

Older Adult Ministries in The United Methodist Church

The ***Social Principles*** of The United Methodist Church clearly address the rights of older adults (***The 2016 Book of Discipline***, ¶162.e).

“In a society that places primary emphasis upon youth, those growing old in years are frequently isolated from the mainstream of social existence. We support social policies that integrate the aging into the life of the total community, including sufficient incomes, increased and nondiscriminatory employment opportunities, educational and service opportunities, and adequate medical care and housing within existing communities. We urge social policies and programs, with emphasis on the unique concerns of older women and ethnic persons, that ensure to the aging the respect and dignity that is their right as senior members of the human community. Further, we urge increased consideration for adequate pension systems by employers, with provisions for the surviving spouse.”

Two specific resolutions in ***The 2016 Book of Resolutions*** also address aging: #3023 (pp. 151-152) – “Older Adult Recognition Day” and #3024 (pp. 152-156) – “Mission and Aging of the Global Population.”

Our ***Book of Resolutions*** declares that we are to “observe an annual Older Adult Recognition Day . . . preferably during the month of May.” We do so “to recognize and celebrate the gifts, talents, and contributions older adults make within and beyond the local church,” as well as to “provide congregations with the opportunity to learn more about the issues and concerns related to aging and older adulthood.”

While Older Adult Recognition Day can be observed anytime during the liturgical year, it has become customary to have this special Sunday in May to coincide with May’s Older Americans Month or on one of the Sundays between Mother’s Day and Father’s Day. Whichever Sunday you select, the day provides a wonderful opportunity to recognize, and to educate your congregation to the fruits of lives well lived and ministries well done.

The Book of Discipline requires a General Church Committee on Older Adult Ministries which is administratively related to the General Board of Discipleship (¶1120). This committee currently relates to the Lifestage division of the GBOD. Scott Hughes is the staff contact as Executive Director of Congregational Vitality & Intentional Discipleship.

Each annual conference **may** have a conference council on older adult ministries as described in ¶651 of ***The 2016 Book of Discipline***. Its purpose “shall be to strengthen the older adult ministries in the local churches and districts of the annual conference.” Administratively, the Older Adult Council shall be related to the Conference board of discipleship (as in Virginia), board of laity, or equivalent structure. Responsibilities of the council are to:

- a) Initiate and support ministries, plans, activities, and projects that are of particular interest to older adults
- b) Advocate on behalf of older adults
- c) Support and facilitate, where appropriate, the formation of older-adult caucuses
- d) Identify the needs, concerns, and potential contributions of older adults in the annual conference, districts, and local churches

- e) Cooperate with the boards and agencies of the annual conference in receiving and making recommendations to provide for the needs of older adults in The United Methodist Church
- f) Recommend to the annual conference committee on nominations qualified and motivated older adults for leadership
- g) Educate and keep before the annual conference, its districts, and local churches the lifelong process of aging with emphases on the quality of life, intergenerational understandings, and faith development
- h) Serve as a focal point for supplying information and guidance on older adult ministries.
- i) Support the development of resources that will undergird older adult ministries.

Membership:

- Majority should be older adults
- May include persons with specialized education, experience, and passion for ministry with older adults
- Lay and clergy
- May also include members-at-large, nominated by the conference nominating committee to achieve racial, ethnic, gender and geographic inclusiveness
- The Conference Lay Leader (or designee), the conference coordinator of older adult ministries (if any) and a cabinet representative shall serve as ex-officio with vote
- Members should represent the diversity of older adults in the general population: working, retired, with disabilities and/or chronic health conditions, single, widowed, married, persons living in a variety of residential settings and family situations.

Virginia Conference Standing Rules

In the Virginia Conference, the Older Adult Council falls under the Board of Discipleship. According to the VAUMC Standing Rules, the Board of Discipleship in cooperation with the General Board of Discipleship and the Common Table for Church Vitality shall create partnerships by providing a network of experience, knowledge and coaching through intentional connection to enhance or create effective disciple making processes. These partnerships are created by: (1) coaching at local levels and pulling in identified district and conference resources as needed, (2) training at district or regional levels, (3) drawing on best practices gathered locally, jurisdictionally, nationally and globally, (4) connecting mentor/resource churches with those who request assistance and information, (5) organizing in regional teams, and (6) raising vision, visibility and possibility during Annual Conference sessions and inviting people to connect with a congregational coach.

There are three age-level councils under the Board of Discipleship: Youth, Young Adult, and Older Adult. Each age-level council will meet at least annually as the conference council for the respective ministry areas (with additional members as required by Conference Rules and the **Book of Discipline**, if any) for: (a) sharing of the best practices in their regions, (b) training which will enhance their service to the faith communities within each region, (c) coordinating of conference programs and initiatives as appropriate, and (d) serving as resources to the Regional Network Teams of the Conference Board of Discipleship.

The Older Adult Council shall have six members elected by the Annual Conference.