

Council of Trustees Working Group on Seniors, Spirituality and Evangelism
Report to Diocesan Convention
October 2019

The Council of Trustees charged the Working Group with the following tasks during their meeting on December 1, 2019.

- **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**

The Working Group is an outgrowth of discussions leading up to and during our Diocesan Convention last October. We've met three times via ZOOM this year.

Ideas discussed – Parishioners over the age of 65 could serve as Sunday school teachers and leaders of intergenerational ministries. How do we support aging members in need of care. Older members are assets – we need spiritual leaders. The task force is exploring opportunities and best practices for supporting seniors in their spiritual journeys. We've discussed the stigma sometimes associated with aging and want to find new terminology that captures the joy and wisdom of aging spiritually.

Societal trends – people are living longer, people desire to age in place. People from all over the country come to retire in central PA.

What do we call this population? The group spent time discussing the need to reframe the conversation on aging. What should seniors over the age of 65 be called? No one cares for the term “elderly.”

As a group, we're committed to the process of engendering joy and spiritual fulfillment as we age. Helping people to grow into spiritual maturity. Live life to the fullest in Christ, not just reaching end of life. Remain engaged and contributing members of their communities, families, parishes.

Practically – people who are aging are thinking of their legacy and giving. Many are connected to other generations and families because some retired people move to be closer to their children and grandchildren.

We discussed the need to identify resources for people who are caring for aging and dying parents as well as young children - the so-called “sandwich generation.”

The working group recommends we use the term aging. Aging is a process, a part of life. Not a population. May also talk about Aging in Faith. As a working group, we are learning to use inclusive language and this is a type of inclusive language.

Contemplative leader Richard Rohr observes that our perspective shifts from *doing* to *being* in the second half of our lives.

Next Steps

- Examine aging trends in Pennsylvania and the nation to see how consistent we are; if our demographic trends match these state and national trends.
- We could connect our final report to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's Way of Love. That multi-step process may serve as an organizing structure for our report and recommendations.
- We recommend doing a survey of all the parishes within our diocese. What has worked to stimulate that spark or has been helpful to minister to the aging process. The Task has drafted a survey which we will ask the Diocesan Office to distribute after Convention.
- The group discussed the need for a framework to guide our deliberations. Language is important. As a group we aspire to support people as they age and grow in spiritual maturity. How can their journeys be made more meaningful and how can our Diocese and parishes support their continued spiritual growth.
- Our vision is help equip our parishes with a diversity of worship, educational and spiritual resources will engender joy in people who are aging. Please join our rallying cry to change the perception of aging. It is a privilege to walk with people later in life.

Our Goal – To recommend an effective framework for Aging in Faith, with practical examples and best practices for supporting our older members in their faith journeys. Our final report will include programs and models adopted by other parishes and Dioceses and identify areas for further study.

Respectfully Submitted,

Martha Harris, Chair,

Rev. David Peck, Rev. Jim Robertson, Mary Alleman, Mary Grace Shearer