

THE CONTINUING EDUCATION OF SENIOR ADULTS: AN EXAMINATION AND
ANALYSIS OF PROGRAMMING FOR THE SUCCESSFUL AGING OF
SENIOR ADULTS IN BAPTIST CHURCH
RECREATION MINISTRIES

DISSERTATION

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of PHILOSOPHY
with a Major in Adult, Professional
and Community Education
December, 2013

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the countless number of churches which minister to senior adults, and to the ever-growing number of senior adults who are trying to make the most of their golden years. May God richly bless the efforts of the church recreator as he or she toils in the trenches of trying to help educate and train senior adults on how to enjoy longer, healthier, happier, and continually productive lives. “May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and evermore.” (2 Cor. 13:14, New International Version).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The culmination of this study was made possible by the support, encouragement, and assistance of many different individuals over the course of many years, and any attempt to name them individually, although necessary, would prove futile. Special thanks, however, are due to the members of my committee, Steve Furney, Steve Awoniyi, Robert Reardon, and Paul Stutz, for their support of the development of the original idea behind this study; to Ann Brooks, who constantly encouraged me to “follow my heart” with this project; and to Russ Hodges and Kathy Fite, who, with great patience, made me a better researcher and writer.

Thank you to all the members of Cohort '05. Counting each of you as a friend is one of the true joys of my life. Amber Thompson-Adams and Liz Garcia have been especially meaningful as constant sources of encouragement and support. Thank you, ladies, for putting up with the incessant ramblings of old trial lawyer!

Special thanks are also due to Pete Knight and Bob Raus for refining my love for the ministry of recreation, and sharing with me the vision for how recreation can be used to bring people to Jesus Christ.

A special thanks to James Booth, Debbie Brown, Dave Bundrick, Corky Holland, Jason Phillips, and Frank Wallace. Without your openness and cooperation, this project would have never been completed. There are many, many senior adults across our state

who are enjoying health, wellness, and a higher quality of life in their senior years because of your love and passion for Jesus Christ, senior adults, and recreation ministry.

An incredibly large amount of appreciation also goes to my friend Teresa Stark Alexander, one of the most gifted stenographers I know. Her talents and skills proved invaluable in the transcription process of the interview tapes.

Thanks also go out to the countless men and women who serve as recreation ministers in churches throughout this great country. Thank you for toiling in your labor of love each day to help people find Jesus through their recreation activities.

Thanks be to God the Father for showing us how to build relationships with other people, and to “be Jesus” to them through the medium of recreation. May any fruits of this labor be to His glory and honor.

Finally, an especially big thank you goes to my wife, Melinda, and my two children, Jennifer and Andrea, who have now blessed us with Zoë and Andy, our grandchildren. Without their love, support, encouragement, and sacrifice, this journey would have never been possible.

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ABSTRACT

One of the more intriguing phenomena of this young 21st Century is the Baby Boomer generation. Members of this group entail the post-World War II babies born between the years of 1946 and 1964. Often referred to as “Boomers,” this generation is now entering their retirement years. As they encroach on senior adulthood in increasing numbers, an interesting dilemma is developing, as gerontologists, sociologists, physicians, theologians, and psychologists come to the realization that this generation is different, and must be treated differently than previous senior adult generations. The development of this conundrum has found no bigger stage than the church.

In an effort to develop a better understanding of the enormity of this phenomenon, the MacArthur Foundation funded a multidisciplinary study which served as the foundation for John Rowe, M. D., and Robert Kahn’s landmark book entitled *Successful Aging*. The thesis of this work was that to age successfully, people must maintain (a) low probability of disease and disease-related disability; (b) high cognitive and physical functional capacity; (c) active engagement with life.

The main purpose of this qualitative research study was to discover how the successful aging of senior adults is being encouraged and aided by the recreation ministries of Southern Baptist churches. Therefore, the main research question of this study is: Based on the knowledge of the benefits of regular physical activity and proper

nutrition for senior adults, what is the educational and activity programming response of church recreation ministries for senior adults?

In other words, what are the churches doing to help their ever-growing numbers of senior adults live longer, healthier, and happier lives? This study influences the field of Adult Education, of which Religious Education is a component, by shedding light on what churches seem to be doing right in this area, and where the churches could be doing so much more.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

According to an old fable, there was a man stranded on the roof of his house because the town's river had flooded, and he had nowhere else to seek refuge. After some time, a canoe approached and the oarsman beckoned the man to get into the canoe, but the man refused, saying, "No thank you! I am a Christian, and God will save me." The canoe paddled on. The water level continued to rise. A short time later, a motor boat came by and, again, the man was beckoned to jump into the boat. Once more, he said, "I am a Christian. God will save me." The motorboat went on about its way, and the flooding grew progressively worse. Finally the man found himself at the apex of the roof, in a spot barely big enough for him to stand on when a helicopter came flying overhead. A voice from the helicopter's loud speaker said, "Let me lower a rope down so you can climb aboard." Again the man declined the offer proclaiming, "I am a Christian, and God will save me." The water level continued to rise, the house became totally submerged, and the man drowned. When the man's soul got to Heaven's pearly gates, he met St. Peter and asked, "St. Peter, I don't mean to complain, but I've been a Christian for years, being a loyal and faithful church member, and doing my best to live by the Christian principles. Why did God not save me when the flood waters came along?" St. Peter replied incredulously, "Save you? God sent a canoe, a motor boat, and a helicopter to save you and you refused them all. What else was God to do?" (God's Topshelf, 2009).

The goal of this study is to help churches come to grips with one of the most perplexing dilemmas facing them today: what to do with the growing number of older adults in its church pews, on its membership rolls, and in its midst. To put it another way, one of the purposes of this study is to help churches see that God is sending them a

canoe, a motor boat, and a helicopter to help them minister, in a life-impacting manner, to the fastest growing segment of their rolls – the senior adult population.

As members of the baby boomer generation move into their early to mid sixties, a rather delicate situation has arisen for the churches. The number of older adults is increasing exponentially, but the churches are seeing a decline in the numbers of younger and middle aged adults (Lovelace, 2006). The older adults are the same people who for years have faithfully served the church in a plethora of leadership roles: deacons, elders, teachers, choir members, committee members, and tithers. Growing old should, in no way, mean relinquishing one's role in the life of the church. Therefore, churches should employ all means at their disposal to see that the older adults, many times referred to as senior adults, live as long, healthy, and vibrant lives as possible. In the context of the opening illustration, the canoe, motor boat, and helicopter have been sent to the churches through modern research and science, and collectively go by the name of successful aging. For the churches' opportunity to help their senior adults enjoy longer and healthier lives, one of the most appropriate forums available is a healthy, active church recreation ministry.

Rationale

A basic function of the recreation ministry, known in many churches today as Sports and Recreation ministry, of any church is to support the other ministries of the church, i.e.: evangelism, education, outreach, children, youth, fellowship, and music. The specific programming areas of recreation ministry cover a wide range of leisure activities, from church socials to competitive sports leagues. The evangelical theory behind recreation is that it creates an avenue of minimal resistance that enables Christians to

share their faith with friends and family members who have no church or faith affiliation. In other words, church members can be more successful in getting acquaintances to participate in church-sponsored activities such as arts and crafts, group exercise classes, or sports such as racquetball, basketball, softball, and volleyball, than getting them to attend a Bible study class or worship service. In this regard, recreation ministry, while supporting other church ministries, represents the epitome of the friendship evangelism movement.

However, evangelism and outreach are merely two components of this ministry. It is also the primary area of ministry where the church is able to minister to the whole person: spiritually, emotionally, socially, and physically. It is here, through education and activity programming of its recreation ministry, that the church can have a profound, life-enriching, and life-extending effect on its senior adults.

Conceptual Framework

Matters of spirituality, religion, and faith are important to many adults these days. With all the problems present in contemporary society, there is widespread concern that the social order is in a state of moral decline and disrepair. Yet, in the midst of it all, the human spirit must still be nourished and nurtured, uplifted and sustained (Zinn, 1997). Spirituality is an important part of the human experience. Tisdell and Tolliver (2001) described spirituality as relating to a connection to “what many refer to as the Lifeforce, God, a higher power or purpose, Great Mystery, or Buddha Nature, and is, for some people, related to religion” (p. 13). Understanding how these dimensions of spirituality play out in our own lives and those of adult learners offers new direction to culturally relevant adult education, which includes religious education for adults at the local church.

One of the fundamental principles of adult education is that learning is for the whole person, including the spiritual, physical, intellectual, and emotional dimensions of ourselves (Zinn, 1997). Zinn also pointed out that adult education practitioners who focus on the religious education of adults generally do their teaching through church programs such as Bible study groups, and Sunday schools, providing learning opportunities that support spiritual growth, renewal, and commitment among adults to live what they believe and value in their innermost beings. Spirituality also encompasses one's relationship to others based upon his or her relationship to God.

One of the primary purposes of church recreation is to serve as a ministry tool to those people who otherwise would not feel comfortable in a traditional church setting. Even though people have no particular faith affiliation, many of them are still concerned with spirituality in their lives. However, the reasons that people might choose not to attend church are many. Hezner (2001) performed a study regarding people who had no church affiliation, whom he labeled the unchurched, but who attended a regular Bible study class. He concluded that two of the reasons the unchurched feel uncomfortable in a church setting is because 1) they are afraid that there may be a hidden motive in their being invited to church, and 2) they are afraid that they will be judged for their current views on life issues or their current lifestyle. However, among the spirituality characteristics being sought by the unchurched, they want to feel that they are cared for, they want some clarification on the role of the church in their lives, and they seek Biblical truths that, when applied, will make a difference in their lives (Hezner, 2001). A properly programmed recreation ministry in the church can meet the physical, social, and, ultimately, spiritual needs of the unchurched. As part of the teaching ministry of the

church, it can educate on matters of spirituality in a non-threatening, non-judgmental, and caring manner while people participate in leisure activities. Evangelism is a byproduct of spirituality. For Christians, evangelism, as related to spirituality, is manifested in two ways: the individual salvation experience and one's involvement in evangelism. The salvation experience is personal, and denotes acknowledging Jesus Christ as the son of God and accepting Him as Lord and Savior of one's life, a concept that evangelicals refer to as being saved. Evangelism, on the other hand, is the act of sharing one's faith with others, both in words and through actions, attempting to influence them to enter into a similar relationship with God through Jesus Christ (Fish, 1988). The purpose of evangelism is to reconcile people to God (Rainer, 1989).

In most evangelical churches, there are two main types of evangelism: proclamation and educational. Traditionally, proclamation evangelism has meant preaching. Educational evangelism includes all the other programs of the church and falls under the auspices of the religious education ministry of the church. Educational evangelism is an effort to get the good news of Jesus Christ to people by involving them in some aspect of the church's educational ministry programming, such as Sunday school (Fish, 1966), discipleship training, mission organizations, or church recreation. The church's mandate for this educational evangelism is found in the scripture passage known as the Great Commission:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey

everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:18 – 20 New International Version)

Research Questions

The main research question of this study is this: based on the knowledge of the benefits of regular physical activity and proper nutrition for senior adults, what is the educational and activity programming response of church recreation ministries for senior adults? To address this issue, three specific sub-questions will be investigated:

- 1) What educational programming regarding successful aging is being offered for senior adults by Texas Baptist church recreation ministries? The term “successful aging” has been defined as (a) low probability of disease and disease-related disability; (b) high cognitive and physical functional capacity; (c) active engagement with life (Rowe & Kahn, 1997).
- 2) What activities are being offered for the senior adults by church recreation ministries?
- 3) In those church recreation ministries that are programming specifically for the senior adults, how is participation affecting participants in the areas of spirituality, health, wellness, and fitness?

Significance of the Study

Determining the proper recreation programming model to address the needs of senior adults adequately can have a tremendous impact on churches as they seek to minister to the whole person, not just the spiritual dimension. As part of the education ministry of the church, recreation programming provides an opportunity to educate older adults about lifestyle choices that can lead to better health, less illness, and longer life,

and is of paramount importance. At the same time, as people understand the importance of these options, they are more highly motivated to incorporate these healthy lifestyle choices into their daily lives. By appealing to the spiritual dimension of wellness and successful aging, there is no institution better poised to deliver these educational services to this rapidly expanding portion of our adult population. It is also important for churches to formulate new methods of reaching out to the senior adults who have no church affiliation. Further, it is important to senior adults to learn how to make prudent and appropriate choices in the areas of physical activity, nutrition, and to have a positive attitude, a crucial factor in spirituality. It is also important to the field of adult education in that while this education may be occurring inside the church, it still constitutes adult education. This study will, therefore, have both theoretical and practical significance for the church recreation professional, the education ministry of the church, the field of adult education, and the field of church recreation, regardless of denominational affiliation. It is anticipated that the results and conclusions of this study will establish a benchmark for how church recreation ministries can program for senior adults and their ability to age successfully.

Background to the Study

While serving a local church as a recreation minister in the early 1990's, I was regularly troubled by the lack of programming for senior adults. It was evident that this particular group of adults was the largest and fastest growing age group in the church, but the majority of the adult recreation programming was for the young and median adults, or those between "young" and "senior" adults. Programming for the senior adults was primarily in the areas of activities that required no physical exertion, such as game nights,

and taking fun trips. Both were good, wholesome activities that attracted many participants, but such programming only provided fellowship and social opportunities to this important group of church members. There was no programming for them that required physical activity, and the only educational programs for the senior adults were those offered through the main education ministry of the church. Surprisingly, this was about the same time that McLean and Hawkins (as cited in Epstein & Kelly, 1992), were putting forth the idea that the public recreation industry must transform the senior citizens' center concept from "one of card games, dances, bingo, and crafts," (p. 3) to an organizational model that provides "activities that relate directly to life satisfaction and the maintenance of healthy intellectual, social, and physical functioning" (p. 3).

Also, about that time, results of studies were beginning to surface revealing that, through improvements in diet, physical activity, and social engagement, senior adults have the ability to delay the aging process. The genesis of this movement was a 1984 commission by the John D. and Catherine MacArthur Foundation for a multi-disciplinary group of scholars to conduct long-term research projects whose primary purposes were to improve the physical and mental abilities of older Americans (Rowe & Kahn, 1999). Entitled *The MacArthur Foundation Study of Successful Aging*, the project was really a "coherent set of dozens of individual research projects," (Rowe & Kahn, 1999, p. xii), that gave rise to the first scholarly and scientific-based research compilation aimed at a concept that became known as successful aging, a term which served as the title to their book (Rowe & Kahn, 1999). The findings from these studies opened up an entirely new programming dimension for all leisure service providers, including the church recreation ministry.

Thus, based on this newly emerging area of study, birthed by the MacArthur Foundation, and honed, in its infancy, by Rowe and Kahn, there are two distinct purposes to this study. The first is to examine existing programming for senior adults by Texas Baptist church recreation ministries in order to identify specific programs, if any, being offered to this particular group of adults, and to determine if the programs are appropriately contributing to the participants' successful aging. The second aim is to ascertain and evaluate the effectiveness of these programs from the perspective of Rowe and Kahn's theory of successful aging. More simply, what programs are they doing for senior adults, and are those programs working? Once those two objectives are attained, general recommendations can then be formulated and proffered so that more churches can do more to enable and assist their senior adults to live longer, healthier lives.

Delimitations of the Study

For the initial purposes of this study, the target population from which data will be drawn will be limited to those Texas Baptist churches which have an organized recreation ministry as part of their church's ministry programming, primarily because this is the area with which I have the most familiarity, and will serve as an appropriate starting point.

Definitions

Church Recreation Ministry: Activity that takes place during leisure time with the stated purpose or intention of helping people become aware of their need for a relationship with God, his daily role in their lives, and their place in his kingdom work (Garner, 2003).

- 1) Church Recreation Programming: Relying on Rossman (1991), Stutz (2009) defines a recreation or sports program as "a designed opportunity for a leisure

experience to occur. A program, then, is the track that guides the participant toward the leisure experience, not the experience itself” (p. 110). Church recreation programming, therefore, is any such designed opportunity for leisure presented or sponsored by a church. For both the purposes of this study as well as real life events, this leisure program can take the form of an activity such as an exercise class or going for a walk, but it may also take the form of an educational experience, such as a class on healthy food preparation.

- 2) Leisure: Leisure has many forms, and hence, a variety of possible definitions. Leisure refers to time, free from work and free from fulfilling the basic obligations and necessities of life, available for the pursuits freely decided upon by the person (Maxwell & Sessoms, 1956). Kelly (1982) refers to leisure as an “activity chosen in relative freedom for its qualities of satisfaction” (p. 7). Dahl (1972) speaks of leisure as something “to be understood in the quality of leisure-time experience; that is in the nature of the self-fulfilling values achieved by an individual as he uses his leisure time, as he chooses what he does, and attains relaxation from tension, pleasure, and creativity . . .” (p. 73). Earlier, Miller and Robinson (1963) defined leisure as “a state of being in which activity is performed for its own sake or as its own end” (p. 6). Bradley (2003) opines that leisure is defined by the characteristics of “freedom of choice and intrinsic satisfaction” (p. 14). Garner (2003) contributes that leisure can be viewed in the context of time, activity, a state of mind, social status or holistic process. Citing Rossman and Schlatter (2003), Stutz (2008) furthers the discussion by identifying key attributes of leisure as perceived freedom of choice within the activity,

intrinsic satisfaction or motivation gained from participation, and engagement in and interpretation of the activity.

- 3) Ministry: Ministry is the act or process of helping people understand their relationship with God, His daily role in their lives, and their need to move from where they are to where they need to be in a right relationship to him (Garner, 2003).
- 4) Recreation: “Recreation refers to the apparent purpose of leisure activity, a therapeutic process of repairing the wear and tear resulting from work and its stresses. By recreating, a person is able to restore, to re-establish, to return to an original or ideal state,” (Ernce, 1987, p. 13).
- 5) Senior Adult: This term, which is used interchangeably with “older adults” both here and in the pertinent literature, has no set definition. Each faith, denomination, and church is free to assign its own age parameters to the term “senior adult.” The American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association define older adults as being men and women who are 65 years of age, or older (Nelson, et al., 2007). However, after consultation with my dissertation committee chair, we agreed to use the age of 62, the earliest age at which a person may begin drawing retirement benefits from the United States Social Security Administration (Social Security Administration, 2011), as the definition of senior adult, for the purposes of this study.
- 6) Successful Aging: Rowe and Kahn (1997) define successful aging as being comprised of three components: (a) low probability of disease and disease-related

disability; (b) high cognitive and physical functional capacity; (c) active engagement with life.

CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A comprehensive review of published research uncovered a litany of findings on the independent sub-categories of this study: church recreation and its ministry programming, the positive effects of regular physical exercise, proper diet and nutrition, and attitude, and the education and learning styles of senior adults. Nonetheless, despite this relatively robust literature no published research on the specific topic of church recreation ministry programming and the successful aging of senior adults was found. This review, therefore, will examine and integrate the research in these major areas. Although the target churches of this study are Baptist churches located in Texas, the information in this chapter references recreation ministry offerings of other faiths, to illustrate that using recreation in the context of the church is neither new nor limited to a certain faith or denomination.

The Relationship of Adult Education and Religious Education

Several individual ministries of the church comprise the broad spectrum of religious education. These are considered base programs or foundational ministries of the normal church structure and include: Bible teaching and learning, discipleship training, mission education, and music (Tidwell, 1996). Additionally, within the context of religious education, there are ministries of support and enrichment, such as family ministry, ministries of stewardship, media library, administrative services, and recreation. In serving to enrich and support a church's ministries, recreation can be a tool for teaching and an avenue to abundant living as it serves to support and enrich a church's ministries (Orr, 1987).

Teaching is an essential function within the Christian community, “just as metabolic processes are vital to a living organism,” (Coleman, 1984, p. 148). The hoped-for outcomes of a church’s religious education program should be equipping the participants to carry out the work of Christ and his church more effectively (Blanke, 2001). Martin Luther saw education as a “crucial instrument in orienting the Christian toward service in the world,” (Harran, 1997, p. 270).

Sipe (2001) suggests that the religious education program of a church has an andragogical nature, and, as such, demands an andragogical approach (Sipe, 2001). The principles of andragogy, a term first coined by Knowles (1978), assume “the learner is increasingly moving toward self-direction, has a rich experiential basis for learning which serves as a resource for self and others, wants to learn that which will help in the performance of life tasks and in solving problems, and is motivated by internal incentives and curiosity” (p. 89). In suggesting that religious education embraces the principles of andragogy, Sipe states, “Being motivated by a topic that grabs their attention or by an activity they believe will help them meet a personal goal, they [adults] are assuming responsibility for their own learning, which is the most effective learning” (p. 88).

The andragogical model is based on six assumptions that differ from the pedagogical model. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) describe these six assumptions as:

1. “The need to know. Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it.
2. The learners’ self-concept. Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives” (p. 63).

3. “The role of the learners’ experiences. Adults come into an educational activity with both a greater volume and a different quality of experience from that of other learners” (p. 64).
4. “Readiness to learn. Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real-life situations” (p. 65).
5. “Orientation to learning. Adults learn new knowledge, understandings, skills, values, and attitudes most effectively when they are presented in the context of application to real-life situations” (p. 66).
6. “Motivation. The most potent motivators are internal pressures, like the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like” (p.67).

Long before Knowles’ theories began taking root, however, Eduard Lindeman, in 1926, was espousing a similar theory. In his point of view, however, there were five key assumptions about adult learners (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011):

- Adults are motivated to learn as they experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy;
- Adults’ orientation to learning is life-centered;
- Experience is the richest source for adults’ learning;
- Adults have a deep need to be self-directing;
- Individual differences among people increase with age.

The application is that the recognized theories of adult education must be utilized in creating awareness among senior adults of their need to make the necessary lifestyle

changes, especially in the areas of exercise, diet, and nutrition. Otherwise, they might be reluctant to give credence to such urgings.

According to Houle (1961), the majority of senior adults participating in any facet of the religious education ministry of the church, and, more specifically, the recreation ministry, fall into one of the three categories of adult learners: the goal-oriented learner, the activity-oriented learner, and the learner-oriented learner. The effective recreation minister should program in a way that is enticing to all three groups.

One of the problems with adult religious education programs is that, traditionally, most of the thinking and reflection on this subject has been performed by theologians from a theological perspective (McKenzie, 1982), instead of from the perspective of education. In that regard, McKenzie agrees with Sipe (2001) that andragogy serves as a “useful conceptual tool for the analysis of adult education, and as a source concept from which religious education leaders can derive guiding principles for religious program development and instructional processes” (1982, p. 124). McKenzie further states, “the development of the theoretical foundations of adult religious education and guidelines for the practice of adult religious education is properly the work of professionals who are thoroughly grounded in the systematic study of education” (p. 15), not the theological sciences. The major objective of adult religious education is to be the enabling of “adults to actualize their potentialities to the end that they become more fully liberated as individuals and more fully prepared to participate in bettering the life of the communities to which they belong,” (McKenzie, 1977, p. 13).

Knowles and Lindeman are not the only secular theoreticians credited with contributing to adult religious education. Other humanistic theories and theoreticians

have also contributed to the field, including Rogers, Maslow, Tough, Mesirow, and Freire (Elias, 1993). Elias furthers this point, “The basic assumptions of humanistic learning theory, which is called experiential learning, are (1) learning requires personal involvement of cognitive and affective aspects of persons, (2) learning should be self-initiated, (3) learning should be pervasive – make an impact on the behavior, attitudes, or personality of the learner, (4) self-evaluation should take place to determine if needs are met, and (5) the essence of learning is the meaning that is incorporated into the person’s total experience” (1993, p. 112).

The relationship between adult education and religious education becomes abundantly clear when we consider that both are primarily concerned with the education of adults.

Leisure and Recreation

Synthesizing the literature, the term leisure means different things to different researchers and theorists, resulting in a variety of ways of viewing the concept of leisure. Even though to most laymen the two terms are synonymous and interchangeable, one of the most striking and basic differences between leisure and recreation is that leisure is an amount of time, a state of freedom, a state of mind, or a social status. Recreation, on the other hand, appears to have a connotation of activity (Mannell & Klieber, 1997). The conclusion, then, is that recreation and leisure are inseparably related though different, and this will be further discussed in ensuing sections.

It is not a new proposition for the church to want to help its members make constructive use of their leisure time. As far back as Aristotle and Plato the true meaning of leisure has been discussed and debated. Aristotle spoke of the life of leisure versus the

life of action, wherein by action, he was referring to activities toward other persons or objects in order to effect some purpose (De Grazia, 1963). The term for leisure further evolved into a state of being in which activity is performed for its own sake or as its own end. In his piece entitled *Politics*, Aristotle said that leisure has intrinsic pleasure, happiness and felicity. Ultimately, Aristotle used the term leisure in two senses: one being available time, and the other being the absence of the necessity of being occupied (De Grazia, 1962).

An alternate position espoused by the Romans, whose thoughts regarding leisure diverged from their Greek counterparts, viewed leisure as the absence of work. In other words, a man is occupied in the affairs of army, commerce, or state, and then he rests and re-creates himself (De Grazia, 1962).

Mannell and Kleiber (1997) identify seven generally accepted ways of defining leisure: a) time; b) activity; c) state of mind; d) anti-utilitarian; e) social status; f) a social instrument; and g) a holistic concept. Further examination reveals that each of these definitions holds implications for senior adults.

Leisure as Time

Time can be divided into three broad categories: existence, subsistence, and discretionary time (Kelly, 1996). For the majority of senior adults in Baptist churches, the time allocated to subsistence is much less than earlier in their lives. The term senior also presents an interesting dilemma as a uniform definition among churches as to when an adult becomes a “senior” appears to be nonexistent. In some churches, senior adults are those over the age of 60, other churches use either 63 or 65. Some churches define their senior adults by retirement status. Whether individuals are retired from full-time

jobs or professions, or whether they may work on a part-time basis, these are individuals who have more discretionary time available. Discretionary time implies that individuals have choice, autonomy, and freedom to exercise their will to experience leisure (Kelly, 1996). Nonetheless, one thing is clear: as people continue to live longer, any definition of senior adults needs to be fluid and flexible.

This concept of leisure as time can be advantageous to the church recreation planner, in that many programs for senior adults may be conducted during the day, allowing the church to dedicate resources and facilities to the older adults during the hours that most others are working.

Leisure as Activity

Leisure can also be seen as an activity (Dumazedier, 1967). From this perspective, leisure can be approached as an activity separate and distinct from the obligatory activities of work, family, and society. Instead, individuals turn to leisure activities for relaxation, diversion, or spontaneous social participation. Further, leisure activities can be classified in terms of the form the activity takes, and activities in terms of their meaning. This focuses attention on the outcomes of the activities (Edginton, Hanson, and Edginton, 1992; Kelly, 1996; MacKay and Crompton, 1988; and Russell, 1996).

Defining leisure in terms of individual activity is appropriate for senior adults. As it pertains to adults, the engagement of life theory refers to the initiation of action that perpetuates current interests and relationships or establishes new ones (Kleiber, 1999). In other words, senior adults are generally inclined to do their utmost to stay alert and empower the aging body to remain actively involved. The greatest impact of activity

involvement comes in doing the activities with others, providing the connectedness that is so important to ego integration, so much so that the activity itself may be largely irrelevant at times.

The theory of engagement parallels the concept of leisure as social instrument, which represents leisure as being viewed as a way of enhancing individual or community life in ways that promote useful ends (Murphy, 1974). Participation in organized group activities such as political action groups, service organizations, or churches is important to quality of later life (Kleiber, 1999). In the United States, more than two-thirds of people over the age of 65 belong to voluntary organizations, and nearly as many go to church at least once per month, with such activities having a positive impact on their quality of life (Cutler & Danigelis, 1999). The platitudes of leisure as promoting stress reduction, health, psychological well-being, human happiness, and enhanced community life, to name a few, are a part of the professional jargon of leisure, and should also be part of the professional jargon of church recreation, which refers to this concept of activity and social instrumentation as fellowship.

Fellowship, in today's churches, is a term that enjoys two separate and distinct meanings. First, churches frequently participate in fellowships, which are a segment of social recreation ministries that occur by age groups or after services to enjoy one another in a social setting. Second, from the Greek word *koinonia*, churches embrace the concept of a common bond or like-mindedness among members, perhaps better described as a community of faith, or group of kindred spirits. The word has been translated to mean fellowship, belonging, communion, partnership, participation, and sharing. Paul used the term to describe the relationship of Christians to one another (Vanderveld, 2005). For the

believer in Jesus Christ, the church, then, should be one of the most appropriate venues for enjoying fellowship with other like-minded individuals, and to participate in wholesome, beneficial activities.

Leisure as a State of Mind

Defining leisure as a state of mind should also have broad implications for the church when ministering to senior adults. Leisure has been considered not only a mental, but also a spiritual attitude, and a condition of the soul (Pieper, 1952). From an experiential perspective, leisure is a mental condition located in the consciousness of the individual, emphasizing what happens in a person's mind as he or she is engaged experientially (Kelly, 1999). Leisure is an entire way of being, an opportunity for building purpose into life, and being capable of providing opportunities for self-expression, self-achievement, self-actualization, and social generativity (Russell, 1996). The emotional benefits, including self-expression, self-achievement, and self-actualization, derived from leisure and recreation have been well chronicled (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Therefore, there are many emotional benefits to be realized from constructive use of one's leisure time and recreational activities. This theory is relevant to the church recreator in that a positive attitude is one of three elements of successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1998), a broad concept of how the senior citizens may delay the aging process. Leisure has also been characterized as a state of being (Manell & Kleiber, 1997), another prominent element of successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1998).

Attitudinal Characteristics and Applicable Theories.

With one description of leisure being that of a state of mind, it bears mentioning four leisure theories and their applicability to an attitude of leisure: generativity, self-efficacy, self-determination, and motion.

One school of thought is that those retired from full-time work have the opportunity, through their leisure, to produce social capital and thus make a contribution to the well-being of their community (Maynard & Kleiber, 2005). Those authors point out that late middle age is a time for generativity, defined by Erikson (1982) as being a concern that one's efforts will have some impact on and value for the generations who will follow, and that one's work and leisure can be creative and productive. Generativity is reflected in the process of creating, maintaining, or providing for those who are to follow. However, the lengthening of the life span has changed the nature of the tasks of the later years. The hope is that after a lifetime of work-compensating diversion, retirees will see new opportunities in and through leisure for meaningful social and community engagement.

The idea of self-efficacy, as it relates to leisure, is based on notions of control and freedom (Bandura, 1977, 1986), and is defined as a person's belief that he or she is capable of specific behaviors required to produce a desired outcome in a given situation. This expectation of personal control underlies the motivation behind many behaviors, including those related to leisure. Self-efficacy judgments influence the degree of effort people expend and their persistence in the face of obstacles or aversive experiences (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997).

The theory of self-determination proposes that people have an intrinsic desire to explore and understand their environment and that this desire is present in the very earliest stages of child development and continues to be important throughout life (Deci & Ryan, 1991).

Aristotle described motion as fulfilling what exists potentially (Russell, 1996). Aristotle's concept of fulfilling potential corresponds with the contemporary definition of self-actualization. Maynard and Kleiber (2005) expanded this idea by theorizing that, "Defining motion as the actualization of a potential leads to the view that it is part of the nature of motion that the potential being actualized has, during movement, not yet lost its potentiality to become fully actual" (p. 477). Activity defined in the Aristotelian/Platonic/Socratic tradition is a process through time by which some potential is brought to actualization at every moment of the process (Maynard & Kleiber, 2005).

Leisure as a Social Instrument

Equally applicable to church recreation is the concept of leisure as a social instrument. The basis of this concept is that leisure can be viewed as a way of enhancing individual or community life in ways that promote useful ends, but it also necessitates examining free time use as having potentially negative or undesirable consequences. Misuse of leisure has been linked to social disruption, poor health practices, and other issues (Pylant, 1959).

Although this concept has been criticized and doubted, it began making a comeback during the end of the twentieth century. With a greater emphasis on defining the social, economic, and other benefits of leisure, the platitudes of leisure as promoting stress reduction, health, psychological well-being, human happiness, enhanced

community life, and others became, again, a part of the professional jargon of leisure (Edginton, De Graef, & Edginton, 1998).

The Role of Play In Leisure

The sixth concept examines the role of play in leisure, a concept that some refer to as the anti-utilitarian concept (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). This sixth concept also bodes well for the church as it ministers to senior adults. This anti-utilitarian concept theorizes that the joy of play for its own sake is universally recognized (Lee, 1925). Play is seen as more than a mere instrument or means, and as a phase of life, has its own justification. This philosophy involves believing and doing what one wants to do rather than doing so in response to outside pressures, and provides an arena for fellowship, spontaneity, authenticity, and creativity. There is a joy, and hence a benefit, to the simple act of playing. Some have criticized this concept, but the positive ramifications for the church recreation programmer are clear: provide a place where people can come and simply play, with no other cares. When one plays merely for the sake of playing, and for the benefits to be derived from the joy of playing, it is still possible for Maslow's (1968) peak experience and Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) flow to be realized. The concept of flow, when viewed through the experiential lens, proposes that the good life is "one that is characterized by complete absorption in what one does." (Nakamuro & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 89).

The peak experience has been described as moments of highest happiness and fulfillment, often achieved through the nature experience, aesthetic perception, creative movement, intellectual insight, organismic experience, athletic pursuit, and the like (Maslow, 1968). Flow, on the other hand, is the experience individuals frequently seek in

their various activities, and that leisure and play activities and settings can be excellent sources of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Three of Nakamuro and Csikszentmihalyi's identified characteristics of flow are germane to this discussion:

- intense and focused concentration on what one is doing in the present moment;
- distortion of temporal experience, or typically a sense that time has passed faster than normal; and,
- experience of the activity as intrinsically rewarding, such that often the end goal is just an excuse for the process. (Nakamuro & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 90).

The recreational and leisure offerings of a well-programmed church recreation ministry would be well-served by providing ample opportunities for participants to experience peak experiences and flow.

Leisure as Social Status

The final concept is leisure as a symbol of social status. Even though, in my opinion, this concept has no real relevance to a church recreation program for senior adults, it does merit a mention. The crux of this theory is that some people will use leisure as a way of claiming or demonstrating social status in society by virtue of the products and services consumed or purchased. This philosophy appears to be counterindicative of a Christ-centered, church recreation ministry where one goal is to treat everyone equally. The hope is that, for example, during a volleyball league, a bank president, a homeless person, and former addict can all enjoy playing together. In Christ, all class distinctions should disappear, in that all Christians are one in Christ, all members of the same body. Col. 3:11 (New International Version).

Constraints to Leisure

Three major types of leisure constraints have been identified by researchers: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Intrapersonal constraints refer to internal psychological conditions such as personality factors, attitudes, or more temporary psychological states such as moods. Interpersonal constraints arise out of interaction with others such as family members, friends, co-workers and neighbors. Structural constraints include such factors as the lack of opportunities or the cost of activities that result from external conditions in the environment (Mannell & Kleiber, 2003).

The figure below illustrates three major categories of constraints that must be negotiated before participation in structured activities can take place.

Figure 1 Hierarchical Constraints Model

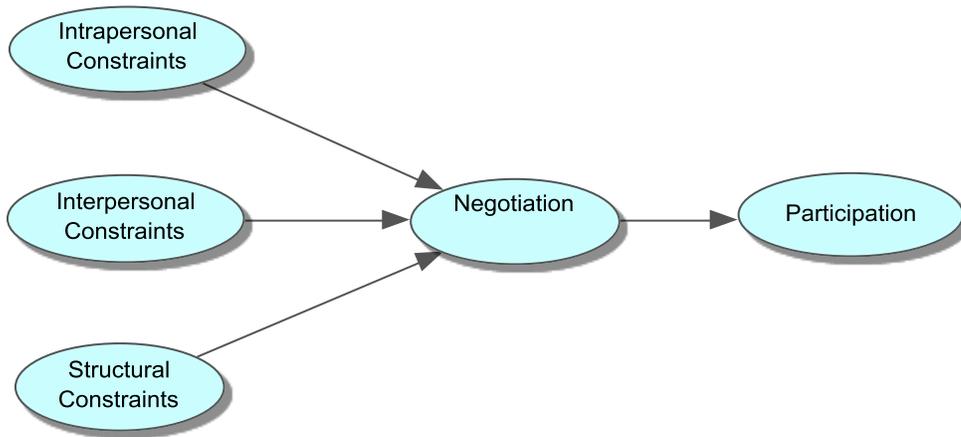


Figure 1. A visual representation of the process of negotiating various constraints that lead to full participation.

It is reasoned that people with intrapersonal constraints, such as negative attitudes toward a leisure activity or low expectations for their ability to successfully participate (i. e. self efficacy), are unlikely to have a preference for the activity or the desire to participate. An example of interpersonal constraints is if an interest in participating is

present, however, participation and enjoyment may be prevented by the lack of appropriate partners or co-participants. Finally, if intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints are absent, structural constraints such as a lack of time, money, or activity accessibility might determine participation (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1993; Mannell & Kleiber, 2003).

It is incumbent upon the church recreation professional to take these constraints into account when programming for senior adults, especially within the realm of successful aging (Rowe & Kahn, 1999). In many cases, the adult learners will be asked to break bad habits, and simultaneously, begin new habits and activities that may seem foreign to them. Each of the constraints is a valid concern and must be addressed and overcome through support of the recreation professional.

There are two leisure related mechanisms to help overcome these constraints. The first, constraint negotiation, refers to the strategies people use to avoid or reduce the impact of the constraints and barriers to leisure participation and enjoyment. Traditional research revealed that the strategies employed to negotiate constraints could be classified into two categories: cognitive strategies and behavioral strategies.

Cognitive strategies are those that relate to the mental or psychological aspects of participation, relating to such emotional factors as aspirations, level of interest, value, analysis of cost vs. benefit, personal fears, and possessing the personal strength to resist the power of constraint, or according to Kleiber, Waller, and Mannell (2011, p. 430), “just get over it.”

Behavioral strategies, on the other hand, deal with concrete, physical factors that serve as participation constraints: time management, learning new skills, transportation, money, required equipment, work, and arrangement of priorities.

Recently, however, studies in this area have included the concept of motivation and the self-determination theory. Kleiber, Waller, and Mannell (2011), while citing Hubbard and Mannell (2001), state that “Being more intrinsically interested in an activity leads potential participants to find ways to overcome constraints and participate in an activity more readily than would the case for someone with moderate intrinsic interest” (p. 431).

Recreation substitutability deals with how people stay active and continue to meet their leisure needs by choosing a new leisure activity or setting when a preferred leisure behavior is no longer possible. An example of this is about a man whose hobby was sailing, but had to find a new activity when his job transferred him to a city nowhere near a body of water large enough on which to sail (Mannell & Kleiber, 2003). The astute recreator will, through his/her relational skills, find out what this man enjoyed most about sailing, then help him find a suitable substitute activity. This particular theory suggests that, when having to choose, people are likely to choose a substitute activity that provides the same or similar “psychological experiences, satisfactions, and benefits” (Kleiber, Waller, & Mannell, 2011, p. 432), as the displaced activity. It has been further theorized that, when faced with this decision, a person’s willingness to substitute a new activity is directly proportionate to the person’s degree of freedom in choosing the substitute activity, a concept that Iso-Ahola (1986) coined as psychological reactance.

This is germane to the church recreator when dealing with senior adults. Due to loss of physical capacity, continued involvement in favorite activities might be difficult. Therefore, the church recreator must be in a position to help that person find a suitable, substitute activity that offers many of the same rewards, allowing for compensation for diminished functioning, but still providing the most enjoyable and satisfying aspects of the old, favorite activity.

Recreation vs. Leisure

Recreation is separate and distinct from leisure. Recreation has been described as an activity that is engaged in during one's free time, is pleasurable, and which has socially redeeming qualities (Kraus, 1990). This description entails three of the ways in which leisure is viewed: a quantity of free time, something which is pleasurable, and something which has a certain social dimension. Recreation involves an individual's participation in specific and voluntary activities. The main thing that sets recreation apart from other leisure activities is that leisure has little or no value orientation. The originating idea for the church was to provide a place where people could engage in wholesome, constructive activities, as a desirable alternative to latch-key children coming home to an empty house, teens running loose in the streets, or adults spending their leisure time pursuing unwholesome endeavors. It was from this basic theory of alternative recreational offerings that the concept of church recreation ministry was born, and Pylant, (1959), took it a step further, suggesting that these alternative recreational offerings should also be engaged in for the glory of God. For many who believe in God, a common saying is, "We serve a big God." As such, because of his omnipotence, and as

the creator of everything, he can use anything to further the work of his kingdom. The constructive and proper use of leisure time and recreational activities are no exception.

Leisure is a concept that has been debated for many, many years, and, as a result of such dialogue and debate, a plethora of theories has been propounded on the subject. This discussion has only scratched the surface of the theoretical dialogue that has taken place since Plato, Aristotle, and others contemplated the meaning of leisure. However, the constructive use of one's down time was discussed much earlier than Aristotle or Plato. In the 10th Century, B. C., Solomon, King of Israel, addressed this subject in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, when he said if a man is lazy, the rafters sag; if his hands are idle, the house leaks, Ecc. 10:18 (New International Version). Later, the King of Israel directed the people to "sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hand be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well," Ecc. 11:6 (New International Version). King Solomon recognized the need for the presence of both work and leisure in a person's life.

One of the great pillars of the purpose of the church is to help individuals become the person God wants them to be. With this in mind, an area of ministry that employs leisure and recreation fits well into the purpose of the church. One of the earmarks of an effective recreation ministry is not only that it fulfills the mandates of the Great Commission of Jesus Christ, Matt. 28:19 – 20 (New International Version), but that it also comports with the current theories on leisure and recreation. The purpose of this discussion has been to blend these two worlds, leisure theory and church recreation ministry, into one, so as to add legitimacy to a ministry which uses recreation to bring people into a love relationship with Him.

Recreation As a Ministry of the Church

Background

“A church that follows the example of Jesus seeks to minister to the whole person by showing concern for the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical welfare of both fellow Christians and the unsaved” (Orr, 1987, 19). Given the redemptive mission of the church, the chief obligation of the church is to lead people into a life of faith over all aspects of their lives, and in so doing, the church would stand against evils that would hinder a life of faith. A substantial part of this obligation is generating worthy use of leisure time (Tull, 1971). Christians most often witness to the community regarding the claims of Christ during periods of leisure, which means that the church must learn to communicate with people in this area of their lives (Boyd, 1967). The idea is that the church would become attractive to non-church attendees, of all ages, by providing the opportunity for recreational activities that promote an environment of warmth, fellowship, and the opportunity to participate in a non-traditional church setting.

Historical Perspective of Church Recreation

The developmental beginnings of the field of church recreation are quite interesting. Groups of Protestants and Catholics agreed to establish Sunday and one weekday evening as times for community oriented religious activities. As leisure time increased, a corresponding increase of non-religious activities soon began to invade this established church schedule, forcing the churches to become leisure service providers. Some churches moved to incorporate recreation into their programs in an effort to hold onto control of what took place during time under their jurisdiction. Youth groups,

summer camps, music, sports and socials were added to the church programs as church leaders took up the challenge of filling and impacting leisure time (Ernce, 1987).

Church recreation is not limited to any one denomination or religious affiliation. In Catholicism, the Catholic Youth Organization (commonly known as CYO) is one of the largest youth group sponsors across the nation, and regularly uses recreation for its participants. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or Mormons, was one of the first religious faiths to affirm the value of recreation inside the church. The Jewish Community Center has utilized education and recreation as unifying forces in Jewish life to develop individual character and leaders for civic responsibilities (Ernce 1987). The Seventh Day Adventist churches have long been participants in the recreation ministry (Thomas, 2007).

Although now somewhat dated, a study was conducted of the recreation ministry in the Southern Baptist churches, and a summary of the statements in the results of that study indicated support for the Southern Baptist Convention's involvement in providing recreational activities (Mobley, 1965). The study revealed that there was agreement among those surveyed that leisure promoted developmental time for the human spirit, recreation was essential to well-rounded development, and that the church should incorporate it into its theological and philosophical thinking. Survey participants believed that recreation supported joy and happiness, characteristics of the abundant life promised by Jesus to believers in John 10:10 (New International Version). Also, since the desire for wholeness is an innate human yearning, the church should provide guidance for the proper use of leisure to assist man in pursuit. In light of the common ideological predisposition to support the goal of self-realization, religion and recreation are not in

conflict with each other. Instead, recreation can provide an enticement to attract people to the church. Recreation was perceived as good or bad depending on whether or not it promoted the honor and glory of God and spiritual growth in the participants (Ernce, 1987; Mobley, 1965).

Immediately before Jesus ascended back into Heaven, in an emotional final meeting with his disciples, Jesus told them, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you,” Matthew 28:18 – 20 (New International Version). This passage, commonly referred to as The Great Commission, is God’s growth plan for every Christian and every church. A recreation ministry is one of the church’s ministries that reach out with intentionality to people of the twenty-first century and can help a church in this growth plan (Garner, 2003). A recreation ministry is another way of fulfilling that commission (Bradley, 2003), and can add to the spirituality of people as readily as any other area of a church’s ministry. The Great Commission defines God’s mission for the church, the ministries of the church, including recreation and sports ministry, and for individual believers. Without the driving force of The Great Commission, any attempt at recreation ministry will be little more than trying out new techniques, and will lead that particular part of the church to closely resemble a local YMCA.

The first book written on recreation ministry for Southern Baptists was *A Handbook for Christian Recreation Leaders* by T. B. Maston. He proposed several basic concepts and reasons for recreation in the church, and of the six listed reasons, number five was that the participants should be “recreated physically, mentally, and spiritually”

(Maston, 1937, p. 60). In 1937, Dr. Maston probably never envisioned that seventy years later, churches would be facing a golden opportunity to not only minister to, but to help extend the life expectancy of, the church's burgeoning population of senior adults.

However, as early as 1959, this phenomenon related to the burgeoning population of older adults was being written about. Pylant (1959) said, "Because of the way the economic world is geared, most of these people are retiring at the age of sixty-five. Because of scientific and medical discoveries they have prospects of nearly two decades of living ahead of them. They can do productive work and still enjoy life at retirement time" (p. 116). Factors such as no responsibilities, decrease in income, loneliness, physical changes, and loss of authority and prestige give senior adults a feeling of "being laid on a shelf" (Pylant, 1959, p. 118). There is no better place than a recreation ministry "to meet the basic needs of older people: to feel needed and wanted, to be loved and understood, to find new interests, to have a sense of belonging, to be given a chance to be of service somewhere, and to have opportunities to laugh and share happy experiences with friends" (Pylant, 1959, p. 119). If she were writing today, she would probably add: engage in learning and physical activities that will enhance, extend, and, perhaps, save their lives.

Contrasting Maston's view of recreation ministry, Garner (2003) states, "As recreation and sports ministry matured, the intent has changed. The days of rolling out a basketball and having pickup games are over. Programming is the key, is done with the intention of sharing the gospel, and can be done effectively with or without a facility. Success does not mean having a facility to run. Recreation and sports ministries can be done without a facility. No longer are churches satisfied with being activity driven. More

and more, churches are seeking to be intentional in their recreation and sports ministries,” (p. 8). The intentionality of the ministry is in three distinct realms (1) reaching people by sharing the gospel with them at every opportunity, (2) disciplining believers toward Christian maturity, and (3) developing a multiplication of ministering Christians by providing new and different avenues for ministry participation (Garner, 2003).

Church Recreation as a Ministry

The starting point for any ministry-based program in the church is The Bible. There has been much published on the subject of recreation as a ministry of the church. The first leader of the Recreation Department of the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board, Agnes Pylant, based her recreation philosophy on I Corinthians 10:31 (New International Version), in which the Apostle Paul admonished the members of the church at Corinth, saying, “so whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of the Lord” (Pylant, 1959, p. 9). It was her philosophy that recreation as understood, planned, and promoted by churches should deepen spiritual roots, strengthen Christian character, enrich Christian personality, and bear witness to the joys of Christian living, all because recreation ministry should have “for the glory of God” at its center (Pylant, 1959, 10).

There are eight reasons why a church should employ a recreation and sports ministry: (a) recreation and sports events are gathering places for people, (b) recreation and sports events bridge cultural and racial barriers, building fellowship, (c) recreation and sports ministry offers ways for Christians to live out their abilities, interests, talents, and spiritual giftedness, (d) recreation and sports ministry offers an avenue to gain visibility in the community, (e) recreation and sports ministry offers a way to abundant

balanced life, (f) recreation and sports ministry provides a catalyst for outreach, (g) recreation and sports ministry provides an environment for fellowship, and (h) recreation and sports ministry becomes a tool for teaching leadership skills (Garner, 2003, pp. 10 – 14).

Garner sums it up best when he says “Recreation and sports ministry, through its strategies and methodologies, addresses three stages of spiritual transformation in the life of a believer (a) making disciples represents the efforts to win the lost, (b) maturing believers represents the efforts to disciple new believers and members, and (c) multiplying ministries represents providing opportunities for service and missions,” (Garner, 2003, p. 19).

Ministry Opportunities to Enhance the Health and Wellness of Senior Adults

We are an aging society. “Fueled by the recognition of the social, economic, and health care consequences of the unprecedented aging of America’s population,” the MacArthur Foundation commissioned its study. This led to Rowe and Kahn’s landmark work on successful aging, and began the avalanche of opinions, facts, and conjectures about the aging of the world’s population. Seemingly every day, some new and interesting statistics are being released concerning the exponential proliferation of the senior adult population (Rowe & Kahn, 1999, p. xi).

It is anticipated that the world’s 65-and-older population will triple by mid-century to one in six people. The number of senior citizens has already jumped 23 percent since 2000 to 516 million, according to census estimates recently released. That’s more than double the growth rate for the general population (Yen, 2009). Seniors make up almost eight percent of the world’s 6.8 billion people. In the United States, seniors

comprise 13 percent of the population, a figure that is estimated to double by mid-century, making this particular group of adults 88.5 million strong.

Research trends regarding population revealed that, for the period of 2005 – 2007, 17.1% of the population of the United States was age 60 and over (U. S. Census Bureau, 2009), and that the United States had an estimated 36 million adults aged 65 or older. In examining the statistics surrounding only the younger portion of the senior adult ranks, the Baby Boomer generation, the numbers are as equally revealing. In 2008 in the United States there were 78 million “boomers,” or those people born between 1946 and 1964, and they comprised 26% of the adult population. By 2020, the number of people aged 60 to 74 will expand by 66%, or more than 20 million (LifeWay, 2008). Because of the unparalleled growth of this particular segment of the population, churches are finding extraordinary opportunities to meet the needs of an aging population (Maxwell, 1998). One of the primary reasons being, as older adults begin dropping memberships in other organizations due to their age and declining ability for involvement, the one membership most frequently retained is that in the church. With wellness, health, and longevity occupying so much of the adult leisure time today, especially among the senior adults, recreation ministries, like public leisure providers, are facing a new and refreshing challenge to engage the older adults in meaningful physical activity (Maxwell, 1998).

Since Rowe and Kahn’s (1999) groundbreaking work on this subject, the past 15 years have witnessed an outpouring of research and published literature in this area. Because of the vast amount of research, “there is an acceptance by the scientific community that maintaining a physically active lifestyle in later life has an important role to play in helping people maintain independence and good quality of life. Furthermore,

engaging in a physically active lifestyle is a plausible way to address the relationship between illness and a sedentary existence,” (Phoenix & Grant, 2009, p. 362).

The church is in a position to play a pivotal role to meet this challenge. Research has found religion to be one social factor that affects how older adults utilize preventive services. Because religious beliefs and activities can influence individual lifestyles, worldviews, and motivations, it is possible that religion has an effect on behaviors involving health promotion and disease prevention. In fact, research has shown religion to have a positive influence regarding awareness of other health behaviors such as smoking, drinking, drug use, and diet, as well as with general health care. It is reasonable to assume, then, that religion may also be associated with preventive services (Benjamins, 2005). It is this philosophy that led the recreation ministry department of the Seventh Day Adventist church, a denomination well-known for its promotion of a healthy lifestyle, to emphasize the importance of the inter-connectedness between the elements of the Body-Mind-Spirit triad (Thomas, 2007). Churches with recreation ministries would be remiss by either overlooking or ignoring the current opportunities for improving the aging process of senior adults. Pylant (1959) said that there is nothing “sadder than a church in the midst of a changing, challenging world unable to meet the challenge because it is not alert to the times and its tools are too antiquated and dull to be effective” (p. 7).

Jackson (2003) made a similar finding when she wrote, “Churches have unique and growing opportunities to offer leisure services that can meet the needs of all ages of senior adults. Some of these needs are: (1) to be accepted by others; (2) to feel that they belong to a group; (3) to be recognized as individuals of worth; (4) to feel that they are

contributing from their life experiences; (5) to have opportunities of growth in mind, body, emotion, and spirit” (pp. 203 -204).

Subsequent to Rowe and Kahn’s (1999) introduction of the three tiered concept of successful aging, a group of researchers added a fourth conceptual component to the mix; positive spirituality (Crowther, Parker, Achenbaum, Larimore, & Koenig, 2002).

Drawing distinctions between spirituality and religion, they defined positive spirituality as a process that involves “developing an internalized personal relation with the sacred or transcendent that is not bound by race, ethnicity, economics, or class and promotes the wellness and welfare of self and others” (p. 614), a concept that draws conceptually from both religion and spirituality. It is further suggested that this concept, when integrated with the three prongs of successful aging, will enhance the percentage of senior adults who age successfully, because positive spirituality “fosters active engagement in life, through religious and/or community activities, prayer, meditation, and other practices” (p. 615). Crowther, et al. (2002) cite numerous other studies also verifying links between spiritual/religious activities and the reduction in disability and disease.

Rowe and Kahn’s Concept of Successful Aging

Senior Adults Need to Get Moving

Under the auspices of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2001), Rowe and Kahn launched their study into the concept of successful aging. Their findings underscore the crucial role that regular physical activity plays in reducing the risk of dying prematurely, developing diabetes, high blood pressure or colon cancer, helping to control weight and maintaining healthy bones and muscles. In addition, physical activity improves the effect of cholesterol on cardiovascular health by lowering LDL and

increasing HDL, and strength training helps older adults maintain and improve their balance, which will help prevent falls and resulting injuries (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2001). Additional research has also produced substantial evidence that physical activity increases cardiovascular fitness, flexibility, muscle strength, and endurance. These are all important to senior adults to maintain a sense of independence, enjoyment of movement, and to accomplish activities of daily living (Marinelli & Plummer, 1999; Grant & Kluge, 2007). The benefits of delaying the onset of disease are very substantial, and problems in old age such as heart disease and cancer are often subject to delay, as well as prevention. Since older adults will commonly have many simultaneous life-threatening conditions, delay in the emergence of a single disease, such as cancer, may also delay or reduce the risk of other life-threatening diseases (Rowe & Kahn, 1999). In their assessment of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's research, The American College of Sports Medicine concluded that because of their low functional status and high incidence of chronic disease, no segment of the population can benefit more from exercise than the elderly, due to the strong relationship between physical activity involvement and prevention of most chronic diseases (Baker, Meisner, Logan, Kungl, & Weir, 2009).

Based upon research (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2008; Garber, et al. 2011), there is also substantial evidence that physical activity reduces cardiovascular risk and obesity, lowers cholesterol and low-density lipoproteins, slows the decline in bone mineral density, increases bone density, reduces the risk of falls and fractures, and makes people feel good. Earlier studies have suggested that older people can benefit the most from regular physical activity because they are more at risk for the

health problems that can be prevented by physical activity, and because physical activity can improve overall functioning (Marshall & Altpeter, 2005). It is evident that age-related changes to the cardiovascular system can be reversed by increasing levels of physical activity, and that endurance training is associated with positive modifications of the major risk factors for cardiovascular disease (Taylor et al., 2004).

Examining this phenomenon from a different angle, Kruger, Ham, and Sankar (2008) found that coronary heart disease, stroke, and diabetes are associated with leisure-time inactivity among older adults. Based on the findings of a study by Tudor-Locke, Bell, & Myers (2000), they further proposed that since regular physical activity has been shown to improve blood lipid profiles, body composition, and glycemic control, it is important to encourage senior adults to become more physically active. Physical activity helps in keeping a constant, healthy body weight and reduces obesity (Gregg, Cauley, et al., 2003), has positive effects on cognitive status (Newsome & Kemps, 2005), and protects against depression (Dunn, Trivedi, & O'Neal, 2001).

Physical activity among senior adults has also proven to be successful in fighting diseases that normally beset this age group: cardiovascular disease (Berlin, & Colditz, 1990; Wannemethee, & Shaper, 2002; Hillsdon, Thorogood, & Foster, 2005), osteoporosis (Dalsky, 1989), coronary hypertension and diabetes (Haapanen, Miilunpalo, Vuori, Oja, & Pasanen, 1997), and breast cancer, colorectal cancer, along with other cancers (Schnohr, Gronback, Petersen, Hein, & Sorenson, 2005; Thune, Brenn, Lund, & Gaard, 1997; Thune, & Lund, 1996). It also helps in lowering blood pressure (Halbert, et al., 1997).

There is excitement about research on physical activity and its effects on diabetes because there is also credible research linking both borderline and Type 2 diabetes to dementia and Alzheimer's disease. "Diabetes was found to be associated with an increased risk of subsequent dementia and vascular dementia, independently of other vascular diseases, and marginally with Alzheimer's disease in this population. We are now able to expand our previous findings by showing that borderline diabetes is also associated with Alzheimer's disease," (Xu, Qui, Winblad, & Fratiglioni, 2007, p. 214.)

Recent research also reveals a mental aspect of regular physical activity. The senior citizen who swims, jogs, plays tennis or participates in some type of regular exercise program is likely to be better prepared to respond to situations requiring quick thinking than a peer who logs too much time in the recliner (Hillman, McCauley, & Kramer, 2002). Increased levels of physical activity have positive effects on the cognitive functioning of older adults.

As early as 1994, research revealed that almost 85% of older adults suffer from at least one chronic degenerative disease, diseases which not only challenge health care resources, but also diminish personal independence and vitality. Exercise along with proper nutrition may delay the clinical manifestations of many of these diseases. Therefore, researchers concluded that increasing physical activity by older adults may result in improved physiologic function (Kendrick, Nelson-Steen, & Scafidi, 1994).

Science is, therefore, giving a gift to the churches, and that gift is a prescription for extending the life, health and longevity of the senior adult population of the church. However, one of the first obstacles facing the church in providing this prescription to the senior adults is motivation. "The National Blueprint for Increasing Physical Activity

notes that despite a wealth of evidence about the benefits of physical activity for midlife and older adults, there has been little success in convincing Americans aged 50 and over to adopt a physically active lifestyle,” (Navarro, Sanz, del Castillo, Izquierdo, & Rodriguez, 2007, p. 241). About one-third of the American population over the age of 50 is sedentary (Sasidharan, Payne, Orsega-Smith, & Godbey, 2006). According to Swan, Friis, & Turner (2008), “Physical activity is a recognized and widely accepted preventive health measure for older adults” (p. 262), and physical activity in older adults has been shown to lower the risk of dementia (Whitmer, et. al, 2008).

Given Rowe and Kahn’s (1997) definition of successful aging consisting of three components: (a) low probability of disease and disease-related disability; (b) high cognitive and physical functional capacity; (c) active engagement with life, it should be clear that participating in regular physical activity will make a positive contribution to each segment.

Senior Adults Should Watch What They Eat

Diet and nutrition also factor in to Rowe and Kahn’s (1998) concept of successful aging.

There were 506 million people in the world older than 65 years in 2008, and by 2040, that number will increase to 1.4 billion. In the United States, alone, by 2030, there will be 72 million people, or 20% of the population, over 65 years old (Depp, Vahia, & Jeste, 2010). The largest percentage increase in adult obesity has been seen among adults over the age of 60. Being obese or overweight has been associated with hypertension, hyperlipidemia, diabetes, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, cardiovascular disease, and some forms of cancer (Goldberg & King, 2007). Bordone and Guarente (2005) state, “In

humans, it is clear that chronic high calorie intake over time is a risk factor in cardiovascular disease, many types of cancers, type-2 diabetes and stroke (p. 298).

Rowe and Kahn articulate three primary reasons why older adults need fewer calories: loss of muscle mass over time, one's basal metabolism rate dropping by 10 percent by the age of 75 years, and older adults simply tend to be less active. In summarizing, Rowe and Kahn contend, "This means that you either have to eat less to maintain your weight or exercise more so you can consume the calories you're used to having" (1998, p.111). This position has also birthed much research and published literature. Goldberg and King (2007) phrased it like this: "Given the deleterious consequences associated with obesity, many of the ill effects could be prevented with efforts to maintain a healthy weight" (p. 146), with their recommendation suggesting a slow weight loss, one to two pounds per week, "through a combination of decreased caloric intake and increasing physical activity" (p. 155), which can be achieved by creating an energy deficit of 500 to 1000 calories per day. Citing a study by the National Institutes of Health, Goldberg and King (2007) also contend "physical activity combined with positive dietary changes produces greater weight loss than diet does alone (p. 157). The recommended activity level for older adults is 40 to 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous intensity physical activity (Goldberg & King, 2007).

Additional studies have been performed that concur with Rowe and Kahn's findings in this particular area. It has been found that calorie restriction, or CR, alters metabolism and insulin sensitivity, improves blood pressure, cholesterol profiles, body mass index, and triglycerides, and can increase one's lifespan 30% to 40%. Conversely,

obesity and high calorie diets may increase the risk of dementia (Depp, Vahia, & Jeste, 2010).

Another study was conducted on adults in Osaka, Japan, and the findings suggest that a CR diet contributes positively to healthy aging, longevity, and significant improvement in cognition. Conversely, it was shown that obesity contributes to the increase of risk for age-related cognitive decline (Witte, Fobker, Gellner, Knecht, & Floel, 2009). A high CR diet has been linked to the accumulation of central obesity, or the abdominal distribution of body fat. Central obesity, in turn, has been linked as a risk factor for type 2 diabetes, insulin resistance, coronary heart disease, stroke, and increases the risk of dementia, Alzheimer disease, and neurodegenerative changes (Whitmer, et. al, 2008).

Another study revealed that a 20% CR diet has been found to significantly reduce body weight, blood pressure, blood cholesterol, and blood sugar, all prominent risk factors for cardiovascular disease and diabetes (Bordone & Guarente, 2005; Everitt & Le Couteur, 2007), and for hypertension, hyperlipidemia, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, and cancer of the breast, colon, endometrium, kidney, and esophagus (Goldberg & King, 2007), leading Masoro (2005) to declare, “CR delays the onset and/or slows the progression of most age-associated diseases, including neoplastic diseases, degenerative diseases, and immune diseases,” (p. 914).

These studies reveal clear and convincing evidence of the significant health-related benefits to achieving and maintaining an appropriate body weight, and that two of the best tools to accomplish that are regular physical activity and eating a reduced calorie diet. This, too, contributes greatly to the goal of successful aging.

Senior Adults Should Stay Engaged with Life

Continued engagement with life and social connectedness. If Rowe and Kahn's (1998) model of successful aging could be described as a three-legged stool, the third leg, or component, of the model would be what they refer to as "continuing engagement with life," (p. 45), also described as social connectedness.

The basis of this idea is that human beings are not meant to live solitary lives, a concept originally seen in the creation account in the book of Genesis. According to scripture, God had finished creating the first man, or Adam, and upon discovering Adam's loneliness, God said, "It is not good for man to be alone," Genesis 1:1 (New International Version). Touching, talking, and relating to others is essential to one's well-being, and one of the tasks of successful agers is to "discover and rediscover relationships and activities that provide closeness and meaningfulness" (Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p. 46)

Rowe and Kahn (1998) described this concept:

. . . the fact is we need continued contact with others, and the lack of such social relations is damaging. Loneliness breeds both illness and early death. And as a rule, people whose connections with others are relatively strong – through family (including marriage), friendships, and organizational memberships – live longer. And for people whose relationships to others are fewer and weaker, the risk of death is two to four times as great, irrespective of age and other factors, such as race, socioeconomic status, physical health, smoking, use of alcohol, physical activity, obesity, and use of the health services. (p. 156)

The authors further described this supportive behavior as being a combination of two broad and distinct categories: socio-emotional and instrumental. They describe socio-emotional support as including "expressions of affection, respect, and esteem" (Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p. 47), and instrumental support as acts of direct assistance, further described as actual physical actions given in the form of assistance to another.

The description of the latter leads Rowe and Kahn into their second phase of continuing engagement with life, a concept they refer to as continuing productive activity, which they define as “all activities, paid or unpaid, that create goods or services of value” (p. 47).

Two separate studies, by Duay and Bryan (2006), and by Uchino (2006) confirmed Rowe and Kahn’s definition of continuing productive activity. Based upon the responses from those interviewed, the studies concluded that positive family relationships, the value of getting involved in social relationships and activities, a sincere commitment to helping others, and being a life-long learner are paramount attributes to successful aging. Duay and Brian summarized the first part of their findings with the following:

To summarize the first theme, successful aging for these participants means maintaining family relationships; engaging in social activities with friends and new acquaintances; helping friends, neighbors, and the community; and connecting with others during the learning process. Thus, aging successfully is not aging alone. To these participants, interacting with others is an important aspect of what it means to be successfully aged. (p. 430).

Can this concept be reconciled with the theory of disengagement? In the early 1960’s, Cumming and Henry announced a new theory of aging called the disengagement theory (Hochschild, 1975). Disengagement is defined as a process of letting go – letting go of a job or profession, letting go of more strenuous forms of exercise, letting go of many family members and old friends, and, ultimately, letting go of life; basically withdrawing from activities and social interaction (Duay & Bryan, 2006). Needless to say, as this theory became influential among gerontologists (Rowe & Kahn, 1998), it generated much research, dialogue, and debate.

Hochschild (1975) described the disengagement theory like this:

Growing old involves a gradual and inevitable mutual withdrawal or disengagement, resulting in decreased interaction between an aging person and others in the social systems he belongs to. In every culture and historical period, the society and individual prepare in advance for the ultimate disengagement of death by an inevitable, gradual and mutually satisfying process of social disengagement prior to death. This is a double withdrawal – of the individual from society and of the society from the individual. (p. 553).

“Fortunately, this theory is much less influential now” (Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p.

46). Based on Rowe and Kahn’s concept, and based upon the research findings that reveal the immense importance of staying engaged and connected with society, disengagement, as a theory of aging, is not a preferable means of aging successfully.

Conclusion

The Robert Wood’s Jones Foundation, and Rowe and Kahn’s (1997) description of the successful aging process were at the forefront of a plethora of research dedicated to the aging process of older adults. Rowe and Kahn’s (1997) definition of successful aging consisting of three components: (a) low probability of disease and disease-related disability; (b) high cognitive and physical functional capacity; and (c) active engagement with life. Subsequent research reveals that engaging in regular physical activity, achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight, and remaining actively engaged with life through positive, constructive relationships and activities are all vital components in striving to reach Rowe and Kahn’s perception of successful aging.

Churches are positioned to provide assistance to senior adults in their efforts to achieve successful aging. More particularly, a church’s recreation ministry, should it so choose, is uniquely able to combine all three of these elements through both activity and educational programming. The questions then become are they, and if so, what, exactly, are they doing?

CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of church recreation ministries in helping senior adults engage in successful aging. Basically, it is the goal of this study to discover current attitudes and trends in church recreation regarding its ministry to senior adults, to discover and highlight what churches are doing, through the context of the recreation ministries, to a) raise awareness among senior adults about the benefits of the lifestyle recommendations associated with Rowe and Kahn's (1998) concept of successful aging, and b) program activities geared to senior adults participation, thereby improving their chances of obtaining the health benefits available through such participation, and, finally, to draw conclusions and make recommendations on what appearance a church recreation ministry to the successful aging of senior adults should take.

Therefore, the main research question of this study is this: based on the knowledge of the benefits of regular physical activity and proper nutrition for senior adults, what is the educational and activity programming response of church recreation ministries for senior adults? To answer that question, three sub-questions will be investigated and answered: 1) What educational programming regarding Rowe and Kahn's concept of successful aging is being offered for senior adults by Southern Baptist church recreation ministries? What educational programming regarding successful aging is being offered for senior adults by Texas Baptist church recreation ministries? The term "successful aging" has been defined as (a) low probability of disease and disease-related

disability; (b) high cognitive and physical functional capacity; (c) active engagement with life (Rowe & Kahn, 1997).

- 2) What activity programming is being offered for the senior adults by Southern Baptist church recreation ministries?
- 3) In those church recreation ministries that are programming specifically for the senior adults, how is participation affecting participants in the areas of spirituality, health, wellness, and fitness?

“Qualitative researchers typically rely on four methods for gathering information: (a) participating in the setting, (b) observing directly, (c) interviewing in depth, and (d) analyzing documents and material culture,” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 97). The qualitative data to address these questions by means of “experiencing, enquiring, and examining,” (Wolcott, 2001, p. 88) will be obtained primarily from four sources: surveys, interviews, field notes, and by direct observation.

Survey Instrument

In any project, to know where one wants to go, it is first necessary to determine where one is. The starting point of this study, therefore, was to discover the current state of affairs in church recreation ministries concerning attitudes and practices for senior adults.

To address the first and second sub questions, an informational survey was created. The survey, attached as Appendix A, was prepared after consultation with current church recreation ministers, recreation leaders from both the national and state conventions, and members of the dissertation committee. Further insight into the composition of the questions in the survey instrument was garnered through informal

discussions with Ministers of Recreation, recreation educators from Baptist supported universities and seminaries, and denominational workers while attending the Southern Baptist Convention's Rec Lab in San Antonio, TX, in the winter of 2009.

Although not designed as a data gathering instrument from which measurable variables can be ascertained and relationships predicted, the data to be garnered from the survey would allow a snapshot of the current state of recreation practice among selected Southern Baptist churches as a basis for crafting recommendations to all churches concerning future programming opportunities in recreation ministry for senior adults.

The benefits of ascertaining an idea of current practices in recreation ministry will be twofold. First, churches will be encouraged and guided in providing an invaluable service to a significant (and growing) portion of their members, an affirmative step that will help churches ensure that their senior adults are provided the opportunity to remain vibrant and active for longer than previously anticipated. Second, senior adults will receive information and training from their church to help them live longer and healthier.

After the survey instrument was designed, and since it was being administered to only Texas Baptist churches, it was piloted to three individuals currently serving as ministers of recreation in Baptist churches in other states. After the return of the survey from these pilots, after considering the accompanying suggestions and construction criticisms, and after further consultation with the survey resource member of my committee, the composition of the survey instrument was finalized (Appendix A).

Sample

For the initial step in determining the sample for the survey, a list of churches and names was obtained from the offices of the Baptist General Convention of Texas in

Dallas, TX. This list specifically identified those Texas Baptist churches having a person, either paid staff member or volunteer, whose duties for the church involve recreation ministry.

Traditionally the more active recreation ministries occur in the larger churches in medium sized communities and greater metropolitan areas. Churches averaging approximately 750 or more in Sunday school, as Sunday school attendance has become the “measuring stick” for Baptist churches, are considered as “large” churches. Utilizing Maxwell’s (2005) purposeful selection process, and wanting to obtain survey responses from a representative cross section of churches, ten to 15 churches in medium sized communities were selected from the list, as well as a similar number of churches from greater metropolitan areas. The term “medium sized communities” represents cities of around 100,000 in population, such as cities like Tyler, Abilene, Midland, Odessa, San Angelo, Wichita Falls, Lubbock, and Amarillo. The greater metropolitan areas included Houston, Dallas-Fort Worth, Austin, San Antonio, and El Paso, plus their suburban cities. The survey was also sent to five churches in towns with populations of 10,000 or less.

After asking for some general demographic information, the survey items inquired in two areas: specific recreation activity programming offerings for senior adults, and specific educational offerings to senior adults regarding lifestyle factors related to successful aging, a term which was defined at the top of the survey instrument.

The designated representative from each selected church was sent an introductory email, advising them of the current project, and requesting their assistance. Each participant had the option of taking the survey via email, or by receiving a hard copy through regular mail, with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope enclosed. The

emails were followed up with some telephone conversations regarding the study. Within seven days of that introductory email, a cover letter and a copy of the survey instrument was dispatched via email or regular mail, with each subject being asked to complete the survey, and return to the researcher within two weeks. Each survey participant was promised anonymity, so there was no procedure in place for tracking, with any degree of specificity, which participants returned the survey through regular mail, nor was there a way to perform further follow-up. Even with this limitation, approximately 80% of the surveys sent out through regular mail were returned completed, guaranteeing responses from a good cross section of churches, both in geographical location, and in size. Based on the information gleaned from the responses to the survey instrument, a general portrait of the current landscape of recreational ministry practices in selected Baptist churches emerged. Given that the survey instrument was for information gathering purposes only, the identity of the responding churches will, as promised to each potential survey participant, remain anonymous.

Case Study

To address the third sub question, individual churches were identified for a case study that employed different data gathering methods. The selected churches were those whose recreation programming for senior adults provide activities that keep them moving, teach them diet and nutrition practices unique to the needs of older adults, and encourages and instructs them in maintaining a positive attitude, which, as an aside, is a prime example of how recreation ministry supports one of the church's other major ministries: worship. Regular worship has a positive effect on one's attitude. The identification and selection process for these churches was performed after consultation

with church recreation professionals in the Sports and Recreation Department of the Southern Baptist Convention and the Baptist General Convention of Texas, as well as with several of my friends who serve churches as ministers of recreation, and whose opinions I trust.

The case study of the church's recreation ministry programming and education initiatives for older adults included interviews, observation, analysis, and scrutiny, an approach described plainly by Wolcott (2001, p. 40) as "going to have a look around." Regular, or frequent, program participating senior adults were interviewed to obtain participants' perceptions of health benefits they have received or are receiving from exposure to the recreational programming at the church, and to gain a better understanding of their feelings and interpretations concerning Rowe and Kahn's concept of successful aging, the factors that impact successful aging, and the strategies they use to cope with age-related changes in their lives. In addition to the taped interviews and their transcriptions, extensive field notes were kept. Upon receiving verbal consent from the interviewees, the interviews were digitally recorded, then transcribed. The transcriptions were then coded for emerging themes and patterns.

Two members of the churches' ministry staff, the Pastor or Senior Adult minister and the minister who coordinates the recreation ministry, were also interviewed to gain their individual perceptions of any evangelistic and/or spiritual effects on the church as a result of the recreational ministry programming to the senior adults. Two additional areas of inquiry for these interviews were budgeting and planning. Where a church places its value can be ascertained by where it budgets its funds, and an effective ministry to senior adults will not happen by happenstance, nor occur in a vacuum. It takes much planning,

and the first step of planning is developing the desired outcomes. The staff interviews also revealed information in these areas.

CHAPTER IV. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Survey

In the early portion of Chapter Three, I made the statement, “In any project, to know where one wants to go, it is first necessary to determine where one is.” In order to determine a starting point for this research project, it was necessary to attempt to paint a portrait of the landscape of the current practices of the recreation ministries in purposefully selected (Maxwell, 2005) Baptist churches in Texas. To do that, an information gathering survey instrument was prepared in consultation with members of the committee. The instrument was then piloted to three ministers of recreation in churches located in other states. Based upon their feedback, modifications were made to the instrument. A selected sample of churches was identified, and the survey instrument was distributed. The goal was to obtain survey responses from churches of varying sizes, from different geographical parts of Texas. A total of 29 responses were returned, although not all 29 returns answered all questions. The survey instrument was intentionally prepared to allow the responses to be anonymous.

The survey instrument sought to elicit information that would paint a portrait of the current church-based recreational landscape for senior adults. The church recreation ministries’ responses provided the data to evaluate current attitudes pertaining to, and opportunities provided for senior adults. The first set of questions gathered general demographic information about the church and the particular staff member completing the survey.

Demographics

The first question sought to know the particular ministry title and/or area of responsibility of the person completing the survey. Of those responding to the question, three were Pastors and three were Ministers of Education, Administration, Outreach, Programming, or in some combination thereof. For those responding who had either full or part time duties in the field of recreation, 15 identified themselves as being full time church recreators, with such titles as Minister of Recreation, Minister of Recreation and Sports, or a similar title. Nine of the respondents combine their recreation responsibilities with other areas of ministry: five of them combined their duties with other adult groups such as Singles, Seniors, and Families, while the remaining four combine recreation duties with pre-adult ministries such as children, junior high students, youth, and university students.

The responses to this question reveal that, of those churches responding, approximately one half of them have a full time staff member dedicated exclusively to the ministry of recreation and sports, approximately a quarter of them have a staff member who divides his or her recreational ministerial responsibilities with another area of ministry, and approximately one fourth of the respondents report having no staff member overseeing a recreation ministry.

The second question asked about the respondent church's average Sunday school attendance. This particular statistic has evolved into the default measuring stick used by Texas Baptist churches to classify the size of the church. One of the goals of the survey was to obtain responses from churches of all different sizes, and that goal was achieved. The smallest church responding reported an average Sunday school attendance of 110,

while the largest respondent listed 6,000. Of those responding ($n = 29$), the median of the average Sunday school attendance figures reported was 1203. Seven of the responding churches reported an average Sunday school attendance of less than 499, seven designated 500 - 999, five reported 1,000 - 1,499, six listed their average Sunday school attendance at 1,500 – 1,999, and four reported the figure to be 2,000 or greater.

The responses to this question merely show that the researcher achieved his goal of getting survey responses from churches of all different sizes, thus indicating that recreation, as a ministry, can be employed regardless of the size of the church.

Even though the American College of Sports Medicine and the American Heart Association have said that the term “old age” applies to men and women who have attained the age of 65 years or older (Nelson, et al., 2007), each Baptist church is permitted to decide for itself at what age a person will be classified as a senior, or older, adult. Therefore, question number three of the survey asked that specific question: At what age does your church classify a person as a senior adult? Interestingly enough, of the 29 responses, 40% designate a person to be a senior adult when the age of 55 is attained; 30% use the age of 60, and 20% use the age of 65. The remaining 10% represented two responses with no answer, and one response of 64. Therefore, this researcher’s decision to use the age of 63 as the benchmark for reaching senior adulthood is in keeping with 53% of the respondents surveyed.

Question four, the final demographic inquiry, asked what percentage of the church’s average Sunday school attendance was comprised of senior adults. The range of the responses ($n = 29$) to this question was surprisingly wide: the smallest reported percentage was 8.5%, while the largest was 62%. When plotted, the responses were bi-

modal, with 50% and 25% each being the response from four churches. The median was 31.7%, or, in other words, on average, almost a third of those regularly attending Sunday school at the reporting churches are senior adults. Eight of the responding churches reported that at least 40% of their average Sunday school attendance is senior adults. These data confirm the numbers of senior adults in the Baptist churches continue to grow, in line with the growth of senior adults in society.

The Presence of Church Recreation Facilities

One of the first lessons taught in church recreation classes is that a recreation facility is not a prerequisite to a recreation ministry, although the presence of a facility could enhance the ease and convenience with which a recreation ministry and its programming are offered. Questions five and six sought to solicit information from the churches about the presence and usage of a recreation facility on the church's campus.

Question five asked if the church had a recreation facility, and if so, would the respondent include a brief description of the facility. Of the responders ($n = 30$), 25, or 83%, indicated that their church did have a recreation facility, and five, or 17%, responded that their church did not have a facility.

When asked to describe the facility, the answers ran the gamut from a $\frac{3}{4}$ basketball court all the way to three different recreation campuses that include the traditional gym facility, a retreat center, and an outdoor facility where participants can fish, hike, and play softball, soccer and disc golf. Of those responding to the survey, the typical recreation facility on a church campus has a multi-purpose gymnasium, one or two racquetball courts, a fitness room with resistance training machines and cardiovascular workout machines, meeting rooms, and some type of provision where the

facility's patrons can gather, be refreshed, and fellowship, such as snack bars, small cafés, delis, and similarly named venues.

For those churches with a recreation facility, question 6 asked the responders about the weekly average number of senior adults who use the recreation facility. Again, the answers comprised a wide range: zero to over 1,000. The majority indicated they have some senior adult patrons who use the church's recreation facility on a regular basis. Only two churches said no senior adults use their facility. Of those two, one was quick to point that a) his church had closed its facility due to its lack of use, and b) that most of his church's senior adults who are interested in fitness belong to one the city's "superb" fitness clubs.

Familiarity with the Concept of Successful Aging

I also wanted to survey the sample regarding what they may or may not know about the research findings surrounding the concept of successful aging. The seventh survey question simply asked, "How familiar are you with the research findings on the subject of 'successful aging' for senior adults?" Three possible answers were then provided: very familiar, somewhat familiar, and not familiar at all, and the respondents were asked to place a check mark beside the most appropriate response.

Of the answers to this question ($n = 30$), one, or 3%, answered "very familiar," six, or 20%, answered "somewhat familiar," and 23, or 77%, answered "not at all." The one who admitted to being very familiar with the concepts was a minister of education at a church with an average Sunday school attendance of 145.

Analysis of the six "somewhat familiar" responses, uncovered a wide variation in church characteristics. The responding ministers work at churches ranging in size

(Sunday school attendance) from 400 to 1,900, and Sunday school percentage of senior adults ranging from 10% to 60%. Of the six, two were sports and recreation ministers, two were pastors, and two were ministers in the areas of administration and education.

Programming Specifically for Senior Adults

Questions eight through 11 took a decidedly pointed and specific direction in an attempt to discover what programming opportunities respondent churches are offering to and for its senior adult populations.

Question eight asked, “How many times, during the course of a calendar year, do you offer classroom teaching to senior adults about exercise?” Of those churches responding (n = 29), none was the answer given by 72.4% (n = 21), 17.2% (n = 5) responded with one to three times, two responders (6.9%) reported weekly, and one church (3.4%) said monthly.

The ninth question of the survey asked the same basic question, except that the area of inquiry regarded the frequency of classroom teaching offerings in the area of diet and nutrition. Again, of those answering this question (n = 27), the overwhelmingly popular response, 63% (n = 17) was none. Coming in a distant second place, 29.6%, eight churches responded with three or less. One church (3.7%) reported monthly, and one church reported such offerings to be ongoing year round.

The churches were asked, in Question 10, about the frequency of activity programming exclusively for senior adults. Of those responding (n = 28), 11 churches (39.3%) reported year round recreational offerings. For those churches whose activities were offered less frequently, the following ranges of activities were reported: (a) four churches (14.3%) offered programs five to 16 times per year; (b) three churches (10.7%)

offered programs less than five times per year; (c) one church (3.6%) said they offered programs ‘several’ times per year; and (d) nine churches (32.1%) offered no programs.

Question 11 asked the churches to describe their recreational programming offerings for senior adults. Of the 29 responders, 14 (48.3%) provided descriptions of their programs; 13 (44.8%) indicated they did not offer recreational programs for seniors; and, 2 (6.9%) failed to answer the question. Those responding by naming activities mostly reported offering some type of exercise class, even though they used a variety of descriptive terminology such as exercise class, fitness class, tone and stretch class, and chair and water aerobics. One church has a weight lifting class for senior adult ladies, and one reported having a fitness instructor in the fitness room dedicated to senior adults. One church offered a senior adult volleyball league, several churches reported an organized effort at motivating their senior adults to walk, and several churches spoke of bowling and golf tournaments exclusively for seniors. One church admitted to using the Wii gaming system for senior adult fitness related programming. For those churches that are programming for seniors, a variety of activities and opportunities are being offered.

Final Thoughts and Comments From the Survey Respondents

The final two questions of the survey instrument were general questions designed to gauge the value placed on senior adult recreation, and to give the individual responder an opportunity to express, in his or her own words, any additional insights into the senior adult recreation ministry.

Question 12 asked, “What value do you place on recreation for senior adults?” Aside from the five returns which either left the question unanswered, or a nonresponsive answer, the responses could be categorized into three main ideas: highly valued,

somewhat valued, or little or no value, and the responses will be addressed in ascending order of value.

Ten survey responses admitted placing little or no value on recreation ministry for senior adults. These responses came from a Pastor, Youth Minister, three combination ministers, and four Recreation and Sports ministers. Of the churches represented by these individuals, seven have recreation facilities as part of the church physical plant, average from 400 to 6,000 in Sunday school attendance, and their senior adult population comprises 10% to 60% of their average Sunday school attendance.

Some of the comments accompanying the answers bear publishing. One Sports and Recreation minister wrote, “We value our senior adults, but probably put little value on their recreation.” Another Sports and Recreation minister wrote:

The senior adult trips have been the most successful thing we have done in recreation for senior adults. They have the most time and money to take trips and so our ministry has been asked to plan and promote those, but our yearly programming focuses on a younger demographic while being available for senior adults.

Another minister wrote, “While I believe that senior adult recreation is important to improving quality of life, our sports ministry purpose does not include programming for seniors. Our sports ministry focuses on the kids and younger families of the community.”

A Recreation and Children’s minister opined, “Not much. It seems that young families are the ones who are more interested in recreation, so that is where we focus primarily.”

Three respondents, two recreation combo ministers and one Sports and Recreation minister, passed the buck to the senior adult minister by saying, “Our senior adult minister plans activities events, recreational included, for the senior adults in our church and community,” “I had never really thought of recreation ministry for senior adults. Think I’ll get with our senior pastor this week and discuss the possibilities,” and “We have a senior adult ministry called ‘The Primetimers’ with a full time senior adult minister. They stay quite busy with trips, game days, day outings, etc.”

One administrative pastor wrote, “In our city, there are many superb fitness clubs, which attract those interested in ‘fitness recreation.’ We have chosen to not compete as we don’t want to invest in a facility to be on par with the clubs.”

Although, in this least value category, one Sports and Recreation minister said, “We recognize the need. We are looking at starting an exercise class for senior adults that will meet at least 2 times a week.”

The second category of answers came from two individuals who seem to place some value on recreation ministry for senior adults. These two responders are both Recreation ministers from churches that average between 900 and 1,500 in Sunday school, have a recreation facility, and where senior adults comprise less than 25% of their average Sunday school attendance. One minister said that although his church presently does nothing primarily for the senior adults, he hopes to “inject this aspect into our programming.” The other respondent said, “We need to do more in the education aspect for senior adults regarding exercise and nutrition...and, we need to do more to attract new senior adults.”

The third, and largest, category of responses comes from those ministers whose churches place a high value on senior adult recreation. These 11 responses, coming from six Sports and Recreation ministers and five combination ministers, represent churches ranging in average Sunday school attendance from 300 to 3,900, with senior adults comprising from 10% to 60% of that average attendance. Each church in this particular category has a recreation facility on the church campus.

The explanations accompanying their answers proved very interesting. Some of the responses from the Sports and Recreation ministers are: “They are one of our largest groups at our church, so there is a pretty high value placed on recreation for senior adults.” “The value of recreation for senior adults is equal to all other ages. We consider it of very high importance both for them physically and emotionally.” “It is very beneficial for physical and social reasons. I know brain function improves and can be helpful in some types of disease prevention.” “Recreation for senior adults has tremendous value.”

Comments from those whose areas of ministry are in recreation and in combination with other ministry areas echo similar sentiments. One wrote, “HIGH VALUE! It is an amazing opportunity to connect with senior adults – plus help them connect with other adults for a higher quality of life at this season of life.” In justifying his answer, another wrote, “Next to children’s programs it is our next most important area of concern. Training and information seem to lead to involvement.” Another said, “As people start living longer and senior adults become more numerous, we will need to adjust our programming for that age group.”

This section concludes with two of the more poignant quotes from this final group of responders, those who place a high value on senior adult recreation ministry. A minister of recreation and junior high students writes:

I think this is important because many of the men and women in this age group need to maintain healthy habits, otherwise their bodies will break down more quickly than maybe they should. I think we should try to incorporate more training or teaching about health, specifically designed for various age groups within our church. I think this would help bring about an awareness that is not there otherwise.

Finally, from a Minister of Education:

We believe that the interpersonal relationships of our seniors can be greatly enhanced by recreation. We have recently added 4 people to the membership because of these developing relationships. As the Baby Boomers come of senior adult age, this facet of our programs and ministry will become even more important.

Case Studies

The second data gathering methodology employed necessitated my witnessing senior adult programming at different churches, then interviewing some of the participants and appropriate members of the church staff.

The process for selecting the individual churches to visit first entailed discussions with Ministers of Recreation who currently serve in a Baptist church, and recreation professors from Texas Baptist universities and seminaries, wherein I sought their advice and recommendations on churches which might have active recreation ministries to

senior adults. As a result of these discussions, a list of possible churches was compiled. That list was then categorized by the churches' geographical locations. Because the state of Texas encompasses such a large geographical area, the decision was made to try and make visits to three churches in completely different areas of the state, primarily due to the philosophical differences in these different parts of the state. The initial decision was to attempt to visit one church in the north Texas area, one in central Texas, and one in east Texas.

The next step was to identify and contact the churches, seeking consent on their part to participate in the study. An introductory phone call was placed to the three ministers of recreation. The purpose of the study was explained to each minister, and what their church's participation in the study would entail. It was explained to each one that I would like to visit their church, interview them and other staff members who might be involved with the senior adult ministry, observe some of the recreational programming for senior adults, then after observation, interview some of the participants who might be willing to be interviewed. They were assured that the identity of the church, and those of the individual interviewees would remain confidential.

All three ministers immediately consented to allowing their church to participate in the study. Further discussion centered on the types of programming offered for senior adults, and when might be a convenient time for my visit. Once those details were settled, an appointment was made with each for the visit. Each minister assured me that individual participants, willing to be interviewed, would be identified in advance so they could be available for the interview.

In preparation for the visits, an interview protocol was formulated, a copy of which is attached hereto as Appendix B.

The scheduled visits to the church in north Texas and the church in central Texas occurred as scheduled. However, upon arriving at the church in east Texas, the interview with the minister of recreation ended up being briefer than planned due to an unforeseen personal crisis. Additionally, due to a scheduling conflict regarding use of the gymnasium, the senior adult activity that I had been scheduled to observe had been canceled, so no data were gathered on that trip.

After consulting with the members of the committee, we agreed that a third church visit would still be appropriate. I then contacted a church in south Texas. Once again, the minister of recreation immediately consented to participate in the study. He, in turn, put me in contact with one of his staff associates who facilitates a weekly senior adult exercise class. She readily agreed, and we scheduled an appointment for me to visit.

The Individual Church Visits

North Texas

The first church visited was the church located in north Texas. According to data from the United States Census Bureau, this church is located in a city with a reported population of almost 200,00, 16.3% of which is over the age of 60. The church has an active ministry for senior adults, with a staff minister whose primary duty is coordinating the various components of the church's ministry to senior adults, who, coincidentally, had been the church's recreation minister prior to assuming his current ministerial position.

I was scheduled to observe the Ladies Weightlifting Class, and the Senior Adult Men's Exercise Class, the two regularly meeting activity programming opportunities exclusively for senior adults. Both classes meet twice each week.

Upon arrival, I was greeted at the reception desk by the minister of recreation, who accompanied me on a tour of the facility. Upon entering the weight room, I noticed a group of five women exercising using the weight machines. This was the first activity I was scheduled to observe. The participants appeared to be working very hard, moving briskly from machine to machine, all the while engaging in good-natured conversation and encouraging each other. After observing the class, I was able to interview some of the participants. Field notes of the interviews were taken, and the interviews were digitally recorded.

After a break for lunch, I interviewed the Minister of Recreation and the Minister of Senior Adults. Again, field notes were taken, but the digital recorder was not utilized.

The next morning, I observed the senior adult men's exercise class in the gymnasium. This was a gathering of 10 to fifteen older men who spent an hour doing stretching exercises, utilizing such tools as chairs and exercise bands. The leader of the class was a member of the group. Afterwards, most of the men stayed for the interview, in part because they were celebrating a birthday, and cake was being served! Again, I took field notes, and the interviews were digitally recorded.

Central Texas

The next church visited is located in a city in central Texas. This city is approximately a third of the size of the city in north Texas, with approximately 12.5% of its population being over the age of 65 years.

After the initial telephone contact, the process began by having lunch with the Minister of Recreation and the Minister of Education. After preliminary discussions about the research project, the conversation turned to the church's approach to activity programming for senior adults. The visit ended with appointments being made to observe and interview.

The first class observed was a water aerobics class. The church, in lieu of constructing a recreation facility, purchased and renovated a facility near the church campus that had previously been used as a commercial recreation facility, complete with an indoor swimming pool. The class was primarily made up of women, although it was open to men, as well. After the class, several of the class participants participated in the interviews, which were digitally recorded along with field notes that were taken during the interviews.

The second class observed was a coed senior adult exercise class. Much like the men's class at the church in north Texas, this class utilized such exercise tools as chairs, fitness bands, and light hand-held weights. Light strength training exercises, and a range of different stretching exercises for flexibility took up the class's allotted hour. The class concluded with a member sharing a scripture and leading the group in prayer. Prior to the class, all four of the participants had exercised in the cardio room, either on a stationary bicycle or the indoor track. Afterwards, all four stayed and were interviewed. Both field notes and digital recording were employed for the interviews.

The digital recordings from all interviews, conducted at these two churches, were later transcribed and coded.

South Texas

The final church visited is located in a large metropolitan area in south Texas. Just over 12% of the population is people over the age of 60. Upon my arrival, I visited with both the minister of recreation, and the leader of the exercise class I was about to observe. They both were perplexed by my requests in that there are senior adults who participate in a vast array of fitness/wellness activities, even though those activities are not exclusively for senior adults, serving as one reason for the small number of activity related programs implemented exclusively for seniors.

The exercise class I observed was very similar to the other two churches' exercise classes: utilizing chairs, stretch bands, kettle bells, and hand weights, emphasizing stretching and light weight lifting through a variety of range of motion exercises, with upbeat, contemporary Christian music playing in the background. Although the class was open to both genders, only women, ages 69 to 80, were in attendance this day. One thing different about this class is that its leader is a certified fitness instructor, whereas the other two classes were led by one of the class participants. This class was also different in that I was able to engage the ladies in free and easy discussion during the class. They had many stories and questions. All but one was able to stay for the interview portion. Extensive field notes were taken, and even though the digital recorder was available, I chose, instead, to simply listen, observe, and rely on field notes.

Church Visits

The main purpose of the church visits was, in addition to interviewing the participants in the various programs, to actually observe them as they engaged in the different components of the activities. As mentioned in Chapter Three, when taking the

three church visits collectively, I observed three senior adult “stretch and tone” classes, one senior adult water aerobics class, and one senior ladies’ weight training class. Each of the three “stretch and tone” (my descriptive term, not the churches’) classes was unique in their make-up, implementation, and leadership methods, but all sought to accomplish the same goal. Watching the participants as they went through the different phases of the class, and listening to the interaction among the class members and between them and the class leader, provided me a rare, but valuable, insight into how I would go about presenting my interview questions to the participants.

Based upon research revelations, it is now commonly understood that engaging in regular physical activity, achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight, and remaining actively engaged with life through positive, constructive relationships and activities are all vital components in striving to reach Rowe and Kahn’s (1998) concept of successful aging.

I wanted to discover, through the interview process, if the three components of successful aging were evident in the participants’ lives, and if so, how. Not quite knowing what to expect, I found some of the results to be interesting. More specifically, I wanted to answer the third question of this study, which is:

In those church recreation ministries that are programming specifically for the senior adults, how is participation affecting participants in the areas of spirituality, health, wellness, and fitness?

I truly had no preconceived notions about what I might find when I scheduled these visits. What I witnessed were senior adults of all shapes and sizes, both men and women who were serious and dedicated about their workouts, but who, when pressed,

wanted to discuss the social aspect of their time in the gym. It was as if each individual class transformed participants into an accountability group, who kept up with each other outside of the gym, and were concerned about a participant's absence in class, almost to the point where the physical advantages of exercise became secondary.

Findings of Church Visits Based on Rowe and Kahn's Definition

A review of the findings of the church visits in light of Rowe and Kahn's (1998) definition of successful aging is warranted at this point.

Successful Aging, Criteria 1 and 2

The first two behaviors or characteristics: low risk of disease and disease-related disability, and high mental and physical functioning, will be considered together, as the two are intricately intertwined.

South Texas. When questioned about these two components, the participants were very quick with their positive responses. Most of the ladies present have been regular attendees of this particular class for most of the five years it has existed. The ladies exercise class in South Texas all had an example of how their health had improved since joining the class.

Improved mobility, flexibility, and weight loss were recurring themes expressed by the ladies. One of the ladies related that she was unable to turn her head due to neck pain and stiffness, but she proudly showed me that she can now turn her head from side to side, primarily due to the stretching and strengthening exercises they perform in the class. She also mentioned a number of normal life functions that are impaired when one can't turn their head from side to side.

One of the other ladies talked about her husband's sudden death several years ago, and that she was so out of shape, she was unable to perform simple tasks around the house because she was unable to climb a ladder. However, after becoming a regular attendee of the class, she is now able to climb ladders and perform menial tasks around the house.

Other ladies mentioned the increased stamina and mobility that has been a byproduct of regular participation in the exercise class, with one bemoaning the fact of so many of her friends who are no longer able to go and do primarily because they do not exercise.

The class leader related a story of a church member who, although not a member of the exercise class, at over 70 years of age, was planning a trip to go home to an Asian country to see her family. However, she was so feeble and out of shape, she couldn't walk but about five steps. The lady's daughter sought out the help of the class leader, and together they planned a low impact exercise regimen. After about six months of faithful training, the lady was able to walk for extended periods, and had regained much of her flexibility. Her trip home was a roaring success, and since returning, has been a regular at the church gym, being able to work out on the elliptical trainer for 30 to 45 minutes at a time.

Several of the ladies also related as to how the positive results of the exercise class have allowed them to regain much of their involvement in the other areas of church life, but that will be addressed in the discussion of the next characteristic.

North Texas. Very similar results were discovered when interviewing the participants at the church in the Texas panhandle.

It was a special day to be in attendance at the senior men's exercise class, which has existed for about 20 years, because they had doughnuts! The class members, who pay \$12 per year to belong to the class, allow themselves to have doughnuts and coffee after each class, in that they feel they have "earned" that right through their rigorous exercise routine. This class was attended by about a dozen or so men, all of whom stayed afterwards to take part in the group interview. And, when asked why they exercise so hard, the response, in unison, was, "So we can have doughnuts!" The other added treat is that they have birthday cake on the first Wednesday of each month, celebrating the members' birthdays for that particular month.

These men echoed the ladies from South Texas when talking about the benefits of regular attendance at the class in the areas of mobility, weight control, and flexibility. Several of the men acknowledged that joining and regularly attending the class has enabled them to expand their exercise repertoire. They are now able to work out on other pieces of equipment like the treadmill, the weight machines, and perform light exercises at home, like sit-ups.

One man mentioned that he had not been particularly cognizant of the improved health benefits realized from attending the class until he goes out of town for an extended period. Then, due to missing the class, he notices how his fitness declines, especially in the areas of his respiratory fitness and endurance, when he is absent from class.

The instructor mentioned that the class had been originally started to allow the men simply to be able to continue being unimpaired in their simple daily functions: i.e., tying one's shoes, and getting out of bed and getting dressed.

One of the participants had enjoyed a long career as a sports official, but then lost a kidney, went through dialysis, and just sort of retired from everything. But, then he joined the exercise class, and now he has returned to an active lifestyle, and his quality of life has improved dramatically since resuming regular physical activity.

One of the unexpected highlights of the morning was a surprise appearance by the church's pastor, who had lost about 50 pounds from involvement with a fitness program at the church's recreation ministry. He was very encouraging to the men, and supportive of their exercise routines.

One of the members also expressed, unsolicited, the notion that helping the senior adults remain healthy is good for the church finances because the older adults are the ones who seem to better support the church's budget.

The senior ladies' weight lifting class meets twice weekly. It is not quite as large as the men's class, but the ladies who attend are very fervent about their class, which has existed for about 10 years. I was able to observe them toward the end of the class, and they were truly working – mostly using the weight machines. There was not quite as much friendly banter back and forth as in the men's class, but they were very encouraging of each other. After class, we had a chance to visit about their participation, and their answers were very similar to the others who had been interviewed. None of the ladies had ever participated in weight training prior to joining this class, but they could not say enough about the remarkable improvements in health they experienced. One lady said the improvement in her strength had greatly enhanced her ability to “chase after” her grandchildren, do chores around the house, and participate in fitness related activities

outside of the church, such as walking in the neighborhood or in the mall, playing golf, and practicing yoga.

Their class leader acknowledged that the goal was to improve strength, flexibility, and stamina, not to become “Olympic weight lifter type muscle bound.” One class member commented that she participates so that she falls less, and doesn’t get hurt when she has a fall. Another lady added, “Regular check-ups with my doctor are now happier times,” adding that, since joining the class, she has had fewer trips to the doctor’s office. One member of the group has been battling cancer for over 16 years, and believes that her regular work out regimen has helped in that fight. In addition to the weight lifting class, one of the participants, who has undergone two hip replacements, walks three times a day on the walking track, and she says she prefers to do those walks at the church because she “doesn’t have to cross streets, dodge cats, or fight unpredictable weather.” As an added bonus, her husband has begun walking with her, which has improved his health.

The church makes it very comfortable for the ladies because it closes the weight room to others for that one hour twice a week. The ladies mentioned they would probably not go to a private work out facility, but that the convenience of the church gym, and the willingness of the church to accommodate them are primary reasons why they come to the class. The ladies present for the interview had all been part of this class for at least three years, and although none would admit to having overcome a specific physical malady because of the class, they each mentioned friends whose level of activity was growing less and less with each passing week because they did NOT engage in any kind of meaningful exercise or activity. One lady mentioned a friend who, as she aged, had

stopped being active, then got sick, and is now suffering from the onset of dementia. This lady was forlorn, wondering what might have been had she only convinced her friend to join the ladies in this class. It was almost as if she could see, through her friend's physical demise, the benefits that she was receiving from her fitness efforts! One class member even admitted that she remained motivated by watching the faithfulness of the church staff in their individual work out routines!

These ladies, likewise, echoed the sentiment of the ladies from South Texas that the level of fitness gained from the class allowed them to continue to contribute to other areas of the church ministry.

Central Texas. The visit to the church in Central Texas occurred over a three day period. The first trip was to have lunch with the church's Minister of Education and Minister of Recreation. During this interview, I was able to gain a little insight and information about the church's background with recreation ministry, its current programming, and the facility used by the church for recreation programming. Both men were very open and helpful. We also agreed upon dates for me to return and do my observation and interviews. A few days later, I returned to the church and was given a tour of the facility by the Minister of Recreation, was introduced to some of the senior adults as they worked out, observed the water aerobics class, then interviewed some of the participants from that class. This class, which meets three mornings a week, is a coed class, but only ladies were present this particular day. When I mentioned that, one of them replied, "Once in a while, we'll have a poor man come, but not in a long time. I think we ran them all off!" Two days later, I returned to observe the senior adult stretch and tone class, and interview those participants.

The group of ladies in the water aerobics class was a particularly interesting bunch. They all had great attitudes about their aging process. One stated that the water aerobics gives her a great excuse to be active, but to do so among friends. This lady, a retired pharmacist, admitted that she takes part in a water aerobics class five mornings a week, having done so for about 11 years. She was very insistent that her exercise regimen has resulted in her enjoying good health, thus allowing her to stay engaged with others.

Another participant opined that the water aerobics class, combined with her regularly playing golf allows her to “continue to be a part of the world.” She still does her own yard work, and most of the routine house work. Her exercise routine “keeps her mobile,” allowing her to continue to participate in life. “If you can’t get around, you have to change your whole aspect of your life,” which allows her to play Bridge as well, and to sing in a senior adult choir, which meets twice a week. When asked what advice she would give younger adults regarding aging successfully, she immediately replied, “Stay active!”

This same sentiment was echoed by the next interviewee who, when asked about her initial reaction to the term “successful aging,” replied “being active.” Then, she continued, “It represents keeping your mind AND your body active and eating well.” She further opined that staying active, and participating in regular physical activities, like water aerobics, allows her to make smart decisions about eating well. She also admitted that, having attended this class for about five years, she does not feel as good when she has to miss a class or two. She also believes that the class helps her be able to assist her husband in working the garden, along with a plethora of household chores. Summing up her feelings on staying active, she said, “Our body is our temple, so, you know, we just

have to keep it in good shape,” referencing 1 Corinthians 6:19 – 20 (New International Version).

Another participant mentioned that she began coming to this class because she was caring for her mother, an Alzheimer’s sufferer, and she chose this class as a stress reliever. Now that she has been a part of the class almost five years, her blood pressure and cholesterol are both down into the normal range, and her doctor advises her to “keep doing what you’re doing.” After her mother passed away, the doctor told her that her mother was a textbook case of Alzheimer’s, so this lady is “trying to do everything she can,” to not let that happen to her. She believes that God has given her good health, and it is her responsibility to keep it.

Two ladies mentioned that they had both knees replaced, and participating in the water aerobics class aided in their post-surgical recovery. One said, “I was stronger, and I got over that [surgery] really, really quickly. The doctors were all amazed at how well I did, and they let me finish my rehab in this class.” She related that sometimes she has to visit a new or different doctor, and when “I tell them I go to water aerobics three times a week, they always say ‘Great!’” Her advice to younger adults is “to start an exercise program in your life. Don’t wait until you think you need it.”

One lady has used the deep-water portion of the class to overcome her fear of deep water. She said she was looking for an exercise program, and called the church. She was advised the only thing available was the deep-water aerobics class. She decided to come and try it once, thinking that if she didn’t like it, she’d find something else. So she came for that initial class, “and I nearly drowned,” she said laughingly. However, she stuck with the program, and now puts on her life belt, gets in the water, and never gives

that fear a second thought. Today, she “looks forward to coming and doing this.” It keeps her active, and she has lost weight.

I also observed the senior adults’ stretch and tone class. This class meets in one of the general meeting rooms of the church’s recreation facility and, very similar to the stretch and tone classes at the other two churches, involves gentle stretching movements, utilizing chairs, exercise bands, and very light hand weights. This class, which has been in existence for over nine years, meets three times a week, lasts approximately one hour, and is led by a volunteer instructor.

There were five participants, all in their seventies and eighties, in class the day I visited, although the members reported having as many as 35 at different times throughout the class’s existence. Of the five present, only four were able to remain after class for the interviews.

When asked about the concept of successful aging, one of the participants replied, “Be active and live longer.” The other three agreed, and each one admitted to believing that he/she was successfully aging.

In response to a question about how this particular class might be contributing to their successful aging, one replied that he had joined this class as a way to continue his cardiac rehabilitation after having undergone quadruple bypass surgery. Participating in this class, along with other fitness activities, has allowed him to lose 44 pounds, and five inches from his waist. This gentleman, along with the other three, admitted that the stretch and tone class was merely one piece to the puzzle: that they also work out on weight machines, walk on the track or treadmill, and ride the stationary bicycles, each individual activity makes the other activities easier. One also does water exercises in the

pool for his legs. When asked about the emotional benefits of the exercise program, the replies were that it allows them to “feel younger and more vigorous,” “feel good,” “keeps me thinking,” and “allows me the time for socialization.” One class member admitted to having a rare disease that, when left untreated, will kill muscle tissue, but the only way to treat it is through regular exercise. When he started his exercise program, he could only get around with the assistance of a walker, and now regularly walks five miles at a time. Each of the class members identified some area of their life that had improved since beginning an exercise program at the church, from losing weight, to increasing the amount of weight they can lift, to increasing their ability to play with grandchildren. And, they all spoke admiringly of another friend who, although not part of this class, works out with them on the cardio machines and weights, and is in great shape! She’s 92 years old!

One of the class members has a brain aneurysm. Recently, after spending four days in the hospital, the doctors told him there was no use performing surgery at his age. Instead, they encouraged him to return to his workout regimen, and “continue doing what you’re doing.” Today, he takes a small amount of medication, but works out on a regular basis.

One of the members credited the class, and the other activities, with having improved her ability to cope with her arthritis, and having cured a “frozen shoulder.” In her opinion, working during class with bands and hand weights has significantly improved the arthritis in her hands.

When asked about the barriers to participation by their friends, the overwhelming response was “they are too lazy” to even try. The consensus was that if their friends would just come down and try the class once, and see how much fun it can be, then they

would be back and become regulars. One member spoke of his best friend who regularly complains about when trying to walk, “if I get half a mile, I’m ready to quit.” Then the class member will invite him and his wife to the class, but they always have some excuse why attending is not convenient! One member discussed his deceased wife, who had hated exercise, “she would do everything in the world to keep from taking exercise, but then after she got into it, she was all right.” These sentiments echoed the answer of one minister of recreation when asked why senior adults do not avail themselves of the available programs, “They get sick with a variety of illnesses, they lose their spouse and then their motivation, and others age into a variety of physical infirmities which cause them to approach participating in exercise programs with trepidation.”

When asked about words of advice to the younger generation, one said, “Stay active, because if they’re active, they’re into a lot of things.” One reminisced, “I have found out that if I could have worked [exercise] those things in – I would have gone through a lot less pain as a senior.” He continued, talking about his son, a former marathon runner now in his sixties. He said he continues to run today, and an occasional cold is the worst he gets. The female in the group chimed in, “Staying active is one of – that’s the main thing anyone can do.”

The stories of senior adults and the health and fitness benefits received from a regular routine of exercise are many. One of the interviewed Ministers of Recreation related a story of a senior adult in his church who had spent her adult life being actively involved in the church’s music ministry. However, as she began to age, she lost her ability to climb the stairs into the choir loft in the church sanctuary. The recreation ministry was able to get this woman on a regular walking program, and in a matter of

weeks, she was again able to negotiate the stairs of the choir loft, thus allowing her to resume her involvement in an area of church ministry, which she loved.

Successful Aging, Criteria 3

However, it is the third area of inquiry, or the third leg of the successful aging stool, what Rowe and Kahn (1998) refer to as “continuing engagement with life,” (p. 45), also described as social connectedness that produced the most surprising results from the interviews.

The basis of this idea is that human beings are not meant to live solitary lives, a concept originally seen in the creation account in the book of Genesis. According to scripture, God had finished creating the first man, or Adam, and upon discovering Adam’s loneliness, God said, “It is not good for man to be alone,” Genesis 1:1 (New International Version). Touching, talking, and relating to others is essential to one’s well-being, and one of the tasks of successful agers is to “discover and rediscover relationships and activities that provide closeness and meaningfulness” (Rowe & Kahn, 1998, p. 46)

Rowe and Kahn (1998) described this concept:

... the fact is we need continued contact with others, and the lack of such social relations is damaging. Loneliness breeds both illness and early death. And as a rule, people whose connections with others are relatively strong – through family (including marriage), friendships, and organizational memberships – live longer. And for people whose relationships to others are fewer and weaker, the risk of death is two to four times as great, irrespective of age and other factors, such as race, socioeconomic status, physical health, smoking, use of alcohol, physical activity, obesity, and use of the health services (p. 156).

In interviewing the five different groups and the church staff members, terms like community, accountability, connectedness, encouraging, and plugging-in kept recurring. One minister of senior adults, who had previously served this church as a recreation minister, said that he had witnessed an enhancement of the participating senior adults’

quality of life that he attributed to the prolonged participation in the group exercise classes. He reasoned, “They become like their own little Sunday school class. When one is absent, the others will call and check on the absent member. They really work hard at holding each other accountable to the group.” One of the members of the ladies weight lifting class in the panhandle said, “The camaraderie is almost as important as the health benefits from the class. We check-up on each other, we laugh and cry together, and we comfort each other through sickness and deaths.” All of the ladies in the weight lifting class admitted to being involved in other areas of the church life, i.e.: teach Sunday school, sing in the choir, work with children during the summer educational programs (what the Baptists call Vacation Bible School), as well as being actively engaged in other areas of life – a theme that would appear in all observed classes at all three churches.

The men who comprise the exercise class, which, to best of anyone’s recollection, had been in existence for 32 years, seemed to enjoy more the camaraderie of the doughnuts and coffee after the class than they did the class. One could tell from the good-natured banter back and forth that these men cared deeply for each other, and they enjoyed their time together. They openly admit that the best-attended class is the one that meets the first Wednesday of each month because that is when they have birthday cake, celebrating everyone’s birthday for that particular month. The group contained a few retired ministers, who good-naturedly absorbed the brunt of the jocularity – one even being accused of “losing his salvation upon his ordination.” Another retired minister was admonished that he wouldn’t recognize the seminary he attended because it now has “indoor plumbing, and they’ve removed the hitching post. They even have cars and stuff now.” One of the current church staff members wandered into the room, greeted all the

men, then after he left, one of the men said, “He comes down here and talks to us when he’s running short of preaching material!”

One of the members was relating to the interviewer how much better he feels when attending the class, and one of the other men responded, “Yeah, but he don’t look any better!” One other chimed in with, “No, exercise hasn’t improved his looks one bit. He looks terrible.”

When asked what they noticed from their participation in the class, one member wryly commented, “What we noticed is all of this malarkey that passes back and forth across this table and the doughnuts that get here sometimes.”

One of the members, when talking about the camaraderie, said, “The older we get, the more we have fellowship with other people.”

The group was asked about if their numbers ever grow, and if the class is marketed in any way inside the church. After a brief discussion of previous recruitment efforts, one man responded, “I don’t know why we don’t have more – almost anybody can fit in here.”

Then, without warning, one of the group named Jerry became the target. “Jerry doesn’t spell very well, but he’s a good counter – he can count in those Roman numerals. But he’s good for the exercise class, as he’s the only one who can talk while holding his breath.”

When talking about the structure of the exercise class, one said “We pay \$12 a year to join this group, and out of it we get cake once a month!” It was duly noted that he referred to “the group,” and not “the class.”

The men were proud of the fact that they were not exclusively a Baptist group. The church owns a senior adult apartment complex across the street from the church, and the people who reside in those apartments are allowed access to the church's recreation facility. One of the men said, "Yeah, one of our class members [from the apartments] died recently – and he was Catholic!"

Another passerby strolled into the room and said, "Y'all are having too much fun sounds like."

After spending a couple of hours with this group of spirited senior adult men, it was obvious that they cared deeply about each other, but weren't about to act like it! The benefits of the regular exercise were evident, but more evident were the benefits of the fellowship and camaraderie, and how they equipped these men to remain actively engaged with life and each other.

Analyzing the interviews with the ladies in the water aerobics class revealed a similar result. One of the ladies said that the exercise class provided her with the impetus to stay engaged. She said, "I think it's all a frame of mind. You can be as miserable as you want to be or as happy as you want to be. We [the members of the class] all get along because we're all putting forth the effort to get out and be among people and do something." It also allows her to be active outside of the church, "I have a group of widow friends there that we do a lot of things together. After her husband passed away about a year ago, the members of the group "have really, really helped me, just the group association." She also expressed a novel opinion: because of the benefits of her regular exercise and her active engagement with life, she feels "like it's been a help to my children because they don't worry about what I'm doing or if I need anything . . . She

reiterated “aging is a mental approach, and you have to be out and among people.” This lady also believed that the benefits from the water aerobics were secondary to the benefits she received from “being with this good bunch of gals that we have.”

In discussing the importance of the concept of active engagement, the ladies all commented on the importance of staying connected with family and friends. One of the ladies mentioned that she eats lunch at the church every Wednesday with a group of about 20 or so other senior ladies, and that they have a good time together. Then, when lunch is finished, they will go as a group to the church office and volunteer for the rest of Wednesday afternoon. It is not only fun, it gives them a chance to visit and fellowship, and, they are also helping out the church.

One of the group members echoed an earlier sentiment when she commented that successful aging is, in her opinion, a peace of mind, a mental state, saying “The physical aspect isn’t any good if you don’t get the mental going.” Her vision of unsuccessful aging was along the same vein, just from a different direction, “If you fail to be a part of the world, by that I mean, if you just sink back into your own self and don’t keep up with what’s going on and don’t be a part of what’s happening – you’ve got to keep yourself physically and mentally a part of the world.” When asked if her aerobics was aiding in her engagement, she acknowledged both the physical and engagement benefits by saying, “Well, it helps me – it keeps me mobile. If you can’t get around, you have to change your whole aspect of your life, but it keeps me able to participate.”

One of the ladies belongs to a senior adult choir that numbers about 100 members. She commented that everyone in the choir is older, and most of them are retired, excitedly adding, “I have met people in every walk of life and now that they’re retired,

they're singing, and it's great conversations!" Her eyes sparkled as she shared details about the choir's tours to places such as Oklahoma City and Hot Springs, AK.

Another member spoke of belonging to a group of senior adults called Health Shapers that meet weekly, but was not bashful when relating about her affection for the other ladies in the class. "When I miss coming to my class here I really miss a lot about it. Number one, I don't feel as good as I do when I come; number two, I miss the interaction with my friends, and number three, it keeps me active."

One of the ladies spoke about how the class helped her after having both knees replaced shortly after the death of her husband. "I needed this class, as I needed to get out and have some interaction with other people."

Another lady quickly interjected, "Yeah, we're always afraid we'll miss something [if we miss class]." Later she added, "I like being with the people and we just have a good time. We just enjoy everybody, and it's just very satisfying."

Among the other activities in which the ladies of the water aerobics are engaged are gardening, housework, walking, charity work, volunteer at their church, singing in a community choir, having lunch with friends, chasing grandchildren, playing golf, taking yoga classes, and participating in Health Shapers, an organization promoting good habits for senior adults.

The people in the chair aerobics class gave very similar responses. One of the things that binds them together in addition to the chair aerobics class, is that they work out as a group in the facility's large workout room. Here, they have access to numerous treadmills, elliptical trainers, stationary bicycles, a soft-surface track, and various bar bells, dumbbells, and weight machines prior to each class. One of them allowed that,

since his wife died eight years ago, the members of this class “is my core of friends that I meet down here. I mean, this is our core group and this is the ones that – I draw from them and, hopefully, they draw from me.” Another mentioned, “these four of us here in this group had belonged to one Sunday school class, and we’ve become better friends.” Another added, “We’ve become better friends after we’ve come down here and start socializing together.” The group leader joined in by saying, “When you go to Sunday school, you – you only talk for just a few minutes when you first get there or leave, and down here we cut up, so we have a lot of fun. And then, they – about four of them - go out and eat after they come.” “Yeah,” added the first one, with self-deprecating humor, “Four of us, the ones that are in my Sunday school class, we go out and eat lunch with the old folks and we just thoroughly enjoy it.”

The members of this group, all in their 80’s, also stay active and engaged in other areas of the church, and life in general. The married couple, when they retired from their occupations, volunteered their summers with a larger group of Baptist retirees and traveled around performing construction projects at Baptist churches that could not afford to have the construction done commercially. The men did the construction work during the day, while the women prepared the meals. At the end of the day, the volunteer couples either stayed in a local motel, or in their own travel trailers. One of the men leads a weekly Bible study at a nearby women’s prison. Some of them teach Sunday school, some serve on church committees, one member even discussed the various local charitable projects for which he volunteers, such as projects “with the Lions Club, the local Chamber of Commerce, and some in my neighborhood.” One spoke of the exercise she gets by trying to keep up with her granddaughter.

The ladies in the class in the church in South Texas came pretty close to the men's class in the Panhandle in the area of good-natured ribbing and back-and-forth banter. It was evident these ladies, who ranged in ages from 69 to 80, cared deeply for each other. They, too, were active in other areas of the church: teaching Sunday school, volunteering at mission organizations and taking mission trips, keeping the toddlers during church in the nursery, and two of the group excitedly talked about their involvement in "the Stephen ministry."

The true common bond among all these wonderful folks, however, from the Panhandle to South Texas, is that they are all followers of Jesus Christ. Their faith in God makes them comfortable with the church setting, and with the church offering exercise classes, they see no need to look elsewhere for exercise opportunities. That same faith enables them to accept new members into the group naturally, as different people frequently come, looking for a place to remain engaged. According to scripture, one of Jesus' final charges to his disciples is found in John 13:34 - 35, when Jesus told his disciples, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," (New International Version). These participants are looking for ways to stay engaged in their senior adult years, and the three churches visited are providing them with excellent opportunities to do so.

When that is combined with the health and fitness opportunities provided by the churches to their senior adults, there appears to be ample opportunity in these settings for unfettered access to successful aging!

CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to a recent report entitled *Global Health and Aging*, the National Institute on Aging (NIA), a division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), in 2010 an estimated 524 million people were aged 65 or older – eight percent of the world’s population. By 2050, this number is expected to nearly triple to about 1.5 billion, representing 16 percent of the world’s population,” (NIH, 2011). The NIH and NIA further predict that in five years, for the first time in recorded history, the number of people aged 65 and over will outnumber the children under the age of five!

This phenomenon, the significant change in aging demographics, also known as “the graying of society,” as has been repeatedly mentioned throughout this research, is due primarily to the mass of individuals born between 1946 and 1964. This generation, more commonly referred to as Baby Boomers, is beginning to reach retirement age, and, as a result, the impacts of this change in demographics will affect all segments of our society..., even including our churches.

Bill Craig, Director of LifeWay Leadership and Adult Ministry at LifeWay Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, wrote, “There’s a big change coming for churches related to Baby Boomers – and most churches haven’t recognized it yet. . . . Churches must understand the changes that are coming with this generation of adults and discover how they can be effective in keeping, reaching, and ministering to the baby boomer adults . . . in the years ahead,” (Craig, 2009). The change to which Craig is referring is no more evident or important than the manner in which church recreation ministries are responding to this growing segment of the population.

This dilemma forms the nucleus of this research. The main research question of this study is: based on the knowledge of the benefits of regular physical activity and proper nutrition for senior adults, what is the educational and activity programming response of church recreation ministries for senior adults? To address this issue, three specific sub-questions were investigated:

- 1) What educational programming regarding successful aging is being offered for senior adults by Texas Baptist church recreation ministries? The term “successful aging” has been defined as (a) low probability of disease and disease-related disability; (b) high cognitive and physical functional capacity; (c) active engagement with life (Rowe & Kahn, 1997).
- 2) What activities are being offered for the senior adults by church recreation ministries?
- 3) In those church recreation ministries with programming specifically targeting senior adults, how is participation affecting participants in the areas of spirituality, health, wellness, and fitness?

This research examined the genesis of “successful aging,” beginning with the multi-disciplinary study commissioned by the MacArthur Foundation, through the seminal work by Rowe and Kahn (1997). These initial, foundational studies resulted in an avalanche of research and publications regarding health, wellness, and fitness issues for burgeoning numbers of senior adults. To this day, this field of study continues to provide the basis for volumes of research findings.

The vehicle used for this research was the field of church recreation ministry. Framed in the context of spirituality, this study approached its questions from the

theoretical intersection of spirituality and adult education, a broad field including religious education of adults, a component of which is church recreation.

This study also provided a relatively brief history of recreation and leisure, generally, and church recreation, specifically.

In order to answer the research questions, this study utilized a bi-furcated research methodology. First, utilizing the purposeful selection process (Maxwell, 2005) a survey instrument was created and mailed to 30 elected Baptist churches in Texas. Those selected for the survey represented churches from all geographical regions of Texas, and included churches of all sizes. The survey was designed to provide a general snapshot of the current landscape. As such, it established a starting point from which to examine recreation ministries and programming for senior adults in Texas Baptist churches.

After compiling and analyzing the survey responses, site visits to three churches were planned and carried out. These three particular churches were selected because of their reputations for recreation ministry, their locations in different regions of the state of Texas, and because each church offered at least one program exclusively for senior adults.

During these three visits, I observed five different activities/classes involving only senior adults, interviewed, formally and informally, over 20 participants, four ministers of recreation, one associate minister of recreation, and one minister of senior adults.

Conclusions

The findings of this study produced several conclusions, a few of which are applicable to society in general, and others which pertain specifically to the church. I will

begin the discussion with some inescapable conclusions applicable to society as a whole.

These are drawn primarily from the data outlined in Chapter Two:

- The population is getting older.
- As more adults live longer, there are concrete steps that can be taken to insure that the senior adult years are lived in a healthy and more disease-free manner.
- The concept of Successful Aging was born out of the MacArthur Foundation study, and Rowe and Kahn's (1997) seminal work on the subject.
- Successful Aging is comprised of three components: (a) low probability of disease and disease-related disability; (b) high cognitive and physical functional capacity; (c) active engagement with life.
- Subsequent research in several different, but related, disciplines has substantiated the validity of the successful aging concept, and its efficacy for older adults.

Conclusions specifically pertinent to the church include:

- Like society in general, people who attend church are also becoming older.
- As the number of senior adults in churches continues to grow exponentially, churches must find ways to keep these adults actively engaged in both life in general and the life of the church.
- Churches have been slow to respond to the increasing number of senior adults.
- Some churches have a staff minister whose responsibility includes ministering to the senior adults, and some churches assign no one to this area of ministry.
- Some churches are programming exercise classes specifically for senior adults, and some churches are not.

- Some churches will present periodic health and wellness related educational opportunities (health fairs, blood pressure screenings, nutrition/label-reading classes, presentations on healthy cooking techniques), while some do nothing.

Answers to Research Questions

The answers, therefore, to the research questions are addressed in the following paragraphs.

The first question was, “What educational programming regarding successful aging is being offered for senior adults by Texas Baptist church recreation ministries?”

The simple answer is “not much.” Several of the churches with larger senior adult populations reported that they hold a regular, generally meaning “monthly,” social activity for the senior adults which involves a meal and a program. Sometimes, the program presenter will be a person with specialized knowledge or education in an area pertinent to successful aging, such as a nutritionist, chef, or physician. This finding underscores the fact that programs specifically targeting successful aging for senior adults can be a two-edged sword. No church wants to present programming for which there is no demand. When asked about attending such classes, men expressed very limited interest. On the other hand, women’s interest level was slightly higher, but more for the social aspect of coming together as a group. A couple of ladies even responded with remarks like, “Oh, I’ve done that all my adult life,” and “I already do that.”

Other churches reported that they sponsor annual health fairs for the whole church. At such gatherings, there is a plethora of health care professionals present, and among them are some with knowledge and expertise in diet and nutrition.

The second research question was “What activities are being offered for senior adults by church recreation ministries?”

Many churches responded to this question by stating the obvious: that every program offered in their recreation ministry is open to any senior adult physically able to participate. Therefore, senior adults who are able to participate are more than welcome at any recreational activity. The variety of activities and programs identified by this research included aerobic exercise classes, access to all fitness equipment such as cardio machines, weights, weight machines, or jogging/walking tracks. In fact, at each church visited I observed a small number of senior adults working out in these different areas.

A few churches offer limited programming exclusively for senior adults. At three different churches I witnessed a co-ed senior adult exercise class that involved nothing more than a chair and some resistance bands. I also observed a senior ladies’ weight lifting class, and a senior adult water aerobics class. Other churches had organized senior adult basketball and volleyball leagues. And, one church even reported having a senior adult men’s softball team!

Some churches reported offering nothing exclusively for senior adults. Some churches don’t have the numbers to justify such programming, others churches blamed the minister of senior adults for not planning and overseeing such programming, and one minister of recreation dismissed such notion by saying the senior adults at his church, should they so desire, are more than welcome to join any one of a number of excellent health clubs and gyms in that city!

The third research inquiry asks, “In those church recreation ministries that are programming specifically for the senior adults, how is participation affecting seniors in the areas of spirituality, health, wellness, and fitness?”

This area elicited the most positive responses. Almost everyone interviewed had a story about the health and fitness benefits received from their participation in the exercise classes at church. Many were what one would normally expect: lowered blood pressure, lost weight, better able to chase grandchildren, ability to lift more weight and/or walk longer on the treadmill. Others were more pronounced: the class helped them recover from bypass surgery, from knee replacement surgery, from some muscle-destroying disease. It has allowed many to simply get in the exercise habit, with them sharing tales of how they feel when they have to miss a week or two of classes, and once they realize the benefits, they want to get better at it!

The responses were equally interesting in the wellness aspect of their participation. The regular exercise received at these classes is but a mere piece of the overall wellness puzzle. Benefits from exercise allow them to remain engaged in the life of the church by doing such things as teaching Sunday school, singing in the choir, volunteering in the church office, and working with the babies in the nursery. It also keeps them engaged in the community, being able to volunteer for charitable organizations, taking trips with choirs, lunching with friends, as well as maintaining their ability to do things around the house such as gardening and routine housework.

The common denominator, however, binding them together is their love of and deep abiding faith in Jesus Christ. Because this is the common thread running through all the interviews, an argument can be made that there is no better place for continuing

engagement with life than in the church. Through the interviews, it was apparent that the members of these individual classes have become very close to each other, to the point of checking up on each other outside of church. Though the specific exercise class is the venue, the heart of engagement is the loving nurture that comes from Christian relationships. Within each of these groups interviewed, the familial tone to their relationship was obvious; from the good natured banter and ribbing among the men, to the women who talked openly about walking with and comforting each other through dark times of life. It served to remind me of a previously cited scripture passage, “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another,” John 13:15 (New International Version).

Recommendations

- Churches should feel some sense of responsibility and urgency in helping the senior adults in any way they can to lead longer, healthier, and fuller lives in their senior years.
- Ministry to senior adults must be intentional. On every church’s ministerial staff, there should be one staff member, regardless of ministerial title, charged with the responsibility of being the shepherd to the senior adults.
- This staff minister should become familiar with the unique needs and lifestyle challenges of senior adults, including the basics of the concept of successful aging.
- Churches should do everything in their power to assist their senior adults to live a healthy, active, and engaged life during their senior adult years.

- Churches who have senior adult members should offer some type of physical activity/exercise program especially for them. Irrespective of a church's size or available facilities, every church should have access to at least one room where senior adults can sit in folding chairs and perform stretching and toning exercises with resistance bands.
- Churches which have an ongoing recreation ministry should offer programs exclusively for senior adults. They should be welcome in any of the general programming options for which they are physically capable, but there should be some classes offered only for seniors. Most senior adults, due to retirement or curtailed work hours, are able to have access to the recreation facilities when the remainder of the general adult population is at work.
- Churches should also offer, on occasion, opportunities for their senior adults to learn more about the vital components of successful aging such as food preparation and label reading. This would serve as an excellent supplement to the physical activity/exercise programming. The body of knowledge regarding the concept of successful aging increases with frequent regularity, and the church should want its senior adults to be armed with the latest information.
- Because of the relationships forged through the exercise classes, an astute recreation minister should also plan some social opportunities where seniors can focus on enhancing and enriching their relationships with each other.

Closing Thought

This research journey started with a story about a man stranded on the roof of his flooded home, and how he shunned all rescue attempts, only to perish in the flood. Much like the man on the roof, churches, while trying to get a grasp on the flood of senior adults in their midst, have been sent a way in which they can help their senior adults live longer, healthier, more disease-free lives. The manner of rescue provided is not a canoe, power boat, or helicopter, but instead comes from Rowe and Kahn's (1997) theory of Successful Aging. They define successful aging as being comprised of three components: (a) low probability of disease and disease-related disability; (b) high cognitive and physical functional capacity; (c) active engagement with life. The church, and especially the recreation ministry of the church, is in a remarkable position to help senior adults with all three elements of successful aging. Nonetheless, it will take commitment on the church's part, the effort must be intentional and consistent, and it will involve a bit of self-education. However, with the investment of time and effort, the results will be healthier and happier senior adults, who have been enabled to live out the golden years of life feeling like there is still a place in the world for him or her. These individuals can, and will remain a contributing, engaged member of life, for as long as life shall last. After all, these senior adults, those who have successfully raised their families, contributed to society and church for all these years, are due nothing less.

APPENDIX A

SURVEY

Thank you for agreeing to respond to this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated and is crucial to my study. As we discussed on the phone, I am working on my dissertation as one of the requirements for earning a Ph.D. at Texas State University-San Marcos. For my dissertation topic, I am studying different church sports and recreation ministries and how they are programming for senior adults. I hope to identify trends and best practices that will help us, as ministers involved in Sports and Recreation ministry, help our senior adults live longer and healthier lives. The identity of you and your church will remain absolutely confidential. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you encounter any problems with the questions. Thank you, again, very much. Please place your answer in the space allotted between questions.

1. What best describes your particular ministry area? (Sports and Recreation or in combination with another ministry area?)
2. What is your church's average Sunday school attendance?
3. At what age does your church classify a person as a "senior adult?"
4. What percentage of your church's average Sunday school attendance is senior adults?
5. Does your church have a recreation facility? If so, please describe.
6. How many senior adults, on average, use your recreation facility each week?

7. How familiar are you with the research findings on the subject of “successful aging” for senior adults?

_____ Very familiar

_____ Somewhat familiar

_____ Not familiar at all
8. How many times, during the course of a calendar year, do you offer classroom teaching to senior adults about exercise?
9. How many times, during the course of a calendar year, do you offer classroom teaching to senior adults about diet and nutrition?
10. How many times, during the course of a calendar year, do you offer activities programming exclusively for senior adults?
11. Please describe what recreational programming you currently have planned primarily for senior adults.
12. What value do you place on recreation for senior adults?
13. Please feel free to share any other insights you have regarding recreation ministry for senior adults.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW

1. What is your date of birth? ____/____/____
2. What level of education have you reached?
3. How long have you lived in this geographical area?
4. How long have you attended this church?
5. Are you retired? If so, from what type of work/employment/profession did you retire?
6. If not, in what type of work/employment/profession are you engaged?
7. What is your marital status? S M D W
8. What do you think it means to age successfully?
9. Think of someone you know who is aging successfully. Describe some of the things that you believe contribute to his or her successful aging experience.
10. What do you think it means to age unsuccessfully?
11. Think of someone you know who is aging unsuccessfully. Describe some of the things that you believe contribute to his or her unsuccessful aging experience.
12. Do you believe, in your opinion, that you are aging successfully? If so, why?
13. In which recreation programs do you regularly participate?
14. What types of physical exercise do you participate in on a regular basis?
15. Do you believe that your participation in those programs contributes to your successful aging?
16. If so, in what ways does it contribute to your physical and emotional health?

17. If so, in what ways does it contribute to your staying actively engaged with life?
18. How would you describe, if any, the impact that regular participation in your church's recreation programs has had on your health? On your successful aging?
19. In addition to the recreation ministry, in what other ministries/areas of the church do you participate?
20. How important is religion and spirituality in your life?
- a. Not at all
 - b. Somewhat important
 - c. Extremely important
21. Do you profess to having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? Y N
22. Do you believe that religion, spirituality, or your personal relationship with Jesus Christ plays a role in your successful aging? If so, how?
23. How would you describe your health? Are you currently taking any kind of medications? What are they for?
24. How has learning impacted your life?
25. What new things would you be interested in learning at this stage of your life?
26. Think of something that you learned about recently. How did you learn about it (for example, reading, watching television, using the computer, a friend told you about it, you took a class, etc.), and what did you like about learning it?
27. If your church's recreation ministry offered informative classes in the various components of successful aging (for example, diet and nutrition, weight control, physical activity, healthy cooking and food preparation techniques, grocery

shopping and label reading, tax issues and budgeting on a fixed income, etc.),
would you be inclined to attend? Why or why not?

28. What advice would you give to adults, younger than yourself, on how to age
successfully?

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