



## Congregations, Districts and Homes Can Forge New Relationships

*By Ralph McFadden, Coordinator of Shared Services, Association of Brethren Caregivers*

The Church of the Brethren has 24 retirement homes. One of the homes is a for-profit facility. The homes are related directly to 17 of the districts — and related indirectly to a number of others. Statistically, from 2001 information, there are more than 7,000 residents. The percent of Brethren in the homes range from a high of 66 percent to a low of 2 percent. But don't let the low figure fool you. Often the administrators of those homes with a low percentage of Church of the Brethren members are still very closely involved with the Church of the Brethren.

The homes offer a continuum of care, often called "Aging in Place": independent living units, assisted living, skilled nursing care, Alzheimer's and dementia care, and hospice care. Some of the homes are "stand-alone" homes with self-perpetuating boards, and some are wholly owned by a congregation or by a district with either a board made up of all Church of the Brethren members or a majority of Church of the Brethren members.

Recently the Partner Council of the Fellowship of Brethren Homes, a ministry of the Association of Brethren Caregivers, appointed a District/Home Committee for the purpose of encouraging strong and healthy relationships of districts, congregations and homes. I have found, as I have visited all of the homes and talked with some of the District Ministers, that the communication between homes and districts varies a great deal. There are some very extraordinarily healthy and grounded relationships of homes, congregations and districts. And there

are some situations for homes and districts where the communication is not strong.

The District/Home Committee works at strengthening district and home relationships. In that regard, some concerns come up from time to time. Some members of congregations feel that the homes are large institutions with good or excellent facilities, and that they do not need the church, or the congregation, or the district. Sometimes the staff of the homes feels that the churches and the pastors really do not understand the history, mission and program of the homes.

Congregations and homes have much to offer each other. For instance, the homes can, with the support of the district and congregations, use volunteers for all manner of help. Many of the homes need qualified board members. And on the other side of the equation, many of the homes are more than willing to offer educational opportunities on caring for a parent with Alzheimer's Disease, what to consider when looking for a skilled nursing facility, dealing with grief and loss, or preparing financially for long-term care. Staff persons in the homes can offer many quality workshops, especially in the arena of older adult ministries.

One excellent model currently has been developed by The Village of Morrisons Cove and Middle Pennsylvania. The Village at Morrisons Cove understands that its ministry with older adults is not narrowly focused only on the

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residents or even on the older adults of the community. The district and the home have collaborated on a model that encourages a ministry with older adults in the Church of the Brethren whether or not they become residents. The Village, as an agency of the Church of the Brethren, recognizes that a part of its mission is to work collaboratively with the district in education and support not only of adults, but with congregations asking for such support. For more information, see Robert Neff's article.

There are other models. The three homes in Atlantic Northeast District have collaborated with the district on an attractive promotional brochure. The District Minister of Atlantic Northeast District has a quarterly luncheon with

the administrators of the three homes. Atlantic Southeast is working on a policy that identifies a working relationship between The Palms — a for-profit home, Palms Estates, and the district. Southern Pennsylvania and the Brethren Home Community have a rich history and working relationship. Pinecrest Community, Pleasant Hill Village and the District Minister in Illinois-Wisconsin District are looking at a model similar to that of Middle Pennsylvania.

The history of almost all of the homes identifies that the home was started as a mission, for the indigent, for widows of ministers, or for widows and orphans. That mission continues. The bridges need to be built or rebuilt, between the homes, congregations and district.

## Ministry to Older Adults

*By Robert Neff, Associate for Resource Development,  
The Village at Morrisons Cove, Martinsburg, Pa.*

Only about 6 percent of the population resides in retirement communities and that percentage is not likely to increase by much in the next decade. What does that say about the ministry to older adults in the Church of the Brethren? It is my belief that our ministry extends to all older adults in the region we serve. We should expand our view of ministry to assist in preparing older adults to reinvent life in the later years. We have often done this in the past by offering estate planning seminars to encourage people to prepare wills and make sure their financial affairs are in order. This endeavor, however, is too limited.

The Village at Morrisons Cove and Middle Pennsylvania District have agreed to co-sponsor activities throughout the district. The district will schedule and promote, and the Village will provide financing and the expertise for these events. This fall we will provide a seminar for ministers who provide pastoral care to families dealing with an older adult with dementia. The minister will be able to earn CEU credits. We will also provide a session for families that have a family member who suffers from dementia. We already provide bereavement groups for families who have lost a loved one.

The facility has become one of the sponsors of a new curriculum for older adults developed

by the Mennonites, entitled *Reinventing the Way We Age*. The facility will assist churches in presenting these sessions in church school classes. These sessions will cover health care, financing older adult life, spirituality, intergenerational relationships, volunteering, and other topics. Ken Dychtwald suggests that fully 25 million people will be unprepared for older adult life in the next decade.

We interface with the larger community by sponsoring a Family Fun Day that brings residents and citizens of the region together in a day-long fair at the facility. We have an excellent volunteer program from Junior High youth to older adults that provides many hours of volunteer time. This year we have added Reasy's Tot Lot that provides childcare for our staff as well as the local community. Older adults in the independent living units are now part of an Adopt-a-Grandparent program. Our major task remains assuring the integration of life on campus with the citizens of the region and the members of local churches, and letting people know our ministry extends beyond the boundaries of our facility.

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