

More churches becoming equipped to meet senior adult needs

By Brooklyn Noel

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NASHVILLE, Tenn. (BP)--It used to take two vans and a bus to get the 25 members of the Live Longer and Like It band and their equipment to as many as four performances each week. But since August, when Central Baptist Church in Winchester, Ky., purchased a 26-passenger bus through LifeWay Christian Resources, all the band members -- plus their keyboard, guitars, umbrellas, tap shoes and kazoos -- can make the trips together.

"You just can't imagine how wonderful the bus has been for us," said Billie Pace, the band's keyboardist and, for about the last 20 years, the senior adult director at Central Baptist. "Now when I make announcements, I know everyone heard the same thing at the same time instead of having to repeat it in each vehicle."

Providing comfortable transportation is just one way churches can meet the needs of their blossoming senior populations. Assistive and remote listening devices, as well as easily accessible facilities, become more important for churches as their congregants grow older, said Jennie Taylor, a production associate in direct marketing for LifeWay's retail division.

"People are living longer, and they want to be in church and be involved," Taylor said. "They don't want to just watch church on TV."

According to data gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2000, people over age 65 make up more than 12 percent of the American population. As baby boomers begin reaching retirement age, that number will only grow -- a fact that is leading many churches to look seriously at the way they minister to seniors.

Mic Morrow, an adult ministry specialist in LifeWay's church resources division, said he most often hears seniors complain of loneliness, so ministering to them, for them and through them is crucial.

"There's a need for closeness, fellowship and warmth," Morrow said.

For Central Baptist, getting the Live Longer and Like It band members on one bus added the aspect of fellowship to the music outreach.

"It made [the trips] more comfortable and allowed us more fellowship time," Pace said. "It made the difference between night and day."

The band is an important ministry tool for both the seniors involved and the people for whom they perform.

"Music is such a common denominator that even with Alzheimer's patients, they may not know who they are or where they are from, but when they hear those old songs they can sing along," Pace said.

The band is just one aspect of the senior adult ministry at Central Baptist. As many as 135 seniors get together several times each month for various activities.

“I’m always amazed at how many people want to be involved,” Pace said. “It’s the difference between being homebound and actually getting out and being with other people.”

There is a misconception that seniors in the church can no longer contribute to the church’s mission and should spend their time resting instead, Morrow said.

“But they are living longer and feeling better. They’re asking, ‘What can I do as a Christian to be involved in the Lord’s work?’”

Central Baptist has operated the Live Longer and Like It ministry for nearly 30 years, but Taylor points out that many churches are getting a better focus on the needs of their seniors. Combating loneliness means getting seniors out of their homes and into more social settings, but there are unique physical accommodations that seniors often need to effectively participate.

For that reason, LifeWay’s retail division offers several products, in addition to church buses, designed to meet senior needs. Services such as Audio Link provide listening assistance and multi-language applications; **Lightcast**, a real-time audio connection, helps remote listeners; and Handi-Ramps provide easier access.

Morrow estimated that seniors provide nearly 60 percent of a church’s income but often don’t have the services they need to actively participate in church ministry or programs.

“Seniors often give a lot but ask for little in return,” he explained. “Churches must make sure they are taken care of all the time.”

For more information or to purchase services and products for seniors, visit www.lifewaystores.com/specialservices or call 1-800-464-2799.

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