

The Universal Mechanism for Ministry to Seniors – Description

Larry Spears: <https://universalistfriends.org/weblog/the-universal-mechanismfor-ministry-to-seniors>

Purpose: To provide support for seniors in all religious communities.

Product: A clear and intentional mechanism for meeting the needs of seniors consistent with religious and cultural traditions.

Results: The benefits of an intentional mechanism for meeting the needs of seniors include:

- Religious community is strengthened;
- Senior appreciation for the initiative by the religious community to address important issues;
- Support for senior independence in their residence; and
- Implementation of the application of religious faith in practice.

The proposed mechanism for meeting the needs of seniors should include all seven of these elements:

1. Ministry of Contact: A ministry of contact provides continuity of relationship. It includes:

- Contacts initiated by the religious community
- Regular personal visits by personal visit, mail, email, phone, Skype/Zoom, Twitter as appropriate
- Contact regularity for continuity and changing needs
- Clear arrangements for appropriate emergency contact procedure.

2. Ministry of Listening: A ministry of listening to seniors provides mutual benefits. These benefits include:

- A physical presence in listening with each senior;
- Training for religious community members in active listening; and
- Time-structured contacts for listening and ample sharing of senior stories and concerns.

3. Ministry of Focused Conversations: A ministry of focused conversations for seniors provides opportunity to address deep issues of concern for seniors. It includes:

- Resolution of life issues and relationships; and
- End times, including consideration of
 - Medical care for the duration of life
 - Advanced healthcare directive, living will and durable power of attorney services
 - The “Bucket List” of remaining activities and opportunities
 - Will arrangements
 - Opportunities for legacy arrangements before and after death
 - Residential options
 - Home care options
 - Dementias and aging diminishments
 - Final death arrangements
 - Hospice services and other assistance

4. Ministry of Shared Experience: A ministry of shared experience provides mutual sharing of practical care experiences. It includes sharing the experiences of religious community members and seniors on issues of concern relating to:

- In-home support services
- Residential transitions
- Memorial meetings
- Obituaries

5. Ministry of Food: A ministry of food provides symbolic and substantive support for seniors. It includes:

- Symbolic gestures of kindness represented by periodic, appropriate food offerings; and
- Sustaining, regular food delivery arrangements to support health and residential independence.

6. Ministry of Counsel: A ministry of counsel provides advice and referral to resources to address the needs and concerns of seniors. It includes:

- Reading materials
- Referral for theological reflection
- Referral to legal service resources
- Referral for financial arrangements
- Referral for assistance services as death approaches

7. Ministry of Mourning: A ministry of mourning provides confirmation, comfort, and support for the mourning process. It includes:

- Recognition of anticipatory mourning processes before death;
- Recognition of anticipated mourning processes in others after death;
- Support for caregivers; and
- Opportunities for memorial meetings before and after death.

Senior Selection Criteria: Seniors eligible for Meeting ministries are identified as:

- Anyone beyond their 65th birthday in age or other objective age criteria; and
- Any person with appropriate health diagnosis, illness, or disability in the judgment of the leaders of the religious community.

Refusal: Seniors may refuse one or all of the seven ministries.

- Note any refusal on the checklist.
- The religious community may reconfirm the offer to each ministry in the Ministry of Contact at a later time, recognizing the evolution of each Meeting senior's changing life situation.

Organization: This ministry is grounded in volunteers, but any parts can as well be provided through employed persons. The seven elements of the full ministry to seniors can be organized in any manner appropriate to the religious community and culture, provided that all seven elements are effectively included.

The Universal Mechanism for Ministry to Seniors – Checklist

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Senior:	Address:	Telephone:
<p>This checklist supports the ministry support services for seniors. These seven services for each eligible person include:</p>		
Ministry of Contact:	Contact Person:	Dates:
Notes:		
Ministry of Listening:	Contact Person:	Dates:
Notes:		
Ministry of Focused Conversations:	Contact Person:	Dates:
Notes:		
Ministry of Experience:	Contact Person:	Dates:
Notes:		
Ministry of Food:	Contact Person:	Dates:
Notes:		
Ministry of Counsel:	Contact Person:	Dates:
Notes:		
Ministry of Mourning:	Contact Person:	Dates:
Notes:		
Leader Confirmation:		Date:

The Universal Mechanism for Ministry to Seniors – Comments

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Gail Rogers · 30 Sep 2016 at 6:23 am

Thank you for this, Larry. This is a topic currently under discussion in my meeting and yearly meeting. I appreciate the comprehensiveness of your preparation, and will share it with Ministry and Counsel Committee in my meeting.

There is a workshop at Woolman Hill in November on this topic: [Building Pastoral Care Skills to Support Meetings: Support Across Generations for Elders \(Sage\)](#).

Larry Spears · 06 Oct 2016 at 10:33 am

A Minnesota friend has suggested the more explicit recognition and inclusion of relationship loss within the Senior Ministry mechanism:

I feel like your areas of ministry to seniors are all very relevant. My comment is a question about whether the needed assistance by persons who are dealing with significant loss of relationship, usually through death or the gradual diminishing of a relationship brought about by dementia, or it could also be other type of loss, such as divorce. The significant point is that the loss of a very significant relationship, when a person is elderly and perhaps vulnerable, can result in a specific need for supportive help dealing with the loss.

It is partially addressed in 'Ministry of Mourning', but I wondered if this section might be expanded to something like 'Ministry of Mourning or Support for Significant Relationship Loss' or words of that nature. The bullets would then also include specific follow up services (ministry) to elderly persons who are grieving, sometimes a prolonged process.

My thought was that in the alternative you could have a separate Ministry #8 dealing with this 'Ministry of Support following Significant Relationship Loss'

I consider this a great need for the elderly person who is emotionally stressed, lonely, and in a vacuum, particularly if they do not have other family or supportive people around them, following such a major loss in their life.

Relationship Loss Clarification: Clarification is intended for 7. Ministry of Mourning to include recognition of loss of relationship.

Larry Spears · 06 Oct 2016 at 10:35 am

A further suggestion suggests expansion of the pool of "Seniors" to include those who may not have an identifiable illness or disability:

Senior Pool Expansion:

See your 'Senior Selection Criteria'. The second 'criteria' category would seem to exclude people who do not have an identifiable illness or disability. People could have a need for the help defined in your different ministries, without being ill or 'diagnosable' in some other way. Am I misinterpreting something?

The ministry services can be directed to anyone in the religious community for situations that come to the attention of members or leaders within that community. There is no intention to exclude. Inclusion is a matter of judgment within the religious community to be of service. Clarification of the "senior" pool should rightly be addressed in any revision of the Ministry to Seniors for raising awareness of the importance of discernment in providing these services.