



Aging Together/
Grace Lutheran Church
Ellen Ryan, Loretta Jaunzarins, Sarah Ayerst

Contact:
Ellen@hamiltonagingtogether.ca

Strengthening Connections for Older Adults through Faith Communities

July 26th meeting

We are particularly interested in learning how the **Hamilton Aging-in-Community website** we are creating can help faith communities to support socially isolated seniors, especially those living on low income and those who are family caregivers. The website will be interactive and feature positive stories (like some in our report) about activities and strategies as well as offer the chance to respond to queries.

Also we want to hear about what can be done through future interfaith meetings on aging in community – about promoting home sharing and alternative housing options and sharing strategies for reaching out to enhance intergenerational connections.

- 1. What information would you like to be able to look up when considering how to help a socially isolated person?**
- 2. Were there examples in the June 8th summary that you'd like to know more about?**
- 3. What information would you like to see on the website about activities with seniors in local faith communities?**
- 4. How can intergenerational connections be strengthened within faith communities?**
- 5. How do we promote alternative housing options?**
 - Co-housing, Granny-flat with family, home sharing (joint purchase, joint rental, renting space).
- 6. What are some of the challenges and deficiencies that can be addressed in the current housing models for older adults?**
 - Caring Co-ops, Virtual Villages, Buddy Programs, Tenant Associations.
- 7. What housing options interest you?**
- 8. What would make it easier for you or others in your faith community to explore housing options?**

Strengthening Connections for Older Adults through Faith Communities: Summary of Discussion

1. What are the obstacles to social engagement in later life?

Where and how we live / Transportation

Housing developers have a lack of economic incentive to construct safe, clean senior housing.

Structure of communities now changed, culture is more secluded and individualistic which affects the elderly and their caregivers. Our modern social structures encourage self-sufficiency and family sufficiency rather than community dependency.

Physical environment in rural and suburban living is not designed well for elderly and may be isolating

Having to use **taxis, DARTS and busses** is less convenient and more time consuming than driving.

Costs, being late, etc. can discourage efforts to get out and about.

Communication Barriers

Language and cultural difference can reduce opportunities available to English speaking individuals.

Lack of computer literacy reduces knowledge about supports (both in the senior and in potential helpers) regarding housing, finances, specialized services.

Older adults need to **learn how to voice their changing needs** and the obstacles they are facing.

Sometimes obstacles are perceived by others, not the individual. Voicing observations with care and consideration can overcome some of the awkwardness in these discussions.

Inconsistency with health care providers creates a lack of trust. We need to have a trust relationship in order to communicate about intimate and sensitive issues.

Health issues

Hearing, sight and physical impairment can discourage participation. Accessibility issues such as stairs, noisy rooms and small print materials.

Mental health, depression, cognitive decline and dementia, both diagnosed and undiagnosed, affect an individual's inclination and motivation to engage socially. It's so much easier to not go anywhere.

Ageism & care providers can impact communication between older adults and their care providers. Well-meaning family and friends sometimes "takeover" our conversation in our medical consultations blocking our full participation.

1. [cont.] obstacles to social engagement in later life

Loss of Family and Friends

Loss of friends, peers and family increases as we age. Having less family in close proximity means not having family to look after us. Losing a close friend or partner is more difficult for individuals who were socially dependent on that loved one. We need to develop new social habits and communicate our changing needs.

2. How does social isolation show up in your faith community?

Weakness in social supports

Caregiving. Many older adults are caregivers which can be a very isolating situation. Depression is common among caregivers dealing with guilt, duty, sadness and loneliness of caregiving.

(See Question 1, Loss of Family and Friends)

Older folks get forgotten, because people who knew that person have passed as well.

Difficulties when starting over after a recent move, loss of partner or recovering from illness.

Younger people lead busy lives and it is hard to consider including others on top of that.

Gossip; hearing about someone's health issues or personal issues such as a divorce.

In large congregations, it is **more challenging to notice individuals who no longer come** but in smaller congregations, people notice more.

Older adults stop coming due to **lack of interest**.

Difficulty contributing: Feeling that we can't contribute, not knowing how to contribute, not be given opportunities to give back.

Accessibility / Transportation

Old buildings have lots of stairs and lack an accessible entrance.

Insurance Concerns: volunteer transportation to those in need at risk due to insurance

People have trouble going to church in winter (walking or driving is difficult)

Health

Visiting Volunteers. When older adults get ill or have health issues, people visit often, but then visits dwindle to the point where new churchgoers don't know you.

(from Question 1) **Hearing, sight and physical impairment can discourage participation.**

Accessibility issues such as stairs, noisy rooms and small print materials.

3. Who in your faith community reaches out and finds these people?

Friendship groups made of older adults.

“Call Out” committee checks in with people who are missing services and usually don’t

Attendance monitor check each week to see that their people are there at church.

Pastoral visitor (10 hours per week)

Buddy Systems for seniors and others

4. How do faith communities successfully overcome social isolation in older members?

Accessibility

Strategies and adaptations to include people with **hearing, sight and physical impairments**

Transportation support; Informal carpooling, Taxi chits and taxi carpools

Check-in Plans

Contact person to call and talk to, pastor or trained volunteer

Parish nursing (this needs funding)

Volunteers to visit members in LTC, nursing home, or shut-in

Programs and Event Ideas (that draw people in and keep them coming)

Small Group Ministry, sharing vulnerability among and between members of church

Visiting Services / Meals on Wheels, Good Food Box

Meaningful and Fun Volunteer Opportunities scaled for various abilities and interests

Hospitality House concept; when organizing community events volunteers are grouped in

“Hospitality Houses” who collaborate with each other then rotate in order to get to know more people.

Volunteering, both locally and fundraising for other communities of need.

Intergenerational volunteering and mentoring, secret pen-pal exchange

Activities and educational events - time-appropriate for older people

Knitting groups, storytelling groups, community building exercises, music and movies, birthday club every month, intergenerational parties

Newsletters to keep people connected

Food is a connector - lunches and dinners to mix it up with old and new members