

**Council of Trustees Working Group on Aging in Faith  
Report to Diocesan Convention  
October 2020**

## BACKGROUND

The Council of Trustees charged the Working Group with the following tasks during their meeting on December 1, 2020

- **Identify resources helpful to deepening the spirituality of elders and those who work with them**
- **Provide case studies and models of how parishes in Central PA can more effectively attract and successfully engage active retirees within our Episcopal parishes**
- **Present these findings to the next convention**
- **Create web-based resources for parishes that can be made available through the Diocesan website**

This past year, the Working Group designed a survey which was administered via the Diocesan website. We received responses from large and small congregations throughout the Diocese. Note, the survey responses were submitted BEFORE the pandemic lockdown.

## SAMPLE OF SURVEY RESPONSES

Question: How Does Your Parish Use the Experience and Skills of Older Members?

A: The parish invited participation by older members in all activities. More can be done to tap into the unique gifts that older members bring to enrich the church and its impact.

A: Not well. Their skills and knowledge are seldom sought out.

A: Shouldn't that be the other way around? Older members often feel as though the church has moved beyond them. They feel they no longer know their church. Liturgies and programs have become unrecognizable to the older parishioner.

Question: What ministries, programs or events has the parish had for older adults?

A: Christian formation through "Parlor People" (adult forum on end of life/advance care planning issues) Other topics offered included advocacy, living the way of love.

A: Pastoral Care Committee often interacts with older members. We are a close community, involved with each other for much more than choir practice.

Question: What other forms of outreach does your parish provide for older adults in the community?

A: Ten months of the year, we go to apartment complexes our church helped build.

A: I think the emphasis should be on what the older adults can be in the world and do for the church, rather than what the church can do for older adults.

A: We host the community food bank and a monthly free dinner for the community. Most attendees are older adults.

Question: How can the Diocese assist your parish to better support older members?

A: Planned giving opportunities and discussions/video presentations on the spirituality of aging.

A: Help them to be spiritual and wisdom leaders in the art of impacting the larger world using their unique gifts more fully to be the person they were born to be.

The Working Group met via ZOOM on September 3, 2020 to review the survey results and discuss next steps.

#### NEXT STEPS/RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In light of the ongoing effects of the pandemic, the Task Force recommends that we pause further deliberations of the Working Group until after the crisis has passed. It is clear from the survey results that there is work to be done. We foresee a critical need to reach people who have been isolated and unable to worship online due to technology challenges, or in person due to safety concerns.
2. We also recommend that as the Shaped by Faith process continues, consideration be given to appointing an Aging in Faith ministry leader who can help support the work of clergy and parish leaders on finding ways to help older members deepen their spirituality through contemplative prayer practices, Bible study and small group fellowship.

The members of our Working Group remain committed to helping the Diocese work on strategies and outreach efforts that can help older members feel welcome and valued by their faith communities and engaged more fully in the life and ministry of each parish.

Respectfully Submitted,

Aging in Faith Working Group

**Martha Harris, Rev. David Peck, Rev. Jim Robertson, Mary Alleman, Mary Grace Shearer**