsibility of the family to satisfy the needs of the older members. Younger members of the family must minister to the loneliness of the aged and thereby keep strong their feeling of security as a person. Scudder has pointed out that "family ties with children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren are increasingly significant for older people,

12 John G. Cull and Richard E. Hardy, *The Neglected Older American* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1973), p.127.

13 Smith, p.29.

14 Ibid.

15 Irene Smith Caldwell, *Basics for Communication in the Church* (Anderson, Ind.: Warner Press, Inc., 1971), p.34.

as they lose friends by death, disability or departure to other places."¹⁶⁾

It is possible for an individual to feel lonely in the midst of a crowd if there is no relatedness to the crowd, if there is no sense of really belonging or of having a place as a person. Among the institutionalized, however, social isolation from relatives and friends is much more widespread. In one study of 436 patients in twenty-five nursing homes, 20 per cent had no living relatives or friends and had no visitors at all. Others were visited only very infrequently and perfunctorily. Thirty-two per cent of these patients had only social needs rather than medical or nursing requirements. A large number lacked even companionship with other patients, and numerous deficiencies of the staff and the program added to their problems.¹⁷⁾

An old person especially needs to be recognized as part of the family and included in its concerns. Happy events should be shared with older people. Members of a family should stimulate and strengthen a sense of personal security by the expression of true affection. Young people should cultivate a strong love and affection for older people. Ernest W. Burgess says that the decline of familism and the growth of individualism "have increased the part which affection, congeniality, and common interest play in the relation of the older generation to the family."¹⁸⁾ These more personal elements must replace the older considerations of law, custom, and duty. Affection, personal security, and a sense of significance constitute the basic emotional and social needs of the elderly. All of these can be satisfied through proper family relations.

One of the greatest needs of older people is a real sense of significance. They need to feel secure and to know that they are loved, but they need also to have a feeling of usefulness. Man must respect himself and feel that he is worthy of the respect of his group. Many older people feel that there is really nothing left for them to do. All men have a desire for recognition; that is, everyone wants to be thought of as a distinct individual with a distinctive personality. Every human being needs to feel that he has worth,

16 C. W. Scudder, *The Family in the Christian Perspective* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1962), p.123.

17 Roy B. Zuck and Gene A. Getz, *Adult Education in the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), pp.58-59.

18 Wilma Donahue and Clark Tibbits, eds., "The Older Generation and the Family," *The New Frontiers of Aging* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1957), p.171.

that he is admired and respected by somebody for something. This desire motivates people to strive for position in their social groups, institutions, and communities. It causes them to seek status and attention. Older people desire this as much as anyone else. They want to be recognized for what they are, not for what they have been.

Losing one's sense of importance as a functioning individual also causes emotional distress.¹⁹⁾

The older people desperately need, as all of us do, a sense of belonging, a feeling of being accepted. But the older has much to offer, too. He has something to give to family life-- a link with the past, stories of the family, a sense of continuity, the stability that grows out of experience, the patience that comes with the years, a philosophy of life.

Religious organizations can do a great deal to provide older people with diversion and companionship.

Churches can organize clubs for the elderly that will provide book reviews, courses, knitting, ceramic making, and games.

Above all, adults need inner peace and eternal salvation.

Psychological needs. Man is continually trying to establish security. The need for security makes people conservative and cautious. It has long been recognized that all animal life is dominated by a strong instinct for selfpreservation. The need for security includes the need for physical safety. The person must feel that he is secure as an individual member of the family group and that he is secure in having a place to live.

Psychologically, no person operates best when he is threatened by forces he cannot control or adjust to. Much mental illness is the result of insecurity through unemployment, unsatisfactory employment, or forced retirement.

Possessions have become the marks of security in our society. However, material possessions do not guarantee security. Many have realized this and sought other strengthening ties. The hometown with its familiar faces and places provides a sense of security because it is familiar and known. But life is dynamic and changing. Families are on the move today more than ever before. Many adults have lost their sense of security in that which is familiar. They are finding it hard

19 Joseph T. Drake, *The Aged in American Society* (New York: The Ronald Press Co., 1958), p.315.

to establish their roots in new soil.

Real security is found only in one's relationship with God.

A strong Christian faith becomes an anchor for life.

The need for response is also stated as the need for love and affection. The need for love which infants and young children have has been studied rather extensively. It is concluded that if an infant is deprived of love and affection he frequently becomes a maladjusted individual. Several of the obstacles to the satisfying of their need for love which older people encounter are that their lifelong mates die, their children leave home or become primarily interested in their own families, and their long-time friends either die or move away. It becomes difficult for older people to retain their friendships and difficult to form new and abiding ones. Part of the difficulty in forming new friendships stems from the fact that there is a lack of communication between the generations. Frequently younger people hesitate to form friendships with older people for various reasons. Some older nonmarried people have attempted to satisfy their need for love or response by remarrying a person of their own age, or in the case of some men, a younger person.

All people want to be liked. This is the most social of the needs. To love and be loved is basic to psychological health. There is no time in life when one does not need affection. Older people need to love and to be loved as truly as do children and youth. They need to feel that there are those who really care what happens to them.

The church must be a "fellowship of the concerned."

They need to become involved with other persons. They need to show personal concern for each other in times of illness or need. They need to reach out sacrificially to others who are unfortunate and to provide concrete ways for each other to invest himself in the burdens of the world. Affection and concern must be sincere.

There must be the need for self-realization or growth.

This is the feeling that I am able to explore new experiences, to develop toward my full potential. The older people seek adventure, excitement, and risk. People tend to become bored with too much routine. Sullivan points out that "the basic direction of the organism is forward."²⁰⁾ Even in old age there is apparently a need to keep growing. If they cannot feel

20 Malcom S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (New York: Association Press, 1970), p.82.

that there are heights yet to climb and goals to be reached, adults lose purpose. Studies of retired persons reveal that "those who have found a new purpose in life toward which they can continue to strive tend to make a better adjustment than those who have not mapped out new directions to explore."²¹⁾ Life is a continuous thing.

Christian Personality is the result of growth.

Spiritual needs. The human person is a whole being, not a composition of different natures. Therefore, religious needs are interrelated and interdependent with economic, physical, psychological, social, cultural and other types of human needs.

Old people often raise questions concerning life and death: "Why do I live on, when some young person dies in the prime of life?" "Why do I live?" "Why can't I die?" "I wonder if I'll see my husband (or wife) in heaven?" "Is there a life beyond the grave?" "What is the meaning of existence?" They face critical problems and look toward the end of life. They need spiritual insights that can be secure enough to live by and finally die by. They review mistakes of the past, admit to errors of long ago, and even try to make amends for misdeeds real or imagined. Such questioning indicates that people tend to become more philosophical as they grow older, even those who may have shown no such tendency in their younger days.

We all should be seeking answers to these questions; they only seem more urgent to the elderly. In the seeking, they may become more interested in scripture and devotional literature or poetry. They need a vital, living relationship with God. When he comes to God he finds acceptance on the basis of love rather than on anything that he might profess to be. He is accepted as a person with all the potential possibilities of being a member of the Christian fellowship.

Jesus came to earth to make real God's love for man. The Scripture says, "We love because He first loved us" (I John 4:19). Jesus Christ stands as the answer to this need in man. Through faith in His atoning work and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in his life, a believer shares a continual spiritual reality of acceptance and forgiveness.

They need power through the Holy Spirit. The promises of God are that He will give power and make you able to accomplish the goal. The

21 Ibid.

first condition for this power is the clear decision to live life as you feel uniquely called to live it. This is a call from God felt deep down within your being. The next condition is a humble surrender to God, acknowledging possible wrong motives and weakness but opening yourself to be used of God.

Both at the National Conference on Aging held in Washington, D. C., in 1950, and at the International Conference on the Church and Older Persons held at Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, in 1953, a list of basic spiritual needs of older persons was considered. The listing include: (1) assurance of God's continuing love; (2) the certainty that life is protected; (3) relief from heightened emotions (especially guilt, grief, fear); (4) relief from pangs of loneliness; (5) a perspective (for life) that embraces time and eternity; (6) continuing spiritual growth through new experiences; (7) satisfying status in life as a person; (8) a feeling of continuing usefulness.²²⁾

Jesus declares His conviction in such a sweeping statement as, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). This brings us to the theological implications of Christian education. We must study Bible teaching carefully to know what it has to offer for meeting our spiritual needs. The Sermon on the Mount, for example, covers a wide range of divine resources for human needs. Beginning with the Beatitudes, we find not only a listing of several human needs but the resources of ministering to these lacks.

Needs mentioned are humbleness in spirit, ability to mourn, meekness, hunger and thirst for righteousness, merciful attitudes and practices, pureness of heart, peacemaking attitudes and practices, ability to stand up under persecution, and ability to rejoice. The spiritual needs of the old are not really different from those that we all have, but the feeling that death is near makes these needs more important. By honoring them, we can contribute much to an aging person's peace of mind.

PROBLEMS

"The problem of Old Age" has become a common expression. In the contemporary church, just as in social and recreational organizations, academic

22 Earl F. Zeigler, Christian Education for Adults (Philadelphia: Cooperative Publication Association by the Westminster Press, 1958), p. 121.

institutions, and business and industrial establishments, attention is often turned to questions of the social, economic, spiritual and mental well-being of older people. Americans are increasingly aware of the fact that the problems of old age have economic, social and psychological consequences for everyone in our nation, whether aging or old. The number of people affected by the problems of old age and retirement in America is far greater than the number directly affected by the traditional types of crime and juvenile delinquency that have been the subject matter of many college and university courses. This chapter is a discussion of some of the problems commonly experienced by older persons in America.

Family problems. The old American family is almost gone. And this is no news to the elderly who remember another era which he feels was more often disciplined and more gracious. The frontier home held its aged members in the greatest respect. They were patriarchs and grandmothers who felt needed in the larger family. But through the pages of American history, our society has changed. It is no longer a land where elders are unchallenged in their authority.

Today the American community often has no mention of the Bible in the public school. Freedom of religion is now often replaced with freedom from religion. Many homes have no religious training. Divorces have become common as hasty marriages have taken place between teen-agers of different cultures, races, and educational levels.

Senior members of the family quite often fare ill in this ferment of change. Suddenly there is no place for aging Mom and Dad. The family is broken, with no thought of putting out a welcome mat for the elderly parents.

Many problems in the life of the elderly revolve around his relationships with those near and dear to him.

Perhaps one of the most common difficulties is that children, brothers and sisters often feel compelled to make decisions for the elderly at times of crises; such decisions usually result from a genuine feeling of concern and responsibility.

Frequently it will seem that the elderly is not competent to make decisions about his future, and it is true that there are times when he is not.

More often, there are many times when the elderly appears incompetent because he is under severe stress at a time of crisis. It is at such times that relatives take on the responsibility of decision-making.

When the older person is under great stress because of very real grief, the relatives are buried under a mountain of guilt because of all the times they should have behaved differently toward the older person.

The daughter-in-law who has neglected her mother-in-law, for whatever reason, will feel she must insist that the mother-in-law, suddenly widowed, should sell her own home and move in with the son and daughter-in-law.

She completely ignores the fact that such an arrangement will probably work even less well than it would have earlier, because the mother-in-law's emotional needs during a period of grief are much greater than they would normally have been.

The daughter-in-law becomes tired of the excessive demands, the mother-in-law feels increasingly rejected, everybody feels increasingly guilty and an insoluble impasse has been reached with the probability that the mother-in-law will react with illness, depression, alcoholism, or some other form of withdrawal.²³⁾

The question of impending death often poses more of a problem for relatives of older people and for gerontricians than it does for the older people themselves. Relatives usually have conflicting feelings of guilt, fear, loss, and anger as well as genuine affection, love, and respect. The tendency of almost everyone to avoid a discussion of death presents a real problem to the older person. He usually both wants and needs to talk about death. He wants to be an integral part of the making of orderly plans, and he often wants to be encouraged to talk about death.

With one-tenth of the population in the United States over the age of sixty-five, in numbers alone the older American is an important statistic in our society. Added to this the following distressing facts:

Two out of three of the aged have at least one chronic condition, such as high blood pressure, arthritis, diabetes, heart disease, or mental disorder. 1,250,000 of the aged or more are invalids not under institutional care. The vast majority of aged couples have inadequate incomes even for modest needs. Because of their poor health, their physical limitations, and their depressed economic condition, the aged are, as a class, dependent on their families or on the state.²⁴⁾

²³ Ruth Gasink Boyer, D. S. W., Tomorrow is Living (Tallahassee: The John E. Barton Company, 1968), p.103.

²⁴ Richard M. Garvin and Robert E. Burger, Where They Go to Die: The Tragedy of America's Aged (New York: Delacorte Press, 1968), pp.151-152.

Economic problems. Among the causes of tension in family circles, none is mentioned more often than money. In the case of the older person, the money question is often acute. Invariably his resources are less than what they once were. Savings must be used, and always there is a fear that he may outlive his money and become a pauper. Some have annuity income. Others have pensions from their lifetime work. Most older American citizens now receive Social Security payments; and some are entitled to old-age assistance funds. It has been investigated that many older people in the United States have serious economic problems.

Housing and living space are important for everyone but very difficult for the elderly. Older persons are often the victims of circumstances, having very little to say about where they live. One study of the elderly indicated that "over 90 per cent were unhappy with their living arrangements."²⁵⁾

When children have grown up and moved away, the old family home may be much too big for its elderly occupants. Added to this may be an increased tax burden levied by modern civic costs. The loneliness of the old homestead contrasted with the vibrance of former family joys reminds us that no bird's nest can seem quite the same as when filled with fledglings.

Many are continuing to exist in unsatisfactory situations because they cannot afford anything better. They do not have the transportation to look for other arrangements. It requires great effort to pack even their limited belongings and move. They do not want to leave familiar surroundings even though the community has changed.

Many older people find it best to live as long as possible in their own home and community. However, this is not always practical. Special housing facilities are not available for the feeble and the lonely. Excellent nursing homes are open to the chronically ill who can afford them. Shopping helpers and visiting nurses are a benefit to many. Modern public hospitals furnish the best surgical and medical skill in the nation to older people who are acutely ill.

Quite closely related to the need of income is the problem of employment. It is a truism of large business personnel operations that employees

²⁵ Charles Kemp, Pastoral Care With the Poor (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972), p.47.

over the age of 45 are not wanted. This unwise procedure not only constitutes an economic hardship, it also creates a social problem. Elderly people often do not have enough to occupy their time. When they are denied the opportunity to work, it takes away their sense of being a worthwhile individual and causes them to feel dependent on others. This is damaging to their personal pride and self-confidence.

Employers, too, are beginning to acknowledge that automatic retirement at the age of 65 represents a tremendous loss to business and industry in terms of experience and skill. A survey conducted several years ago by the Bureau of Employment Security revealed that, in the opinion of employers, "Older workers have real stability, waste less time, are more reliable, responsible, and loyal, are absent less frequently, and need less supervision."²⁶⁾ From an economic point of view, older families average just under half the income of younger families. Older persons living alone or with nonrelatives average only two fifths of the income of their younger counterparts.²⁷⁾

In general, then, what can the church do to be of help in the economic problems of aging? (1) The members of the local church can continue to treat the retiree as a person--just as he had been treated while he was on the job. Its friendly atmosphere can also help the really old people to stay on their feet and keep functioning. The pastor may ask adults with special competence in housing, job placement, small businesses and investments to be available to advise older people who seek their help in economic problems. The friendly fellowship of the church can take many tensions out of the older person's life. (2) The church must sometimes give direct economic help in emergency circumstances. This is primarily a social welfare problem. (3) As they come to their years of retirement, it is hoped that people will discover some of these satisfactions in giving increased Christian service through both the church and community agencies. (4) The church itself can set a good example and ask its members to do likewise in their economic relations to older people. (5) The church may set up pre-retirement classes, job clinics, or employ-

²⁶ Clyde M. Narramore, The Mature Years (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), p.28.

²⁷ Wayne E. Oates and Kirk H. Neely, Where to Go for Help (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), p.200.

ment exchanges.

Physical Problems. Both the belief that old age is necessarily a period of deterioration and that there are certain diseases which are the special province of old age alone are false. It is true, however, that the effects of many diseases upon older people differ radically from the effects of the same diseases upon the young.

Although almost everyone who lives to the age of sixty has acquired some more or less permanent disability or disease, only about ten to fifteen per cent of the elderly are actually incapacitated at any one time. About one man in every seven aged sixty and over is hospitalized in the course of a year. The National Health Survey found that "persons aged sixty-five and over were confined to bed by illness and accidents an average of 16.3 days and restricted in their activities for 47.3 days during the year ended June 30, 1958."²⁸⁾ A clinical survey in Baltimore revealed that:

Only one in every twenty-two persons aged sixty-five and over was free of chronic disease; in six cases out of seven the disease interfered with or limited daily activities or required care. Over half of the older people examined had arthritis, and nearly three-fifths had some form of heart disease. The illnesses of the aged are more frequent than those of younger adults, and they also tend to be of longer duration.²⁹⁾

Many elderly people are faced with the problem of adjustment to their own or their spouse's disability, and frequently they are invalids for prolonged periods of time before death relieves them of their suffering. As Havighurst has indicated, half of all who live to be over the age of fifty die of heart disease or its complications; this comes on slowly and first makes one an invalid in a substantial proportion of cases. Fully one-half of those who reach the age of seventy can expect several years of invalidism before death.³⁰⁾

With increasing age there is a general reduction in strength, endurance and skill. Hearing and vision, often adversely affected by the aging pro-

²⁸ Robert M. Gray and David O. Moberg, The Church and the Older Person (Grand Rapids: William E. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), p.22.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., p.22.

cess, encourage increased isolation of the afflicted individual. Fears of ill health, chronic invalidism and death often contribute to mental illnesses and may contribute significantly to the many psychosomatic ailments of which the medical profession is becoming increasingly aware.

Health and care are the problems of the older people. Sufficient health and mental health care for the aging may be more dependent on public attitude than on placement of services. In a nation which spends more than \$ 5 billion in 1970 on various cosmetics and hair-dyes and only \$ 1.86 billion on Old Age Assistance, the negative regard for the older population is evident.³¹⁾ Older people, often passive, have often been ignored. Health needs of older people have often been denied by those who could render help. Their loneliness, reduced financial state, and poor health may leave them with diminished self-image and purpose.

Social problems. While growing old has always presented its problems, in our day older people have become one of our major social problems. For one thing there are more of them. "At the turn of the century there were eleven young people for every one older person. Today there are only four."³²⁾ When we consider that this is also the day of the population explosion so far as the number of young people are concerned, we begin to realize just how many older people there are. There are actually four times as many people sixty-five years and older today as there were sixty years ago. Naturally our medical advancement deserves the credit for this. But it is a question of whether it is an advancement if with the increase in the quantity of life there is brought about a decrease in the quality. Numbers alone do not account for the problem. With the growing emphasis on compulsory retirement in the mid-sixties there is also an increase in the number of older people who are idle.

Older persons are less concerned about their external appearance than are young people. However, appearance can affect social relationships--and a physically-impaired older person is more likely to be isolated from others. There may be problems of social interaction, also, because communication is difficult due to hearing deficiencies; one may not initiate commu-

³¹ Smith, p.59.

³² William E. Hulme, The Pastoral Care of Families (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p.168.

nication because it is not possible to identify people due to visual impairment; or, perhaps one is aphasic as a result of a stroke. The combination of physical isolation plus the variety of factors which negate the opportunity to initiate social contacts, causes large numbers of older disabled people to be very lonely. Disability affects the ability to continue other types of social roles. Older people give up employment, club activities, church activities and other leadership activities when disability occurs. Within the family roles may change. A husband might be found caring for household tasks and administering to a chronically disabled wife -- or a wife may assume the instrumental role when the husband becomes disabled.

The advancing years bring with them a host of new problems; but perhaps the one most difficult for older adults is the problem of loneliness. Their search for community does not cease with the passing of the years, but rather becomes the more urgent. Bereavement separates them from their mates, retirement separates them from their fellow-workers, and distance often separates them from their children and grandchildren. Their problem of loneliness, their need to feel needed, can be met effectively in the fellowship of small study groups in the church which accepts them, give meaningful content to their leisure hours, and stimulate them mentally.

Many older people do not know their place in society. The church must help these older people to help themselves, to better employ the skills, the experiences and the resources they have gained over a lifetime. The older individual is compelled to make choices, but he has no assurance that he has chosen "correctly," because there are no definite patterns of behavior laid down for him.

A major problem for many older persons is that of adjusting to the death of the spouse. More than half of all American women aged 65 and over, and more than two-thirds of those past the seventy-fifth birthday, are widowed. This compares to just under one-fifth and one-third, respectively, of the men at corresponding ages.³³⁾ The man who becomes a widower may have to learn how to cook, keep house, keep his own clothes in order, and care for many other details new to him. In addition, he will have to face the major problem of learning how to live alone. More often, however, this is a woman's problem. She may be forced to move to a smaller home, learn about business matters, economize severely because of reduced income, and reconcile herself to living

33 Gray and Moberg, p.27.

alone.

The aged have many problems associated with their friendships. The older person's friends often die before him, so the very persons who could do the most to bolster his morale may be beyond the place of help. The old friends not only depart by death, they also move away. The older person himself may move away to some distant place where he must make new friends--if he is to have any friends at all. Older people who remain in the home community are left socially isolated in all too many instances as newcomers fill the occupational, social, and residential gaps vacated by those who have departed.

The stereotype of old people also contributes to their problems. There is the idea that all of them have certain definite characteristics. This idea usually emphasizes the undesirable traits found in a few individuals. They thus are looked upon as living in the past, hopeful of getting back into the pleasant circumstances of an age gone by, but forgetting the many unpleasant conditions of the same age. They are considered to be past the age of usefulness--except when a babysitter is needed and they are thought to desire only a final period of life at ease in the rocking chair.

Problems of social relationships are similarly increased by the tendency to emphasize individual accomplishment and individual competition to such an extent that the aged are sometimes actively competing with younger adults for recognition. With our emphasis upon speed, vigor, youthful beauty and similar values, older people usually lose out in the competition.

Much of the disability among the elderly may be created by society:

A high proportion among those entering state hospitals in old age are the poor, the uneducated of low occupational status. Many may have been adapted until they lost their resources . . . Social rejection, the cultural discard of older people in the United States, is a major factor in their unhappiness over growing old.³⁴⁾ Feelings of rejection by others lead to feelings of self-rejection, anxiety, even fantasy and delusions.

The elderly person who cannot handle his multiple losses and attendant grief may commit suicide. As Earl A. Grollman has said, "Year in and

34 Roy B. Zuck and Gene A. Getz, Adult Education in the Church (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), p.63.

year out, the older people rank at the bottom of the list for suicide threats and attempts. Annually they top the statistics of these whose suicide has been completed."³⁵⁾ Grollman goes on to say that a British study of suicide among the aged showed that the suicidal persons had demonstrated chronic feelings of discouragement, loss of general competence, and a major shift of self-image. He states that "ingredients vital to the morale of people of all ages--love, caring, and understanding--are so often forgotten when elderly people are concerned."³⁶⁾ Often, illness of the older person is a triggering factor.

The incidence of suicide is highest in the aged in our country, and suicide itself is the eleventh leading cause of death.³⁷⁾ Further, "There is a decade-by-decade rise of depression, including the peaking of the suicide rate in men in their eighties. Twenty-five per cent of all suicides occur in persons over 65 years of age."³⁸⁾ The older person "commits suicide" conversely by failing to care for himself, to eat properly, and to seek medical attention when it is needed. He may even cease his bodily movements and activities in order to allow himself to worsen physically.

Spiritual problems. There is a sense in which every problem of an individual is a spiritual problem, or at least has spiritual implications. Among the other problems of older people are some that are much clearly of a spiritual and religious nature more than others. The older people live in the midst of the problems of life.

One spiritual problem of the older person is a fear of the future, especially of death, that often torments the conscious or the subconscious mind of the person who cannot but realize that he is nearing the grave. The comfort and hope imparted through religion can be a major source of alleviation of this dread.

Not only the religious group activities of the older person, but also many of his own personal acts of devotion to God often suffer. Because of poor eyesight and small print, it becomes difficult for many to read their Bible and devotional literature. Because of poor hearing, they may

35 Smith, p.21.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

miss religious radio and television broadcasts that otherwise could impart spiritual help to them. The impairment of their senses may also limit the benefits received from visits of church groups and from various services provided by the clergy.

When other problem conditions interfere, it is often difficult to get to church to engage in public worship and in fellowship with others of like faith. In the winter in cold climates, the heating and ventilation of the church facilities may be poor and very uncomfortable to the older person. High steps at the church entrance, heavy and ominous doors that frighten the stranger away, and other physical obstacles discourage many older people from attending. The lack of suitable transportation facilities, contributing through a sense of obligation to voluntary offerings, poor eyesight, poor hearing, poor acoustics in the building, careless enunciation and diction by the preacher and other speakers, and other difficulties both within the church and within the older person himself contribute to infrequent attendance and a low level of general participation in the church by many older people.

The church has a significant task to perform in solving the spiritual problems and lifting the spiritual burdens of older persons. The older people do not stop growing or changing when they have reached maturity. Extensive projects outside as well as inside our churches have shown the rich possibilities of adult education. Sunday church school classes, for example, provide many opportunities for Christian fellowship and service, as well as for study. In many ways, these experiences are as educational as the formal study program of the church. The educational program of the church should enrich the Christian knowledge and understanding of the older persons, train them for service and leadership, and explore with them the devotional disciplines that expand and strengthen the Christian commitment in daily living. E. P. Westphal believes that the church's failure to meet vital needs is the reason millions of the older people pay no attention to the church today. He says, "It may seem a harsh thing to say, but we believe it to be a fact that for many of their most vital needs--and many of these are spiritual needs--people do not think of the church as a possible source of light and of life."³⁹⁾

39 Irene Smith Caldwell, *Adults Learn and Like It* (Anderson, Indiana: The Warner Press, 1955), p.32.

Many older persons carry with them a burden of guilt that sends them prematurely to the grave. They sometimes have a sense of failure and regret for not having attained goals set early in life. Some of them have violated the customs (folk-ways and mores) of society either privately or publicly, and others have engaged in activities definitely classified as sinful both in religious and in social circles. Their guilty consciences may result from truly despicable activities, or they may result from misconceived notions of moral and ethical standards. Regardless of the nature or the source of such feelings of guilt, they create tensions and mental problems that are not easily resolved.

What do the older people need from the church? In general, they need opportunities for Christian fellowship, worship, study, witnessing, and service. Some of these experiences are churchwide, others find their effective expression through various adult groups within the church, and still others through the community and elsewhere.

CHARACTERISTICS

The latter period of adult life, like earlier ones, is a time of change and transition. This transition from middle age to older adulthood is a gradual one. Self-image changes slowly. Individuals at this stage of life hold tenaciously to the belief that they are not growing "old," and they may be completely unaware of their senescence. Not until some event forcibly dramatizes for them the fact that they are old, or are aging, do they become conscious of this reality. The death of a spouse, retirement from one's lifework, a major illness, partial or complete disability, diminishing physical vigor, failing memory, or a changing status in the home and community may serve to accentuate the fact that age is imminent.

This may be a period of radically reduced mobility and freedom brought about by illness or sharply reduced income. It may be a period of partial or complete dependency. Or it may be a period of increased freedom from responsibility and enlarged opportunity to do the things one wants to do. It may be a time when the ripe fruits of one's labor and love can be enjoyed to the full, in which attention can be turned to the spiritual aspects of life. In any event fulfillment has to be found within a contracting life span.⁴⁰⁾

40 Joseph John Hanson, Our Church Plans for Adults Valley Forge, Chicago or Los Angeles : The Judson Press, 1962), p. 17.

This is often characterized by physical decline and a decrease in energy, but it also can be a time of psychological growth. During this period, attitudes, aspirations, and one's concept of self are sensitive and vulnerable to many stimuli; they are subject to both dramatic and subtle changes that are crucial in shaping the remaining years of the individual's life.⁴¹⁾ Decisions are made or deferred, actions are taken or rejected, and the effects of these decisions and actions can be deep and significant.

Dr. Lewis Sherrill has indicated that the major task of persons reaching senior adulthood is to simplify life; they need to discover what is most important and what is really worth doing with limited time, energy, and opportunity.⁴²⁾

In this age of longevity, a very substantial number of persons reaching retirement age show no sign of being incapacitated mentally, physically, or psychologically. They are vigorous, alert, gregarious, and in pursuit of countless interests. It is not unusual for such persons to acquire new skills, attend formal classes, participate in group activities, contribute leadership, read widely, and be intelligently conversant with contemporary world events. These men and women are vibrant, inquisitive, venturesome, and in many respects, even more alert, purposeful, and spiritually sensitive than many young and middle-aged adults.

On the other hand, not all old people are physically active and intellectually alert. Old age leaves its indelible imprint of infirmity, dependence upon others, mental and emotional deterioration, prolonged sickness, and sorrow. Loneliness, lack of recognition, and the feeling that one is no longer needed (perhaps, no longer wanted) are disquieting experiences of old age.

The days of old age are days of decline. The body declines. The older person just "can't do" as he used to do. As men grow old, their hair begins to turn grey and then white, or it thins out and finally baldness occurs. Few women become bald but their hair thins and becomes grey or white as they grow older. Both men and women begin to lose their hearing, and their eyesight dims as they grow older. Depending upon circumstances, most of them lose their teeth in later life.

41 Joseph H. Britton and Jean O. Britton, Personality Changes in Aging (New York: Springer Publishing Co., 1972), p. 169.

42 Hanson, p. 18.

When this occurs it is often accompanied by a sagging of the jaw and a look of old age about the mouth and chin. Facial skin as well as the skin on the rest of the body loses its elasticity as one grows older. Wrinkles appear in the skin around the eyes, mouth and forehead.

Another characteristic which is generally more apparent in older people rather than in younger people is a slowing down in walking. Often older people develop some difficulty in walking--either their joints or their feet hurt. If there is no actual pain involved in walking, their pace becomes slower and more careful. Frequently, this is because of the knowledge that older people seem more prone to falling and that old bones do not knit as rapidly or as thoroughly as young ones do.

Also related to this slowing down is a shortness of breath associated with the poorer functioning of some internal organs. This malfunctioning of the internal organs sometimes is associated with the external characteristics of stooping that can be observed in many older people. Some of the characteristics usually associated with the aging are a weak heart, hardening of the arteries, poor digestion, sluggishness in the digestive system, constipation, and a deterioration of the kidneys and liver.

It is generally believed by younger people that there is a sharp decline in the sexual urges of both men and women as they approach old age. The menopause in women very definitely is the close of the childbearing period. However, there is no indication that sexual activity in women or the desire for sexual activity need decline sharply immediately after the menopause.

Mental abilities may also decline. The older person retains his sharpness for past memories, but recent events and new names may slip. Then comes the decline in usefulness. Even if the body and mind would allow the older person to continue to be useful, society will not. With this comes the decline in being needed. This loss of purpose may accentuate the normal decline of body and mind. There may also be grief over those lost. This is most pronounced when the older person has lost his mate. While the grief over the lost mate is genuine, it is also symbolic of all that is lost out of this life, including the lost status.

Many of these older adults are free, when retirement days come, to give a large part of their time in various channels of Christian service. They can help the church and the church can help them. All of these older adults need fellowship. Whereas some are able to come to the church,

others will have to be reached inside their homes. The most significant need of those in this group is an assurance of their personal usefulness. By the nature of things, this usefulness may take a different form from that in their earlier years. The church can be of help to them in making this adjustment. Thus, adult characteristics need to be considered in the creation of an adequate and attractive program. Thus, the church faces an unprecedented opportunity to serve the multiple needs and interests of older men and women through varied programs of enrichment and activity. It should project its witness, concern, and Christian teaching ministry into the homes of those persons also who are ill, infirmed, or physically handicapped.

Elderly life is the period of ripe fruitage, of good judgment and wise counsel. Quite often the highest and most responsible position in church, state, and business is held by those in this life period. It is in this period, too, that frequently the ripest scholarship is found and oftentimes the greatest scientific discoveries are made.

There are many different types of adults; hence, there are many different kinds of characteristics. These differences are due to heredity, environment, education, and experience. Some psychologists say that "child-
psychology is more uniform than adult-psychology; that there is a more pronounced individuality among adults than among children; that the adult mind takes a more sober and settled cast."⁴³)

Adult interests are different from those of children and young people. There is a backward as well as a forward look. There are the interests of the home, children, business and the like besides the many spiritual interests that each one has. The intellect is different. The judgment is more likely to be sound and dependable. Reason is dominant; the power of memory is not so strong. He remembers more by the law of association. Perception is not so keen, but attention is stronger due to power of concentration for longer periods. The mind has formed its habits of application by experience. The feelings of the elderly are either more fully developed, due to nurture, and thus more stable or deadened, due to neglect. The social feelings are strengthened, or the deeper and finer emotions are deadened. The will is strong, if properly nurtured and trained

43 Charles W. Brewbaker, The Adult Program in the Church School (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1925), p.26.

in childhood and youth, and will decide to do the seemingly impossible. There is a ready response to an appeal, and it is stronger and more resolute. Religious indifference is a marked characteristic among the elderly. Many belong to church who show but little concern for the mission of the church and much less concern to help carry out the program of her mission. The temptation and tendency is to substitute lodges, clubs and other organizations for the home and the church.

There is a marked tendency to material mindedness.

As men and women grow older and are in the busy whirl of life, money and things, houses and lands, stocks and bonds, and various kinds of investments absorb their attention largely for selfish interests. Many of the rich are characterized by greed, covetousness, and have lost sight of soul values. The mad pursuit for wealth and gain supplants a deep heart concern for the spiritual and moral certainties.

The senior adulthood has been summarized as follows: "Senior adulthood is grandchildren, hobbies, memories, remembering, forgetting, looking ahead, new friendships, adjustments, spiritual revitalization, mellowing, fulfillment, and experiencing."⁴⁴)

Some events seem to an observer to be only normal matters in the course of life. It seems quite unremarkable, for example, that an adolescent should grow rapidly and be awkward; that brides and grooms should be ungraceful in their new roles; that the middle-aged should have a bout of serious illness, tend towards obesity, "marry off" their children, cease menstruating and wear bifocals; that the elderly should be retired, grow forgetful, live on less income, and, in due time, die.⁴⁵) This idea is expressed in a few lines by the ordinarily humorous poet, Ogden Nash:

Old Man

People expect old men to die,

They do not really mourn old men.

Old men are different. People look

At them with eyes that wonder when...

People watch with unshocked eyes;

But the old men know when an old man dies.⁴⁶)

44 Martha M. Leyboldt, Learning Is Change (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1971), p.15.

45 Thomas W. Klink, Depth Perspectives in Pastoral Work (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), pp.87-88.

46 Ibid., p.87.

At retirement, whether that be at sixty-five or later, man's chances are better today than ever that he will live at least another ten years. And he will still have new experiences ahead of him and new situations to meet. Sherrill has pointed out that the central problem of later adulthood is simplification. He describes it as "achieving simplification of life in the physical, material, and spiritual aspects, so that the soul may with less and less impediment progress toward its chosen destiny."⁴⁷)

The older adult is like the mountain climber who, having struggled with all his might, finally reaches the peak and then murmurs, "Now if I can only get down alive." His task is to come down from status and prestige gracefully, and yet to remain emotionally alive.

To be sure, the older adult is still the parent of his children, but his role has changed. People formerly spoke of John Evans and his son, Robert; but now they speak of Robert Evans and his father. The focus of importance in family relations is now on the son rather than on the father. To accept his changing role without losing one's sense of worth becomes a real test of maturity.

Older people must be encouraged not only to see themselves as others see them, but to examine themselves critically in the light of the new knowledge. These older people must learn to face reality. Occupationally, the majority of them must retire. Biologically, adjustments have to be made to bodily changes and needs. Socially, new outlets must be discovered now. Economically, living costs and, for the majority, reduced incomes require careful planning. Educationally, learning needs can be satisfied with all the facilities that society is providing, almost lavishly. Spiritually, this period of life should be the most satisfying of all. Even though all these adjustments have to be made, they can become the challenging forces to provide older people with incentives to live to the fullest.

A favorite Bible quotation for every old person might be, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Others might prefer Paul's magnificent philosophy of life, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13-14).