

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP WHITE PAPER

Still Bearing Fruit

The Untapped Resource of Older Adults

A VISION FOR STRONGER CHURCHES,
HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES AND A BRIGHTER FUTURE

*“They will still bear fruit
in old age.”*

PSALM 92:14

A CALL TO ACTION FOR PASTORS AND SENIOR CHURCH LEADERS

VALUE  MOBILIZE  MAKE A DIFFERENCE

STILL BEARING FRUIT

The Untapped Resource of Older Adults

A Christian Perspective on
the Global Aging Opportunity.

A Collection of Thoughts for Christian Leaders.

A slightly biased view from an 84-year-old man, still bearing some fruit.

Baha Habashy · October 2026

Note: In the research and development of this paper, we used Perplexity AI, Google Gemini, ChatGPT and Claude AI.

Executive Summary

Please allow me to be very personal. I am 84 years old, and I believe that I am living the most purposeful years of my life. One of the unexpected gifts of my later life has been discovering a new sense of purpose through caring for caregivers. Rather than feeling that my most productive years were behind me, I have found myself challenged and energized by the opportunity to encourage people who are carrying the heavy responsibility of caring for someone they love.

The purpose of sharing this paper is not to be admired, but rather to challenge and energize senior like me and Christian leaders to see this stage of life as the greatest untapped resource in the kingdom of God.

For leaders, perhaps the primary role of leadership is not to serve seniors but to create a culture of seniors in service. That is why I write this research-based paper.

The World is Aging.

The World Health Organization expects the number of people aged 60 and over to double, from about one billion in 2020 to 2.1 billion by 2050. [\[1\]](#) The Lausanne Movement asks what this means for the church. Its research finds that global aging has received little attention in Christian mission beyond a few small initiatives, that most Christians are unaware of where the trends are heading, and that churches and their leaders are largely unprepared. [\[2\]\[3\]](#)

This is more than a demographic challenge.

It may be one of the great mission opportunities of our generation.

Older adults are not simply people who need care. They are people who can give care, offer wisdom, disciple younger generations, mentor, pray, evangelize, encourage, lead, create, serve and bear witness to the faithfulness of God.

The biblical picture is not of people becoming spiritually or relationally irrelevant as they age. Psalm 92 declares:

“They will still bear fruit in old age; they will stay fresh and green.”

The question for the church, therefore, is not simply:

How can we care better for our older adults?

That question matters. But another question may be even more important:

What might God want to do through our older adults?

I hope this paper proposes a shift:

- From ministry to seniors → ministry with seniors
- From caring for older adults → equipping older adults
- From asking what seniors need → asking what God can do through them
- From retirement as withdrawal → retirement as a new season of calling
- From programs for one generation → intergenerational communities of mission

This is not an argument for ignoring the needs, frailty or limitations that can accompany aging. Nor does it suggest that every older Christian will remain physically capable of the activities they once performed.

Rather, it is a call to recover a biblical vision of fruitfulness in every season of life.

The opportunity before Christian leaders is remarkable:

What could happen if the accumulated wisdom, experience, faith, relationships and gifts of millions of older Christians were intentionally released into the mission of God?

1. The World Is Changing

For most of human history, relatively few people lived into advanced old age. That is changing dramatically.

People are living longer, families are changing, birth rates are falling, and the proportion of older adults is increasing throughout the world.

The United Nations Population Division, as quoted by Lausanne, describes population aging as unprecedented, pervasive, profound and enduring. It is not a passing trend. We are moving toward a world in which older adults will make up a much larger share of humanity. [2]

Lausanne is clear that this is more than a social or economic matter. Global aging will affect the church, discipleship, relationships between the generations, and the Great Commission itself. [2]

The implications are large, and most of us have not yet thought them through.

Yet it is easy for the church to see an aging population mainly as a problem of care.

There will certainly be greater needs for pastoral care, transportation, health support, visitation, caregiving, dementia ministry, grief support and practical assistance.

But if that becomes our only way of seeing it, we may miss something important.

The aging population is not only a population to reach.

It is a population through which God may reach others.

2. An Opportunity the Church May Be Missing

The Lausanne Movement has been unusually direct about this issue.

Lausanne says that global aging has received little attention from Christian leaders beyond a few small initiatives. [2] Most communities have many older members, yet those who face the hard realities of growing old are too often remembered only in the prayer list, while the church's energy goes to the young. [3] But Lausanne does not stop there. It asks how the church might mobilize what it calls the untapped mission force of older adults. [3]

That is the heart of it.

The older generation should not be viewed solely as the recipients of ministry.

But more importantly, they can also be its agents.

A church that sees older adults primarily as people who require ministry may unintentionally create a culture of dependency.

A church that sees them as mature disciples who can still contribute may discover a remarkable reservoir of wisdom, life experience, biblical knowledge, professional expertise,

relationships, prayer, perseverance, resilience, compassion, and knowledge of God accumulated over decades.

Some may have little physical strength left. Some may no longer be able to work. Some may struggle with illness or disability. But fruitfulness is not synonymous with productivity.

A person confined to a chair may pray for a missionary. A widow may become a spiritual grandmother to a younger woman. A retired teacher may mentor children. A former business leader may coach younger ministry leaders. A grandfather may become the spiritual anchor of a family.

While the form of ministry may change.

The calling to bear fruit should never disappear.

3. Is Later Life A Time of Greater Spiritual Searching?

We should be careful here.

It would be an error to say that everyone becomes more spiritual as they age. People are individuals. Some become more engaged with faith. Some remain stable. Some become less religious or disengage altogether.

Research, however, does suggest that later life can be a significant period of spiritual development.

Vern Bengtson and Merrill Silverstein's 45-year Longitudinal Study of Generations found three broad patterns of spiritual change among older adults: increase, stability and decline. In the interviews, increase was the most common pattern. [\[4\]](#)

A separate 35-year study by Bengtson, Silverstein, Putney and Harris found that the oldest generations showed a "retirement surge" in religiosity. [\[5\]](#) The picture is not simple, though. Part of the difference between older and younger people comes from the generation they belong to, not from aging itself.

More recently, Pew Research asked Americans to look back over their lives. Among those aged 65 and older, 45% said they had become more spiritual and only 8% said less. Thirty-three percent said they had become more religious, and 24% said less. [\[6\]](#) These are people's own memories, not measurements taken over time, but the direction is clear.

The distinction between spirituality and religious participation is important.

An older person may be thinking deeply about: *What has my life meant? What really matters? Have I made a difference? What will I leave behind? What do I believe about God? What happens after death? How can I repair relationships? How can I help my children and grandchildren? What is God asking of me now?*

These are not merely questions about aging. They are questions about meaning, identity, purpose and eternity.

And they create extraordinary opportunities for Christian witness.

4. The Question Is Not Simply Whether Seniors Will Come to Church

This is where churches may need to rethink their approach.

It is tempting to say: “Seniors aren't interested in church anymore.” That statement is too broad.

A better observation is: Many older adults may not be looking simply for more traditional church programming. They may be searching for **deeper purpose, meaningful relationships, spiritual community and opportunities to make a difference.**

A senior may have little interest in joining another program labelled “Senior Ministry.” But that same person may be deeply interested in mentoring a young couple, helping a struggling family, studying Scripture with others, praying for missionaries, supporting caregivers, sharing life lessons, helping immigrants, encouraging younger pastors, serving the community, writing their story, reconciling with family, or discovering what God wants to do with the years remaining.

The question may therefore be less about: “How do we attract seniors to our senior program?” but “*How do we help older adults discover and live out their calling?*”

That is a very different ministry philosophy. We offer it as something to test in your own community, not as a research finding.

5. From “Senior Ministry” To “Ministry by Seniors”

Lausanne’s vision points in exactly this direction. It pictures churches where older adults are “released into their full potential” instead of spending their last decades on the sidelines, and where retirement becomes a new opportunity for fruitfulness. [3]

This is an important theological correction.

Older adults are not valuable because the church can use them.

They are valuable because they are human beings created in the image of God.

But once that dignity is recognized, the church should also ask: What gifts has God entrusted to these people, and how can those gifts bless others?

Paul's vision of Christian ministry is fundamentally about multiplication:

“And the things you have heard me say ... entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.” — 2 Timothy 2:2

That is not a retirement strategy. It is a multiplication strategy.

6. Purpose Does Not Retire

There is also growing evidence outside specifically Christian research that older adults benefit from meaningful engagement and purposeful service.

In a randomized controlled trial of 445 retired Australians aged 60 and over, those who took up formal volunteering as asked, about an hour a week for six months, showed significant gains in life satisfaction, purpose in life and personal growth over the following year, compared with those who did not volunteer. [7]

A large U.S. study of almost 13,000 adults over 50 found that those who volunteered at least 100 hours a year, about two hours a week, did better on several measures four years later:

more purpose in life, optimism and positive feeling, and less loneliness and depression. They also had a lower risk of dying during the follow-up. [8]

Another study found that when older adults stopped volunteering, their quality of life, self-esteem, esteem and sense of autonomy were more likely to decline. Participants spoke of how much it mattered to feel useful and to pass on skills and knowledge. [9]

These studies come from secular research, and most show association rather than proof. We cite them as illustration, not as our foundation. Our foundation is Scripture.

The church has something more profound to offer than volunteering alone.

It can offer vacation.

It can say to an older Christian: Your life has not become irrelevant because your career has ended. Your experience has not become meaningless because your children have grown. Your usefulness is not measured by your physical strength. Your calling is not cancelled by your age. God may still have people for you to encourage, disciples to make, prayers to pray, wisdom to share and fruit to bear.

That is a powerful message of hope.

7. A Biblical Vision of Fruitful Aging

The Bible does not present old age simply as decline. It acknowledges weakness, mortality and the realities of aging. But it also repeatedly portrays older people as important participants in God's purposes.

Psalm 71:18

“Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation.”

Notice the purpose. The psalmist does not merely ask God to sustain him. He wants to declare God's power to the next generation.

Psalm 92:14

“They will still bear fruit in old age; they will stay fresh and green.”

Psalm 78:4. The older generation is instructed to tell the coming generation about the works of God. Faith is transmitted across generations.

Titus 2. Older men and women are given an explicit role in teaching and modelling faith to younger believers.

Luke 2. Simeon and Anna are not incidental characters. They are older people whose faithfulness places them directly inside the story of Christ's arrival. Anna, described as an elderly widow, worships, fasts, prays and then speaks to others about the child. Her age did not remove her from God's story. It positioned her for a particular kind of ministry.

Joel 2:28 / Acts 2:17. The Spirit's outpouring is described across generations: “Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.” God's kingdom is not a youth movement. It is a multi-generational movement.

8. The People Who Keep Bearing Fruit

History gives us memorable illustrations—not because every Christian should expect to become a Corrie ten Boom, Billy Graham or John Stott, but because their lives challenge the assumption that significant Christian influence necessarily ends with advancing age.

Corrie ten Boom

Corrie ten Boom (1892–1983) kept on ministering long after most people would have retired. In April 1976, the month of her 84th birthday, a new travelling companion joined her, and in the months that followed they travelled across Europe and North America. At nearly 85, she settled in California, where she kept writing, answering letters, giving interviews and welcoming guests. In 1978, a stroke took away her ability to speak and write as before. Her companion, Pamela Rosewell Moore, remembers her as no less resolute through those last five years, and still a powerful witness to Christ. [\[10\]](#)

Her story reminds us of something important: Fruitfulness may change form. There may be a season for speaking. A season for writing. A season for mentoring. A season for hospitality. And perhaps eventually a season when the ministry becomes largely prayer and presence.

The objective is not to pretend we are still 40. The objective is to ask: What does faithfulness look like at this stage of life?

Billy Graham

Billy Graham's final major North American crusade took place in New York in June 2005. He was 86 years old. Police and park officials estimated the crowds at 242,000 across the three days, and nearly 2,800 people at each meeting, on average, came forward in response to his invitation to commit their lives to Christ. [\[11\]](#)

But the lesson is not that every 86, year, old should stand before a stadium. The lesson is that Graham's later years did not have to be defined simply by what he could no longer do. His influence continued through preaching, writing, prayer, relationships and the platform God had given him.

John Stott

John Stott offers a different model. His later life influence was not primarily large public events. It was about multiplication.

Stott wrote more than 50 books. In 1969, at the age of 48, he began giving his book royalties to what became the Langham Partnership, to train and equip pastors and Christian leaders around the world. In 2001, at 80, he invited Chris Wright to take over its leadership, handing on the work he had started. [\[12\]](#)

His example may be particularly relevant to the church's opportunity with older adults.

Sometimes our greatest contribution in later life is not what we personally accomplish. It is what we enable others to accomplish.

9. The Most Overlooked Asset May Be Wisdom

A church can easily measure what people do. It is much harder to measure what they know.

A 75, year, old may have managed employees, raised children, cared for dying parents, survived financial hardship, experienced marriage difficulties, built businesses, taught students, served in government, worked in health care, led organizations, immigrated to another country, experienced failure, experienced forgiveness, and walked with Christ through decades of life.

That knowledge is not theoretical. It has been tested.

The church should ask: Where is this wisdom needed?

Perhaps by young parents. Perhaps by new Christians. Perhaps by young pastors. Perhaps by couples struggling in marriage. Perhaps by caregivers. Perhaps by immigrants. Perhaps by people facing financial hardship. Perhaps by people approaching death. Perhaps by younger leaders who desperately need someone who has already made the mistakes they are about to make.

The older generation carries something that cannot simply be downloaded.

Wisdom accumulates slowly. And once it is gone, it cannot easily be recreated.

Christians believe that we are stewards, not owners, of what God has given us. That is true of money. It is just as true of the years, the experience and the wisdom He has given an older person to use for the good of others. If we truly believe this, it will transform how we see our ageing years.

10. Grandparents: A Global Mission Force

Lausanne highlights another large opportunity: grandparents. Citing The Economist, its report estimates that there are about 1.5 billion grandparents in the world today, and projects about 2.1 billion by 2050. [\[2\]](#)

Grandparents occupy a unique position in the lives of families. They often have relational access, credibility, time, family history, life experience, and opportunities for conversations that parents may not have.

They can tell stories. They can pray. They can listen. They can model forgiveness. They can transmit family values. They can talk about God. They can become spiritual mentors.

A church that equips grandparents with intentional spiritual influence may be reaching not merely one generation but multiple generations simultaneously.

11. The Intergenerational Church

The answer is not to create churches divided into age compartments. Children over here. Youth over there. Young adults somewhere else. Seniors in another room.

Such organization may sometimes be useful. But the church is fundamentally a body, not a collection of age-based departments.

Lausanne's vision calls for churches to become intergenerational communities marked by reciprocal care, mentoring, mutual encouragement and belonging. [\[3\]](#)

That means younger people need older people. Older people need younger people. And both need one another.

Imagine: young couples being mentored by older couples; young pastors having older pastors as spiritual companions; older Christians mentoring teenagers; retirees helping young entrepreneurs; grandparents praying intentionally for grandchildren; older women mentoring younger women; older men mentoring younger men; younger people helping older adults navigate technology; older adults sharing stories of God's faithfulness; generations serving together in the community.

This is more than a senior's ministry. It is church being church.

12. Multiplying Ministry

There is also a practical leadership issue. Pastors have limited time. This is not a criticism. It is reality.

A pastor cannot personally provide every pastoral conversation, visit every shut-in, mentor every young leader, counsel every couple, disciple every new believer and meet every community need.

Yet many churches unintentionally organize ministry around the pastor doing ministry for people.

The New Testament presents another model: Equip the people of God for ministry.

Ephesians 4:11–12 describes leaders whose role is to equip God's people for works of service. Instead of asking: "How much ministry can our pastor provide?" ask:

"How many people can our leaders equip to become ministers?"

This is where older Christians become especially important.

Suppose a church has 100 mature older adults. Perhaps ten could mentor younger Christians. Another ten could provide regular encouragement to caregivers. Another ten could become prayer partners. Another ten could help new immigrants. Another ten could mentor young couples. Another group could support missionaries. Another could provide practical help in the community.

Some may lead. Some may simply listen. Some may pray. Some may write. Some may provide hospitality. Some may serve only a few hours a month. But the cumulative impact could be enormous.

This is what multiplication looks like.

The pastor's role changes from being the person who does the ministry to being the person who helps multiply ministry.

This is not a commercial calculation about people. Every person has inherent dignity as someone created in the image of God. But stewards do ask whether they are using limited time in ways that multiply ministry. Ten mature Christians equipped to walk alongside ten families may accomplish what no pastor could accomplish alone. And the experience older Christians carry is not only a record of the past. It can become an investment in the future.

13. From Retirement to A New Season Of Calling

Retirement is a relatively modern concept. For many people, it has become a psychological dividing line: Before retirement: I have purpose. After retirement: I am finished.

Christian theology should challenge that assumption.

A career can end. A job can end. A particular ministry can end. Physical abilities can change. But God's purposes do not automatically end at age 65.

A new season may begin. For one person, it may mean more time with family. For another, mentoring. For another, prayer. For another, writing. For another, community service. For another, evangelism. For another, caring for a spouse. For another, simply being a faithful friend.

The question is not: "How can I keep doing what I did when I was younger?" It is: "What does faithfulness look like now?"

That question allows aging to be neither denial nor defeat. It becomes discipleship.

14. From Vision to Action: Mobilizing Older Adults for Mission

The case for older adults as a mission force should lead to more than a change in language. It should lead to a change in practice.

If the church believes that older Christians are still bearing fruit, **then Christian leaders must create pathways through which that fruit can be expressed.** This does not mean finding another list of volunteer jobs for seniors. It means helping people discover where their accumulated experience, wisdom, relationships, faith and time can become a blessing to others.

One particularly important place to begin is care for people who are already carrying significant burdens in their families and communities.

CAREGIVING: ONE PLACE TO BEGIN

The Ontario Caregiver Organization's 2025 report, *Preparing to Care*, gives a picture of the pressure. It found that the number of Ontarians providing physical or emotional support to a family member, partner, friend or neighbour could grow by more than 50% in the next five years, from about 4 million to 6.5 million. At the same time, 2.7 million Ontarians who expect to face caregiving demands said they will decline to take on the role, either because of their own capacity or because they expect the health system to provide care. ^[13]

This is not simply a social services issue. It is a mission opportunity.

Churches are called to "carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2), yet many churches struggle to develop sustained care ministries. Not because they do not care, but because meaningful care is labour-intensive. It requires people who can listen, visit, encourage, pray, accompany, follow up and remain present over time. Pastors and paid staff cannot personally provide all of that care.

Here the church may discover one of its most overlooked resources: **older adults.**

Many older Christians bring precisely the qualities that care ministries require—maturity, patience, empathy, resilience, practical wisdom, knowledge of life’s difficult seasons and, often, something increasingly scarce in our society: **time**.

The opportunity is therefore larger than asking, “How can we care for our seniors?” We must also ask, “How might our seniors help us care for our communities?”

A FIVE-STEP PATHWAY

A practical approach could be remarkably simple:

DISCOVER — Help older adults identify their experience, gifts, interests, relationships and areas of compassion.

EQUIP — Provide the training, boundaries and spiritual support needed for the ministry they are being invited to undertake.

CONNECT — Match their gifts with real needs in the community—caregivers, isolated people, younger families, new believers, immigrants, grieving people, or emerging leaders.

RELEASE — Give them genuine responsibility rather than merely asking them to assist with church activities. Trust mature believers with meaningful ministry.

SUPPORT — Build a community around those who serve. Encourage them, pray with them, provide supervision where appropriate, and help them continue learning.

This model is not limited to caregiving. The same pathway could mobilize older adults for mentoring, prayer, visitation, discipleship, marriage support, grief care, hospitality, community outreach, grandparenting, leadership development and many other forms of ministry.

One word of caution. Releasing older adults must never become pressure on them. Some are tired, some are frail, and some are caring for a spouse at home. Their worth does not depend on what they do, and the church’s duty to care for those who cannot serve does not end (1 Timothy 5). Training, clear boundaries, and the freedom to say no are part of doing this well, especially in visiting and caregiving ministries.

15. How About Your Church? Five Questions for Leaders

If this paper is to become more than an encouraging idea, it needs to result in conversation and action. A leadership team could begin with five questions:

1. Who are the older adults in our community who still have a strong desire to contribute, serve and make a difference?
2. What wisdom, experience, relationships, spiritual gifts and life lessons do they already possess?
3. What needs exist in our community that could be matched with those gifts?
4. What training and support would enable these older adults to serve with confidence and appropriate boundaries?
5. What ministry are we currently expecting pastors or staff to carry that could be multiplied by equipping mature believers?

16. The Church as A Beacon of Hope

Imagine a church in which hundreds of years of accumulated experience are not sitting unused.

Imagine older Christians mentoring younger believers, encouraging struggling families, supporting caregivers, visiting the lonely, praying for their communities, discipling grandchildren, welcoming newcomers, sharing their stories, and using the wisdom gained through decades of living to help others navigate life's difficult seasons.

Imagine older adults discovering that retirement does not mean retirement from purpose. Imagine younger generations discovering that older people are not simply recipients of care but sources of wisdom, friendship and spiritual strength.

Such a church would not merely have a better seniors ministry. It would be more intergenerational. More relational. More purposeful. And potentially more missional.

The Church could become a beacon of hope in a world that desperately needs care.

17. A Call to Christian Leaders

The question before the church is not simply, "How will we care for an aging population?"

The critical question leaders should ask: "How will we mobilize the aging population to help care for a world that desperately needs hope?"

The difference is profound.

We can see older adults primarily as recipients of ministry—or as participants in the mission of God. We can design programs for them—or invite them to help shape and lead ministry. We can assume retirement means stepping back—or help people discover a new season of calling.

And we can ask what older adults need from the church—or ask what God may want to do through them.

The world is aging. The need is growing. The church has a biblical calling to care, disciple and equip. And within many communities there is already a generation of people with experience, wisdom, faith, relationships and time.

The opportunity is to see them, listen to them, value them, disciple them, equip them, release them—and then allow God to determine the fruit.

Conclusion: From An Aging Church to A Church of Hope

The church should not see an aging community as a problem to manage. It can be seen as a generation of people who have lived through decades of experience, suffering, work, relationships, faith and failure—and who may have decades of wisdom and service still ahead of them.

When older adults are valued, disciplined and released to serve, the church does not merely become better at ministry to seniors. It can become more intergenerational, more relational, more spiritually mature, more purposeful and potentially more missional.

Still Bearing Fruit

The question is not whether every older person will remain physically active. They will not. The question is not whether every older Christian will become a ministry leader. They will not. The question is whether we will continue to believe what Scripture tells us:

“They will still bear fruit in old age.”

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing the church is not that seniors need more ministry. Perhaps it is that the church has not yet fully discovered the ministry that is already sitting in its pews.

The challenge is not that seniors need the church. The challenge is that the church may need to rediscover what God has placed in seniors.

I write this not as an expert, but as a fellow traveller who is still learning what faithfulness looks like in the later years of life and in some small way still bearing fruit.

A PRAYER

My prayer is that the God of all wisdom would give you and your community eyes to see what He has already placed in your pews, the courage to release it, and the joy of watching your older generation bear much fruit.

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