

Elder Justice Ministry Model:
New Hyde Park

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Holistic Mission Project Paper Outline

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Abstract

The purpose of this integrative paper is to develop a holistic mission project to best serve the elders in the New Hyde Park community. Throughout the aging process, elders are faced with many difficulties as they slowly lose autonomy and status within a society. Elders are one of the most vulnerable members of a community and are often targeted, abused, and exploited. This paper first examines the statistics surrounding older adults in the U.S and the prevalence of abuse. Second, it explores different scriptures to the develop a theological foundation for how the Church is to serve and honor elders. Lastly, the author presents an Elder Justice Ministry Model and provides an example of how it can be implemented in a local church.

Introduction

New Hyde Park is located in Nassau County, Long Island, and is right on the border between Queens and Long Island. Back in September 2022, I was part of a church plant in New Hyde Park. We chose this area because it was central to both Long Island and Queens and we wanted to reach communities in both the suburbs as well as the city. The vision for Bridge Fellowship Church is to become the bridge for the unchurched, de-churched, and the churched to find, renew, and deepen their relationship with Jesus Christ. Currently, most of our members are between the ages of twenty and forty. One of the emerging issues that our community has been facing is understanding how to best help our own elderly parents as they are navigating the difficulties and complexities that come with aging. Many of our members are now becoming the main caretakers for their parents and are looking for resources and guidance on how to best honor and serve their parents with a sound biblical foundation. Additionally, one of the strengths of our congregation is that many of our members are currently working in the health care field as nurses, social workers and mental health counselors. Within New Hyde Park, there are also many different local institutions that are serving the elderly. We believe that God has strategically placed us in New Hyde Park and gifted us with various talents and abilities to best serve the elders in this area. As a church we want to obey God's word and not just serve the elderly in our own congregation, but the elderly in the local community as well.

U.S Statistics on Elder Population

As of 2018, there were 52.4 million adults over the age of 65 in the United States. By 2040, that number is expected to climb to 80 million. Additionally, the number of adults age 85 and over in the United States is expected to more than double from 6.5 million in 2018 to 14.4

million in 2040.¹ For the first time in U.S. history, older adults are projected to outnumber children by 2034. This is largely due to the declining rates of fertility and more of the baby boom generation reaching older adult age.² These statistics mean that the issues surrounding elders will only continue to increase and it is imperative to develop a framework to best honor and serve older adults.

New Hyde Park

New Hyde Park is primarily a commuting town as its relatively a short commute to Manhattan. 75% of the land is utilized for single family residences where the median household income is \$135,625. About 3.7% of the population are living below the poverty line. 15.9% of the population is 65 years and over. Additionally, New Hyde Park consists of families that come from various ethnic backgrounds. About a third of the population is foreign born and about 45% of persons age 5+ years speak a language other than English in the home.³

Within New Hyde Park there are a number of local institutions that are potential partners in the elder justice work. The Golden Years Senior Program and the Alzheimer's Day Program are both adult day care centers that provide a place for seniors to interact with other seniors through shared meals, games, exercises, and other social activities. Their services are either completely free or covered under Medicaid. Additionally, there is the Geriatrics and Palliative

¹ Administration on Aging. (2020, May). *2019 Profile of Older Americans*. (Retrieved on April 18, 2023, from <https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/Aging%20and%20Disability%20in%20America/2019ProfileOlderAmericans508.pdf>), 3-4.

² Vespa, Jonathan. (2018). *The U.S. joins other countries with large aging population*. (Retrieved on April 18, 2023 from <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2018/03/graying-america.html#:~:text=Starting%20in%202030%2C%20when%20all,add%20a%20half%20million%20centenarians>)

³ US Census Bureau, QuickFacts. (Retrieved on April 18, 2023, from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/newhydeparkevilagenewyork/POP010220>).

Medicine department at the Long Island Jewish Medical Center/Northwell that focuses on providing reliable and high-quality medical care to older adults. They provide a wide variety of services such as geriatric, palliative, hospice, rehabilitation and long-term care, and advanced illness management services. Also, the New Hyde Park Fire District and the Nassau County Police Department are potential partners in the work as they are the first responders and are usually the first eyes and ears on the ground for elders in the community. Finally, there is a diverse group of churches and Christian networks within New Hyde Park. Some include; Bridge Fellowship Church, Christ Lutheran Church, Chinese United Methodist Church, Notre Dame Church, and New Hyde Park Baptist Church. Engaging a network of churches in the area would have a greater impact and reach to serve all the elders within the New Hyde Park.

Elder Abuse and Covid-19

The World Health Organization defines elder abuse as “the single, or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, occurring within any relationships where there is an expectation of trust, which causes harm or distress to an older person.”⁴ There are many different types of elder abuse which include, but not limited to: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, financial exploitation and neglect. A study from the Department for the Aging and other organizations found that 76 in 1,000 older New York state residents were victims of elder abuse during a one-year period.⁵ However, many professionals in the elder justice field believe that this number is much higher as another study estimated that only one in twenty-four cases of abuse are

⁴ World Health Organization. (2022). *Abuse of Older People*. (Retrieved on April 18, 2023, from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abuse-of-older-people>).

⁵ New York (N.Y.). Cornell University Lifespan of Greater Rochester and New York (State). 2011. *Under the Radar: New York State Elder Abuse Prevalence Study: Self-Reported Prevalence and Documented Case Surveys Final Report*. Rochester N.Y: Lifespan of Greater Rochester. (Retrieved on April 18, 2023 from <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dfta/downloads/pdf/reports/UndertheRadar2011.pdf>).

reported to authorities.⁶ Additionally, elders who have been abused experience a mortality rate three times higher than those who have not been mistreated.⁷ Elders are also victims of financial exploitation, and while likely under-reported, estimates of elder financial abuse and fraud costs to older Americans range from \$2.6 billion to \$36.5 billion annually.⁸ The increased aging of the population and technological advances have led to a dramatic increase in the opportunity for elder financial abuse. Two major risk factors for elder abuse are social isolation and cognitive impairment. Older adults who are socially isolated are especially vulnerable because they are less likely to seek advice before making a major decision on their finances. Additionally, those who are isolated are less seen by medical professionals or people who can potentially report suspected abuse.

Covid-19 only exacerbated the prevalence of elder abuse. Older adults were further isolated as they had to stay at home combined with increased interpersonal stressors. According to a study that was conducted during the heat of the pandemic, one in five elders reported being abused, which was an increase of 83.6% from prevalence estimates before the pandemic.⁹ Overall, Covid-19 had a much more significant impact on the elderly population. People 65 and older account for 16 % of the total U.S. population, but 75% of Covid deaths came from people ages 65 and older.¹⁰

⁶ Storey, Jennifer E. *Risk factors for elder abuse and neglect: A review of the literature.* (Aggression and Violent Behavior, Elsevier. January-February 2020).

⁷ Dong, Xinqi et al. *Elder self-neglect and abuse and mortality risk in a community-dwelling population.* (JAMA vol. 302,5 (2009): 517-26. doi:10.1001/jama.2009.1109).

⁸ Met Life Mature Market Institute. (March 2009). *Broken Trust: Elders, Family, and Finances.* (Westport, CT: Author. March 2009).

⁹ Chang, E-Shien, and Becca R Levy. *High Prevalence of Elder Abuse During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Risk and Resilience Factors.* (The American journal of geriatric psychiatry: official journal of the American Association for Geriatric Psychiatry vol. 29,11 (2021): 1152-1159. doi:10.1016/j.jagp.2021.01.007).

¹⁰ Freed, Meredith et al. (2022) *Deaths Among Older Adults Due to COVID-19 Jumped During the Summer of 2022 Before Falling Somewhat in September.* (Retrieved on April 18, 2023, from <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid->

Theological Reflections

Biblical View of the Elderly

The elderly in the Bible are often categorized as those deserving of respect and honor. In Exodus 20:12, God commands his people to honor their father and mother. Additionally, in the book of Proverbs, the elderly is distinguished as people filled with wisdom that the youth can glean knowledge from to live a righteous and God-fearing life. Also, old age and a long and prosperous life is seen as a blessing and gift from God. Deuteronomy 5:33 states, “You shall walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess.” God commands his people to honor and respect the elderly and also to learn from their life experiences. Every human being deserves to age with dignity and respect. The Bible calls for elders to have the seat of honor in a community as they are full of wisdom and life experiences. Acts 20:35 states, “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’” The Biblical view of the elders in a community and how we are to treat them is clear. However, often times because of ageism and the current diminished view of the elderly in our society, older adults are not provided the opportunities to share their wisdom and knowledge. Elders are seen as incapable of contributing to society as they need assistance with their activities of daily living. Moreover, elders are being preyed upon by exploiters and they are often suffering in silence. It is imperative for the church to restore the dignity and reinstate elders back into positions within society where they can flourish.

Theological Vision

The body of Christ must be active participants to restore the dignity and honor for all older adults in the community. We must strategically place our older adults in positions where they can teach and guide the younger generations and they can learn and glean from their wisdom and experience. Additionally, the Church is called to protect and look after the older adults in the community. As older adults are often one of the most vulnerable groups within a society and as they navigate the difficulties that come with aging such as cognitive impairment, physical disabilities, loss of loved ones, and social isolation, Jesus commands the body of Christ to serve the “least of these” as a way to also serve God. The reality is that we are all aging and will one day be in a position where we need care. The church is to be a model to the larger community in how we serve, protect, and honor our elderly.

Holistic Mission Approach

Elder Justice Ministry Model

The Elder Justice Ministry Model is a guide for churches to restore the God-given human dignity and honor for elders within the local community by implementing holistic well-being. Well-being isn't just about being happy or getting routine medical check-ups. The Christian Community Development Organization (CCDA) states that well-being is about “finding fulfillment in what we do each day, the quality of our relationships, and the love we experience in our communities.”¹¹ As mentioned earlier, elders within a community are often targeted, abused, and exploited. One of the major risk factors for abuse and financial exploitation is social isolation. Churches can create different programs to regularly check-up on the elderly within a

¹¹ New Church Ministry. *CCDA National Conference 2022*. (Retrieved on April 18, 2023, from <https://newchurchministry.org/event/ccda-national-conference-wellbeing/>).

local community. One simple way to strategically prevent social isolation is to develop relationships with older adults in the community. Churches can visit and volunteer at senior centers, nursing homes, and adult day care centers, and can host outreach events for seniors. Churches can also contact local hospitals and community-based organizations to have their social workers, health care professionals, and elder estate attorneys provide trainings to the local community on elder abuse and financial exploitation as well as provide and share elder resources. The church building itself can be the meeting place and venue for these trainings and events.

Another way to implement holistic well-being for elders in the community is to provide for their basic necessities. Churches can partner with community-based organizations and non-profits that provide basic necessities to elders within their community. The complications of Covid-19 as well as the loss of mobility for many elders make it difficult for elders to go to their local grocery stores, markets, restaurants. An effective way to provide essential items and groceries to elders is by preparing, packaging, and delivering care packages. Churches can partner with already existing organizations that deliver meals and care packages to the elderly or churches can gather their own volunteers to donate, assemble, and deliver care packages to the elderly in their local community.

Finally, the last step to bring holistic well-being to elders is to position them in roles within the community to flourish. Elders have lost their place in society today as they are culturally seen as incompetent and are easily targeted for abuse and exploitation. However, the Bible clearly portrays elders in a high regard and they are categorized as people who hold a wealth of wisdom and knowledge. The Church must create a platform for elders to be reinstated back into society and to have roles where they are able to guide and mentor the future generation.

Bridge Fellowship Church

Bridge Fellowship Church will implement the Elder Justice Ministry Model to reach and restore the God-given human dignity and honor for elders living in New Hyde Park. As mentioned earlier, 15.9% of the population is 65 and older. There are two adult day care centers in New Hyde Park; the Golden Years Senior Program and the Alzheimer's Day Program. There are also various senior centers as well as hospitals in the area where they need volunteers. The first step in the process for Bridge Fellowship Church to implement this model is to gather volunteers regularly to attend and visit seniors in the community. We want to first develop relationships with the organizations and community-based agencies that are already serving the elderly.

After we expand our reach to older adults, we want to develop our own internal programs to address the basic necessities of older adults and combat social isolation. The first program we want to incorporate is to assemble and deliver care packages to elders all across our community. We will partner with the existing organizations that serve older adults to deliver and drop off these care packages. The care packages will consist of daily necessities and non-perishable groceries. We want to also include various encouraging notes and Bible verses in these packages.

Another program we want to incorporate is to invite our elders to our church service and events. Bridge Fellowship Church will create an Elder Outreach Committee to plan and coordinate outreach events to the local community. One form of outreach will be to provide training and resources for the elderly as well as caregivers. We will invite guest speakers and trainers from various hospitals and organizations to deliver talks on elder estate planning, government resources such as Medicaid and Medicare, signs of elder abuse, dementia, caregiver

stress, elder fraud and scams, safety planning, etc. We will also host fun events for seniors such as game nights, exercise and fitness classes, and dance classes. Through our outreach we want to intentionally develop relationships with the elders in our community and create a space for them to be an integral part of our community.

Once we develop relationships with the elderly in our region, we want to develop the “Phone an Elder” ministry where volunteers will regularly call on elders in the community to check up on them. The purpose of this program is for elders who feel isolated and lonely will always have someone to talk to. Elders will have the option to receive weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annual phone calls from volunteers. Elders have the option to cancel at any time and will be a no cost service to them. The program will initially start with Bridge Fellowship Church, but we hope to expand our network and partner with the many local and diverse churches in the area to ultimately reach a wider audience.

Lastly, we want to develop an Elder Advisory Board for New Hyde Park. The purpose of the Elder Advisory Board is to have senior voices represented in our community decisions. The Elder Advisory Board will consist of elder leaders in our community, and ultimately, they will guide and advise on all our elder programs. The needs and desires of the senior community in New Hyde Park will always be represented and these elder leaders will be able to share their knowledge and wisdom to make a greater impact in the community. The vision is for the Elder Advisory Board to be the guiding pillar in New Hyde Park.

Conclusion

Evidently, the issues that surround older adults within our community will only continue to increase and intensify as the population of older adults continue to increase at a rapid rate. The Biblical view of older adults within a community has long been lost in our society and it is

imperative for the Church to restore the God-given human dignity and honor to older adults. Older adults are one of the most vulnerable people in society and the Bible calls for us to serve and protect the “least of these.” Elders have much to contribute to society and they play an integral role as they are the storytellers and historians that are full of wisdom and knowledge to help guide the future generations. The Elder Justice Ministry Model seeks to restore dignity and honor to older adults through implementing holistic well-being. The programs and plans that were developed for Bridge Fellowship Church is an example of how the Elder Justice Ministry Model can be utilized by other churches in their local communities.

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