



ANOTHER DAY OLDER

Guide for the
CONVERSATION HOST



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INTRODUCTION TO THE CONVERSATIONS

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 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. This series will encourage participants to think about their own aging process and the messages that influence our attitudes about aging.

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

We will consider how our internal biases about aging impact how we relate to those older or younger than ourselves. We will look at some of the external messages about the aging process we receive from our culture. And we hope to consider some ways to change those thought processes and messages.

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 views of aging from a young age.

Because we do not internalize these stereotypes by ourselves, we hope these conversations with others will awaken 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:

- Create an intergenerational community among participants.
- Consider the language of ageism and alternative ways to think and talk about aging.
- Provide resources to change our conversations about aging.

The Role of Faith

The Ruth Frost Parker Center for Abundant Aging is grounded in a faith-inspired organization, United Church Homes. There is a component to each of the four conversations in this resource that adds a biblical text and spiritual dimension to the conversation. This component is not written to influence anyone's expression of the divine but to use the lens of faith and scripture to look at our own aging.

Critical to our faith formation, we must be grounded in the understanding that all 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. And throughout our long lives, we can continue to grow in breadth and depth of faith and relationship with the divine.

Tip

Optional: If your conversation group is not comfortable with this component of the conversations, the materials have been written so you are free to pass over this portion of the supporting materials.

Timing: If you choose to use these materials, please know that it will be helpful to increase the length of each session beyond the core hour. Your conversations may not go as long as 75 minutes, but it's better to have people plan for that amount of time and finish a little early than rush through the rest of the material to stay within a 60-minute window.

CONVERSATION HOST PREPARATION

To get started, review the background materials for this course. Watch the videos and see the resource list for additional references for your own questions. Although we began the creative process of putting this curriculum together long before March 2020, we recognized that we needed to change our original format for small group in-person sessions once COVID-19 upended our world. This edition has been reconfigured to accommodate these conversations via a web-based platform, but it could easily be used in-person when it is safe to do so. However, even with the possibility of in-person conversations, the materials are contingent upon the ability to show web-based videos to the assembled group for the small group conversations.

Program Flow:

The materials are divided into Four Conversation sessions.

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 a corresponding VIDEO for each session to be viewed with the group. You will need to stream these online and share through your virtual format 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.
GROWING WISDOM	During portions of the session, 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.

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH is a section with a **spiritual component** to look at aging. (Again, this can be omitted if it is not suitable for your group.) These may include scripture passages, prayers and opportunities for reflection by the members of the group.

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 add that extra half hour if you are using the **THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH** component.

Promotional ideas:

- Share the link to AARP's **What is Old?** video. This provides one illustration of the impact of cultural aging narratives on the interactions of individuals of different generations.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lydNjrUs4NM>
- 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

Possible information for promotion of the conversations:

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 are 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 own aging process and the messages that influence our attitudes about aging. And we will look at ageism, the prejudice or discrimination on the grounds of how old someone is or is perceived to be by another. Ageism has negative consequences on individuals and society in general. Through these conversations, we will examine why recognizing ageism is important and discuss what to do to disrupt it. We internalize these views of aging from a young age and hold on to them far too long, so it is never too early or too late to join the conversation.

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

Optional group size:

If your virtual platform does not allow the opportunity to break the group into smaller conversation spaces (chat rooms), then keep the group number capped at nine. This will enable all participants to be seen on the screen at the same time. This seems to be the limit for those who are participating through an iPad or other tablet.

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 these smaller cohorts, you can break these groups out into four or five people.

We used Zoom during our initial group conversations, with 19 people registered. Both the conversation host and the participants were learning how to use the technology together. Please note that if you do not have access to a Zoom license, there is a free version. But in this version, you are limited to a 45-minute call, and other features, such as the breakout rooms, may not be available.

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

If you are using Zoom or some other platform, **do not share the link on social media or even a website.** Send the link directly to the participants' email. This, plus using a waiting room, registration ID or password, will increase the security of your group. Although you may not be talking about national security, hackers do occasionally disrupt online gatherings, and these are some best practices to prevent that from happening.

Preparations for meeting using virtual technology: (i.e., Zoom)

1. Choose a technology platform that is easy for participants to access and use at home.

Disclaimer: We are not able to make official recommendations about possible platforms. Please check with the leadership of your organization or congregation to see what licenses they may hold, so you can conduct these conversations in a safe, participatory format for all involved.

Key: You need the capability to show video content from online channels to the whole group in whatever format — virtual or in person, that you choose.

2. Send the link of the platform ahead of each of the four conversation sessions. It may be the same link for all four, but people have a tendency to lose track of the link and you will save time at the start of the gathering if everyone can get on quickly.
3. Ask participants to have pencils and paper available they will be asked to do some writing as they participate in the small conversation cohorts.
4. Include attachments with any handouts for the session and ask them to have access to these during the conversation session (either on another device or a printed copy).

Hard Copy: If participants don't have the ability print their own copy, you may need to send everyone a hard copy. When meeting in person, have hard copies available for everyone.

PRIOR TO CONVERSATION ONE

SEND to participants at least 24 hours before the “meeting”:

1. Ask them to have paper and a pen available during this session.
2. The link and password for the meeting.
3. 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.

Tip

If you are going to use the **THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH** portion of the conversation: **Send the page with the [Prayer for Maturity](#) and ask them to print a copy, if possible.**

!

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.



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

BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION

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

20 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. Create an intergenerational community among participants.
2. Consider the language of ageism and alternative ways to think about aging.
3. Provide resources to change our conversations about aging.



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

CONVERSATION HOST: *share the following information:*

Parameters of the conversation

In all formats (live or online):

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.

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.).

Introduce yourself and explain why you are facilitating these conversations.

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.

You may want to ask one person to serve as tech support to help answer questions through chat so you can concentrate on facilitating the conversations.

Ask each member to:

1. Introduce themselves.
2. Share their name and where they live.
3. Share their "ideal or favorite" age that they shared with you.
NOTE: If you have a large group, you may need to wait until they can be in small group cohorts to answer the following.
4. Share the reasons they listed that number as their "ideal" age.

Share two timelines with their ideal ages and with their chronological ages on a screen share.

1. Ask for observations about the range and reasons for their ideal ages and the span of ages from their current chronological ages.
2. Was it difficult to share their chronological ages (even though they didn't have to identify which one was theirs)?

ZOOM TIP

You could present this question as a poll and have it available as they enter the Zoom room. Then you could share the results to see how many in the group are uncomfortable sharing their chronological age.

CONVERSATION HOST: *Please read this information or share in your own words.*

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 about aging because we live in the same culture. These common assumptions lay the groundwork for stereotypes and internal biases.

And yet, the older we become, the more diverse our experiences of aging become. The variation that happens in the aging process is the result of the opportunities, challenges, context and particularities that have shaped us throughout our lifetimes — our access to healthcare, access to healthy food, educational opportunities, financial stability, our genes, access to housing and community support. Add to that the various 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 (An Evolving Approach to Ageism, LeadingAge Insights, July 6, 2020, Kirsten Jacobs). Aging is one of those components that affects and reacts with the other components of our lives. How we think about each of these, including aging, has an impact on all of the other pieces.

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

FIRST

Ask participants to take 90 seconds to write down all the words they can that have to do with “old” or “aging.” (Set a timer or watch your clock.)

SECOND (5 mins)

Have participants share their words with each other in the conversation cohorts.

THIRD

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

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)?

Be prepared to share the lists when the group reconvenes.

OR if this was done as one group experience, share the three lists.

FOURTH

Reconvene the full group after five minutes.

Have each group share their list.

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?
- If there were multiple groups, were the lists similar?

Each person needs a writing utensil and paper.



Tip

ZOOM TIP

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.

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.

SUMMARY

CONVERSATION HOST: *Please read this information or share in your own words.*

The language we use about aging matters. It expresses how we think about and value or diminish ourselves and others. There are often more words on the negative list than on the positive one. Coming up with new language is difficult because different generations have their own perspectives on what is positive or not. But there are common themes in how we talk about the aging process.

We are going to watch a video that explores some generational perceptions about aging. The first set of individuals thought they were asked to come in for an audition.

5 min

VIDEO

#DisruptAging by AARP

[LINK](#)

Tip

ZOOM TIP

Have this queued and ready to start in your browser. Be sure that you are set up to share the audio for the video.

10 min

CONVERSATION

Defining "OLD"

Ask the group what they noticed in the video.

1. What surprised them?
2. Did they experience any other emotions related to the interactions?

Ask the group: How would you define old?

- **If the group is larger than five people, you might want to go into breakout rooms again.** Or you could work on this definition with the whole group.
- **If you had smaller groups do this exercise, have small groups share their definitions.**
 - Where are the commonalities in their definition of "old"?
 - What is most important to them about defining what it means to be "old"?

20 min

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

Optional

[GO TO PAGE](#)

10 min

WRAP-UP

[GO TO PAGE](#)

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

Read the passage from Romans 12.

(Eugene Peterson's version, *The Message*)

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

Reread the passage.

Perhaps have a different person read it out loud.

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

Reread the passage.

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.

Refer to the copies of the Prayer for Maturity.

Read it aloud slowly, allowing time for inhaling and exhaling as in the poetry (optional version available as a litany).

- Invite the participants to consider the question of how God is developing well-formed maturity in them.

LECTIO DIVINA

This is an ancient practice of reading through a passage several (4) times with reflection time between the readings. Each time, the passage may be read by different voices with different emphases. 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 and then an opportunity for thoughtful response to the passage.

[LINK TO BEGINNER'S GUIDE](#)

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

Note 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 previous chapters. He wants the people to know that their lives, lived in their bodies in time and space and all that they do in the course of their days, are a form of worship. And when we live in our bodies and embrace the Spirit of God, our lives are pleasing to God.

[MOVE TO WRAP UP](#)

Share with the group the following prompts for their personal reflection between now and the next time the group gathers.

1. Let them know that you will send this in an email following this meeting.
2. Introduce the two online surveys used to reveal our internal biases about aging. Information about the Harvard test and the one from the World Health Organization are included in [APPENDIX A](#).
 - a. The links for those tests will be included in the follow-up email you will send to the participants.
3. Check in to see how the experience of the virtual conversation was for each person.
4. Let them know that if they have any questions or concerns, they can contact you.
5. Thank everyone for participating in the conversation!

Prompt for

PERSONAL REFLECTION

When have you experienced someone else making an assumption of your abilities based on their perception of your age:

- How did that feel?
- How did you respond?
- What would you have preferred to communicate to them?

BEFORE WE MEET AGAIN

CONVERSATION ONE

For a follow-up email with the participants:

COPY **PASTE**

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

1. TAKE at least one of the following online surveys about ageism.

[\(See Appendix A for more information\)](#)

The *INTERNAL BIAS TEST ON AGING* through Harvard University:

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/Study?tid=-1>

- 1) Project Implicit Social Attitudes: You will need to register (or log in if you have taken one of these previously) with your email address.
- 2) Complete the registration form when prompted and click “proceed.”
- 3) On the Project Implicit page, click on “Take a Test” in the top bar.
- 4) You will be asked to view the page on Preliminary Information and then agree to their disclaimer. At the bottom of the page, click on “I wish to proceed.”
- 5) Click on the Age IAT tab in the list on the left. Follow the directions throughout the test.

The *AGEISM QUIZ* from the World Health Organization:

<https://www.who.int/ageing/features/attitudes-quiz/en/>

2. REFLECT on the following before the next meeting:

When have you experienced someone else making assumption about your abilities based on their perception of your age?

- How did that feel?
- How did you respond?
- What would you like to communicate to them?

3. REREAD the Prayer for Maturity.

This is for those groups that used the **Through the Lens of Faith** portion of Conversation One.

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

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.

PRAYER FOR MATURITY

Litany for two leaders and response for all

Inspired by Romans 12:1-2 (The Message)

- 1: 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 every day, ordinary life and place it before you.
- 2: You invite us to lift up this life that creates wrinkle lines and stress related disease

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

- 1: That scorns those who cannot keep up and dismisses memories as yesterday's news,
 2: To take all this life and place it before you knowing
 that we don't even think about what we are doing!

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

- 2: What to hide and what to reveal.
 1: So automatic our thoughts, so quick our reactions, we aren't aware of your embrace.

ALL: Until we stop.

- 2: And breathe the long inhale that nurtures wisdom
 1: And release the slow exhale full of confining cultural expectations

ALL: Breathing them into the freedom of the universe.

- 1: In. And out. Again. Receiving and Releasing.

ALL: And we pause. We remember.

- 2: We listen.

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

- 1: And you invite us to ponder anew how it is that we can reflect your light —
 2: 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?

ALL: Your God-life that provides the space and time,

- 1: That provides the ability and desire to live with purpose
 2: To find meaning

ALL: To express gratitude

- 2: And to be grounded in your love —
 1: Love that can only come from the center of all that is or ever was or ever will be.

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

- 2: Reflecting on time long past
 1: and open to the future which lays ahead receiving the gifts ripe with reflection.

ALL: And You, gracious God, rejoice.

- 2: And life is extra-ordinarily connected once again
 1: as we recognize this maturity that comes from faith
 2: as gift for all who are aging.

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

Rev. Beth Long-Higgins, ed. 2019

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.

APPENDIX A

CONVERSATION ONE

Information about the two Ageism Bias tests

Harvard Implicit Bias Test

The Harvard Implicit Bias Test on Aging (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>) is one of many instruments that attempts to illustrate how our internal beliefs affect the way we think about other people. If this link does not work, you can google “Harvard Project Implicit” to be directed to their website.

The World Health Organization Ageing Attitudes Quiz

<https://www.who.int/ageing/features/attitudes-quiz/>

[The World Health Organization Ageing Attitudes Quiz](#) is a first step in your “Stand Against Ageism.” For your reference, here are the explanations from the WHO website for each question:

1. “All older people are the same.”

Explanation: There is no typical older person, because the older we get, the more diverse we become. Stereotyping is the assumption that all members of a group are the same. Stereotyping is always a mistake, but especially when it comes to age.

2. “Poor health is inevitable in older age.”

Explanation: While most people will eventually experience health problems as they age, aging does not necessarily lead to disease and disability. The health and ability of older adults varies greatly, and chronological age does not determine capacity. Some 80 year olds, for example, are as mentally and physically agile as some 30 year olds.

3. “An older person is somebody aged 60 years and above.”

Explanation: Aging is a normal process of human development that extends across the life course. There is no age at which you suddenly become an older person!

And yet rather than what people can actually accomplish, “older age” is used to tell people when they must stop working, or whether they can access medical screening or care, or whether they are eligible to hold a driving license, for example.

4. “My attitude to aging has little or no influence on my health.”

Explanation: Having negative attitudes about getting older can have a serious impact on your health and life expectancy. Researchers found that older adults who had negative attitudes about getting older lived on average 7.5 years fewer years than those who didn’t.

(Levy BR et al. “Longevity increased by positive self-perceptions of aging.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2002 83(2):261-270.)

Continued

5. “Aging is an obstacle to a good life and must be overcome.”

Explanation: While many people think of aging as a problem, aging actually has many benefits. For example, social and emotional skills improve with age because of the self-knowledge, skills in self-regulation and maintaining stable social relationships that older people have developed over the years.

However, fear of aging makes managing the changes associated with aging much harder. Negative attitudes about aging can damage our sense of self, diminish our opportunities and prospects, segregate us from others in the community and can actually shorten our lives.

6. “Older adults are a drain on the economy, including health systems.”

Explanation: Older people make significant contribution to our societies, many of which go unrecognized. For example, across the world, older adults provide childcare, strengthen communities and provide economic support to their children and grandchildren.

A study in the United Kingdom showed that contributions by older people, through taxation, spending and other activities were worth over \$50 billion more than the money spent on older people through pensions, welfare and health combined.

(Cook J. “The socio-economic contribution of older people in the UK.” Working with Older People, 2011 15(4):141-146.)

7. “Ageism means having negative attitudes and/or discriminating against people because of their age.”

Explanation: Ageism is negative stereotyping, prejudice or discrimination against people based on their age. It can affect anybody, but it is more likely to affect older adults.

Ageism can seriously influence policies and services, which, in turn, have a negative impact upon older people. Understanding this and combating ageism are the first steps to making the world more age friendly.

8. “I can be ageist and not know it.”

Explanation: Most of the time, we are not aware of our negative attitudes about older people and about getting older. However, a global survey of 57 countries found that 60% of people felt that older adults were not respected. (World Values Survey 2010-2014)

Negative attitudes are everywhere. The media often stereotypes older people as loveable but forgetful. Greeting cards commonly make jokes about getting older. We also often tell people they look younger than their age, which is meant as a compliment — but implies that we think that getting older is bad in itself.

Becoming aware of our everyday negative attitudes about older people and getting older ourselves are the first steps to reaping the benefits of aging and older age.

9. “We can combat ageism!”

Explanation: We can all change our attitudes for the better, and it is as simple as ABC.

Awareness: The critical starting point is to acknowledge our own attitudes and prejudices about aging and older people.

Behaviors: Watch for ageist behaviors in and around us; challenge them.

Connections: Connect with people of all ages. An equitable society for all ages requires intergenerational collaboration.

More information is available on the WHO website.

PRIOR TO CONVERSATION TWO

SEND to participants at least 24 hours before the “meeting”:

1. The link and password for the meeting.
2. Your email and/or phone number (or of a person who can provide tech support) in case they have difficulties 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. Their observations from the first session, including:
 - a. Their reflecting about a time when someone made an assumption about their ability based on their age.
 - b. And their general learning from taking the internal bias or ageism “tests.”
5. Reminder to have some paper and a pen available during the meeting.
6. A copy of the [Conversation Guide](#) for the Myths of Aging video.



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

BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION

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 that were not on the call for the first session.
3. **Ask for any insight** they gained about themselves from either the internal bias test or their journal/reflecting on their own aging experience.
 - Allow time for each participant to share at least one thing.
 - If the group is large, do this sharing in breakout rooms.
 - See [Appendix B](#) with a summary chart of the Harvard study results.

Introduction to *Myths of Aging* Video:

You may read 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.

But why? And where do these assessments and assumptions come from?

The reality is that many narratives in the larger culture influence all of these things: 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.

13 min

VIDEO

Myths of Aging

LINK

20 min

GROWING WISDOM

Questions for conversation:

(included on the [handout](#)/screen share)

1. Were any of the myths a "new" idea for you? Which one(s)?
2. There are things about aging we would all like to avoid.
But what about aging do you appreciate?
3. Have you experienced similarities to the Happiness Curve in your own life?
4. How do you experience your own feeling of being smart or productive as you have aged?
5. What are the most important factors for you in considering where to live in later life?
6. How is your aging process different from that of your parents' or grandparents' generations?
7. Who is most important in your own community of support?
(people, organizations, etc.)
8. What aspect of being independent is most valuable to you?
9. 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

CONVERSATION



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 the reflected on the myths.

Here is an additional question for the group to consider:

What other myths can you think of in respect to aging?

20 min

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

Optional [GO TO PAGE](#)

10 min

WRAP-UP

[GO TO PAGE](#)

You may read the following, summarize the information, or share in a PowerPoint or screen share as you introduce the story of Abraham and Sarah.

Because the average life expectancy several thousand years ago would have been below 40, a number that had only increased to 47 by the year 1900, there are few stories specifically about aging and late life. And when older individuals noted their advanced age is often in reference to their ability 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.

In exchange, the matriarchs and patriarchs contributed to the ongoing survival of the larger 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 we share the story about Abraham and Sarah's encounter with the angels, you are invited to see it as symbolic of the place of faith. It is not necessarily concerned with placing childbearing women on a higher platform than those 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.
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)

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."

You may read the following, summarize the information, or share in a PowerPoint or screen share as you introduce the second part of the story.

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 possibility 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 their older years. In fact, they name their child "he who laughs," Isaac.

As we consider the narratives 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!"

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.
Drain the illusion I have that I control my life
 that your new life may take root in my very being.
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.

MOVE TO WRAP-UP

Keep a list or journal and note your observations of the larger images or messages about 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 to express 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. And thinking of Abraham and Sarah — where do you see the power of possibility overcoming your own self-defining limits on aging?

BEFORE WE MEET AGAIN

CONVERSATION TWO

For a follow-up email with the participants:

COPY **PASTE**

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

Keep a 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?
- 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.

Were any of the myths a “new” idea for you? Which one(s)?

1. Aging is a disease to be avoided or cured.

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.

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.

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.

How do you connect with the wider community around you?

5. Old people approach aging in the same way.

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.

Who are the people and organizations that are most important in your own community of support?

7. All adults are to be completely independent.

What aspect of being independent is most valuable to you? What aspect of independence is most limiting to you?

APPENDIX B

CONVERSATION TWO

Results from the Harvard Internal Bias Test on Aging

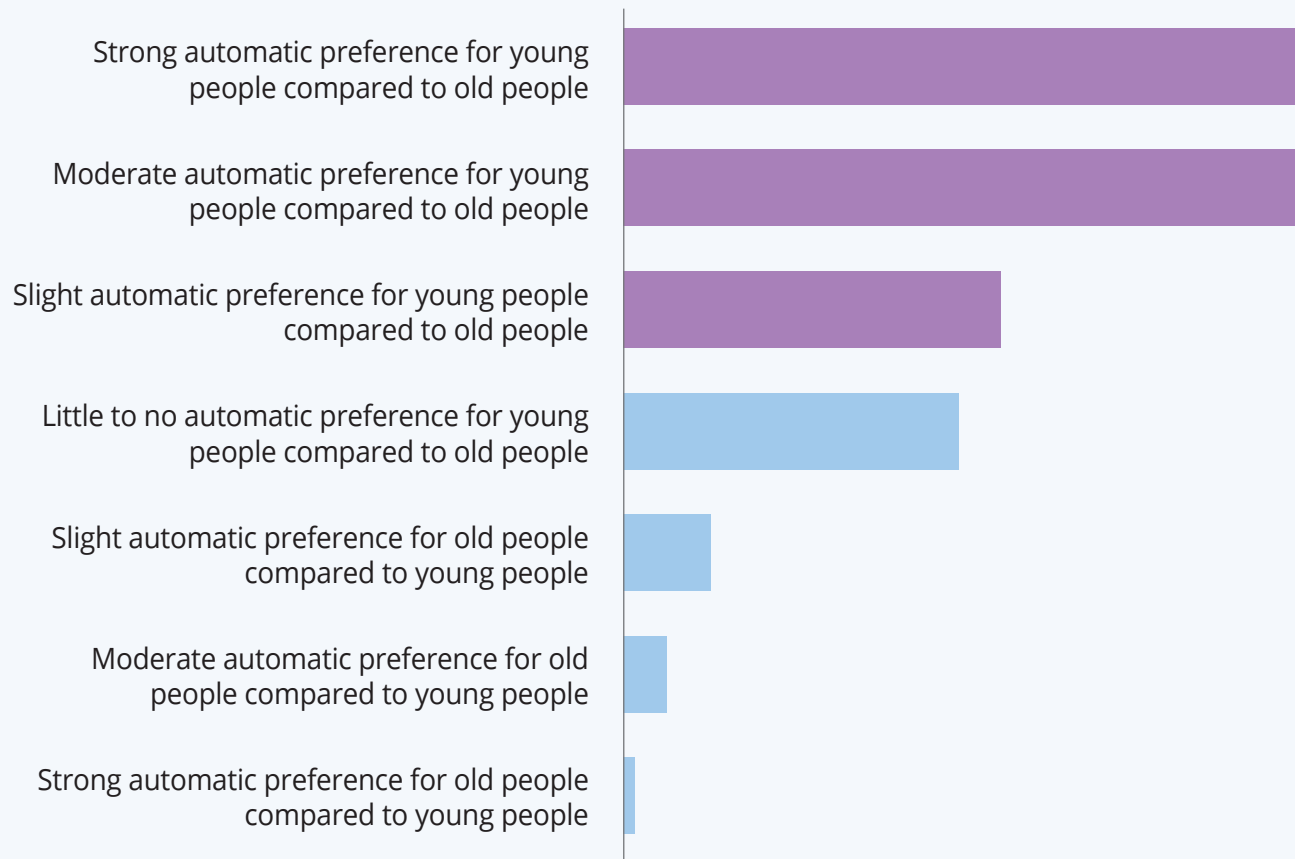
(<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/Study?tid=-1>.)

Below is the graph that is shared at the end of the Harvard Implicit Bias test about Aging. This gives an image of how the general population is skewed toward preferences for young people.

The majority of people, 77%, have a slight automatic or higher preference for young people compared to old people. Only 15% have no bias. And less than 7% of the population has some kind of bias for older people.

All of this is reported, despite that at least 13% of the population is actually 65 years old or older.

Percent of web respondents with each score



This distribution summarizes 974,726 IAT scores for the age task completed between December 2002 and December 2015.

PRIOR TO CONVERSATION THREE

SEND to participants at least 24 hours before the “meeting”:

1. Reminder to have some paper and a pen available during the meeting.
2. The link and password for the meeting.
3. 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. 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.

Tip

If you are going to use the **THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH** portion of the conversation: **Provide copies of Ephesians 4 from Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* version.**



“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

5 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?
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?

You may read the following, 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.

I want you to make a list of those things about aging that you fear for your own future self. Do not think too much about these things, but just list them as they come to mind.

We are going to break into smaller cohorts to share and process your fears. Each person will have time to share their list and perhaps why these things have been included on their 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.

Tip

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

1. **Reconvene** in the larger group:
 - Have small conversation cohorts share the two lists of fears with the larger group.
 - List these using a *screen share* on your platform, or newsprint, if in person, for everyone to see.
2. **Observe** with the large group:
 - What are the fears most widely held?
 - Are there some things on these lists you hadn't thought about and you might add to your own list?

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

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

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.

1. Ask each person to identify one thing they want to change to help alleviate a fear about aging.
2. 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.

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 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 “aging heroes.” (Please note that the use of the word “hero” is not gender specific here. If it is helpful for you to use the word heroine, please do so.)

Have you ever noticed someone who is older than you and thought, “When I am their age, I want to be like them”?

Or 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 your concept of their attitude or ability.

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

These are aging heroes. As we watch today's video, I encourage you to notice the intersections of things in each life of these two men.

You may want to read the questions you will use to guide in the conversation following the video to help them know what to watch for.

10 min

VIDEO

Aging Heroes

[LINK](#)

10 min

CONVERSATION

About Heroes

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 now?
4. What provides them with meaning and purpose?
5. How do they participate in their communities?
6. How are they interdependent with others?
7. What kind of intergenerational relationships do they have?

Tip

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

We can all benefit from the examples of others. Heroes 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 of the supports available to them. They usually reach out to others and recognize that they are not the center of life.

10 min

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

Optional [GO TO PAGE](#)

10 min

WRAP-UP

[GO TO PAGE](#)

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

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 references that 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.

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

Let the group know that you will read a sentence or two 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.

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 there and walk — better yet, run! — on the road God called you to travel. I don't want any of you sitting around on your hands. I don't want anyone strolling off, down some path that goes nowhere.

Possible Observations

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

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

1. Service to other through acts of love
2. Role in helping to foster reconciliation

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

(continued)

4:10-13 He handed out gifts ... to train Christ's followers 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:

1. The work of everyone to build community
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 would be mature — fully developed inward and outward

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:

We are to continue growing ... to grow up and bear witness to what is true and the ability to speak with each other and teach others out of a place of love

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:

Christ continues to nourish us — we never stop growing spiritually

CLOSING PRAYER: Prayer for Maturity

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 changes 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.

MOVE TO WRAP UP

BEFORE WE MEET AGAIN

CONVERSATION THREE

5 min

Share in an email with participants before the next session

COPY

PASTE

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

Aging Hero*:

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!"

1. What about this person makes them your aging hero?

2. 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

- What do you know about their childhood?
- Where do they live?
- What do you know about their general health?
- Who makes up their support community?
- What is their education level and how do they continue to be curious and learn?
- What do you know about their family of origin? Their family of choice?
- What is their general attitude about life? What has influenced this for them?

*Please note that we use the word "hero" here as a nongender specific term. Substitute "heroine" if that resonates better with you as you think of women who serve as models in your life.

PRIOR TO CONVERSATION FOUR

SEND to participants at least 24 hours before the “meeting”:

1. Reminder to have some paper and a pen available during the meeting.
2. The link and password for the meeting.
3. 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. Let them know you will be available online at least 10 minutes prior to the start of the session so everyone can get “settled” and the group can begin on time.
5. A reminder to come to the group ready to share their aging hero and share a picture (if they have one).



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

George MacDonald

BEGINNING THE CONVERSATION

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

4 min

WELCOME

From Language to Behavior

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

As we reach our last conversation, we will see one more video to illustrate another way our ageist biases affect how we see other people. We will allow sufficient time following this video 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 put those who are not like ourselves into a group, we justify the differences by imposing 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” is never “us.” Today we are going to look further into the effect of how we talk about aging, and how this touches our relationships with others and ourselves.

We begin with a video from SoulPancake.

4 min

VIDEO

She Looks Great for Her Age

[LINK](#)

Invite the group into conversation with these question prompts.

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

Share the following information with the group.

More “Othering” trigger word and phrases:

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

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 are often 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 assumption, 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 that launched this campaign online [here](#).

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.

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?
-

25 min

GROWING WISDOM

Our Aging Heroes

Invite the group to share their aging heroes (either large group or in smaller groups).

As we come to the last part of our conversations, please share your aging heroes with one another. Through sharing your heroes, 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 heroes your group members chose?
 2. Was it easy or difficult for you to claim an aging hero?
 3. What is the most inspiring thing that you receive from your aging hero?
-

20 min

THROUGH A LENS OF FAITH

Optional

[SEE NEXT PAGE](#)

10 min

GROWING WISDOM

The Change I Desire:

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

The question is, given our conversations, is there anything you would change in reference to how you think about and approach your own aging process?

For instance: Be bold. Claim old. I disrupt people who put themselves down when claiming to have lived the chronological number of years on Earth.

Are there things you would like to do to continue these conversations with others?

Name one thing you notice now that you were not aware of previously as a result of our experience together.

What do you need to continue to encourage your own positive attitude about aging?

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

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, 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.”

“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 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.

BACK TO GROWING WISDOM

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 added potentially several decades to the end of the human life span, but 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 are already being formed. It is probable that they may have the privilege and responsibility of living longer than our current generations.

[A list of resources](#) is provided for your further study. It is a short list amid 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!

CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

When you have completed Another Day Older, we would love to hear from you!

Please send us your answers to the following questions. The first set of questions below are for your participants.

The questions on the next page are for you as the host of the conversations.

Send responses to Rev. Beth Long-Higgins (blong-higgins@uchinc.org).

FOR GROUP PARTICIPANTS

We would appreciate asking the participants to respond to the following questions at the end of the last conversation.

Have them email you with their answers or record their responses during your last session.

1. Share one idea presented in these conversations that was new to you or that resonated with your experience at this point in your life.
2. What change in your thinking or behavior are you making in response to these conversations?

CONVERSATION HOSTS

FIRST

Please collect the responses from your participants and combine (copy and paste) the information into one document.

SECOND

Include your responses to the 12 questions “For Conversation Hosts” (on the next page) at the top of that document.

THIRD

Send the document to Rev. Beth Long-Higgins (blong-higgins@uchinc.org) with “**Ageism Conversation Feedback**” in the subject line.

These responses will be helpful as we report the impact of this resource to our funders. And it will help us as we consider new projects in the future.

Oldschool.info

For the most complete list of resources on ageism, please visit Ashton Applewhite's Anti-Ageism Clearinghouse, [oldschool.info](https://www.oldschool.info). This site includes books, blogs and papers, speakers, tools, campaigns, videos and podcasts. As this is a global issue, it also includes resources from other countries and the World Health Organization.

Highlights from this site:

VIDEO

Carl Honoré *Why We Should Embrace Aging as an Adventure*, TEDSummit 2019.

https://www.ted.com/talks/carl_honore_why_we_should_embrace_aging_as_an_adventure/up-next

Fighting Ageism: Be Bold, Claim Old, Amy Gorely at Carolina Meadows in North Carolina.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6EC5x23HR8&t=3s>

BOOKS

This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism, Ashton Applewhite, self-published in 2016 and now available through Macmillan Publishers in 2019. There is an accompanying book which serves as a Study Guide.

BLOGS AND PAPERS

Generations: *The Pernicious Problem of Ageism*, the American Society on Aging.

(This is a more academic collection of articles.)

Next Avenue: [nextavenue.org](https://www.nextavenue.org)

This online PBS publication has the tagline “where grown-ups keep growing. 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.

The [Oldschool site](https://www.oldschool.info) also has several sections specifically addressing the issues of ageism during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additional Resources

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.

On the Brink of Everything: Grace, Gravity and Getting Old, Parker Palmer.

Berrett-Koehler, Oakland, CA. 2020.

DEDICATION



**This program is dedicated to two of my aging heroes,
Elinor and my mom, Shirley.
Their friendship has spanned almost 60 years
and continues to be a source of inspiration, adventure and delight.**

WITH GRATITUDE

This resource began as an idea that, once spoken out loud at a get-to-know-you lunch with Noreen Wilhelm from The Dayton Foundation, wasn't going back into the box. Noreen is senior encore fellow working with the Del Mar Encore Fellow program. Immediately, she saw the connection with that program and encouraged us to submit a proposal.

Six months later, Eric Johnson — whose career has been in educational video production — was called to be the Del Mar Encore fellow to work with the Ruth Frost Parker Center for Abundant Aging. The initial focus of his work was to produce videos to support this project. It did not take Eric long to catch 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 as a part of 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 to the members of David's United Church of Christ who allowed us to video tape a presentation and their conversations on Ageism. Little did we know this would be the last in person presentation in February for the rest of the year thanks to the pandemic!

We'd also like to include our thanks to Dr. Joe Coughlin, MIT AgeLab, and Dr. Paula Hartman-Stein, Center for Healthy Aging, for their contributions to our video "The Myths of Aging."

Thanks also to the group of 18 who participated in the Zoom "test" group. The pandemic revealed that these

conversations would not be able to be held in person and we had to redesign things. Your patience as I learned the technology during the pandemic was very forgiving. Ranging in age from 15 to 89, the experience, perspectives and suggestions you offered were invaluable.

I must give particular thanks to Natalie and Jan, both friends and colleagues. They participated in the group and then provided additional input, reading through the materials before it underwent the final editing process. 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!

And finally, thanks for the encouragement and support from my colleagues at United Church Homes. About six months after I joined the staff in late 2013, Rev. Ken Daniel invited me to attend Dr. Bill Thomas' ChangingAging event. That was the beginning of awakening my passion to transform how we think about aging. Rev. Daniel's initial vision that enabled the Ruth Frost Parker Center for Abundant Aging in 2017 has grown far beyond what any of us imagined. And through the center, we have been able to engage in many interesting and important conversations.

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 and celebrate the opportunities which await us all.

Blessings,

Rev. Beth Long-Higgins
*Executive Director, Ruth Frost Parker Center for Abundant Aging
United Church Homes*



RUTH FROST PARKER CENTER FOR ABUNDANT AGING

United Church Homes launched the Ruth Frost Parker Center for Abundant Aging in 2017. As a strategic initiative to help the senior living organization enhance its mission to transform aging, the center focuses on engagement, education and advocacy with congregations and community partners.

The Parker Center received the 2018 Social Impact Program of the Year from LeadingAge Ohio for its annual symposium. In 2019, the center received Partnership of the Year Award from the Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging for copresenting the first conference in Ohio dedicated to LGBTQ aging issues, the LGBT Horizons of Aging Summit.

In addition to the annual symposium, since 2018, the Parker Center has offered Wisdom Conversations, yearly seminars for clergy and lay leaders to learn about aging issues in the context of congregational life.

The Abundant Aging blog is published weekly by clergy and others who are aging themselves. The topics of the blog revolve around the experience of aging through the lens of faith while honoring the liturgical year.

In August 2020, the Parker Center launched the Art of Aging podcast. Initiated by Eric Johnson, the Del Mar Encore fellow with The Dayton Foundation, the podcast shares theories and programs that transform aging. And it tells the stories of everyday people who are aging abundantly.

You can connect with Rev. Beth Long-Higgins, executive director, subscribe to the blog or learn more about the center at abundantaging.org.

(unitedchurchhomes.org/parker-center)