



ANOTHER DAY OLDER

Curriculum for four in-person or online small group conversations that challenge participants to reframe their attitudes toward growing older.



Guide for the CONVERSATION HOST

Version 2.1, 2025



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This resource was made possible in part from a grant through the Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ which helped to produce this supporting guide for the Conversation Hosts.

**HEARTLAND
CONFERENCE**
formerly the Ohio Conference



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We help you help others.

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PLANNING YOUR CONVERSATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Today is the youngest you will ever be. And on this day, you are older than you were yesterday.

Regardless of current chronological age, we are all aging. This idea of counting the number of days, months or years that we have lived is a human construct. So are the attitudes that we hold about the number of candles that sit on our birthday cake. So why is it that so many of us tend to want to change that number when someone asks how old we are? And why are there so many products available to help us reduce the evidence of our age?

These are some of the questions we will consider through **Another Day Older** (ADO) conversations. This series will encourage participants to think about their own aging process and the messages that influence their attitudes about aging.

Why is this important? Because how we think about aging affects how we experience it.

Thinking positively about getting older extends one's life by seven-and-one-half years. That is just one of the findings from research conducted by Dr. Becca Levy, a Yale professor and others.

Ageism, prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of how old someone is—or is perceived to be by another—has negative consequences on individuals and society in general. We internalize these negative views of aging from a young age.

In these conversations we raise awareness of the ageism in the culture around us by looking at **The Words We Use**. We will consider how **The Assumptions We Make** based on our internal biases about aging affect how we relate to those older or younger than ourselves. We will explore **The Examples We Seek** through abundant aging influencers—those who age ahead of us demonstrating how we can flourish through all of life. And we will consider **The Change We Desire**, exploring ways we can interrupt ageist narratives around us.

Because we do not internalize these stereotypes by ourselves, we hope these conversations with others will stimulate us to celebrate the fact that, today, we are all another day older! Together we will pause, listen, learn and discover new ways to disrupt ageism's grip on our aging process.

CONVERSATION OBJECTIVES

- Consider the language of ageism and alternative ways to think and talk about aging in order to live more abundantly.
- Provide resources to support changing our conversations about aging.
- Embrace the aging process as a time of wisdom sharing, learning, wholeness, and connection to the world.
- Create community among participants.

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

The Center for Abundant Aging, formerly known as the Ruth Frost Parker Center for Abundant Aging, is an initiative of United Church Homes, a faith-inspired organization that provides housing and services to older adults. There is a **Through A Lens of Faith** component that compliments each of the four sessions that adds a biblical text and spiritual dimension to the conversations. This component is not included to influence anyone's expression of the divine, but to look at our own aging through a spiritual lens.

Critical to our faith formation, we must be grounded in the understanding that all of life is a gift. When we say in the Judeo-Christian context that "we are created in the image of God," that includes the entire life cycle. Just because our education system, including religious education, is weighted

toward the first couple of decades doesn't mean the desire and joy of learning and growing can't increase as we age. Throughout our long lives, we can continue to grow in breadth and depth of faith and relationship with the divine.

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH components are included in its own chapter for use with faith groups. There are separate resources and discussion suggestions which correspond to each of the central chapters in this resource. These would be included in each session prior to the **WRAP-UP**.

ADO CONVERSATION FRAMEWORK

TIME: Each of the four conversations can be done in 60 minutes. If you choose to include the **Through A Lens of Faith** components, it is best to schedule each session for 90 minutes to allow enough time. Your conversations may not go as long as 90 minutes, but better to have people plan for that amount of time and finish a little early than to rush through the rest of the pieces in order to stay within a 60-minute window.

HOST:

The Host must be willing to read through these materials and be prepared for each session.

The most important role of the host is to facilitate the conversations, to encourage everyone to participate. Good hosts don't do all the talking.

The Host may or may not be responsible for promoting the Conversations, collecting the names and contact information of participants and sending reminders about upcoming sessions.

We also ask the host to submit answers to a few evaluation questions after the fourth session.

PARTICIPANTS:

To have as diverse group as possible, you may want to invite specific people you would like to participate. The conversations with people of truly diverse generations can be some of the richest discussions.

VENUE: Are you going to meet in-person or online? This material can work well either in-person or online using a platform such as Zoom. [See page 6](#) for more information about hosting online.

In-person: While the optimum number of participants for an In-person small group session is 8, more may be accommodated if you decide to break into smaller groups for some of the discussions.

Online: If your online platform does not allow you to break the group into smaller conversation spaces (chat rooms), then it would be best to keep the group number to 9. This enables all participants to appear on the screen at the same time. This seems to be the limit for those who are participating through an iPad or tablet.

If you have access to a platform that allows you to break the group out into smaller conversation cohorts, then you could manage the conversations with many more participants. For the smaller conversation cohorts, optimum size is 4 or 5 people.

Tables and Chairs: In-person: If participants are seated at tables arranged in the round, it's easier for them to take notes and see one another during conversations.

Audio-Visual: Since conversations are contingent upon the ability to show web-based videos to watch as a group, a laptop computer/tablet connected to a television or a projector will work best. There will also need to be an internet connection to download the videos in advance or to stream them during the session. It can also be helpful to have a flip chart or paper on the wall to collect responses to some of the questions.

SESSION OUTLINE

Each of the four conversations include the following elements.

WELCOME	Each session begins with WELCOME time. This includes some guiding questions to introduce the topic and participants to each other.
VIDEO	There is a link to corresponding VIDEOS for each session to be viewed with the group.
CONVERSATION	There are additional questions and opportunities for the group's CONVERSATION surrounding the video content. If you have a group larger than 5 people, you will want to have the capability to break the large group into small conversation cohorts of about 4-5.
GROWING WISDOM	There will be portions of the session during which it will be helpful to draw upon the participants' GROWING WISDOM . Sometimes in the large group, and often in the smaller conversation cohorts, these are opportunities for the group to learn from each other.
OPTIONAL THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH	THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH includes OPTIONAL opportunities to explore a spiritual content (Scripture passages, prayers and opportunity for reflection) through which to look at aging . These materials begin on page F1 .
WRAP-UP	The WRAP-UP brings the conversation to a close and includes supportive information for group conversation and preparation for the next conversation in the following session. (Yes, there will be some follow-up "homework" for participants to do between the sessions.)
10 min	There are suggestions with each section of how much TIME to allot for each of the components of the Conversations.

These, of course, are guidelines. Think in terms of 60 minutes for the core conversation. And if you are using the **THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH** component, add that extra half hour.

CONVERSATION HOST PREPARATION

To get started, review the background materials for this course. Watch the videos and see the resource list for additional sources to find answers to your own questions.

For a small group discussion to be successful, it is important to create trust among group participants. Here are some good guidelines for creating trust. Share these guidelines with your group at the beginning of the first conversation.

In all formats (live or online):

- This is a “safe” space. Please do not share personal information outside of the group unless an individual gives you permission.
- Listen as others are speaking.
- Refrain from multi-tasking during the conversation (even if the others can’t see what you are doing if online).
- Don’t answer texts, phone calls, etc. If there is an emergency, please excuse yourself from view and hearing of the group.
- Encourage the group to speak from their own experiences using “I” statements.

Remember, your job is to encourage everyone to participate. You should be asking more questions than talking. If you want everyone to answer a question, let them know they can “pass” if they would prefer not to answer. No one is required to do anything other than be respectful to others.

BEST PRACTICES FOR IN-PERSON GROUPS

Group Size: While the optimum number of participants for an in-person small group session is 8, more may be accommodated if you decide to break into smaller groups for some of the discussions.

Tables and Chairs: Have participants sit at round or rectangular tables arranged in a “U” or “O”. It’s easier for them to take notes and see one another which helps to make these conversations and not lectures. But be sure everyone can view the video screen.

Paper and Pen: It might be helpful to have some paper and pens available for the participants to use as they reflect during the sessions. There will be times when they reflect in small groups and will be asked to document their conversations to bring back observations to the whole group conversations.

Audio-Visual: Since these conversations are contingent upon the ability to show web-based videos to watch as a group, a laptop computer/tablet connected to a television, or a projector will work best. There will also need to be an internet connection to download the videos in advance or to stream them during the session.

BE SURE THE GROUP WILL BE ABLE TO HEAR THE VIDEO. HDMI cables will be needed to connect to a TV or projector. And external speakers are needed for some projector systems.

Flip Chart or White Board (and appropriate markers): It may also be helpful to have a flip chart or paper on the wall to collect responses to some of the questions during the conversations or to post the questions for the smaller cohort conversations.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ONLINE SESSIONS

Choose a technology platform that is easy for participants to access and use at home. Please check with the leadership of your organization or faith community to see what licenses they may hold to conduct these conversations in a safe, participatory format for all involved.

You need the capability to do **screen share** in order for the entire group to see video content from online channels. You will also need to be sure the participants can hear the sound with the videos. Different platforms have different ways of doing this.

We use ZOOM for group conversations. If you do not have access to a ZOOM license, there is a free version. In the free version, you are limited to meeting for no longer than 40 minutes.

Meeting Link: Which ever platform you are using, do not share the link on social media or even on a website. Send the link directly to each participant's email. This, along with the use of a waiting room or registration ID or password, will increase the security of your group. You may not be talking about things of national security, but there are many examples of hackers disrupting online gatherings.

Group Size: If your virtual platform does not allow for the opportunity to break the group into smaller conversation cohorts (chat rooms), then it is best to keep the group number to 9. This enables all participants to be seen on the screen at the same time.

If you have access to a platform that does allow you to break the group out into smaller conversation cohorts, then you could manage the conversations with many more participants. For the smaller conversation cohorts, you can break these groups out into 4 or 5 people.

Small Group Facilitators: It might be helpful to identify individuals to serve as facilitators of those small conversation cohorts. You could share the questions you will be asking the group to consider with the facilitators ahead of time in order to make the best use of these small group times.

Send the online link in advance of each of the 4 conversation sessions. It may be the same link for all four, but people tend to lose track of the link so you will save time by reminding people of the link prior to each session.

Ask participants to have pencil and paper available as there are several times when they will be asked to do some writing as they participate in the small conversation cohorts.

Include handouts as attachments with the session link reminder and ask participants to have access to the handouts during the conversation sessions (either on another device or a print copy).

First Session: Be prepared to assist participants who may be less familiar with the online platform you are using. Make sure everyone understands how to mute and unmute themselves, use the "raise hand" feature if available and how to use the chat function.

Questions: Can be presented in the chat section or if a poll feature is available, ask questions prior to the meeting.

Virtual Meeting Etiquette:

- When you would like to speak to share something with the group, raise your hand (like we did in school) OR use the "raise hand" feature if available.
- Place your computer on mute when you are not speaking so others don't hear any noises around you (barking dogs, sirens, other people in your house, etc.)
- Remember to unmute yourself when you want to speak.

PROMOTIONAL IDEAS

- Remember, nothing can beat the power of a personal invitation. Talk to people or send personal invitations either through snail mail, emails, or phone calls. If you don't hear back, follow-up!
- Invite specific people to participate in the conversation, striving for as much diversity as possible.
 - In our first group gathered to "test" these materials, the ages of the participants ranged from 15 to 89 and increased the richness of the conversation immensely. Every decade was represented, except one, which helped to demonstrate that although we are looking at the process of aging, ageism exists for the youngest generations as well as the oldest.

- Cultural and ethnic diversity are also helpful in sharing the broad spectrum of influences that affect the experience of aging. No two people age in the same way. And how we age sits at the intersections of all of the various identities that we hold: race, gender, sexual orientation, class and (dis)ability.

COPY/CLIP LOGO



ANOTHER DAY OLDER

Include some or all of the following promotional text in email invitations, social media posts, newsletters, worship bulletins, and other ways you communicate with the people you are inviting to participate.

COPY PASTE

Today is the youngest you will ever be. And on this day, you are older than you were yesterday.

Regardless of chronological age, we all are aging. This idea of counting the number of days, months or years we have lived is a human construct. So are the attitudes we hold about the number of candles that sit on our birthday cake.

So, why is it that so many of us tend to want to change that number when someone asks how old we are? And why are there so many products available to help us reduce the evidence of our age?

These are some of the questions we will consider through ***Another Day Older*** conversations.

We will consider our own aging process and the messages that influence our attitudes about aging. We will look at ageism, stereotypes, the prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of how old someone is or is perceived to be by another. Ageism has negative consequences for each of us individually and for society in general.

Did you know? Thinking positively about aging can extend one's life by seven-and-one-half years according to a [study from Yale researcher Dr. Becca Levy](https://news.yale.edu/2002/07/29/thinking-positively-about-aging-extends-life-more-exercise-and-not-smoking)ⁱ

Through these conversations, we will examine why recognizing ageism is important and discuss what to do to disrupt ageism and embrace the aging process. We internalize these views of aging from a young age and hold onto them far too long, so it is never too early or too late to talk about how we think about aging.

Join in the ***Another Day Older*** four conversations and be prepared to celebrate the fact that today, we are all another day older!

(Don't forget to include the dates, times—and time zone if needed, location, how to register, and what to do if you have questions.)

ⁱ <https://news.yale.edu/2002/07/29/thinking-positively-about-aging-extends-life-more-exercise-and-not-smoking>

Instructions and Background for **ONLINE** Groups

Preparing for **CONVERSATION ONE** **ONLINE** Groups

FOR ONLINE GROUPS: SEND the following to participants at least 24 hours before the “meeting”:

1. Ask them to have **paper and a pen** available during this session.
2. Send the **link and password** (if needed) for the meeting.
3. Send **your email and/or phone number** (or of a person who can provide tech support) in case they have difficulty connecting to the meeting.
4. Let them know that you will be available online **at least five minutes prior** to the start of the session, so everyone can get “settled” and the group can begin on time.
5. **Ask for the following information** that will be seen only by you, the leader of these conversations. Assure them that these numbers will be used in composite form.
 - **their current chronological age**
 - **their “ideal” age—if you could be any age, what would that be?”**



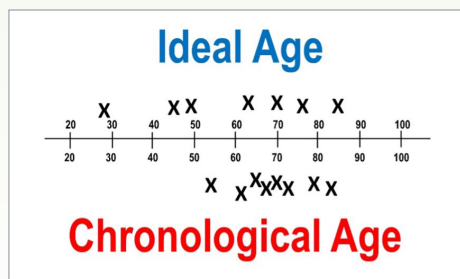
Age Pride is for everyone who refuses to regret waking up a day older, who acknowledges long life as the privilege it is and who is prepared to challenge the power structures that underlie all discrimination.

Ashton Applewhite

Host Preparation for the **ONLINE CONVERSATION ONE**

Prepare a timeline with both sets of numbers shared from the participants. The timeline should have room for the range of ages of the participants. **You can do this one of two ways:**

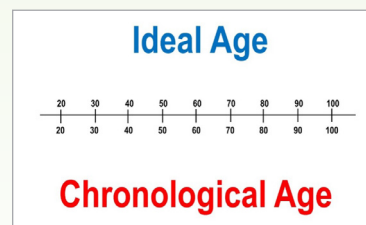
1. “Old school” on paper and then “Screen Share” it so that everyone can see them.
2. Assemble this information on your computer and when the time comes, “Screen Share” the timeline. Here is how it may look:



Sample timeline with participant information

COPY/DOWNLOAD

Graphic to copy for your group's information



TIP FOR ONLINE GROUPS using **THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH**

Send page [F3](#) with the [PRAYER FOR MATURITY](#) and ask them to print a copy to use during the conversation.

Instructions and Background for **ONLINE** Groups (continued)

Additional Guidelines to share at the beginning of the **ONLINE CONVERSATION ONE**

For this first session, be prepared to assist participants who may not be familiar with the virtual platform you are using. Be prepared to begin when everyone has entered the virtual meeting and understands how to mute/unmute themselves.

Virtual meeting etiquette:

1. Raise your hand when you would like to share in the conversation (literally raise your hand so the leader can see you OR use the “raise-hand” electronic feature if available).
2. Place your computer on mute when you are not speaking so others don’t hear the noises around you (barking dogs, other members of the house, sirens etc.).

Make sure everyone knows how to use the features of your virtual platform:

1. How to use the **Chat** function.
2. How to **rename** your frame if needed.
3. How to **mute/unmute** both the microphone and the video.
4. Assure them that you will walk them through things as you go.

TIP FOR ONLINE

GROUPS: You may want to ask one person to be the tech support person to help answer questions through chat so that you can concentrate on facilitating the conversations.

Preparing for **IN-PERSON** Groups

Opening Activity Set-up:

- Have two different colors of post-it notes and markers available.
- Prepare a “timeline” in the room, either on a white board or chalk board, with the use of a non-marking tape on the wall or use a line in the architecture of the room (i.e. seam along row of bricks).
- Label even points along the lines by increments of 10. Beginning with 0 and concluding with 100 representing the decades of life.
- Have tables and chairs set up.

COPIES NEEDED FOR IN-PERSON

GROUPS: Have enough copies of the Age Smart Inventory ([found on page C1-9](#)) ready to give to the participants before they leave the gathering for their “homework” in preparation for Conversation Two.

If using THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

have copies of the [Prayer for Maturity \(found on page F3\)](#) available to use during the session.

Setting the Conversation Space:

As participants enter the room, invite them to take 2 post-it notes one each of two different colors. Ask them to put their current chronological age on one color and their “ideal” age (If you could be any age, what would that be?) on the other. Then place their post-it note with their chronological age below the line and their “ideal” age post-it note above the line.

CONVERSATION ONE OUTLINE FOR IN-PERSON OR ONLINE GROUPS

Welcome everyone as they join the meeting. Engage the participants in friendly conversation that they can join as they enter the meeting space.

30 min

WELCOME

Group

CONVERSATION HOST: *Share the following information.*

Statement of the intent of the course

Through these four conversations, we will strive to:

1. Consider the language of ageism and alternative ways to think and talk about aging in order to live more abundantly.
2. Provide resources to support changing our conversations about aging.
3. Embrace the aging process as a time of wisdom sharing, learning, wholeness, and connection to the world.
4. Create community among participants.



The Welcome will take more time during this first session in order to lay the groundwork and help to build the community between the participants.

Parameters of the conversation

1. This is a safe space.
Please do not share personal information outside of the group unless the individual gives you permission.
2. Listen as others are speaking.
3. Refrain from multitasking during the conversation (even if the others can't see what you are doing in the virtual format).
4. Don't answer texts, phone calls, etc.
If there is an emergency, please excuse yourself from view and the hearing of the group.
5. Encourage the group to speak from their own experience using "I" statements.

INTRODUCE YOURSELF *and share why you are facilitating these conversations.*

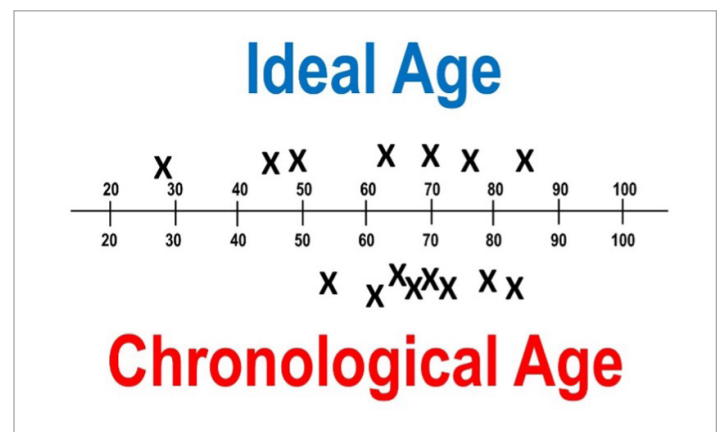
ASK each member to introduce themselves:

1. Share their name and where they live.
2. Share their "ideal or favorite" age that they placed on the timeline.
3. Share the reasons they listed that number as their "ideal" age. If you have a large group you may need to have them respond to this in smaller conversational cohorts of 3-4.

BRING THE GROUP'S ATTENTION *to the two timelines with their ideal ages and with their chronological ages.*

ASK FOR OBSERVATIONS *about the range and reasons for their ideal ages and the span of ages from their current chronological ages.*

Was it difficult to share their chronological ages (even though they didn't have to identify which one was theirs)?



TIP FOR ONLINE GROUPS: You can prepare this ahead of time for the online session as you had requested this information before you met. You can screen share the timelines.

CONVERSATION HOSTS: *please share the following information.*

We all have different images of what is “old” and what is supposed to happen as we age. There are also common assumptions and generalizations that we share about aging because we live in the same culture. These narratives about aging help to lay the groundwork for aging stereotypes and internal biases which we all carry.

And yet, the older we become, the more diverse our experiences of aging. The variation that happens in the aging process is the result of the opportunities, challenges, context, and particularities that have shaped us throughout our lifetime—our access to healthcare, access to healthy food, educational opportunities, financial stability, our genes, access to housing, and community

support, to name a few of these variables. Add to that the assorted components of our identities (gender, race, sexual orientation, class, (dis)abilities, etc.), and the result is that each person’s aging process sits at the intersections of all of these and is therefore unique. Kimberlé Crenshaw calls this intersectionality. Aging is a universal aspect of life that affects and reacts with the other components of our individual circumstances.¹ How we think about each of these, including aging, has an impact on all the other pieces.

How we talk and think about our aging process, affects how we age. So, let’s begin by looking at some of the words that are used in reference to aging.

FIRST

ASK participants to imagine an old person and write down the first 5 words that come to mind without thinking about it too much. If you have a larger group, you might ask them to turn and form smaller conversation cohorts of 2-3 people.

SECOND (5 mins)

HAVE participants share their words with each other in the conversation full group or in cohorts

THIRD

ASK the group to quickly consider each word:

Is this a negative word (or don’t ever use that word to describe me/any of us)?

Is this a positive word (or would I want this word to describe me/us)?

Is this neutral (positive to some, negative to others)?

ASK a representative from each small group to make three combined lists:

Positive, Negative, Neutral

AFTER FIVE MINUTES, reconvene the full group and ask representatives to share their lists.

PROCESS with the group:

- Is there a difference in the length of the three lists?
 - More negative than positive?
 - More positive than negative?
 - Were there a lot of words that were neutral — negative to some and positive to others?
- Was it easier or harder to think of the positive words or the negative words?



Each person needs a writing utensil and paper.

TIP FOR ONLINE

GROUPS: If the platform you are using has the capability to separate the group into “break out rooms,” you can separate the group into small conversation cohorts of 4-5 people.

TIP FOR ONLINE

GROUPS: If you do send the group into break out rooms, it might be helpful to have small group facilitators prepped ahead of time with the instructions.

CONVERSATION HOSTS: please share the following information.

The language we use about aging matters. It expresses how we think about and value or diminish ourselves and others—because we all are aging. Coming up with new language is difficult because different generations have their own perspectives on what is positive or not. But there are also some cultural themes in how we talk about the aging process.

How we think, feel and act toward ourselves and others which are negative and are based on age are all considered to be forms of **ageism**.

Ageism is internalized and affect our own thinking about aging. It can affect our interactions with others. And ageism can be designed to be a part of the systems in our society. Here is a short video that helps to explain these ways ageism affects us all.

3 min

VIDEO

Exposing Systemic Ageism

[LINK](#)

TIP FOR ONLINE GROUPS: Have this queued and ready to start in your browser. Be sure that you are set up to share the sound of the video.

2 min

CONVERSATION

Being Aware of Ageism

ASK the group what they noticed in the video.

1. The women talk about how they have experienced ageism in their lives. Have you had similar experiences? How did you feel in those situations?
2. How does the metaphor of the flower (what we see in society everyday), stem (thoughts and feelings) and roots (beliefs and values which feed the stem and flower) help you to understand the links between these different types of ageism?

CONVERSATION HOSTS: please share the following information.

This next video is a minute long. Pay attention to the assumptions that you make as each new character is introduced and try to make sense of who they are or what they are doing before it is revealed in the message.

1 min

VIDEO

Break Free From Ageism

[LINK](#)

2 min

CONVERSATION

Defining “OLD”

ASK the group:

Were you surprised by the assumptions you made about each of the characters when they were first introduced?

1. The man poking the cell phone.
2. The woman in green and pink with her arms behind her head.
3. The woman in the box.
4. The wobbly woman holding the cane

CONVERSATION HOSTS: please share the following information.

We have internalized assumptions or stereotypes about what older adults can or can't do. Without thinking consciously, we prejudge others based on how old we think they are. This can happen for those older and for those younger than us. And we cannot quickly reverse these biases because they have been repeated so often throughout our lives. But we can begin to be aware of them.

We have one more video for our conversation today. This one is 3 ½ minutes long and was produced by Virginia Commonwealth University. It is a good summary of the challenges of ageism.

4 min

VIDEO

*Disrupt Ageism
(Part One: Recognizing)*

[LINK](#)



Please make sure the **video** is cued to start at the beginning (the video seems to start part way through).

4 min

GROWING WISDOM

CONSIDER the questions asked in the video

1. Have the words “AGING” and “OLD” been given a bad reputation?
2. Do you see yourself as someone that is aging?
3. What are some of the things that have changed for you as you have aged that demonstrates that aging is “growth”?

If you had smaller groups do this exercise: Reconvene the large group and reflect on the conversations from their answers.



If the group is larger than 5 people, you might want to go into breakout rooms again. Or you could work on these with the whole group.

30 min

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

If you are using **THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH** ([go to page F3](#)), you can transition to that section here. Have copies of the [PRAYER FOR MATURITY](#) available to give to participants.

2 min

WRAP-UP

CONVERSATION HOSTS: please share the following information.

[Dr. Becca Levy](#)ⁱⁱ is a leading researcher in the field of aging from Yale University. She talks about the patterns and ways that we grow as we age. For instance, metacognition improves later in life. This is the ability to think about thinking. Thanks to brain imaging, we know that older adults use both halves of their brains better than in our earlier years. Creativity also grows as we age.

[Dr. Laura Carstensen](#)ⁱⁱⁱ, director of Stanford's Center on Longevity, has done research that shows that older adults tend to be happier, or more content, the older they get. We also let go of memories of negative emotions as we age. This is known as the Happiness Curve. Stress, worry and anger all decrease with age—the paradox of aging.

THE WRAP UP *(continued)*

The research of these women and others working in the field of gerontology are providing us with significant evidence that how we think about our own aging process affects how we age. When we absorb and believe the negative messages about aging it affects our mental,

physical, social and spiritual health. As we continue through these four conversations, we hope to open your awareness of the possibilities that our later lives may be full of opportunities to experience the riches of abundant aging.

SHARE with the group the following prompt for their personal reflection between now and the next time the group gathers. Let them know that you will remind them of this in an email (or other communication) following this meeting.

Think about a time when you had an experience of someone else making an assumption of your abilities based on their perception of your age?

1. How did that feel?
2. How did you respond?
3. What would you have preferred to communicate to them?

GIVE them all a copy of the AGE SMART INVENTORY (available on [pages C1-9 and C1-10](#) for you to copy).

The Age Smart Inventory comes from Scripps Gerontology Center at Miami (Ohio) University and was developed by Dr. Suzanne Kunkle and Dr. Kate de Medeiros as a tool to explore ageism.

There are no right or wrong answers. Rather, it is a help for introspection and reflection about individual attitudes, values and judgments about age as compared with how we think about aging for others. We will talk about it next week. It should only take a few minutes to complete the answers.

LET THEM KNOW that if they have any questions or concerns, they can contact you.

THANK EVERYONE for participating in this first conversation!

- i *An Evolving Approach to Ageism*, LeadingAge Insights, July 6, 2020, Kirsten Jacobs. <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>
- ii Dr. Sanjay Gupta: It's time to rethink what we call 'old age'. *Chasing Life* podcast with Dr. Sanjay Gupta, CNN Health. Updated, June 20, 2023. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/20/health/gupta-aging-chasing-life-podcast-wellness/index.html#:~:text=Sanjay%20Gupta%20interview%20his%20parents,influence%20our%20health%20and%20longevity.&text=Is%20Age%20Really%20Just%20a,every%20minute%20of%20every%20day.>
- iii Laura Carstensen: Older people are happier. TED talk. 2012. https://www.ted.com/talks/laura_carstensen_older_people_are_happier?hasSummary=true&language=en

BETWEEN NOW AND WHEN WE GATHER NEXT

CONVERSATION ONE

For a follow-up email with the participants:

REMIND the participants of their “homework” in an email following the session and ATTACH a copy of the Age Smart Inventory:

The below text and links can be copied, pasted and formatted for your follow-up email.

COPY

PASTE

Between now and when we gather next ...

1. Think about a time when you experienced ageism.
2. Complete the Age Smart Inventory — [COMPLETE ONLINE](#) or [DOWNLOAD A PDF](#), print and complete.



LINKS for Host to copy
into followup emails

COMPLETE ONLINE – LINK FOR HOST TO COPY INTO EMAIL

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSc6YMn8JzcVNMuCadFmL5TuY5HScsNpYc94Uc9uY4Hc4UEmvQ/viewform>

DOWNLOAD A PDF, PRINT AND COMPLETE – LINK FOR HOST TO COPY INTO EMAIL

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GxybxWiKFYjUop3MZpQXxK_7c7LP3oyK/view?usp=sharing

The AgeSmart Inventory©: A Multifaceted Tool to Understand Age Bias

Please answer each question with the first response that comes to mind. There are no right or wrong answers. Please indicate your level of disagreement or agreement for each statement.

If you would prefer, you may take the **AgeSmart Inventory© (ASI)** online with this [link](#). There are some demographic questions before the same questions as below—just listed in a different order.

Rather than provide an ageism score, the ASI is a tool for introspection and reflection about individual attitudes, values and judgements about age. It is meant to facilitate interactive dialogue about age.

Please respond with one of the following: **Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree**

1. Younger people should not have to work in the same office as older people.
2. I would be much more likely to avoid eye contact with old people than with younger ones.
3. Older people really need to retire to make room for others.
4. I think that employers should focus their training efforts on younger people since older people tend to be stuck in their ways.
5. I don't think that older people are open to making new friends.
6. I think that the younger a person is, the more creative they are.
7. I would not buy a house in a community where most people are older than me.
8. I believe it is best for older people to live in retirement communities where they can be with people who are like them.
9. I think that most old people are quite enjoyable to be around.
10. I think that old people are wise.
11. I like to compliment people who I think are old by telling them how young they look.
12. I think that the elderly deserve our respect and admiration.
13. I like to listen to the stories that older people tell.
14. I feel better and better about myself as I grow older.
15. In my experience, older people have a hard time learning new things.
16. I think it's hard for older people to use technology like computers and mobile phones.
17. In my opinion, people over 65 are more likely to have racist or other discriminatory views than younger people.
18. I think that older people are less tolerant of people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, or questioning than younger people.
19. I have found that older people focus more on the past than the present.
20. I wouldn't mind be called "old".
21. I wouldn't mind being called "elderly".
22. In my opinion, the word "senior" is empowering.

(Handout continues on the next page)

23. I worry about losing my job because I'm seen as old.
24. I hide my age from others.
25. I often ask myself whether my clothes are appropriate for my age.
26. If people knew how old I really was, they would treat me differently.
27. The older I get, the harder it is for me to learn new things.
28. I prefer friends who are my age.
29. I don't see anything wrong with joking about someone getting old.
30. I think that people should dress their age.
31. In my view, older people are very much alike.
32. If a stranger asked me to recommend product/services, I would first try to decide how old I think they are before making a recommendation.
33. I believe that age is just a number.
34. If given a choice between a younger check out clerk or an older one, I would go to the younger one because it would be faster.
35. I like people for who they are, not for their age.

For Reflection and Conversation: (If you would like, you may answer these [on-line](#))

1. What statements did you find difficult to respond to?
Why do you think that is?
2. Did any statements make you reflect differently on your own aging?
If so, which ones?
What made you think differently?
3. Did any statements make you think differently about other people's aging?
If so, which statements?
What made you think differently?
4. Were there any differences in how you thought about your own aging compared to how you thought about someone else's? For example, decisions you may make about appropriateness of how you dress versus others?

[Gerontology & Geriatric Medicine, Volume 9: 1–9](#), Kate de Medeiros, PhD, Suzanne Kunkel, PhD, and Lei Yu, MSG

Department of Sociology and Gerontology, Miami University, 100 E. High Street, Oxford, OH.

Used with permission of the authors for Another Day Older Resource, December 2023.

Preparing for CONVERSATION TWO

1. Remind participants of your gathering time and place.
3. Participants should bring any observations from the First Session, including:
 - Their reflecting about a time when someone made an assumption about their ability based on their age.
 - A general learning or observation from taking the Age Smart Inventory
3. Remind participants to have paper and a pen available during the meeting.

FOR ONLINE GATHERINGS: In addition to the above, send an email with the following:

1. Send the **link and password** (if needed) for the meeting.
2. Send **your email and/or phone number** (or of a person who can provide tech support) in case they have difficulty connecting to the meeting.
3. Let them know that you will be available online **at least five minutes prior** to the start of the session, so everyone can get “settled” and the group can begin on time.
4. Attach a copy of the [Conversation Guide](#) for the Myths of Aging video ([found on page C2-5](#)) and ask them to have a copy available during the session.



Ageism is
“Destructive most
of all to those who
adopt it — for
in the end, it is
always directed
inward upon the
mind it occupies.”

Ashton Applewhite



COPIES NEEDED FOR IN-PERSON GROUPS

[Conversation Guide](#)
for the Myths of Aging
video found on
[page C2-5](#)

CONVERSATION TWO OUTLINE FOR IN-PERSON OR ONLINE GROUPS

Welcome everyone as they enter the “meeting.” Begin on time.

15 min

WELCOME

1. **SHARE** the general flow of the conversation for this session.
2. **WELCOME** any new participants who were not present for the first session.
3. **ASK for any insight** they gained about themselves from the AgeSmart Inventory. Allow time for each participant to share at least one observation. If the group is large, do this sharing in break-out rooms or smaller cohorts.
 - Were you surprised by any of your responses to the statements?
 - Did you have any interesting revelations about differences in how you answered questions that were referencing other people compared with those that were directed to your own aging process?
4. **ASK for any observations** about their own experience of ageism.

Introduction to *Myths of Aging* Video:

You may read aloud the following, summarize the information, or share in a PowerPoint or screen share prior to sharing the video with the participants.

We all are aging. And we usually don't think too much about it. We make immediate perceptions about other people based on how old we think they are. Maybe we listen for how old their children are or a clue about where they are in their professional life or references to other cultural events or moments. Perhaps we consider the color or style of their hair or their overall physical "condition" as a way of assessing their age. Not that we need to know the number, but once we have a general age range, we then go on to make other assumptions about them. For instance, what they can or can't/shouldn't do, their ability to use technology or learn new things.

But why? From where do these assessments and assumptions come?

In our previous conversation we began to look at some of the narratives in the larger culture that influence how we think about our own aging, how we stereotype other people, what we consider to be "normal" aging and what is possible, or not, as we age.

Many of these narratives are false. They are myths, and there is an increasing number of people challenging these myths as a way of helping us all rethink aging. The *Myths of Aging* video is a starting point to dispel a few of these myths.



You may choose to pass out copies of the Myth of Aging video handout ([found on page C2-5](#)), before the video for them to make notes or reference while watching.

13 min

VIDEO

Myths of Aging

[LINK](#)

20 min

CONVERSATION

ASK for their initial response to the *Myth of Aging* video either in conversation with the whole group or smaller conversation cohorts. Refer them to the [Conversation Guide](#) (sent ahead of time for those ONLINE or distributed to the group IN-PERSON).

Questions for conversation:

(Included on the [handout](#)/screen share [on page C2-5](#))

1. Were any of the myths a "new" idea for you? Which one(s)?
2. Have you experienced similarities to the Happiness Curve in your own life?
3. How do you experience your own feeling of being smart or productive as you have aged?
4. What are the most important factors for you in considering where to live in later life?
5. How is your aging process different from that of your parents' or grandparents' generations?
6. Who is most important in your own community of support? (people, organizations, etc.)
7. What aspect of being independent is most valuable to you?
8. What aspect of independence is most limiting to you?



Either in conversation with the whole group or if the group is larger, have them go into "breakout" rooms for conversation in response to the *Myth of Aging* video.

Refer them to the [Conversation Guide](#) if you shared this with them or do a screen share with the page.

10 min

GROWING WISDOM



If smaller conversational cohorts tackled the questions, reconvene the large group as a whole and have the smaller conversations share where there was energy as they reflected on the myths.

Here are additional questions for the group to consider:

1. Are there other myths from the larger culture in respect to aging that come to your mind, not mentioned in the video?
2. There are things about aging that we would all like to avoid. But what about aging do you appreciate?
3. As you reflect on your own attitudes about aging, is there one myth that is more deeply ingrained in you?

30 min

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

If you are using [THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH](#) (go to page F4), you can transition to that section here.

8 min

WRAP-UP

Dr. Sanjay Gupta interviewed Becca Levy in his June 2023 episode of his podcast, Chasing Life. Dr. Gupta also includes interviews with his own parents at the beginning of this episode and talks about his personal journey of understanding his own aging process.

In their conversation, Levy suggests that the first step for us all is to be aware of ageism around us. She suggests we take one week and write down every reference from our everyday life that has to do with age. You can do this over the coming week or just choose one day and try making your own Ageism Awareness List.

These might be references to conversations you have had, media news stories, TV/movie characters, labels on products in the stores, commercials and advertising, birthday cards...wherever you happen to find yourself on that day. Keep a list and bring it with you next week.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER in making their Ageism Awareness List:

1. What did you see/hear/observe in commercials or on TV or in films that convey a message about aging?
2. What words or phrases did you hear other people using about aging — either their own or about other people?
3. How did you feel as you noticed these things?
4. Did you find yourself adjusting your own thoughts and words given these conversations?
5. If you are using [Through A Lens of Faith](#) materials, thinking of Abraham and Sarah — where do you see the power of possibility overcoming your own self-defining limits on aging?

SHARE THE LINK FOR THE PODCAST *Chasing Life* with Drs. Sanjay Gupta and Becca Levy for those who would like to listen to the [full podcast conversation \(podcast\)](#).

LET THEM KNOW that if they have any questions or concerns, they can contact you.

THANK EVERYONE for participating in this conversation!

BETWEEN NOW AND WHEN WE GATHER NEXT

CONVERSATION TWO

For a follow-up email with the participants:

The below text and links can be copied, pasted and formatted for your follow-up email.

COPY

PASTE

Create an Ageism Awareness list or journal and note your observations of the larger images of aging in your day-to-day interactions.

1. What did you see/hear/observe in commercials or on TV that convey a message about aging?
 2. What words or phrases did you hear other people using about aging – either their own or about other people?
 3. How did you feel as you noticed these things?
 4. Did you find yourself adjusting your own thoughts and words given these conversations?
-

CONVERSATION GUIDE for the *Myths of Aging* Video

Below are the myths that are highlighted in the video for Conversation Two of this series. The questions that follow are for the conversations that will follow the viewing of the video.

Which of the myths have you heard before?

1. **Aging is a disease to be avoided or cured.** [Aging is normal, cumulative and life-long.](#)ⁱ
There are things about aging we would all like to avoid. But what about aging do you appreciate?
2. **Old people have nothing to be happy about.** [Contentment and happiness increases in later life.](#)ⁱⁱ
Have you experienced similarities to the Happiness Curve in your own life?
3. **Old people are not as smart or as productive as young people.** [The most productive decade of life is 60-70 years. The second most productive decade is 70-80 years followed by 50-60.](#)ⁱⁱⁱ
How do you experience your own feeling of being smart or productive as you age?
4. **Old people end up being “put” in nursing homes, where they are lonely, isolated and depressed.** [Older adults can experience loneliness or isolation in any context.](#)^{iv}
How do you connect with the wider community around you?
5. **Old people approach aging in the same way.** [We are more diverse the longer we live.](#)^v
How is your aging process different from that of your parents’ or grandparents’ generations?
6. **Individuals who “age in place” live more fulfilled lives than those who choose to live in a community setting.** [Meaning and Purpose is important no matter the setting in which we live.](#)^{vi}
Who are the people and organizations that are most important in your own community of support?
7. **All adults are to be completely independent.** [We are interdependent and as we age may need increasing levels of support.](#)^{vii}
What aspect of being independent is most valuable to you? What aspect of independence is most limiting to you?

i Overview of Aging. Richard G. Stanacci. May 2022. Merck Manual. <https://www.merckmanuals.com/home/older-people%E2%80%99s-health-issues/the-aging-body/overview-of-aging#:~:text=Aging%20is%20a%20gradual%2C%20continuous,elderly%20at%20any%20specific%20age>

ii The U-shape of Happiness Across the Life Course: Expanding the Discussion. Galambos, Krahn, Johnson and Lachman. May 2020. National Library of Medicine. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7529452/>

iii Optimum age. Dr. Wallace Phillips. October 2021. The Daily Advance (Elizabeth City, NC). https://www.dailyadvance.com/optimum-age/article_9333be33-1bdf-500f-8d2f-cb66c806ec01.html#:~:text=An%20extensive%20study%20in%20the,60%2D70%20years%20of%20age.

iv Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults. The National Academies Sciences Engineering Medicine. 2020. <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/25663/social-isolation-and-loneliness-in-older-adults-opportunities-for-the.>

v A snapshot of today's older adults and facts to help dispel myths about aging. American Psychological Association. December 2021. <https://www.apa.org/pi/aging/resources/guides/older>

vi 9 Ways to Find Your Purpose As You Age. Meg Selig. Psychology Today. February 2020. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/changepower/202002/9-ways-find-your-purpose-you-age>

vii Self-Acceptance and Interdependence Promote Longevity: Evidence from a 20-year Prospective Cohort Study. Ng, Allore and Levy. National Library of Medicine. August 2020. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7460297/>

Preparing for CONVERSATION THREE IN-PERSON

Send to Participants for IN-PERSON GROUPS at least 24 hours before the meeting:

1. Participants should come with **observations** from the last conversation about the larger images or messages about aging in the culture around us.
2. Remind participants to have **paper and a pen** available during the meeting.



COPIES NEEDED FOR IN-PERSON GROUPS

Copies of the Identifying Your Abundant Aging Influencers handout ([found on page C3-7](#)) to give to them before they leave.

FOR IN-PERSON AND ONLINE GROUPS

If using **THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH** have copies of the handout with [Ephesians 4 from Eugene Peterson's The Message version \(found on page F6\)](#) available to use during the session.



"Aging today has become an improvisational art form calling for imagination and willingness to learn."

Mary Catherine Bateson,
Composing a Further Life

"It is not the getting older that is difficult. It is the fear of getting older that plagues us."

Joan Chittister,
The Gift of Years

Preparing for CONVERSATION THREE ONLINE

Send to Participants for ONLINE GROUPS at least 24 hours before the "meeting":

1. Participants should come with **observations** from the last session about the larger images or messages about aging in the culture around us.
2. Send the **link and password** (if needed) for the meeting.
3. Remind participants to have **paper and a pen** available during the meeting.
4. Provide your **email and/or phone number** (or of a person who can provide tech support) in case they have difficulties connecting to the meeting.
5. Send the **Identifying Your Abundant Aging Influencers** ([found on page C3-7](#)) handout for them to print to reference as you describe the homework before the last session.

CONVERSATION THREE OUTLINE IN-PERSON OR ONLINE GROUPS

Welcome everyone as they enter the “meeting.” Begin on time.

10 min

WELCOME

Group Reconnection

ASK the group to share their observations from the last gathering.

1. What did you see/hear/observe in commercials or on TV or in films??
2. What did you hear other people expressing about aging—either their own or about other people?
3. How did you feel as you noticed these things?
4. Did you find yourself adjusting your own thoughts and words?

10 min

CONVERSATION

Addressing our Fears

You may read the following aloud, summarize the information, or share in a PowerPoint or screen share it with the participants.

Introduction to Today's Conversation

In Conversation One, we looked at the language we use when we talk about aging, and specifically older adults. We began to consider how these affect our own aging. In Conversation Two, we looked further into some of the negative myths that exist in the culture around us. And through these conversations, we talked about the negative consequences of internalizing the negative externalized stereotypes.

Even though we were looking at these outside influences, we talked about how we have internalized these messages. Today we are going to begin to look at how we carry and “own” some of these messages.

For marketing purposes, companies want us to be afraid of aging in order to motivate us to buy their products and services. We have also seen examples and known people

whose experience of aging has been less than ideal. Whether things are based on fact or myth, research or anecdote or personal testimony, it is natural for us to have some fears about our own aging. We don't really know what is coming except from the examples of those around us.

So, let us begin the conversation today by looking at some of our fears about our future aging selves.

In a minute, I will invite you to make a list of those things about aging that you fear for yourself. Do not think too much about these things, but just list them as they come to mind.

We will go into smaller cohorts to share our fears. Each person will have time to share their list and perhaps why these are included on the list.



Please have someone make a list of those things you all hold in common and make a separate list of things “unique” to individuals in your group. You will have about seven minutes before we will reconvene and share the common lists together.

Here is a summary of instructions during the small cohort conversations:

1. Individually, list the things you are fearful of related to aging.
2. In your small conversation cohort:
 - a. Have each person share their lists and why these things are on their lists
 - b. Create two lists from your collective sharing:
 - Those things that you all listed
 - Those things “unique” to individuals in the group

OBSERVE with the large group:

1. What are the fears most widely held?
2. Are there some things on these lists you hadn't thought about and you might add to your own list?

FOR ONLINE GROUPS: LIST these using a SHARESCREEN on your platform.

FOR IN-PERSON GROUPS: ADD the lists on newsprint for everyone to see.

Managing our Fears:

Invite the participants to reference their own lists as you give them these instructions.

1. **Cross out** those things over which your behavior today would not produce direct results for your life (i.e., things related to genetics or global warming).
2. **Put a star** next to those things that you could change with the help of others and which are longer-range goals (i.e., regular doctor visits that monitor chronic conditions, making decisions about a living situation or legal/financial preparations).
3. **Circle** the things that you have the power to change today (i.e., exercise to lower high blood pressure, change in diet to improve overall health, scheduling time to meet with others to improve social contact).

TRANSITION

CONVERSATION HOSTS: please share the following information.

One of the ways to address our fears is to look at them and realize there are things we can do to alleviate some of their power in our lives. We are looking at the power of our fears about aging, not aging itself.

ASK each person to identify one thing they want to change to help alleviate a fear about aging.



If there is time, have them share that one thing with the group, or ask them to share the one thing with a partner in their life that will help them follow through with their change.

CONVERSATION HOSTS: please share the following information.

Our mission at United Church Homes is to transform aging. A part of this is helping to change the way we think about and experience aging. Our fears are fueled in part by ageism as we have talked about in the past two sessions. And there are things that we can do to make some changes.

How we think about aging is a much more powerful tool than we ever thought. Becca Levy's research has identified

that individuals who have the gene which is a significant marker for Alzheimer's and who have a positive attitude about their aging process reduce their likelihood of living with dementia by 40%. That is just one example. Listen to this video that helps to continue to dispel the negative myths about aging and gives some more clues of things we can do to dispel some of our fears.

10 min**VIDEO****Citizen Brain: “Age Without Ageism”****[LINK](#)**

INVITE *observations and comments for conversation sparked from the video.*

1. How would you describe the difference between the concept of “aging” and “ageism” with others?
 2. What new information did you hear in this video?
-

CONVERSATION HOSTS: *please share the following information.*

Another way to consider how we approach our own aging process is through having role models. Throughout your life, you have probably known people personally or been aware of those who set an example for you. Perhaps it was an adult during your youth whom you noticed and tried to emulate. Or it might have been a mentor you watched and learned from in a job.

Having a role model who is ahead of you in the aging process can be another way to help you navigate and think about your own aging process. We call these Abundant Aging Influencers.

If you listened to [Dr. Sanjay Gupta’s podcast interview \(podcast\)](#) with Becca Levy, you heard Dr. Gupta reflecting on what he is learning about aging through his parents. I would suspect that if we asked him, his parents would be some of his abundant aging influencers.

Who have you known who is older than you and you have had the thought, “When I am their age, I want to be like them”?

Perhaps you have known people whose lives have served as inspiration and motivation for decisions that you have made in your own life, particularly when you discovered that their chronological age did not match what others thought their attitude or ability should have been.

Or maybe you had a relative whose life has provided you with hope for your aging process.

As we watch today’s video, I encourage you to notice the intersections of things in each of the lives of these two men.

READ *the questions that will be used in the conversation following the video to help them key their observations in the video.* (see below)

10 min**VIDEO****Aging Heroes****[LINK](#)****10 min****GROWING WISDOM**

Conversation about Abundant Aging Influencers

PROVIDE *the following questions for conversation either in small cohorts or in the larger group.*

1. What lessons from their early life continue to be an influence in Al and Morton's later adulthood?
2. What are the obstacles or challenges they currently face? Are the obstacles new or are they things that Al and Morton have lived with for a long time?
3. How do they use skills honed during their professional lives?
4. What provides them with meaning and purpose?
5. How do they participate in their communities?
6. How are they inter-dependent with others?
7. What kind of intergenerational relationships do they have?

30 min

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

If you are using [THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH](#) (go to page F6), you can transition to that section here.

10 min

WRAP-UP

CONVERSATION HOSTS: please share the following information.

Aging is not a solo sport. Throughout our lives we need to be in relationship with people. These relationships vary for each of us. The number of relationships we each need will be different, but having three people in our lives is considered a minimum for good health. The challenge is that older adults who do not have these relationships and connections may experience loneliness or isolation and are seriously endangering their mental and physical health. Scientists report that the effects of loneliness and isolation are equivalent to [smoking 15 cigarettes a day](#).

Both Al and Morton talk about the relationships in their lives. They continue to be involved in activities and organizations that give their lives meaning and purpose.

As we heard in the first video from Citizen Brain, human beings are one of three species who live well beyond the time of reproduction. In this time of older adulthood, our contributions matter. We are able to continue to contribute

to the health and well-being of those around us albeit in perhaps different ways from other times in our lives.

And as Joe Coughlin from MIT's Agelab points out, we have had teachers and coaches and mentors throughout our lives and we need to continue to learn from those who age ahead of us.ⁱ

We all can benefit from the examples of others. Heroes or Influencers are those who show us the value of going above and beyond expectations, obstacles or barriers. They are people who take care of themselves with the help and supports available to them. They usually reach out to others and recognize that they are not the center of life.

In preparation for our last session, please bring a photo or memento of someone who has served as your abundant aging influencer or hero. To whom do you look for examples of how to live life to its fullest as you age?

i [The Making of Generation U & Why A New Model of Retirement Advice Is Needed Now](https://www.forbes.com/sites/josephcoughlin/2021/10/21/the-making-of-generation-u-why-a-new-model-of-retirement-advice-is-needed-now/?sh=5b8ea7482621). Joe Coughlin. Forbes. October 21, 2021. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/josephcoughlin/2021/10/21/the-making-of-generation-u-why-a-new-model-of-retirement-advice-is-needed-now/?sh=5b8ea7482621>

BETWEEN NOW AND WHEN WE GATHER NEXT

CONVERSATION THREE

For a follow-up email with the participants:

GIVE them the Identifying Your Abundant Aging Influencer *handout*. ([found on pages C3-7](#))

SHARE with them the following questions to consider as they choose an Abundant Aging Influencer they would like to share for the next conversation.

The text and links below can be copied, pasted and formatted for your follow-up email.

COPY

PASTE

Identifying Your Abundant Aging Influencers

Think of a person you know who is older than you, about whom you have thought, “When I am their age, I want to be like them!”

What about this person provides you with inspiration for your aging process?

Consider some of the intersections of their lives—either as you engage them in conversation or as you reflect on what you have come to know about them. Don’t worry. You will likely not have the answers to all of these questions.

1. What do you know about their family of origin?
2. Who are the people who make up their community now?
3. How do lessons learned earlier in their life continue to be important to them?
4. Are there things that are valuable to them now in later life that are very different from their up-bringing?
5. What is their attitude about their health—physical, mental, social, spiritual?
6. Who makes up their support community?
7. How are they curious? Do they learn new things?
8. What is their general attitude about life?
9. What is their source of inspiration?
10. What gives them meaning and purpose at this point in their lives?

For our last session, be prepared to share one of your Abundant Aging Influencers. You can bring a picture if you have one.

LET THEM KNOW that if they have any questions or concerns, they can contact you.

THANK EVERYONE for participating in this conversation!

Identifying Your Abundant Aging Influencer

Think of a person you know who is older than you, about whom you have thought, “When I am their age, I want to be like them!”

- ***What words would you use to describe them?***

Consider some of the intersections of their lives—either as you engage them in conversation or as you reflect on what you have come to know about them. Don’t worry you will likely not have answers to all of these questions, but please be sure to answer the final question.

- *What do you know about their family of origin?*
- *Who are the people who make up their community now?*
- *How do lessons learned earlier in their life continue to be important to them?*
- *Are there things that are valuable to them now in later life that are very different from their up-bringing?*
- *What is their attitude about their health—physical, mental, social, spiritual?*
- *How are they curious and do they learn new things?*
- *What is their general attitude about life?*
- *What is their reason or source of inspiration?*
- *What gives them meaning and purpose at this point in their lives?*
- ***What about this person provides you with inspiration for your aging process?***

If your Abundant Aging Influencer is someone you know, bring a picture or artifact to introduce them to the group at our last Conversation the next time we meet. There are several examples from others about their Abundant Aging Influencers on the next page.



(Handout continues on the next page)

Identifying Your Abundant Aging Influencer

Some Examples of Abundant Aging Influencers



This is a photo of my friend, **Esther**. She is now 102 years old. Esther has a remarkably positive attitude despite her various physical challenges and her confinement to a room at an assisted living community. Every staff member who comes in to give her care is blessed by her smiles and her gratitude. She watches our church services on her Kindle Fire tablet, and we often discuss them when I visit her on Sunday afternoons.

-Susan M.



My aging influencer is my friend **Mary**. Mary has lived for 98 years and is enjoying living independently in her cottage at her retirement Community where she has lived for over 20 years. Mary is inspiring to me because she has lived a full and interesting life and has wonderful stories to share.

She is a world traveler and a skilled photographer and enjoys sharing and learning new things. She is a woman of deep faith, someone with a progressive mind and a proud member of her church where she is an active volunteer. Recently she joined the Pride in Faith group at church where she says 'she has met so many new friends.' Mary is curious, kind, welcoming and encourages her friends and neighbors to get involved in the many life enrichment activities that happen there daily.

Mary doesn't miss too many opportunities for life enrichment-- I see her enjoying almost every activity and event! Mary enjoys driving and runs errands for her friends and neighbors who don't drive anymore. Mary enjoys exercise and you'll see her outside on the walking path or if there is inclement weather, she will be inside in the therapy gym. She attends every Resident Council meeting and helps organize cottage resident parties and gatherings. She loves her larger community and has deep roots in many areas around town and enjoys learning about and attending community events too. I'm trying to keep up with Mary now--no sense in waiting until I'm 98!

- Gloria



My Aging Influencer is a little-known man with a big heart, **Dawson**,

who is in his 80s and runs the nonprofit he and his late wife founded, which invites people to bring their unwanted furniture, clothes and household items and then invites people who need them, through social services agencies, to take them for free.

The characteristics of Dawson I want to imitate are 1) his way of uniting volunteers who are retirees, teens and people in between to assist in this worthy program (I am one of those retiree volunteers there) and 2) his energy, enthusiasm and humor doing the work in his 80s.

Dawson is exhibiting Abundant Aging by demonstrating that age is no barrier in making the world a better place, serving the needy and staying sharp.

-Richard

Preparing for CONVERSATION FOUR IN-PERSON

Send to Participants for IN-PERSON GROUPS at least 24 hours before the meeting:

1. A reminder to come to the group ready to share their **Abundant Aging Influencer** and share a picture (if they have one).
2. Remind participants to have **paper and a pen** available during the meeting.

FOR IN-PERSON AND ONLINE GROUPS

If using **THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH** have copies of the [handout](#) with [Ecclesiastes 3:1-8](#) and Parker Palmer quote ([found on pages F11-F14](#)) available to use during the session.



“Age is not all decay. It is the ripening, the swelling, of the fresh life within that withers and bursts the husk.”

George MacDonald

Preparing for CONVERSATION FOUR ONLINE

Send to Participants for ONLINE GROUPS at least 24 hours before the “meeting”:

1. Remind participants to have **paper and a pen** available during the meeting.
2. Send the **link and password** (if needed) for the meeting.
3. Provide your **email and/or phone number** (or of a person who can provide tech support) in case they have difficulties connecting to the meeting.
4. A reminder to come to the group ready to bring a picture and share about their **Abundant Aging Influencer**.

CONVERSATION FOUR OUTLINE

Welcome everyone as they enter the “meeting.” Begin on time.

4 min

WELCOME

From Language to Behavior

CONVERSATION HOSTS: please share the following information.

As we come to our last conversation, we are going to explore some specific things we can do to change the way we approach aging as we view two more short videos. We will allow sufficient time following these videos and conversation for you to share your aging heroes—so just hang on to your pictures and stories for a couple of minutes.

One of the basic concepts that allows us to think in terms of “Us vs. Them” is what is called “othering.” When we talk about *those* old people, we put them into one group separate from ourselves. In the process we set barriers between us based on our differences and we impose our biases and prejudices.

It is permissible to deny that I am “old” by holding onto my preconceptions of what “old” is. And most of the time, “old” never is “us.” Joe Coughlin says that when asked, most people say that “old” is about 15 years older than they are at the time.

Today we are going to look further into the effect of how we talk about aging, and how this influences our relationships and our own aging process.

We begin with a video from [The National Center to Reframe Aging](#).ⁱ Their work is rooted in significant research begun in 2017 and supported by the leading national organizations that work with aging populations.

2 min

VIDEO

Frame of Mind: Reframing Aging from “Them to Us”

[LINK](#)

CONVERSATION HOSTS: please share the following information.

When you kept your list two weeks ago about the ways you heard aging being referenced in your everyday life, were any of those references using this “Us” and “Them” language? This was a big one during the pandemic, as some elected officials blamed the shutting down of our communities on “those” old people and suggested that grandparents should be willing to sacrifice or risk their health in order to keep the economy strong.ⁱⁱ

And we hear “Us” vs “Them” language when stereotypes that suggest that all “millennials” are lazy or when some other negative attribute is broadcast to a large group of people. One of the harmful effects of “Us” vs “Them” references is that it implies that there is some thing or commodity that is in limited supply that either one or the other gets. The reality is that the things that benefit older adults, benefit everyone. Those benefits might be immediate, like ramps built for those who need assistance climbing stairs and is also greatly appreciated by those pushing strollers, pulling suitcases or delivery carts. They

are also beneficial for everyone, because we all are aging.

There is a quote that is often shared and there is some dispute over who originated the idea, but Ashton Applewhite uses it: When we engage in ageism, we are discriminating against our own future selves.

Real World example: Flo was in support of historic preservation in her town. When her church considered moving out of their building from the 1880’s she led the argument as to why they should stay. Thirty years later, after several heart incidents including open heart surgery, the four steps into the building became a barrier and she admitted that she had never thought that one day she would be unable to participate in worship because of those steps. We are all aging and even if we don’t need some item or policy now, we may benefit from it in the future.

There is one more video to share here which highlights another turn of phrase which is common when referencing older adults. This comes to us from SoulPancake.

4 min

VIDEO

She Looks Great for Her Age

[LINK](#)

10 min

CONVERSATION

Large Group

INVITE the group into conversation with these question prompts.

1. What do the words “for her age” do to the conversation?
2. Have you ever used this in reference to other people?
3. What do you think about this language now?

10 min

GROWING WISDOM

More “Othering” trigger words and phrases

CONVERSATION HOSTS: please share the following information.

STILL

[Dr. Bill Thomas](#) suggests that “still” is a similar concept. In reference to older adults, when we say things like, “She still drives” or “He still goes to work (referring to someone well beyond traditional retirement age)” or “They still have date nights,” we are perpetuating the belief that the behavior being referenced is age specific.

It might be admirable that someone who is 95 drives to the grocery store. But to insert “still” into that sentence assumes that *no one* that age should drive. It would be different if the reference to the behavior was linked to

something other than her age. Consider these three statements:

She is 95 and drives to the grocery store.

She is 95 and still drives to the grocery store.

Diagnosed with macular degeneration, she still drives to the grocery store.

We need to use the word “still” very cautiously.

WORDS THAT DIMINISH

When we use words that diminish another, we “other” them.

When we use words that suggest that someone is significantly younger than they are, we diminish their intellectual, emotional and physical abilities.

Just ask older adults what they think or feel when a person with whom they do not have close familiar relationship calls them “honey” or “sweetie.” When not reserved for individuals with whom we have an intimate relationship, these terms can also be used to patronize younger people.

Wait staff in a restaurant might use this language and get away with it. But when a care provider, or someone you would expect to learn more about an older adult, uses these terms, they are not endearing themselves to the older adult but diminishing the older adult’s personhood.

Likewise, when an older individual uses these words in conversation with a younger person with whom they do not have a close relationship, it can also cut short the opportunity for the relationship to honor both individuals. In a way, “honey” and “sweetie” are shortcuts to interaction and place the person saying them in a superior or position that assumes power over the other.

STEREOTYPES

Another way to “other” people is to rely completely on your own set of assumptions, based on the stereotypes you carry into the relationship. These ideas are based on the set of identifiable characteristics you notice about them. Although there might not be specific words or phrases that help to mark when this is happening, we need to be aware of our internal biases in order to discontinue these processes. We also need to find ways to interrupt other people when we hear them perpetuating stereotypical thinking even about themselves.

One example of this comes from the work of [Amy Gorely](#), who works at Carolina Meadows in North Carolina. She

instituted a campaign in her community called “Be bold. Claim old.” [You can see her presentation, which launched this campaign, online.](#)ⁱⁱⁱ

Although this is not the goal of her campaign, what would happen if, when we hear someone stumbling to admit their age or making a joke to hide their chronological number, we said out loud, “Be bold. Claim old”? This one phrase acknowledges that this can be a difficult thing to do — and offers support to an individual to think positively about their age — and to admit this in public! This type of disruption in the usual cultural scripts can help to lift the challenge that we all have before us to overcome ageism.

ASK for observations.

1. Can you think of additional words or phrases that we use to “other” people based on their age?
2. Why is it more difficult to “other” some groups of people, yet we do so easily with elders?
 - For instance, making racial slurs is not socially acceptable. But disparaging comments about being old continue to be the punchline in jokes.
 - If you are unsure if a joke is ageist, substitute the reference about age to race or gender. If the joke is racist or sexist, it will also be ageist.

25 min

GROWING WISDOM

Our Abundant Aging Influencers

INVITE the group to share their aging Influencers (either large group or in smaller groups).

As we come to the last part of our conversations, please share your aging Influencers with one another. Through sharing your Influencers, may you be aware of the gifts you are giving to each other!

Some questions:

1. What are some of the things that are similar about the Influencers your group members chose?
2. Was it easy or difficult for you to claim an aging Influencer?
3. What is the most inspiring thing that you receive from your aging Influencer?

30 min

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

If you are using [THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH](#) (go to page F9), you can transition to that section here.

10 min

GROWING WISDOM

The Change I Desire

CONVERSATION HOSTS: *please share the following information.*

We are made to change. That is what aging is all about.

QUESTIONS for the conversation:

1. We began our first conversation listing words we associated with aging. Are there different or new words that you would use today related to aging?
 - Do they give you a more positive feeling about your aging process?
2. As a result of our time together, name one thing you now notice about aging that you previously did not.
3. What are some positive aspects of aging that we have talked about?
4. What do you need to encourage your own positive attitude about aging?

10 min

WRAP-UP

CONVERSATION HOSTS: *please share the following information.*

Thank you for participating in these conversations. These are important, not only in our own lives, but for the institutions of which we are a part and for the larger culture as well.

As Mary Catherine Bateson points out in her book, *Composing a Further Life*, not only have we potentially added several decades to the end of the human life span, those years shift the rest of the life cycle. We need to engage in these conversations with the children and youth in our lives because their notions of older age began to

be formed as early as 3 years old. It is probable that half of those who have been born since 2010 may have the privilege and responsibility of living longer than our current generations—to 100 and beyond. May we seek to be Abundant Aging Influencers for those who follow us.

[A list of resources](#) is provided for your further study. It is a short list amidst a growing pool of blogs, videos, books and articles. May your courage to add your voice against the messages of ageism combine with others as we continue to grow in the advanced years ahead of us!

THANK EVERYONE for participating in this conversation!

YOU CAN SHARE the resource list with any who would like it. ([Found on pages 9-10](#)).

FOLLOW-UP FOR CONVERSATION HOSTS

Another Day Older Feedback

We would love to hear about your experience using this resource. If you would be willing, please scan the QR code or use this url, <https://forms.office.com/r/syBV6WN94k> , to complete a short questionnaire for your feedback. Please make sure you scroll to the top of the form.



And of course, you can contact us at the [Ruth Frost Parker Center for Abundant Aging \(AbundantAging.org\)](#) where you can find other resources, programs and events to continue your exploration of aging abundantly.

- i National Center to Reframe Aging. [ReframeAging.org](https://www.reframingaging.org). <https://www.reframingaging.org>.
- ii [Texas' lieutenant governor suggests grandparents are willing to die for US economy](#). Adrianna Rodriguez. USA TODAY. March 24, 2020. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/03/24/covid-19-texas-official-suggests-elderly-willing-die-economy/2905990001/>.
- iii <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6EC5x23HR8>.

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

CONVERSATION ONE

30 min

ROMANS 12 LECTIO DIVINA

The following is an opportunity to engage the text in the style of **Lectio Divina**, using Romans 12.

1. Read the passage from Romans 12 aloud.

(Eugene Peterson's version, The Message)

- Allow time for silence to pay attention to words or phrases that “jumped out” or “lingered” for you.

2. Reread the passage.

Perhaps have a different person read it out loud.

- Allow silent time for consideration of what this passage says about aging.

3. Reread the passage. Again, have a different voice read it. And you may have it read in another version.

- Ask participants to note if there are questions that arise from the passage for them about aging?
- Offer a few moments of silence.
- Ask if anyone is willing to share what they heard or learned from the passage and experience.

4. Share some of the background information about the text. See notes below.

NOTES ABOUT ROMANS 12:1-2

The 12th chapter of Paul's letter to the community in Rome begins the conclusion of his instructions and encouragement to the church. He is summarizing what he has been saying in the previous chapters.

There is an understanding from the Greek words used in this passage, that we all live in a particular age or period of time. They understood that within different periods of time there are common ways of thinking and common attitudes about life which could include hopes and dreams, opinions, stereotypes and common prejudices which are difficult to pull apart in one's own thinking because we are all a part of the time in which we live. And within each time or age, there is an adversarial power that competes with God's desires for our lives. To resist the ungodly powers that are present even in our own time, we need to resist the pressure to conform to this world.

People of faith are to be transformed. This word is passive in that we do not do the transforming but prepare ourselves to be transformed. We can facilitate this by controlling how we think about the ways of this world. And when we do, we may be renewed—we can focus our thoughts on God. And because we continue to live in the world and continue to be immersed in the attitudes and thinking which are adversarial, the discipline to keep considering and focusing on God is an on-going process of reflection.

Ageism is one of the adversarial powers at work. So, our challenge is to be aware of the competing aging messages from the world around us and understand who we are as human beings, created in God's image. This offers us a continual discipline of reflecting on God's perception what it means to age. This is an inner process which can have significant influence on how we live.¹

5. Questions to further the conversation:

- How has the culture around you influenced how you think and feel about your own aging process?
- God created us as we are. We were created to age. What do you think God wants you to learn about life in the current chapter of your life—with all of the changes that are occurring in your bodies?
- How can you intentionally pay attention to how God is at work changing you from the inside?

6. Bring the conversation to a close by reading the PRAYER FOR MATURITY. Read it aloud slowly, allowing time for the inhaling and exhaling as in the poetry (optional version available as a litany).

7. Offer a closing blessing:

May you invite God into your aging process this week.

Embrace how God is at work in your life.

And in grateful response may you discern all that is good and acceptable and perfect in God's eyes.

ROMANS 12:1-2

¹⁻² So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life — your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life — and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for God. Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what God wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina (lex-ee-o di-veen-a), which in Latin means, divine reading, is the practice of reading through a passage several (3-4) times with reflection time between the readings. Each time, the passage may be read by different voices with different emphasis. The participants may be guided toward awareness of a word or phrase that speaks (shimmers, reverberates, sparks, etc.) to them. There is silence between each of the readings. Then an opportunity for thoughtful response to the passage.

[LINK TO LECTIO DIVINA BEGINNER'S GUIDE²](#)

[Return to the WRAP-UP for CONVERSATION ONE on page C1-6.](#)

¹ REV Bible, Romans 12:1-2 Commentary

² <https://bustedhalo.com/ministry-resources/lectio-divina-beginners-guide>

PRAYER FOR MATURITY

Inspired by Romans 12:1-2

God, you invite us to

Take our everyday, ordinary life —

Sleeping, waking, eating, planning, getting to appointments,

Caring for others, working, laughing, crying, lonely, busy —

This everyday, ordinary life and place it before you.

You invite us to lift up this life that creates wrinkle lines and stress related disease

That holds youth in the light and hides age in the shadows

That scorns those who cannot keep up and dismisses memories as yesterday's news,

To take all this life and place it before you knowing

that we don't even think about what we are doing!

We assume that we know what to do and what is expected,

What to hide and what to reveal

So automatic are our thoughts, so quick our reactions, that we aren't even aware

Of your embrace.

Until we stop.

And breathe the long inhale that nurtures wisdom

And release the slow exhale full of confining cultural expectations

Breathing them into the freedom of the universe.

In. And out. Again. Receiving and releasing.

And we pause. We remember.

We listen.

We allow our minds to be full of you and to envision our future in your time.

And you invite us to ponder anew

How it is that we can reflect your light —

How we can hold your God-life that disrupts the mindless routines of ordinary

And forms instead, the extraordinary:

The mindful, the mature, the considerate, the passionate

Your God-life that provides the space and time,

That provides the ability and desire to live with purpose

To find meaning

To express gratitude

And to be grounded in the love —

Love that can only come from the center of all that is or ever was or ever will be.

And then, we can embrace this gift of maturity, this gift of years

Reflecting on time long past

and open to the future which lays ahead

Receiving the gifts ripe with reflection.

And You, gracious God, rejoice.

And life is extraordinarily connected once again

as we recognize this maturity that comes from faith

as gift for all who are aging.

And we embrace your joy and resound with our own "Amen."

Beth Long-Higgins, ed. 2019

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

CONVERSATION TWO

10 min

FINDING FAITHFUL RESPONSES TO THE ASSUMPTIONS WE MAKE

CONVERSATION HOSTS *please share the following information.*

Because the average life expectancy several thousand years ago would have been below the age of 30, a number that had only increased to 47 by the year 1900, there are few biblical stories specifically about aging and late life. When there are individuals who are older, their advanced age is often in reference to their inability to produce children.

In ancient cultures, children were not just a way to pass along genes and perpetuate the family line; they were the work force for the family livelihood. Whether by hunting and gathering or working the land, they were the ones to take care of their parents when the parents could no longer do the hard, physical labor. Offspring were also the legacy to carry on the family name.

Likewise, the matriarchs and patriarchs, the elders of the family, were seen to be useful to the ongoing survival of the larger human family. They remembered where to find water from droughts in years past. They knew where the best grazing lands were. It was their job to share their accumulated knowledge as a support for the family system as there were no other libraries or written means to pass along information from one generation to the next.

As we share the story about Abraham and Sarah's encounter with the angels, you are invited to observe the place of faith in their lives. Please note that this is not necessarily a story concerned with elevating childbearing to a higher platform than those women who do not have children. Listen instead to the role of Sarah's faith in understanding what is or is not possible in her older years.

PART 1: ENCOUNTER WITH THE STRANGERS

ASK someone to read Genesis 18:9-15 about Abraham and Sarah and the visitor to their tent/home (with a copy of the text for everyone to follow available on a handout or screen share):

ASK the participants to consider:

What are Sarah's assumptions about her life, given her age?

You can SHARE some of these observations:

1. She assumed that enjoying pleasure in the context of her intimate relationship with Abraham, specifically in the context of childbearing, was not possible since she was past menopause.

GENESIS 18:9-15

⁹ The men said to him, "Where is Sarah, your wife?" He said, "In the tent."

¹⁰ One of them said, "I'm coming back about this time next year. When I arrive, your wife Sarah will have a son." Sarah was listening at the tent opening, just behind the man.

¹¹⁻¹² Abraham and Sarah were old by this time, very old. Sarah was far past the age for having babies. Sarah laughed within herself. "An old woman like me? Get pregnant? With this old man of a husband?"

¹³⁻¹⁴ God said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Me? Have a baby? An old woman like me?' Is anything too hard for God? I'll be back about this time next year, and Sarah will have a baby."

¹⁵ Sarah lied. She said, "I didn't laugh," because she was afraid. But he said, "Yes, you did; you laughed."

2. Since she had not had any children, her connection to future generations would have to be through the offspring of her servants.
3. She was at risk since security in old age was dependent on one's children (this was the social safety net in ancient times).
4. She assumed that the visitor would be upset with her for her laughter — and the reason why she denied having laughed at his suggestion. (This was perhaps not so much an age issue, but might be seen at the intersection of her age and gender and expectations of her role and behavior in the presence of strange men)

CONVERSATION HOSTS *please share the following information.*

The reality is that our lives do change. In our advanced years some things are not possible, that once were. ***Have you ever limited what you thought you should or could do because that was not what “someone of your age” should be doing?***

Even though Sarah doubted that they would become parents, the impossible happened. When Sarah was opened to the reality that with God, the impossible or improbable may happen, God became the source of her life.

PART 2: UNEXPECTED SPIRITUAL EXPRESSION

ASK someone to read Genesis 21:1-7, the story of Isaac's birth and Sarah's response.

Concluding thoughts to share with the group:

Laughter becomes a spiritual expression for Sarah. It is an act of affirmation, whereas in the story in chapter 18, it was a sign of her disbelief. In this episode, others join her as a way of recognizing that our own limits don't have to be the defining parameters of older years. In fact, they name their child “he who laughs,” Isaac.

As we consider the narratives that our society tells us about aging, may we be like Sarah and remember in our laughter that what we thought was impossible in older life may be possible!

GENESIS 21:1-7

¹⁻⁴ God visited Sarah exactly as he said he would. God did to Sarah what he promised: Sarah became pregnant and gave Abraham a son in his old age, and at the very time God had set. Abraham named him Isaac. When his son was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him just as God had commanded.

⁵⁻⁶ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born. Sarah said, “God has blessed me with laughter, and all who get the news will laugh with me!”

⁷ She also said, “Whoever would have suggested to Abraham that Sarah would one day nurse a baby! Yet here I am! I've given the old man a son!”

Offer the CLOSING PRAYER: Prayer of Sarah

God of impossibilities, who considers things well past their “rightful” age
Expand my understanding of your joy!
Grow your vision of happiness in me.
Turn my cynical chuckles into breaths of delight.
Release my control of things that are known
that new life may take root through my unknowing.
Empower and expand my acceptance of what is possible
despite all the reasons why I understand life to be otherwise.
Laugh your joy within me as I catch my breath, renewed and free. Amen.

CONVERSATION HOSTS *please share the following information.*

As you continue to reflect on Abraham and Sarah—where do you see the power of possibility overcoming your own self-defining assumptions about aging?

Return to the WRAP-UP for CONVERSATION TWO on page C2-3.

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

CONVERSATION THREE

10 min

SEEKING FAITHFUL EXAMPLES

CONVERSATION HOSTS please share the following information.

Let's consider the letter that was written to the Christian community in Ephesus. Paul was not writing specifically about old age *per se*. He was, however, talking about growing and maturing. He was encouraging people with suggestions about how to live a life rooted in Christ.

In the passage, Paul suggests the goal of the Christian faith is to grow **in maturity** (*Ephesians 4:13*). Given that the life expectancy during Paul's time would have been about half of what it is today, his use of the word that we translate as "maturity" was most likely referring to a spiritual depth rather than length of life. But we can hope that even with

our longer lives, we continue to strive to achieve a greater depth of understanding of faith and of life itself. We just have a longer period of time over which to learn these things!

Reading from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*, pause along the way for your observations. Listen to this passage as a lens for healthy aging.



Let the group know that you will read a sentence or two of Ephesians 4 and then pause. Invite them to reflect what those words suggest to them about the aging process. You may want to provide a copy of the version on PowerPoint or a screen share for the group to follow along.

ASK the question: How do these words help to serve you as a metaphor for aging in the 21st century?

EPHESIANS 4 (selected verses from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*)

4:1-2 In light of all this, here's what I want you to do ... I want you to get out there and **walk—better yet, run!**—on the road God called you to travel. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere.

4:2-3 And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.

4:4-6 You were called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (Creator) of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.

Possible Observations

1. BE ACTIVE (walk and run)
2. Have purpose — don't spend time going nowhere
3. God calls us/calls you to different places

Possible Observations

1. The importance of the role of humility and discipline throughout life
2. Being compassionate and engage in acts of love
3. Be aware of others, notice differences and help to bring people together

Possible Observations:

1. MAKE ROOM FOR CONNECTEDNESS — Community
2. Be centered in the faith
3. Remember God is God
4. Be at One with God

4:10-13 He handed out gifts ... to train Christians in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, **fully mature adults, fully developed within and without**, fully alive like Christ.

4:14-15 No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are an easy mark for impostors. God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything.

4:15-16 We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. Christ keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, **nourishing** us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.

Possible Observations:

1. Building community is the work of everyone
2. The way the community works together is important (rhythmically and easily)
3. The role of efficiency and grace in the work of the community
4. The hope that we will be mature — fully developed inward and outward

Possible Observations:

1. We are to continue growing ... to grow and bear witness to what is true
2. We are to speak with and teach others out of a place of love

Possible Observations:

1. Christ continues to nourish us — we never stop growing spiritually

Offer the CLOSING PRAYER: Prayer for Wisdom

God of the universe and molecule, the older and the younger—
We give thanks for the glimpse of life in your time.
Help us be honest about the fears that grip us.
Grant us courage to release the fears over which we have no control,
And the discipline to act in ways which change the power of fears' illusions.
Empower us to receive your gifts in this moment, together in this space—
Gifts that prepare us to learn from each other
As we share the burdens and delights of maturing
In our relationships with you and each other. Amen.

Return to the WRAP-UP for CONVERSATION THREE on page C3-5.

Ephesians 4: Selected verses from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*

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Possible Observations:

4:2-3 And mark that you do this with humility and discipline—not in fits and starts, but steadily, pouring yourselves out for each other in acts of love, alert at noticing differences and quick at mending fences.

Possible Observations:

4:4-6 You were called to travel on the same road and in the same direction, so stay together, both outwardly and inwardly. You have one Master, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father (Creator) of all, who rules over all, works through all, and is present in all.

Possible Observations:

4:15-16 We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. Christ keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, nourishing us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love. Everything you are and think and do is permeated with Oneness.

Possible Observations:

4:10-13 He handed out gifts ... to train Christians in skilled servant work, working within Christ's body, the church, until we're all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God's Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ.

Possible Observations:

4:14-15 No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are an easy mark for impostors. God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything.

Possible Observations:

4:15-16 We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do. Christ keeps us in step with each other. His very breath and blood flow through us, **nourishing** us so that we will grow up healthy in God, robust in love.

Possible Observations:

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

CONVERSATION FOUR

20 min

CHANGING FAITHFULLY

SHARE the passage from Ecclesiastes about life's seasons. Notice the opposites held in tension in each duplet.

It is helpful for each person to have a copy. [A handout version of this is found on page F11-F12.](#)

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

To everything there is a season.
A time to be born and a time to die.
A time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted.
A time to kill and a time to heal.
A time to break down and a time to build up.
A time to weep and a time to laugh.
A time to mourn and a time to dance.
A time to throw away stones and a time to gather stones together.
A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.
A time to seek and a time to lose.
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
A time to tear and a time to sew.
A time to keep silent and a time to speak.
A time to love and a time to hate.
A time for war and a time for peace.

Which of these speaks to you right now?

Which of these make you uncomfortable?

TIME PERMITTING, you can engage in further conversation about stories or examples of these.

YOU MAY READ the following aloud, summarize the information or share in a PowerPoint or screen share with the participants.

Parker Palmer, author and contemplative writer, published a book in the summer of 2018, *On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity and Getting Old*. Ask the participants to hear the tension he lifts up in this excerpt from the beginning of his book — similar to the duplets from Ecclesiastes.

"I'll be nearly 80 when this book is published, so it shouldn't surprise me that I can sometimes see the brink from here. But it does. I'm even more surprised by the fact that I like being old.

Age brings diminishments, but more than a few come with benefits.

I've lost the capacity for multitasking, but I've rediscovered the joy of doing one thing at a time.

My thinking has slowed a bit, but experience has made it deeper and richer.

I'm done with big and complex projects, but more aware of the loveliness of simple things: a talk with a friend, a walk in the woods, sunsets and sunrises, a night of good sleep.

(Handout continues on the next page)

I have fears, of course, always have and always will. But as time lengthens like a shadow behind me, and the time ahead dwindles, my overriding feeling is gratitude for the gift of life.

Above all, I like being old because the view from the brink is striking, a full panorama of my life — and a bracing breeze awakens me to new ways of understanding my own past, present, and future. As one of Kurt Vonnegut's characters says in *Player Piano*, "Out on the edge, you can see all kinds of things you can't see from the center."

Palmer identifies some of the opposing life forces as in Ecclesiastes, opposites that he has discovered in his 80-year-long life (diminishment/benefits, multitasking/doing one thing, complex projects/simple things, fears/gratitude). There is no value of one over the other. Just an acknowledgement that both exist. He recognizes that at this point in his life, he is experiencing different things that now give him meaning and pleasure.

If we were to write a similar list today, what would the duplets include? Here is a list to get you started. Each of you will be given the opportunity to add your own duplet of experiences that you have had in the various cycles of change in your life.

To every age there is a cycle of change

A time to learn and a time to teach

A time to reflect and a time to proclaim

A time to imagine and a time to act

A time to change and a time to hold fast

A time to grow and a time to diminish

A time to accept help and a time to reach out to others

A time to focus on details and a time to see the big picture

A time to prepare and a time to evaluate ...

— Rev. Beth Long-Higgins, 2020

ASK the participants to share their duplet and add it to the poem.

Return to the WRAP-UP for CONVERSATION FOUR on page C4-5.

CHANGING FAITHFULLY

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

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If we were to write a similar list today, what would the duplets include?

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- A time to imagine and a time to act
- A time to change and a time to hold fast
- A time to grow and a time to diminish
- A time to accept help and a time to reach out to others
- A time to focus on details and a time to see the big picture
- A time to prepare and a time to evaluate ...

—*Rev. Beth Long-Higgins, 2020*

RESOURCES

WEBSITES

[The Center for Abundant Aging](#), an initiative of United Church Homes. Includes the Abundant Aging blog, information about Abundant Aging zoom courses, annual Abundant Aging Symposium, and other Center for Abundant Aging programs and events.

[OldSchool.info](#), For the most complete list of resources on Ageism, visit Ashton Applewhite's Anti-Ageism Clearinghouse. This site includes books, blogs and papers, speakers, tools, campaigns, videos, and podcasts. It also includes resources from other countries and the World Health Organization. The Oldschool site also has several sections specifically addressing issues of ageism during the pandemic.

[Changing the Narrative: Ending Ageism Together](#), a campaign of NextFifty Initiative to end ageism. Good resources to change how people think, talk, and act about aging. Includes a free downloadable Guide for Age-Inclusive Communication.

[Better Birthdays.org](#), Birthday celebrations are one of the few times when we all think and talk about age/aging. It's a time when we point out what it means to age and what our beliefs are about ourselves and others based on age. Site includes links to age-positive cards.

[Next Avenue](#), This online publication comes from PBS specifically and their tag line is "where grown-ups keep growing". You can subscribe to get the most recent articles to your email or visit their website. They regularly post articles about ageism and how this affects the lives of those who are older adults.

[Art Against Ageism](#), Artistic endeavors that confront and tackle damaging stereotypes and misperceptions about age, older adults, and being older.

VIDEOS WE SUGGEST IN ADDITION TO THOSE USED IN THE CONVERSATIONS:

[Carl Honoré Why We Should Embrace Aging as an Adventure](#), 12:34 minute 2019 TEDSummit video.

[Fighting Ageism: Be Bold, Claim Old](#), 2:02 minute video with Amy Gorely at Carolina Meadows in NC.

[Age Doesn't Define You—Global Campaign to Combat Ageism](#), 1:34 minute 2020 from World Health Organization. #AWorld4AllAges.

[Ageism: Explained](#) 2:57 minutes 2022 from Centre for Ageing Better in UK.

RESOURCES

BOOKS WE RECOMMEND:

[Ageism Unmasked: Exploring Age Bias and How to End It](#), Tracey Gendron, Steerforth, 2022. Dr. Gendron was the keynote speaker at the 2023 Parker Center Annual Abundant Aging Symposium.

[This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Aging](#), Ashton Applewhite, Celadon Books, New York, 2020. Publishers' Weekly writes, Applewhite's "humor, high-energy writing, and emphasis on positive ways to view and experience age contribute to making this a valuable resource, an agent for social change, and an enjoyable read."

[What Retirees Want: A Holistic View of Life's Third Age](#), Ken Dychtwald and Robert Morison. Wiley, Hoboken, New Jersey, 2020.

[Composing a Further Life](#), Mary Catherine Bateson. Vintage Books, New York, 2010.

[Breaking the Age Code: How Your Beliefs About Aging Determine How Long and Well You Live](#), by Becca Levy, PhD, William Morrow, 2022. Dr. Levy has pioneered a new field of research that reveals how our mindset and beliefs shape our behaviors, our ability to heal, and our lifespan, in invisible but powerful ways.

PARKER CENTER FOR ABUNDANT AGING RESOURCES

DISCUSSION GUIDE: **[Another Day Older](#)**, Free downloadable Conversation Host Guide to spark conversation about aging and challenges individuals to address their ageist beliefs and reframe their attitudes toward aging.

PODCAST: **[The Art of Aging Podcast](#)** from United Church Homes.

The Center for Abundant Aging staff are also available to provide programs and presentations to meet the needs of your organization around the topic of ageism. You can contact us on our website **[AbundantAging.org](#)**.

DEDICATION



**This program is dedicated to two of my Abundant Aging Influencers,
my mom, Shirley and Elinor.
Their friendship spanned 60-years
and was a source of inspiration, adventure and delight.**

WITH GRATITUDE

What began as an idea, once spoken out loud at a get-to-know-you lunch with Noreen Wilhelm from The Dayton Foundation, wasn't going back in the box. Noreen was senior encore fellow working with the Del Mar Encore Fellow program. Immediately, she saw the connection between our programs.

Six months later, Eric Johnson, an educational video producer, was called to be the Del Mar Encore fellow to work with The Parker Center. His initial focus was to produce videos to support this project. He quickly caught the spark, thanks to Ashton Applewhite's manifesto on ageism, *This Chair Rocks*.

Eric suggested we contact Ashton to inquire if we could use some of her clips on ageism for the videos. She was quick to respond affirmatively. Many, many thanks to Ashton for the generosity of her contributions and to her passion to overcome ageism, which continues to inspire many.

Thanks also to the 18 who participated in the Zoom test group once we crafted the first edition. The pandemic dictated that we redesign the material for Zoom. Their patience as I learned the technology early in the pandemic was very forgiving. Ranging in age from 15 to 89, the experience, perspectives, and suggestions they offered were invaluable.

Particular thanks goes to Natalie and Jan, both friends and colleagues for their input reading through the materials before it underwent the editing process with the first edition. A special thanks also to Dr. Susan McFadden, who offered her fresh eyes on the project and provided feedback as a reader with expertise in the field. We benefit from the collective wisdom of you all!

Thanks also to Kim Moeller who joined me on the Parker Center Staff in 2022. Her subsequent experience leading these conversations in person has led us to rewrite the material for in-person and online leaders. Her editing help with this second edition has been invaluable. Also, thanks to Darla Metz and Ashley Bills for helping with the final edits and to Lori for her design work for both editions.

Through these conversations in *Another Day Older*, may we be another day bolder as we claim the gifts aging offers and collaborate to find new ways to face the challenges which confront us all.

Blessings,

Rev. Beth Long-Higgins
VP Engagement and Executive Director,
The Center for Abundant Aging
United Church Homes

THE CENTER FOR ABUNDANT AGING



The CENTER for
ABUNDANT AGING

UNITED CHURCH HOMES®

United Church Homes launched the **Ruth Frost Parker Center for Abundant Aging** in 2017. The Center seeks to build a diverse community of individuals and organizations interested in discovering the riches of abundant aging. We advocate for an inclusive society that conquers ageism and we collaborate in delivering education and resources that transform how we think about aging.

The Center's **Annual Symposium** brings together nationally recognized speakers, experts on aging and an interdisciplinary audience of older adults, students, professionals and community members.

Since 2018, The Center has offered **Wisdom Conversations**, online gatherings for clergy and lay leaders to learn about aging issues in the context of congregational life. In 2023, the **Abundant Aging Ministries Network** was created to offer a place for those involved in ministries with older adults to connect online and through quarterly virtual meetings to share resources and engage in conversations about ideas and questions they are experiencing.

Another initiative of The Center is its **Enliven** program, offering online courses to celebrate and nourish spiritual wellness while encouraging older adults to learn, grow and share together.

The **Abundant Aging blog** is published weekly by clergy and others who are aging themselves. Blog topics revolve around the experience of aging through the lens of faith. Themes have included Abundant Grace, Unexpected Clarity, Sacred Journeys, and Community as Agent of Hope.

In 2020, we launched the **Art of Aging podcast**.

Initiated by Eric Johnson, the Del Mar Encore fellow with The Dayton Foundation, the podcast shares ideas and programs that transform aging. In 2023, the podcast expanded and now includes both Art of Aging topics as well as valuable tips for older adults and those caring for older adults. Through interviews and perspectives from seasoned professionals, you will discover ideas, information and inspiration on improving your life as you grow older.

The Center's **Another Day Older** program offers free, downloadable curriculum for gatherings that spark conversation about ageism and challenge individuals to reframe attitudes toward aging.

And The Center joins together with the Walker Leadership Institute of Eden Seminary to offer **NEXT Steps: Re-Imagining Your Elderhood**, a non-academic 16-week process of self-discovery introducing participants to theological, philosophical and psychological concepts of vocation and aging.

You can subscribe to the blog or learn more about the center at abundantaging.org.

Send your questions by emailing The Center at abundantaging@uchinc.org.