

Interview with Judy Laubenstein, Director of Senior Adult Ministry, Atlantic Northeast District



Older Adult Ministry Group: *What prompted the District to create the Director of Senior Adult Ministry position?*

Judy: *Craig Smith, District Executive of the Atlantic Northeast District of the Church of the Brethren, meets quarterly with the CEOs of the three retirement villages in the district. It was at one of these meetings that they saw a need to promote ministry for, by, and with senior adults. Forty to sixty percent of the members in the district are over 50 years of age- so the need for an advocate and encourager of senior adults was apparent.*

Older Adult Ministry Group: *What has the response been thus far to your overtures and attempts at networking within the District?*

Judy: *The response has been wonderful. As with anything new it takes time to get to know people and to know what direction to head. People have been very receptive and helpful. It took a while to put together a ministry team, but it is in place now. We had our first meeting and the team is excited about all the possibilities. The team members are Clara Kniss from Florin COB, Arthur Quackenbos from Pottstown COB, Glen and Sheryl Faus from Chicques COB, Dick and June Blouch from Annville COB and Ralph Speakman from Mohrsville COB. Each area of the district is represented.*

Older Adult Ministry Group: *What vision for older adult ministry within the District is beginning to evolve and how will this staff position facilitate and nurture that vision?*

Judy: *The Senior Adult Ministry team created the vision statement (see above) for Senior Adult Ministry in the Atlantic Northeast District. As Director of Senior Adult Ministry, I will be an advocate for senior adults.*

A plan is in place to improve communication between the district and senior adults in our congregations. We are in the process of gathering the number of senior adults in each congregation. The original thought was to send a newsletter quarterly to each senior's home. However, with rising postage rates, the district will send out a bulk mailing to each congregation, and ask the senior adult contact person or the church secretary to distribute them. This newsletter will contain several articles pertaining to seniors as well as resources and a list of events that might interest seniors.

Most congregations have a senior adult contact person and the team is asking them to aid us also in the process of identifying specific needs and programs for their congregation. The district hopes to provide resources and/or training on various issues and subjects of interest to seniors. We hope to develop a list of resource persons in the district that are willing to share their knowledge and talents.

A goal is to get smaller churches to work with nearby churches to provide activities and programs for older adults. This will give seniors an opportunity to meet new people and reach out to the wider community. Feedback is that more regional programs are needed due to the sheer size of the district.

As a nurse I am developing programs on health and wellness issues, including a program on pre-diabetes and diabetes this fall at Chicques COB to which neighboring churches will be invited. Belinda Graybill from Middlecreek COB will facilitate the bereavement program "Wisdom for Widows" (www.cob-net.org/church/ane/docs/wisdom-for-widows.pdf) for the district.

Kay Weaver, Director of Stewardship for the ANE District, and I have been in dialogue about doing some programs on retirement planning, stewardship and end of life planning.

I would also like to make available Bible studies related to issues of aging. Spiritual growth continues throughout the life span and needs to be nourished. Hebrews 6:10-12 says, "For God is not unjust. He will not forget how hard you have worked for Him and how you have shown your love to Him by caring for other believers, as you still do. Our great desire is that you will keep on loving others as long as life lasts, in order to make certain that what you hope for will come true, then you will not become spiritually dull and indifferent. Instead, you will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith endurance."

Intergenerational activities and programs are seen as vital to the life of the church and these will be promoted and developed. Earl Ziegler, Bus Trip Coordinator for the district, plans on increasing the number of bus trips. Senior adults will be encouraged to serve others by volunteering and going on mission trips.

Mentoring for new members, for engaged couples and younger married couples has also been discussed.

The possibilities are limitless. I pray for God's guidance for the district in reaching out to senior adults and encouraging them to be all they can be for the Lord.

Older Adult Ministry Group: *How did the District succeed in securing funding for this position?*

Judy: *The three retirement communities, Brethren Village, Lebanon Valley Brethren Home and Peter Becker Community, share in funding this part-time—10 hours a week—position.*