

# Churches seek ways to minister to homebound members

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**R**egardless of membership and location, all Alabama Baptist churches have one thing in common — homebound members.

Although there are no estimates of how many Alabama Baptists are homebound, pastors and lay people alike know that there are many people — especially senior adults — who are unable to attend church each Sunday because of health issues that keep them home.

In his article “Lost in the Crowd: Meeting the Needs of Homebound Adults,” Richard E. Dodge of Life-Way Christian Resources writes that homebound people can include those permanently living in institutional settings and those living in their own homes or in their children’s homes. The definition can even include those who are confined because they care for a homebound person.

Jamie Baldwin, an associate in the office of Sunday School for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said that while most people think of senior adults when they think of homebound members, even people who have had surgery or an accident can be homebound for a brief time. Regardless of circumstances, each homebound individual has his or her own ministry needs, Baldwin said. The primary need is maintaining relationships, both with the Lord and the church. “Unless the church stays in touch with the homebound, they are forgotten,” he said. “As a result, this homebound person is hurt physically, emotionally and spiritually because they feel forgotten. A lot of spiritual damage can be done.”

When senior adults first are confined to their homes, Baldwin said, churches have a tendency to reach out to them. But after a couple of years, the church tends to forget. Changes in the leadership and congregation of the church can cause homebound members to be forgotten as well. “The longer a person is homebound, the fewer people there are to have that relationship with the person — people in the church don’t know them,” he said.

Baldwin said homebound ministry can be as simple or complex as a church wants to make it, but he emphasized that all churches are capable of ministering to their homebound members. “Christ spoke about leaving the 99 and going after the one,” he said. “Even if your church has just one homebound member, the church should reach out to that one.”

Homebound ministry could be as simple as visiting and going over the Sunday School lesson, but Bible study isn’t always enough. And sometimes physical limitations, such as hearing or vision loss, affect the way homebound individuals and visitors interact. “For example, as some senior adults get older, they cannot see as well,” Baldwin said. “Someone needs to come in and read to them, or the church needs to help them get their Sunday School lessons in braille. “Or maybe someone needs a ride to the doctor or needs food,” he said. “Meeting these needs is the responsibility of the church.”

Homebound ministry can be challenging because to minister effectively, the needs of each individual homebound member must be considered. Baldwin said, however, anyone who has the time and ability to visit a homebound person should do so. “Although we don’t want to think about it, it’s only a matter of time until we are in their situation. There’s a great possibility that the majority of us will be homebound at some point in our lives,” he said.

As the baby boomer generation ages and the number of senior adults continues to rise, all aspects of senior adult ministry will be essential to church health.

According to Baldwin, “the church that is going to be a cutting-edge church is the church that ministers effectively to senior adults.”

## Beginning a ministry

In his article "Lost in the Crowd: Meeting the Needs of Homebound Adults," Richard E. Dodge suggests 10 steps for churches starting a homebound ministry.

- Identify people whose physical conditions limit their ability to come to church and/or to sit through Bible study and worship. Include people inside your church as well as prospects from your community.
- Determine whether anyone is providing Bible study to these people.
- Obtain personal information from the people identified.
- Determine specific needs and the ability of each person to participate.
- Discuss this ministry need with key church leaders.
- Develop a list of prospective workers.
- Develop a timetable for starting this ministry, including training plans and budget needs.
- Enlist participants for this ministry.
- Match participants and those who will minister to the homebound adults.
- Provide ministry to address Bible study and other needs as appropriate.

(The full text of this article and others on senior adult ministry are available at [www.thealabamabaptist.org](http://www.thealabamabaptist.org).)

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Jamie Baldwin  
State Board of Missions