



ADULT MINISTRY IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Older Wiser Learning Seniors

In the year 2000,

Christ the King Lutheran Church in Newberry Park, California called senior members together to organize a ministry to serve one another, the congregation as a whole, and the community. Pastor Philip and spouse Sheila Ilten agreed to take the lead in helping the group form.

The first planning meeting identified and addressed a number of key questions: What was the purpose of this new ministry? What would be its focus? What special activities would seniors be interested in doing together? How would this ministry function, so that all could attend and different interests met? How might the congregation, and possibly the community, be

served?



A number of decisions flowed from that first meeting. A group of about 20 seniors agreed to meet at noon every second Wednesday of the month, utilizing the large “youth room” on the church campus.

Older Wiser Learning Seniors. Naming the organization took a bit of time, but soon the nickname **OWLS** came to identify the group. In some congregations, OWLS can be an acronym for Older Wiser Lutheran Seniors, but Christ the King chose

Learning Seniors to accent a central purpose of the gathering.

Planners agreed that this would not be another “chat and chew” group. Phil and Sheila report, “Our mutual plan did include lunch together the second Wednesday of every month, but after lunch our gatherings featured a program topic, sometimes using a video.”

Give A Hoot. A mutual decision was reached to avoid ticket charges for lunch. Instead planners decided to use a ceramic owl. “It was formerly a candle holder that had two broken belly holes, but “Hooty” served perfectly as a receptacle for donations. The “GIVE A HOOT” collector has never been short of money, and every Christmas the OWLS donate extra cash to Lutheran World Missions.

Service. To serve the congregation and its visitors, two of the senior OWLS built a Welcome Table. The table serves as a focal point to greet guests every Sunday morning and provides a space for free greeting cards for all occasions.

Another service project was the purchase and ongoing maintenance of a Lutheran Hour Tract Rack Ministry. Information is now easily accessible to church members and guest alike.

As well, OWLS have also ministered in support of the youth of Christ the King. For example, young people preparing for confirmation are supported through prayer, letters of encouragement, and a special gift for each one at confirmation.

Outings. OWLS study and serve, but they also know how to have fun. Pastor Phil and Sheila host members for a home picnic each year as well as an annual Christmas party. You might suppose that this picture was taken at a summer picnic. No; this OWL was snapped enjoying the Christmas outing.



the OWLS group, They share their many talents with the broader community as well, working as volunteer docents at the nearby Ronald Reagan museum and library, where they lead tours and lecture to visitors on the exhibits in that splendid facility.

About the Ilten. Following his graduation from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis in 1961, Phil Ilten served a mission congregation in Carpinteria, California for six years. For the balance of his 40 plus years of full-time ministry, Phil pastored congregations in Wisconsin and then back in California, concluding his ministry at Christ the King in Newbury Park.

Trained as a teacher, Sheila Ilten has taught and volunteered in LCMS schools, but most of her professional career has been devoted to managing residential care centers in California. As well, Sheila has served on the Board of Directors of

the Pacific Southwest District of the LCMS. During her time on the national ALOA Board, Sheila was an effective Membership Chairperson.

At present, Sheila and Phil continue to work with



Getting Started — Ideas For Your Adult Ministry

When Pastor Bradley Hales was called to Reformation Lutheran Church in rural Culpeper, VA in 2005 he found a small aging congregation. Many of his older adults had moved out of the congested Washington area to a slower retirement place. Hales asked the adults—age 50 and above—what they would like to do to enhance their lives, and he listened to their ideas.

They told him they wanted to learn. So Bradley planned a Tuesday Lunch & Learn program that continues today. One week features presentations by community leaders, including health and financial specialists and candidates for local and county offices. A second features Bible study, and on the final Tuesday of the month, an advocacy group addresses community needs and plans, for example, a “friendly caller” program to check on seniors living alone.

About half of the Lunch & Learn participants aren’t members and some have no church home. Many churches have a preponderance of aging adult members, and while they welcome all people to worship, many do not have activities for seniors.

(An April 2008 article by George Kegley in The Lutheran magazine featured the adult ministry of Reformation Lutheran Church in Culpeper, VA.)

Adult Ministry in the Spotlight highlights successful adult ministry programs in Lutheran congregations around the country. We hope these stories generate ideas you can use.