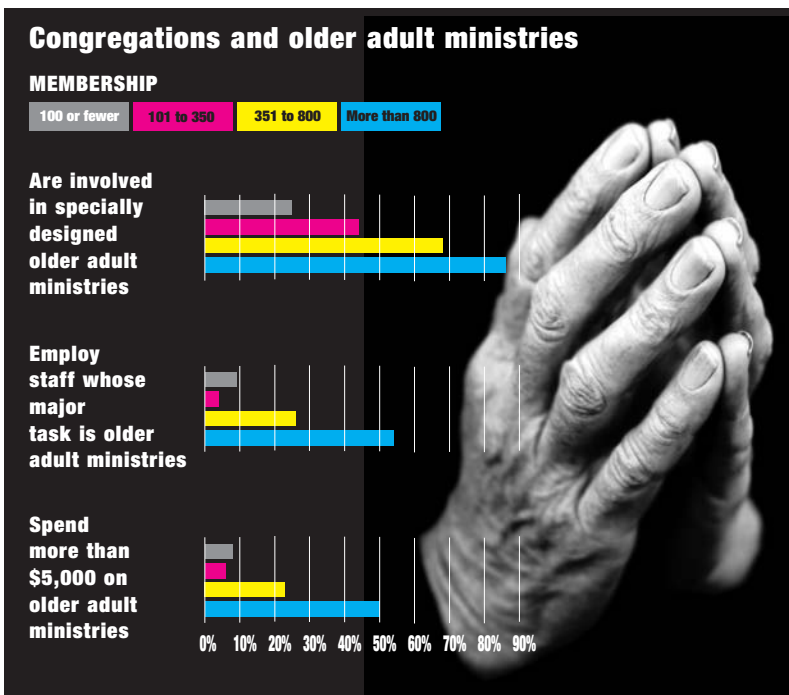


GO FIGURE

PERRY CHANG



Involving older adults

Recent research indicates that, on average, 34 percent of Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) members are 65 or older. A quarter century ago only 13 percent of members were over 65. How have PCUSA congregations responded to this change? Results from a spring 2005 survey of randomly sampled congregations provide some answers.

Two in five congregations are involved in ministries specifically designed for older adults. For example, a volunteer parish nurse for a medium-sized upstate New York congregation offers medical advice, primarily to older adults, two Sundays a month after worship, and a geriatric-trained yogi teaches a senior yoga class at the church. A monthly luncheon program attracts 50 seniors from within and from outside of the same congregation.

Involvement in specially designed older adult ministries varies by congregational size. Eighty-six percent of congregations with more than 800 members and 68 percent of congregations with between 351 and 800 members are

involved in older adult ministries. Only 44 percent of congregations with between 101 and 350 members and 25 percent of congregations with 100 or fewer members have these ministries.

Seventy-seven percent of congregations help older adult members with transportation needs. Most have also sponsored intergenerational activities that involve children and adults of different ages (53 percent) or spiritual development opportunities for homebound older adults or older adults in nursing centers (52 percent). A third of congregations have sponsored programs about living wills, durable power of attorney, health care surrogacy, or other end-of-life legal documents.

ACTIVE SERVANTS

Besides being the focus of ministries, many older adults also actively serve their congregations. In more than three-quarters of the responding congregations, older adults have been involved in worship leadership (88 percent) and community action (76 percent). More than half (57 percent) report older adults

What the research shows

Many older adults put a lot of energy into their churches and many churches put a lot of energy into special ministries for older adults. But PCUSA churches do not put a lot of money—for paid staff or programs—into older adult ministries.

Spending more on specially tailored older adult ministries may not, however, be the only way for congregations to minister to older adults. Larger churches are more likely to be involved in officially designated specialized ministries, including older adult ministries. Still, many small congregations without such ministries are no doubt involved with and involving older adults in other ways. As one respondent put it, “Since most of our members are older adults, they participate in every area of church life. Having a separate program for them wouldn’t make sense in our small-church setting.”

have participated in evangelism.

Almost all congregations with older adult ministries and 82 percent of those without them regard those ministries as “very important,” “important” or “somewhat important.” Only 12 percent, however, employ staff whose major responsibility is older adult ministries, and most of these are larger congregations. Only 7 percent of congregations spend more than \$5,000 each year on older adult ministries. A majority (52 percent) spend nothing. □

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