THE NEED FOR OLDER ADULTS’ MINISTRY IN THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

WINNING ALL (ECWA)

by

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The church is an embodiment of different kinds of people. It embodies within it the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the educated and the non-educated, the young and the old, the healthy and the sick, etc. Each of these groups of people comes with unique gifts and needs to the church and yearns that these unique gifts will be a blessing to the whole body so needs may be adequately met. When the church utilizes its gifts for the benefit of all, there is always the springing up of joy, peace and satisfaction. However, when it fails to provide an avenue for some of its members to exercise and utilize their gifts and meet the needs of others, trouble comes in and in some cases the ministry of the church is hindered and rendered ineffective. Therefore, as much as the church makes every effort to see that it meets the needs of the various groups, it finds itself not able to meet the needs of others consciously or unconsciously. An example of such a scenario is the first ecclesiastical problem that emanated in the early church, where the Hellenistic widows complained of being overlooked and neglected in the ministry of daily distribution of food. Thus, the Twelve apostles gathered all the disciples together and took a decisive decision to mitigate the emerging problem by nipping it in the bud before escalating and metamorphosing into something that would be difficult to contend with (Acts 6:1-7). Some highly gifted members of the church were chosen and given the opportunity to exercise and utilize their gifts for the benefit of all.
The intention was also to meet the unique needs of other vital and integral parts of the church (the widows). This decision brought about peace and sanity to the church. Therefore, the church, being diverse in nature, ought to be sensitively thinking and looking for various ways it will meet the various needs of the divergent groups of people it embodies. None of the groups should feel overlooked, as in the case above. Michaela Kusnierikova quoting Bonhoeffer points how important diversity is to the church. She says, “To Bonhoeffer, diversity within the church is the fruit of the creation of distinct human beings and of the working of the Holy Spirit through and in God’s word. Differences are united in the church and they are to be kept. As soon as love is denied to someone, the church betrays its essence to be the church of Christ.”

Paul, using the analogy of the human body, alludes to the importance of the divergent nature of the church and for the needs of the different entities to be met in his epistles (Rom. 12:3-8; 1Cor. 12:12-30). Worthy of note is what he says to the Church of Rome:

> For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully (Rom. 12:3-8).

Warren W. Wiersbe comments that,

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Paul was writing to Christians who were members of local churches in Rome. He described their relationship to each other in terms of the members of a body. (He used this same picture in 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:7-16). The basic idea is that each believer is a living part of Christ's body, and each one has a spiritual function to perform. Each believer has a gift (or gifts), to be used for the building up of the body and the perfecting of the other members of the body. In short, we belong to each other, we minister to each other, and we need each other.  

Additionally, John M. Frame underscores the need and importance of members of the church to eschew viewing themselves individualistically, but as a family where the need of every member is observed, identified, acknowledged and met. He says, “The church is our extended family. We have a responsibility (stated emphatically in 1 Timothy 5:8) to care for members of our natural families. Since the church is the family of God, we have a special responsibility to our needy brothers and sisters in Christ.”

The biblical principle of the priesthood of all believers (1Peter 2:9) recalls the fact that, all believers are priests of the Lord called by God Himself to display His excellent wisdom in bringing people of diverse giftedness to serve one another mutually, joyfully and willingly not mindful of their status within the community and without discrimination or misgiving. Any negation of this singular purpose of the church taints and damages the beautiful image it supposed to present to a world that is in disarray and struggling with the effects of individualism and all kinds of divisive tendencies.

Kusnerikova furthers explains by saying that,

In this diversity directed for mutual service, one becomes a priest to others within the community. This is how the priesthood of all believers is understood, in which the existing dissimilarities of the different members of the church are confirmed.

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In it, differences between people, “exist for one another (fureinander)” as they live together, thus, not existing alone, not just being just for themselves.⁴

One of the very important groups profoundly represented in the church through all generations are the older adults. They form a very substantial part of the church as much as they do in the larger society. Like any other group in the church, they come with lots of experiences, gifts, memories, stories and wisdom to offer to the church. Richard H. Gentzler adds that,

Older adults desire to share not only their memories but also their wisdom and experience with others. Older adults want to give back to society and give some of themselves to others often beyond their family. Older adults want to be appreciated for their uniqueness and accepted despite their physical limitations. Like most everyone else, they want to be needed and loved and often seek out opportunities to be in service to others.⁵

Besides, they also have some unique needs that are beckoning to be met. The church must brace up, rise to the occasion and begin to consider ways to meet these unique needs just as the apostles in the early church addressed the pertinent need of the needy members. This is a group that requires very serious attention due to the peculiarities of their lives, as noted above.

Our societies abound with older adults. Both past and recent demographic researches indicate that the life expectancy and the unprecedented increase of the older adults within our society and the church are alarming and make it difficult for older

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⁴ Kusnierikova, Acting for Others, 40.

⁵ Richard H. Gentzler, Jr., Designing an Older Adult Ministry (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2000), 9.
adults to be ignored. It is therefore expedient for the researcher at this point to present some of the available statistics to that effect. Gentzler, using America as a case study, affirms that,

> We are an aging society! More people are living longer and better today than ever before. Thus, they should naturally catch the attention of everyone. In 1900, there were three million people age sixty-five and older. This figure accounted for four percent of the total population. By 1990, this same older population numbered 31.6 million. This represented 12.5 percent of the total United States population or about one in every eight Americans. In the year 2000, there will be 34.7 million age sixty-five and older. Within thirty years, by the year 2030, the number of older people will double to 969.4 million.  

A more recent statistic of the life expectancy of older adults in America presented by Jennifer M. Ortman, Victoria A. Velkoff, and Howard Hogan, indicates that,

> Between 2012 and 2050, the United States will experience considerable growth in its older population. In 2050, the population aged 65 and over is projected to be 83.7 million, almost double its estimated population of 43.1 million in 2012. The baby boomers are largely responsible for this increase in the older population, as they began turning 65 in 2011. By 2050, the surviving baby boomers will be over the age of 85.

Furthermore, the most recent research conducted by the United Nations’ Department of Economics and Social Affairs reports the following startling trend of World's Ageing population thus,

> The global population aged 60 years or over numbered 962 million in 2017, more than twice as large as in 1980 when there were 382 million older persons worldwide. The number of older persons is expected to double again by 2050, when it is projected to reach nearly 2.1 billion. In 2030, older persons are expected to outnumber children under age 10 (1.41 billion versus 1.35 billion); in

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6 Ibid., 5-6.

2050, projections indicate that there will be older persons aged 60 or over than adolescents and youth at ages 10-24 (2.1 billion versus 2.0 billion). Globally, the number of persons aged 80 years or over is projected to increase more than threefold between 2017 and 2050, rising from 137 million to 425 million. Two thirds of the world’s older persons live in the developing regions, where their numbers are growing faster than in the developed regions. In 2050, it is expected that nearly 8 in 10 of the world’s older persons will be living in the developing regions.\footnote{United Nations, “World Population Ageing,” http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WPA2017_Highlights.pdf, (accessed, November 25, 2017).}

The report further states that,

Population ageing—the inevitable increase in the share of older persons that results from the decline in fertility and improvement in survival that characterize the demographic transition is occurring throughout the world. Each of the 201 countries or areas with at least 90,000 inhabitants in 2017 is projected to see an increase in the proportion of persons aged 60 or over between 2017 and 2050. Although the process of population ageing is most advanced in Europe and in Northern America, where more than one person in five was aged 60 or over in 2017, the populations of other regions are growing older as well. In 2050, older persons are expected to account for 35 per cent of the population in Europe, 28 percent in Northern America, 25 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, 24 per cent in Asia, 23 per cent in Oceania and 9 per cent in Africa.\footnote{Ibid.}

Someone might argue that this should not come as a surprise to anybody because Europe, America and some of the Caribbean are developed nations and they have to their advantage all the necessary factors that will warrant an increase in life expectancy. Gentzler identifies these factors, saying that, “More people are living longer today than ever before. Because of modern medical technology, better nutrition, reduced job risks, and hosts of other variables, the life expectancy is in the United States is increasing.”\footnote{Genzler, Designing an Older Adult Ministry, 9.} In the same vein, the story about life expectancy in Africa, particularly in Nigeria, the
researcher’s country; experience increase over the years regardless of the differences in socio-economic and political factors compared to Europe and America and other developed nations of the world. In their article, Babatunji Abayomi Omotara, Shuaibu Jauro Yahya, et al. opine that, “In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that the number of elderly persons will rise from about 37.1 million in 2005 to 155.4 million in 2050. The elderly population in Nigeria is estimated at 4 percent and is expected to triple by the year 2020.”

Further than that, Victoria A. Velkoff and Paul R. Kowal present the following data saying that,

If age 50 is used as the definition of the older population, 20 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa had older populations of over 1 million people. Again, Nigeria had the largest older population in Sub-Saharan Africa, with 13.7 million people aged 50 and over in 2006. South Africa and Ethiopia each had approximately 7 million people aged 50 and over. By 2030, over half of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are projected to have at least 1 million people aged 50 and over. Nigeria is projected to have over 25 million people in this age group by 2030. Ethiopia is projected to have 13.4 million, Congo (Kinshasa) is projected to have 12.7 million, and Sudan is projected to have around 8.3 million.

With these alarming statistics of the increase of older adults and while the church in America and other parts of the world are making efforts on this subject, how prepared or ready is the church in Africa and Nigeria in particular to tap from the enormous gifts of the older adults and to address their unique needs? The society may decide to ignore older adults due to some mundane considerations, but the church which serves as a defender and refuge for the weak and the vulnerable cannot. It is necessary for the church


to start thinking and articulating ways to both engage them and their gifts in the effort of edifying the church and to also meet their needs because they are a group that requires a lot of attention from all and sundry. Thus, the presence of the older adults in the church rather than being viewed as a burden and liability should be a blessing and ministry. They are not to be viewed as a commodity that is used and ready to be dispensed of. Omar G. Otterness and Thomas T. Mundahl lament by noting that, “It is evident when older adults are put on the shelf and become second-class members to be regarded as problems.” In order to avoid this trend, the church needs to be intentional by carving out some older adults’ ministry within its context. Gentzler buttresses the need for an intentional older adults' ministry by saying that,

> Although the church cannot ignore its responsibility in helping meet the needs of the frail or at-risk elderly, neither can we ignore the involvement of healthy older adults in ministry. It is imperative that we the local church congregations take seriously our responsibility for an intentional ministry by, with, and for the older adults.14

**Statement of the Problem**

Today we live in a youth-dominated culture. Much emphasis is given to productivity and physical strength. This is seen in how the media is preoccupied with all kinds of presentation of negative images of the old and the aging, while promoting products that will enhance our bodies and make us look young and attractive. Divya Raina et al. affirm that,

> Negative image formation, due to media portrayal of the old age not only hampers their image in the society but also their self-concept. Over accommodation and baby talk does not always have the desired effect as thought to be, many a times

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making the individual feel even more helpless and strengthening of the belief that they can no more function independently.\textsuperscript{15}

The older adults are seen as weak and unproductive. They are also seen as outdated, expired, and in some instances, defective. Recently, the researcher was in the elevator of the Luther Seminary’s library which leads to the books’ stacks while looking for books to commence writing this thesis and his attention was caught by some statements made by some outgoing students on the elevator as being old fashioned, old school, outdated, and slow. The statements read, “You have lived enough and now overtaken by time. When you were young, people of your generation loved and wished you well. Now you are living in another generation. Please rest in peace!! All your service of years despite your ugly door and slow movement are recognized and your burial will be honoured” (Jacob Kanake). Other comments on the Luther Seminary’s elevator that seem to be compliment for the service it renders, but eventually turn out to be satires are, “Good bye elevator!! However, antique you are, you served me for the last five years!! I will not miss you but certainly remember you!! May you rest in peace from all negative comments!!” (Misfin Ayete). “Good bye. Thank you for your service! Hope to see you in an antique shop or possibly in museum.” (H.K.). “Thanks, and love to the most creepstastic elevator I’ve had the pleasure to know. Keep rocking it old school in elevator heaven” (Anonymous).

Even though the above statements were written on an inanimate object because of the years it has served the community, it is still the same statement made about the older

adults in the society and the church. They are seen as people who lived, helped and served their generation. Thus, they are no longer needed and welcomed in this present generation. They should just give way and allow the people of this present generation that are young, energetic, innovative and smart to benefit and serve their generation. There seems to be a very serious agitation among the young people that it is their time, and these old people should give way and let them enjoy their time and all that it has to offer to them. The older adults are seen as people who should just sit at the back burner and watch the people of the time mount the stage of life and display their agility and prowess. As said above, they are seen as a problem and not as an integral part of the society and the church that needs attention and ministry. Martin E. Marty, in describing the problem of the older adults in the world of the nineteen eighties, opines that,

Today, whether an old person is making contribution to the rest of the society, in growing old—informed or not—he or she automatically joins a caste that is described as a problem. As if by divine election or computerized, calculated necessity, everyone eventually becomes part of the caste, just as people who are born retarded, or of a minority, or handicapped are categorized into a problem zones by the larger society which surrounds them.¹⁶

In Africa older adults are generally known to be highly regarded and respected. They are repository of knowledge, wisdom, culture, customs and traditions of the society. In the past and even to some extent now they still have some control over the affairs of the society. Friday Asiazobor Eboiyehi emphasizes this fact by saying that,

Other studies have shown that though the aged are held in esteem and are perceived as vast storehouses of knowledge and power in some societies, in others, their legitimacy to knowledge and power is questioned. In most African societies, old age is perceived as a sign of blessing and the aged are respected and

held in high esteem. Old age is aptly expressed in a number of African languages where the aged is seen as the big person.\textsuperscript{17}

But in recent times, there has been change in the attitude of the society towards them. Once a person reaches sixty and above, they are no longer considered as active and productive. Even if they would not be told directly that they have overstayed their welcome, some body language would be used. They would naturally begin to lose their hold on the reigns of affairs. This attitude toward the older adults is so obvious in almost all spheres of endeavour. Divya Raina, Geeta and Balodi affirm this by opining that,

Studies reveal that young people generally tend to rate older adults with more negatives as compared to the positives. Discrimination and underestimation of potentials in the workplace are common occurrences, by the hands of young employees of the old, exhibiting age related biases. They tend to forget the benefits of experience, knowledge and insight as can be provided by the older adults.\textsuperscript{18}

Therefore, this apathetic attitude towards older adult has been found in the church and the researcher’s denomination, the Evangelical Church Winning All. Right from its inception, the Church has made some significant efforts to ensure that almost all the different segments of society (Men, Women, Youth, girls, boys, Children, Students, etc.) have one form of ministry or the other that ministers to their unique needs and are given the opportunity to serve. But for older adults, there is no intentional ministry within the


\textsuperscript{18} Raina, Geeta and Balodi, “Ageism and Stereotyping of the Older Adults,” 733.
structures of the church that is enabled and empowered to meet their unique needs and to create opportunity for them to unleash and invest their wealth of experiences, stories and wisdom to the church. This renders them more or less spectators watching the participators playing and waiting for the time the game will be over for them (the current participators) to be welcomed into the pity party of the spectators (older adults) too. This is the picture of the unfortunate circle that keeps playing itself in the church. This the researcher finds very unfortunate because it is denying the church the opportunity to uniquely serve older adults and for older adults to be empowered and enriched to serve the church in return.

**Research Question**

To address the critical need for the older adults’ ministry in the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), the following pertinent question needs to be asked: “What are the potentials and problems of the older adults in the church today and what can the church do to benefit from their God given potentials and to help solve their problems?” The researcher believes that obtaining genuine answers to above-stated questions will lead to a very positive outcome at the end of the journey.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose the study is to encourage the leadership of the Evangelical Church Winning All, to consider starting an older adult ministry, which is conspicuously lacking in the church. This can be achieved through the comprehensive exploration of works done by some great scholars on the subject matter and examples of other denominations. Inspiration would be drawn from Biblical and theological frameworks to shape the understanding and perceptions about older adults on how God views and relates with
them, how they can be ministered to, and how they can be given opportunity to minister to the church in their own peculiar way. Bearing in mind some social scientific frameworks on aging and older adulthoods will help in understanding some of the socio-economic challenges and needs they bear. Therefore, it is hoped that at the end of this thesis some proposals and recommendations can be made to the leadership of the church for the establishment and formation of older adults’ ministry in ECWA.

It is hoped that, this thesis will motivate the church to give more space for enriching and empowering the older adults for the work of service for God, the church and the larger society. In the same vein, the church through its various organs would also be encouraged to minister and to serve them in the best way possible. As one of Africa’s foremost denominations, starting and institutionalizing such a very important ministry will afford her the rare opportunity to influence other denominations that lack it to start. This is because of the impact it would have on its older adults, who will in turn influence those of the other denominations. Thus, the ripple effects of such a ministry to the larger body of Christ would be immeasurable. Summarily, the researcher hopes that this thesis will help in transforming the perspective of the church to see older adults in an entirely new and positive light. In this respect, Gentzler concludes saying that, “The church that breaks free from the grip of ageism will find an exciting and challenging ministry before it. Churches that are intentional about older adult ministry know that ministry today is a ministry by and with, as well as to and for the older-adults.”

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19 Gentzler, *Designing an Older Adult Ministry*, 7.
Thesis Statement

The researcher believes that older adults are an essential part of the church. They form part of those that Christ died for and whom He purchased with His precious blood. It is also believed that as people who are coming from different experiences and challenges in life within and outside the church, they have some very salient needs that are yearning to be met. The society in which they have served during their supposed “productive” years is obviously ignoring and despising them. They are made to feel that they do not have a place or belong there. Therefore, they come to the church, the community of faith, a place where all believers in the Lord Jesus have a place to call theirs. They come to the church because they believe that in the church they would be secure, appreciated, valued and respected for who they are in Christ beyond any other borders or negative consideration. The church has what it takes to fill the void created in their souls by one circumstance or the other. Indeed, the church is empowered by the Holy Spirit with different people and different gifts to meet the unique needs of its members, including the older adults (Rom. 12: 4-8; 1Cor. 12:27-31; Eph. 4:11; 1Pet. 4:10-11). It is also believed that they too come with their unique gifts that the church needs and there they have the liberty to bring such gifts to the table and contribute towards the edification and growth of the body of Christ. To this effect, Carole Bailey Stoneking affirms that,

The church needs the gifts of its elders. Those who have grown in years are not relieved of moral responsibilities. “They cannot,” Stanley Hauerwas and Laura Yordy write, “leave the church to survive on its own and move to Florida. For Christians, there is no Florida even if they happen to live in Florida.” The Christian Community cannot allow aging to be a lost opportunity, but the church must insist for a transformation of what the world understands to be a loss of
power into a service for the good of the Christian community. The church requires the wise, particularly the elderly among us, to exist.\textsuperscript{20}

Gentzler succinctly drives this home by saying that, “Many older adults today are continually involved in the world around them. They are an active, energetic, and growing people. They seek out new opportunities for learning and involvement in peace and justice issues. They want to make a difference in the life of their family, community, and the world.”\textsuperscript{21}

Therefore, the researcher strongly believes that the ECWA as a denomination that has as part of its core values holistic ministry to every member, making efforts to enrich and empower its members by meeting their needs through its different organs and creating opportunities for service for the members (Eph.2:10), has the capacity, the wherewithal and space to intentionally create and enshrine in its constitutional structure “Older Adults Ministry.” When this happens, there would be great benefits that would accrue to the fulfilment of the mission of the church. Furthermore, it will ultimately bring glory to God, the owner of the church, who desires that the needs of every member of the church be met.

Therefore, chapter one presents the introduction of the thesis. Therein are, statement of the problem, purpose of the study and the thesis statement. Chapter two explores the historical background of the Evangelical Church Winning All from its


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{21} Gentzler, Designing an Older Adult Ministry, 7.}
inception. The study traces the birth of an indigenous church through the sacrificial efforts of the three young pioneering missionaries of the former Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), now known as Serving In Mission (Walter Gowans, Thomas Kent and Rowland V. Bingham) from 1893 till date. It gives, the leadership structure, goals, objectives, articles of faith and practice the spiritual and socio-economic contributions of ECWA through its departments, companies, units and ministries to the various communities its churches are found. Chapter three presents the theoretical framework in which the aging and the life of the older are explored through the lenses of different paradigms. To begin with, God was presented as the yardstick of all forms of ministry. Other areas explored are, aging and older adults in the Old Testament, metaphors of older adults’ ministry where the some very salient principles were derived from the Old Testament figures (Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Naomi and Ruth). The exploration of the theoretical frameworks Analyses older adults in the New Testament. Within this space various principles on some older adults and their lives were explored from the Gospels (Zechariah and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna), Pauline Epistles, Pastoral and General Epistles and the Johannine Literature. Furthermore, the theological perspectives were explored. The theological models identified for the older adults’ ministry is Christology and love for the older adults with incarnation of Christ as the implication. Since the older adults are social beings, the sociological perspectives on the older has been reflected in this study. The following were reviewed under the sociological perspective: the myths and stereotypes against older adults and how the older adults can grow gracefully regardless of the myths and stereotypes they face.
Since this thesis has its primary focus on Africa, Chapter four presents older adults in Africa wherein the roles of older adults, roles of the family towards the older and the contemporary challenges facing the older adults in African societies were also reflected in this chapter. Chapter five presents to the Evangelical Church Winning All proposal for the older adults’ ministry across the entire denomination. The chapter constituted of motivation for the older adults’ ministry in the church, roles of older adults in the church, obligations of the church towards the older adults, programs for the older adults’ ministry in the church and the proposed procedures for the establishment of the older adults’ ministry in ECWA. Chapter six which is the conclusion of the thesis, gives the synopsis of the need for the older adults’ ministry in ECWA given the giftedness of the older adults and the enormity of their needs which go a long way in adding value and meaning to their lives.
CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH WINNING ALL

(ECWA)

Jesus says, “And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt.16:18). This very profound statement came about because of the response of Peter to Jesus’ critical question about His identity as thought by others and subsequently by the apostles who had been with Him for at least three years. It also underscores the fact that the church was originally established by Jesus Himself and on Him it stands regardless the onslaught of the kingdom of darkness against it. Right from that point, the church of Christ keeps growing from one stage to the other through His ministry of preaching, teaching, and other miraculous acts (Lk.4). The expansion of the church took place in Acts of the Apostles according to the roadmap presented by Jesus Christ to the apostles just prior to His ascension into heaven (Acts 1:8). From then it continues to grow through the sacrificial and selfless missionary activities of the apostles, disciples and committed men and women of God in history.

The history of every person, nations and organizations and the events that characterize them is very important. History also keeps and sustains very important facts about them. It seeks to answer the questions of what happened and why it happened. It indiscriminately tells of the activities of the persons involved in the events (their bravery, sacrifices, commitment and dedication to a certain cause, failure, success, etc.), it paints a
clear and unambiguous picture of their identity. ECWA as a denomination was founded by some three young missionaries, namely Rowland Bingham, Walter Gowans and Thomas Kent. The basic reasons for including the history of this great denomination in this research are outlined thus: Firstly, to establish the fact that ECWA was borne out of the compassionate, loving and sacrificial DNA of those three young men because of the desperate and despondent condition of the people of Sudan. Thus, the ministry of ECWA was and is still growing with that DNA deeply engrained within its blood vessels. As would be seen in the whole of the thesis, ECWA as a church is encouraged in that same spirit (compassion, love and sacrifice), to consider the desperate condition of the older adults within its confines and establish an intentional ministry for them. Secondly, it is unfortunate that there are not much documents published on the history of the establishment of ECWA. Therefore, the researcher believes that ECWA has legacies and heritage that should be made available for the future generation of pastors, leaders, members and other interested individuals to know where ECWA came from, its growth, contributions to the society, where it is now and to challenge them to take it to where it should be.

Therefore, this chapter gives the detail historical background of the birth of what is today known as Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) through the sacrificial efforts of the pioneering Missionaries of what was then identified as, Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Walter Gowans, Thomas Kent, and Rowland Bingham in 1893. It also presents the various stages of the evolution and growth of the indigenous Church founded then as Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) in 1956, its beliefs and practices,
organizational structures and its various contributions within the body of Christ and the society in general.

**The Motivations for Mission to Sudan**

The Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) over the years has evolved over the last one hundred and twenty-five years from being a product of the sacrificial and selfless commitment of some three young men, namely, Walter Gowans, Thomas Kent and Rowland Bingham. Turaki says Walter Gowans was,

A Scotch Canadian. The first of the three pioneers upon whom God laid the burden of the unreached millions in Africa’s Central Sudan. This vision must have been clarified and strengthened when he enrolled at Dr. Simpson’s Missionary Training College in New York in 1892 and 1893. It was here that Mr. Gowans received Dr. Simpson’s vision of a lost world and the church’s responsibility to it.¹

Turaki describes Thomas Kent as,

An American from Buffalo, New York, who attended Dr. Simpson’s Missionary Training College in New York in 1892 and 1893 along with Mr. Gowans. It was during his training at this college that he received his vision and call to the Sudan. Both Gowans and Kent shared the same, “Burden of the Sudan” and Kent was ever willing to join Gowans at any time when enroute to the Sudan. At the decision to go to Africa at any cost by his friend Mr. Gowans and his new team mate Mr. Bingham, Mr. Kent was invited by the two to join them in England that same year in 1893.²

Turaki says that,

Mr. Bingham was an English Canadian who migrated from England to Canada in 1889. He was an affiliate with Salvation Army and was active in its religious activities. Mr. Bingham was a man of many contacts and he met many influential great divines from who he received the great vision and passion for the Sudan.


² Ibid.
But his meeting with the powerful and spiritual mother of Walter, Mrs. Gowans enlisted him for the Sudan.³

Having heard of the predicaments of the land called the Sudan from Mrs. Gowans, they were motivated and convinced to explore the land and take the Gospel of salvation to the people of the land at all costs. This whole land was poignantly described by the leader of the three young men (Rowland Bingham), thus,

There it was, a great, black belt, stretching for twenty-five hundred miles across Africa, steeped in the densest darkness. The whole land was divided between the Moslems in the northern half and the pagan in the vast stretches of the territory in the south. In imagination I could then see what I saw afterwards in reality. The habitations of pagan heathenism were the dwellings of cruelty.⁴

He continues to say that,

Every kind of horrible heathen custom was practiced. Every child’s face was disfigured by tribal marking, done by the witch doctor with his dirty knife, which practice swelled the number of graves of infant innocent, with its blood-poisoning sequel. The murder of twins was performed by the same executioner. Then dashed the heads of the newly-born babes together and left their bodies in the bush for wild animals to devour in the night.⁵

He continues to lamentably describe the land saying that, “Cannibalism was prevalent. With no provocation, merely, to satisfy the hunger for human flesh, the pagans constantly sat down to these human feasts, and then decorated their huts with the skulls of their victims.”⁶ These barbaric acts were done by the pagans against themselves based on

³ Ibid., 46-47.

⁴ Bingham, Rowland V. Seven Sevens of Years and a Jubilee: The Story of the Sudan Interior Mission (Toronto: Evangelical, 1943), 11.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.
the instinct of survival of the fittest. But on the other hand, they also suffered in the hands of their immediate neighbours. Bingham says,

The Moslem kings in the north gathered their armies together every year to raid the pagan areas for slaves. At night they would surround the little pagan villages, while all were quiet in sleep. With the blush of dawn, a rifle shot would waken the sleeping people. Anyone resisting the waiting troops was shot down, the rest of the people were gathered together and chained man to man, woman to woman, child to child, and marched off to the distant slave-market. There they were sold without the slightest regard to the ties of nature.\(^7\)

Turaki adds, “The Sudan was not an easy mission field. It was in the hinterlands which made it difficult for European missionaries to reach. It involved high risks Africa the white man’s grave.”\(^8\) This land covers whole area bordering Northern Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Northern Cameroun, Sudan, etc.

Given the above horrible description of the land called “Sudan” and the commitment of the three young men to still make their way to it, undoubtedly underscores the incarnational hearts they had.

Therefore, the following factors motivated their commitment:

First, the passionate and fervent prayer of Mrs. Margaret Gowans for God to raise missionaries to reach out to Sudan.

Second, the impassioned pleading of a quiet Scotch little lady (Mrs. Gowans to Rowland V. Bingham) to her house for lunch where she told him the burden God had placed in the family for mission. One of her daughters was thrust forth as a witness for

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\(^7\) Ibid., 12.

\(^8\) Turaki, \textit{An Introduction}, 29.
Him in far-away China and how her eldest son (Walter Gowans) was chosen to be an ambassador to the Sudan.

The third factor was appeal of a preacher made after his message on “The Holy Spirit and Missions” to every young man and woman to surrender his or her life to Christ, to go wherever He sends.

Fourth, the deplorable and depraved condition of the people of the Sudan as described above.

Fifth, the influence of earlier evangelical mission movements who provided to them the needed information about the land. According to Turaki, another factor that motivated them into taking this great risk for the Sudan was, “The evangelical environment with its great emphasis upon missions, challenged by the great divines, colleges of missions, conferences and Christian literatures, . . . coupled by this testimony of personal faith, hope and prayers, the foundation upon which the burden for missions burns.”

Sixthly, ultimately, Turaki says, “The SIM’s ‘burden of the Sudan’ was borne out of a life of commitment to a vision of the lost, obedience to the call of God, dependence upon the Sovereign God, and a life of prayer and faith.”

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9 Ibid., 48.
10 Ibid.
Missionary Activities of Sudan Interior Mission in Sudan

This subsection outlines the various activities that characterized the missionary expeditions of the three young men to break into the Sudan and the consequent encounters.

Having prepared and totally surrendered their bodies, spirits and souls to the Lord and for this noble task; they forged ahead as a mission through circumstances and practical life situations as directed by the hidden hand of God. Being motivated and compelled by their love for Christ and burdened by the earlier stated factors, they defied the entire hindrances at home and the prospective perils in the mission field. Thus, they set for the journey without shirking in their faith and resolve. Bingham says,

Finally, we met in Britain. My companions and I sought to arouse interest over there but failing to form a Board or to be accepted by a Board, we decided to go forth without support of any church or society. In Liverpool, we booked our passages to sail on November 4, 1893. At that time, not one of us had sufficient money to carry us through to the field, but we made the necessary deposit in faith and by the time the date set to sail was reached, we had paid the money in full for our passages to Lagos, West Africa. Among the three of us we had left about one hundred and fifty dollars, with which to journey from that city up into the great interior of Central Sudan.11

Turaki adds, “These pioneers in spite all odds against them, refused to capitulate in despondency, but were buoyed up by a life of prayer, faith and hope in God.”12

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11 Bingham, *Seven Sevens*, 15.

Therefore, Because God was with them, on their first attempt, their ship anchored out at sea off Lagos on the fourth December 1893. On arriving Lagos, they were fortunate to have met an English trader who was kind enough to give them a warm reception. They were also fortunate to have met missionaries of other three mission societies already labouring in Lagos. However, they met their first discouraging circumstance. The ones that were to help and encourage them on this great expedition turned out to be a clog in the wheel of their progress and commitment to realizing their vision of reaching the Sudan. This resonates with a Hausa adage that says, “Ana neman wuta a makera, sai aka same ta a masaka.” When literally translated into English, it simply means, “While fire is being sought out for in the blacksmith’s workshop, it was found in the textile factory.” This portent massive destruction. Therefore, Bingham categorically says, “They prophesied dire calamity and they all said that we were undertaking the impossible.”\textsuperscript{13} He continues to say that,

We dined one evening with the Superintendent of the Methodist Mission and this was his gloomy prediction: “Young men, you will never see the Sudan; your children will never see the Sudan; our grandchildren may.” All sought to dissuade us from the purpose, as long years before in South Africa they had sought to dissuade David Livingstone.”\textsuperscript{14}

Hearing such a gloomy statement from the person he describes to be, “. . . regarded as being a well-informed man in West, African affairs,”\textsuperscript{15} and from other well experienced missionaries, it would have been obvious enough to completely discourage

\textsuperscript{13} Bingham, \textit{Seven Sevens}, 16.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
them. Unlike the young prophet who was deceived by an old prophet to defy the clear instruction of God in 1Kings 13:1-32; like Paul, they never considered their life worth anything, but with a strong conviction, they were determined to reach their goal of reaching out to those in dire need of the gospel of God’s grace for their salvation in spite the imminent danger to their lives (Acts 20:22-24; 21:10-14. Also, like David Livingstone, Bingham says, “Prayer brought to us the same conviction that had been the earlier pioneer’s when he said, ‘I will open up Central Africa to the Gospel, or I will die in the attempt.’ So, we prayed and planned.”16 Their prayer reinforced their conviction and their conviction was demonstrated by the practical and sacrificial actions described by Bingham thus,

Immediately, we saw that our resources were altogether inadequate for the long journey which lay before us through the unknown. We decided on a week of prayer and proposed to dispose of any keepsakes or non-essential articles. In this category we included even our watches, for we were now in a country where the sun ruled by day and rose about the same time every morning the year round. Prepared now to lay aside every weight, we had our sale.17

This sacrificial decision to let go and let God was predicated by their unshakeable faith in the fact that, the Lord God who called them is faithful and able to provide their needs and to sustain them through the journey to the unknown (Gen. 22; 2 Cor. 9:8-11; 1 Thess. 5:24). Therefore, their faith was immediately rewarded by the same God they trusted in an improbable manner. Bingham explains how God showed up and rewarded their faith in Him. He says,

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 16-17.
The next mail that reached us brought us five hundred dollars. This included a number of gifts, but the largest donor was a servant named Mary Jones. She knew of our going to Africa and when, just after we left, she had received a legacy of three hundred dollar draft from a relative, she felt moved to give the whole amount to our Sudan enterprise. To this her mistress added one hundred dollars and a few friends brought up the amount to an even five hundred. Of the act of another woman who poured out her most precious gift to anoint Him, our Lord said, “Wheresoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world there this also which this woman hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.”

To these young missionaries, such a gift came to them at the right time. Bingham says, “The gift of this servant girl came just at the moment of our greatest need and made possible that first journey up into the Sudan. Out of that gift of fifty years ago, in a very real sense, has come the greatest harvest of converts every year which we are seeing today.”

With this great provision, they now were set and good to go although the door to the Sudan seemed to be closed and the journey, an obvious precarious one. They counted the cost (Mt. 16:24-26; Lk. 9:23:26). Also remembering the command of the Lord and the example of Paul, they counted it as an opportunity and a great door opened for effective ministry, even though there were adversaries (1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3; Rev. 3:8; cf. Isa. 45:1-4). Bingham recalls the profound statement of Gowans to that regard. He says,

“When he heard anyone speak of the Sudan as a closed field, Walter Gowans, our young leader, said, “It is a closed field because the Church has never stretched her hand to open the door.” He contended that no field could remain closed before a praying Church, obedient missionaries and the command of One claiming

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18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., 18.
omnipotence, who had said, “Go ye into all the world.” He conceded great difficulties, not closed door.\textsuperscript{20}

This statement has great implication to the ministry God has called the church into. Christ has opened all the doors needed for the church get engaged in any ministry that will fulfil the Great Commission and bring the abundant life in people’s life into reality. Therefore, in the light and spirit of Gowan’s statement, it is important to say that, the door is widely opened by God for the establishment of an intentional ministry for the older adults in ECWA which was founded within that framework of mind. It is left for the church should prayerfully stretch it hands and do the needful. At this stage, it appears clear that these young men meant business; their total being was sold and surrendered to the singular cause of obeying their Master Jesus Christ. They were also compelled by the love and compassion of Christ towards the lost souls of the Sudan to the extent that they were feeling accursed if they failed to move on to the Sudan whatever the cost (1Cor. 9:16-18). This was the kind of heart that gave them the impetus to defy all forms of inhibitions, put their lives on the line and by the power of the Holy Spirit (Zech. 4:6; Acts 1:8), they broke the seeming impregnable frontiers of Sudan which today gave birth to one of Africa’s largest evangelical denominations which has an estimated membership of over six million in Africa, America, United Kingdom and Israel. It is also noteworthy that, establishing an older adult ministry in a youth culture dominated society comes along with it its challenges as noted within this research. However, the church should remember its DNA and the legacy of the compassionate, loving and sacrificial hearts of

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 18-19.
the pioneer missionaries. They defied all encumbrances and swung into action with the ultimate benefit as their focus. Thus, the compassionate and loving desire to see that lives of the teeming older adults in the church are holistically enhanced, will compel the church to put all resources in place for this noble cause.

Prior to venturing into the Sudan and besides the earlier problems they encountered at the coast, they unfortunately were confronted with these other problems: first, the problem of transportation. Turaki says, “There were no roads except the little native trails through the dense forests on the coast and through long grass of the interior. The only means of transport was to have all goods carried on the heads of the natives. And it was not easy to hire them due to great slave-raiding wars.”

Second, they had the problem of currency. Bingham says, “In the interior our money was useless, and barter was the only system of exchange, so we had to turn our cash into goods, cotton, cloth, knives and other things to attract the natives. The only native money was the cowrie, a small shell.”

Third, according to Bingham, “Keeping well was also a very real problem. We did not understand the terrible climate in those days. Expedition after expedition of white men in trade, in government and in missionary service was wiped out.”

He noted that right there in Lagos ten days after their arrival, before they reach their destination on the lower Niger, not less than five members of the team died. Bingham himself had to stay at Lagos because he was inflicted with severe attack of Malaria shortly after their

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22 Bingham, *Seven Sevens*, 21.

23 Ibid.
arrival at Lagos, coupled with the need for one of them to receive new supplies from home and to maintain contact with friends there.

In spite the above stated, the other two young men, Mr. Gowan and Mr. Kent, left Lagos in April 1894 and pushed on to the interior of the dreaded Sudan en route to Lake Chad via Kano and got to Bida in June of 1894. Even though they had reached Sudan yet without even starting their mission, they met their inevitable first death because of the harsh weather conditions and the sickness they encountered. Turaki summarizes the circumstances that led to Mr. Gowans’ death thus,

At Bida, it was necessary for Mr. Kent to return to Lagos for provisions, while Mr. Gowan proceeded towards Kano. Mr. Kent arrived back to Lagos by the end of July, 1894 and returned inward to Bida again in early September, 1894 and reached Bida on October 3, 1894. For Mr. Gowan, going beyond Bida was a problem: the problem of getting reliable carriers and the problem of slave-raiding wars of the Muslim Emirs of Sokoto and Kontagora, thus closing the roads to Kano. In spite of those difficulties, Mr. Gowan pushed onward to Kano, but got himself trapped and besieged by the Emir of Kontagora in one little town. At its defeat, Mr. Gowan had his provision confiscated with the promise of cash return, but later he was sent slaves by the Emir of Kontogora which he refused.24

Turaki adds,

On reaching Zaria, Mr. Gowan was taken ill with dysentery. He was met by a party of semi-scientific explorers, Mr. Robinson and Dr. Tonkins on November 4, 1894. Dr. Tonkins advised Mr. Gowan to return home to Canada, telling him that if he did not, he would die. On their return journey, southward to Lagos, just 40 miles from Zaria, Mr. Gowan died on the 17th of November 1894 at Ghirku. At his death bed, he was attended to by the faithful Kru boy, after the flight of Mr. Gowan carriers. It was this young man who took the remains of Mr. Gowan’s property to Mr. Bingham in Ogbomosho.25


25 Ibid., 54-55.
Narrating further the circumstance that led to the death of Mr. Kent, Bingham says,

On his return trip up river, at Bida, Mr. Kent was taken ill with Malaria. Two missionaries there cared for him during the last days of his life and buried him on December 8, 1894. It seemed almost as though these two missionaries had been sent to give him the last loving care, for they turned back then and made for the coast and home and never to return.26

After the death of his two committed companions, Bingham says,

Since there was no Board at home to send reinforcements or to act for me in any way, five months after their deaths I decided to return to see what could be done to arouse interest in the great Sudan and to form a responsible Board. On my return, the whole expedition was written down as a failure. What was there to show for the effort? Nothing but two graves. I visited Mrs. Gowans to take to her the few personal belongings of her son. As I was shown into her parlour, she met me with extended hand. We stood there with hands clasped in silence for a while. Then she said these words that I shall never forget, “Well, Mr. Bingham, I would rather have Walter go out to Sudan and die there, than have him home today, disobeying his Lord.”27

Maigadi commenting on the passionate response of Mrs. Gowans about the death of her son says, “Margaret was able to see what others could not see. The death of her son was not a tragedy for her, but fulfilment of what God had intended.”28

Those unfortunate circumstances were not to be the end of the effort to reach out to the Sudan, since it was a mission started by and with God. Bingham had a very strong determination to continue regardless of the demise of his colleagues. In 1900 Bingham got some two young men and they set out again to the Sudan. That was the second the

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26 Bingham, Seven Sevens, 22-23.
27 Ibid., 23.
second journey to Nigeria. But within three weeks of their arrival, he was traumatized with malaria. With the order of the doctor at the government hospital, he was taken back home. About his young companions, Bingham says “The young companions assured me that they would carry on, but, discouraged by the dark picture painted by the Lagos missionaries, they followed me on the next boat.”

In view of all this Bingham wished he would have died in Africa. He says,

> It would have been easier for me, perhaps, had I died in Africa, for on that homeward journey, I died another death. Everything seemed to have failed, and when I was gradually regaining my strength in Britain, a fateful cable reached me with word that my two companions were arriving shortly; I went through the darkest period of my whole life.

In the light of Paul’s words in which he says, “Being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil.1:6), Bingham dealt another heavy blow to the kingdom of darkness by disregarding the overwhelming discouragement he hitherto encountered. As a missionary empowered by God, filled with the unquenchable burden for the Sudan, the breaking of the powers of the slave-raiding Moslem Emirs by the Britain, the support of the Leader of the British forces (Sir Fredrick Lugard), he set out to Nigeria with his party of four. They located their first mission station among the Nupe tribe at Patigi in 1901. This marked the third attempt into the Sudan. With a rewarding joy, Bingham asserts, “At last we had a station in the Central Sudan.”

Afterwards, they recorded the success of recruiting a new missionary. Turaki observes,

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29 Bingham, Seven Sevens, 25.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 30.
The arrival of Dr. A. P. Stirret at Patigi in November, 1902 further established the footholds of the Sudan party on the Sudan, and thereby ended the series of fruitless attempts at gaining a foothold on the Sudan by the Mission. This man dominated the SIM mission field for many decades until his death in 1948. He was an inspiration and a moving force of the SIM. He was an inspiration and a moving force for the mission field.\textsuperscript{32}

Also appreciating the unrelenting and sacrificial work of the SIM because of the opening of the first station at Patigi, Maigadi observes, “The gospel spread to parts of Yoruba land, the whole Middle Belt and the Hausa land over a period of thirty-six years.”\textsuperscript{33} These areas are presently the stronghold of the present ECWA.

It is so encouraging to hear Bingham’s positive statement despite the death of his other colleagues. He says, “In that second seven years we continued to fill up the vacancies and were thankful to record only two deaths, those of Mr. Taylor at Bida and Miss Clothier, our first lady worker, at Patigi.”\textsuperscript{34} It was later discovered that their death was a result of malaria caused by mosquito. It is noteworthy to mention the roles women played in the success of their mission expedition in the Sudan namely, the conception of the vision by Mrs. Gowans, the exemplary and sacrificial supply of funds by Mary Jones and the commitment of Miss. Clothier to the point of laying her life in the field. This recalls the sacrificial ministry of some ladies to Jesus Christ in the Gospels (Lk. 8:1-3). This is a great lesson to the fact that, ministering to the needs of others knows no bound. It is the work of everyone and not some selected few based-on gender, status, race, etc.

\textsuperscript{32} Turaki, \textit{An Introduction}, 69.

\textsuperscript{33} Maigadi, \textit{Divisive Ethnicity}, 85.

\textsuperscript{34} Bingham, \textit{Seven Seven}, 31.
The Bible says, “There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven” (Eccl. 3:1). After the years of struggles and sacrifices, God in His infinite mercies decided to bless and to reward the mission with great leap of harvests. Bingham describes this period as the “Third seven years of the beginning of fruitfulness, 1908-1914.” But prior to this period, Turaki notes that between 1893 and 1907, SIM had successive changes of names and philosophies. He thus summarizes them thus:

- Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) 1893 to 27th May, 1898;
- African Industrial Mission (AIM), 3rd June, 1898 to 12th September 1905;
- African Evangelistic Mission (AEM), 12th September, 1905 to 1st August 1906;
- Sudan United Mission, 1st August 1906 to 3rd 1907;
- Sudan Interior Mission (SIM), June, 1907.  

Therefore that, year 1908 marks a new era in the sacrificial ministry and work of the SIM in the Sudan. God indeed showed up in amazing ways to honour His word in completing whatever He starts. From this point, many other stations were opened; uncountable souls were won into the kingdom of God. It is heart-warming how Corwin succinctly summarizes the results of the efforts of Bingham being the last of the pioneers and the progress SIM made as at the time of his death thus:

By the time of Bingham’s death, the SIM had grown into what was arguably the largest Protestant presence in Africa 400 missionaries, with hundreds of churches established. Under Bingham, the SIM became a somewhat unique representative of the faith mission movement, more about the need for missionary support and more thoroughly internationalized than the British model of Hudson Taylor and

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35 Ibid., 39.

36 Ibid., 69.
China Inland Mission, and more broadly evangelical and more socially involved than many American faith missions.\(^{37}\)

He further says that,

Perhaps most outstanding among the missiological legacies Bingham left through the SIM were his emphasis on teaching and promoting missions among the newly established churches of Africa, his utilization of thoroughly international teams, and his holistic model of missions’ outreach, which addressed social concerns as part of the process of discipling believers into churches equipped to carry on Christ’s commission.\(^{38}\)

Furthermore, Turaki sums up the mission activities of the SIM saying, “The general missionary activities of the SIM covered the following broad categories: evangelization, itineration, establishment of mission stations, church planting and educational, and medical and literature activities.”\(^{39}\) Presently, the acronym SIM has been changed from “Sudan Interior Mission” to, “Serving in Missions.”

Even though, there was loss of lives because of the sacrifice the three pioneering missionaries of the SIM to the Sudan made, the end justifies the means. Today, while they are back in glory, glorified to the status of the cloud of witnesses (Heb.12:1), their labour was not, and it is still not in vain (1Cor.15:58). Thus, they can turn around and say like Paul that, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Tim 4:7-8). Their effort yielded unimaginable eternal and temporal


\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) Turaki, *An Introduction*, 95.
value as attested above and would be seen in the emergence of ECWA in Nigeria and beyond.

**The Emergence of an Indigenous Church, Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA)**

The primary purpose of the three pioneer SIM missionaries and those that continued after them was to ensure that the entire Sudan which was completely forgotten without hope of the gospel and the salvation it brings got saved and to have access to the other social amenities. These they vigorously and selflessly pursued. As earlier indicated, the Sudan was opened, souls were saved, and the people had access to social amenities like, education, medical services, etc. Some indigenes were trained, and they became pastors and missionaries working under the supervision of the missionaries. Thus, there came a time when the missionaries felt that the indigenes needed to be much more closely involved and begin to take responsibility over the work. This was a giant step toward the emergence of a home grown indigenous church which hopefully will break more grounds than the missionaries would. To achieve this noble dream, All-SIM conferences were organized. Turaki explains the significance of the conferences saying,

> As a result of nationalist movements of the 1940s, SIM thought of creating a common forum of bringing all indigenous leaders together. This common forum provided them with an opportunity of meeting one another and to discuss the future of the indigenous Church. The All-SIM conferences held between 1949 and 1954 were primarily aimed at developing indigenous church leaders, defining the indigenization process and the nature of the indigenous Church. For the first time the African Church leaders sat side by side with the SIM leaders for policy and decision making.\(^{40}\)

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 267.
This was a great step of faith. It was done with the trust that the God that was with the SIM missionaries was the same with the indigenous Church leaders. This came along with mutual trust and respect for one another as fellow workers in the same vineyard. Therefore, in pursuance of the emergence of an indigenous Church, three major items were comprehensively considered as the catalysts for the success of this vision.

This marks the emergence of a new Indigenous Church that was established based on the incarnational sacrifice and selfless effort of the three Pioneering Missionaries (Thomas Kent, Walter Gowans and Rowland V. Bingham) and the support of many. Also worthy of remembrance was the impassionate burden of Mrs. Gowans as the force and propeller that ignited, inspired and motivated the young men to take the risk of taking the Gospel to the life-threatening terrain of Sudan against all odds. This was possible due to the smooth transition that was achieved. Both entities agreed upon the following relational principle as noted by Turaki thus,

While the Evangelical Church of West Africa has now come into its own, nevertheless, the SIM will still work closely in cooperation with it and reserves the right to choose the one who is to be the overseer in the various districts. The position of the Church, however, now is that both Africans and the Europeans should cooperate and work side by side.⁴¹

The emergence and development of the indigenous church (ECWA) means a lot to the SIM in so many positive ways. As far as the SIM is concerned, it is a milestone achievement towards meeting the long-term goal in their ministry in the Sudan. Maigadi quoting Harold Fuller, (former SIM Acting Deputy Director 1966-1968, Deputy Field Director 1968-1972, and Field Director 1973-1977), sums up this milestone saying that,

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⁴¹ Ibid., 276.
Taking over responsibility means taking over the leadership. It is a change of leadership, of authority, of responsibility. It is the next step in establishing the kind of indigenous church that is our goal. From pioneer days we have been working toward a self-governing, self-propagating, self-supporting church in Nigeria. The transfer was a major step in that direction. Preaching the gospel and winning people to Christ was the first. That was followed, on the organizational level, by local churches. Then came regional bodies, and finally, the national organization.42

Because ECWA as an indigenous church was established on a very solid ground from all angles and from every form of ecclesiastical consideration right from its establishment till date, it has been enjoying phenomenal and unprecedented growth, development and progress both in the major cities and rural areas within Nigeria and beyond its shores. It is today one of the largest protestant and evangelical church denominations not only in Nigeria but in Africa at large. It also has churches in America, United Kingdom and Israel. Even though over the years, it has been very difficult for the church to have an empirically verifiable statistic, some approximations have been made. Paul Todd says, “Given ECWA’s claim to a community of about 6 million people, which, if proven, would make ECWA the second largest Protestant church in Nigeria and possibly the largest in Northern Nigeria.”43 Today, ECWA is breaking new grounds in almost all areas of human endeavours in leaps and bounds under the mighty hands of God. This is achieved through the committed and sacrificial services of her leadership, pastoral staff, missionaries, lay leaders and the entire membership at all levels. To God be the glory that the light of the undiluted Gospel that was kindled and propagated by the

42 Ibid., 60.

43 William Paul Todd, “The Attitudes of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) towards Islam in Light of Ethnic and Religious Violence” (Ph.D. Diss., Queen’s University of Belfast, 2010).
pioneering missionaries in 1893 and handed to the indigenes in 1954 keeps shining from one generation to the other till Jesus returns.

For other aspects of the historical development of ECWA, which the researchers considers very important, readers are referred to the appendixes at the end of the thesis.

Departments

Administration and Personnel Department: This department among others is saddled with the responsibility of collecting and preserving records of all personnel in ECWA employment at the Headquarters, Departments, Districts, Units and Institutional levels. It supervises the Estates and Services, Public Relations, Media and Legal Services Units.

Audits Department: This Department is responsible to the President for the overseeing the financial activities of the Headquarters and ECWA in general, by internal auditing with a view to ensuring judicious use and proper accounting of ECWA resources.

Christian Education Department: This Department is responsible for the coordinating fellowship groups’ activities (Men, Women and Youth Fellowships), Sunday School curricula, children ministry, student ministry, youth camp ministry and other ministries that contribute to the goals of Christian education. (Further details will be given subsequently).

Church Related Ministries’ Department: This Department coordinates prayer and Church Renewal, Discipleship ministries, Gospel outreach and pastoral affairs units of the Church (further details will be given subsequently).
Education Department: This Department functions primarily to provide sound education to the children of ECWA members and non ECWA members. ECWA schools at all levels right from the time of the Missionaries were known to have been providing affordable and cutting-edge learning environment for pupils and students. ECWA has established through her different arms have established schools in both rural and urban areas which offered opportunities for many children to have Western education. Thus, because of the enormity of the work, the Department functions through its two-pronged units namely: The first is the Theological Education Unit which evaluates and supervises on behalf of the Department all Seminaries, Theological Colleges and Theological Training Institutes and the second is the General Education Unit which coordinates the operations of ECWA Nursery, Primary, Secondary, Vocational Schools and Tertiary Institutions of learning.

Finance Department: This department among many others is responsible for all financial transactions of the Headquarters and the generality of ECWA. It sees that proper accounting systems and procedures are established throughout ECWA (Headquarters, Departments, Institutions, Units, DCCs, LCCs, and the LCBs). The department sets up or maintains a sound Employee Scheme System with a view to enabling the ECWA to pay any of its employees under Gratuity and Pension Scheme on retirement.

Medical Department: One of the problems of Africa is lack of adequate provision of medical facilities. Nigeria is not left behind in this aspect. In Nigeria, the North is worse off. Medical service was one of the major means the missionaries used to break even in areas that ordinarily they would not be allowed to go. They suffered the pains the
people in such areas were facing. Therefore, they made sure that they established clinics and cottage hospitals in the different communities they served. Turaki notes that,

Medical work of the SIM played a significant role in the propagation of the Gospel of Christ, especially in opening up the Muslim Emirates. The medical work of the SIM can be classified into two broad areas, namely, general medical practice and treatment of various diseases and physical ailments; and sometimes fighting the outbreaks of some epidemics. While in leprosy work. The Mission fought with leprosy as an epidemic and the treatments of lepers, their medical care, cure and social well-being.44

The Mission established hundreds of hospitals, clinics, dispensaries, and leprosarium to cater for the various medical needs of the people that neither the colonial masters nor later the national governments could not provide. Such was the rich compassionate medical legacy that was handed to the ECWA. The ECWA through the Medical Department continues with this giant stride toward the provision of affordable medical care in both rural and urban areas across Nigeria. Not satisfied with only providing quality medical and health care services that bring glory to God and saves lives, the Department has established Community Health Programme, HIV/ AIDS Ministry, School of Nursing and Midwifery and Schools of Health Technology to train God fearing and compassionate health care providers to augment government efforts.

Missions: Evangelical Missionary Society (EMS) Department: This Department which was established by the SIM in 1948 has been nicknamed and fondly called by members of ECWA as, “Bulldozer of ECWA.” Typical of bulldozers, the missionaries under this Department have been known with the unprecedented courage of daring to go to places where believers, pastors or missionaries of other denominations dread to go to

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44 Turaki, An Introduction, 170-186.
preach the Gospel of Christ because of the high medical and mortality risks involved. They are like Paul who says, “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else’s foundation” (Rom. 15:20-21). They strive to break new frontiers of mission for Christ. They have been known for opening entire communities that were locked up from the rest of humanity and living in the jungles naked. In some good cases, such communities were found covering themselves with leaves and animal skins as cloths. Examples of such communities are the Maguzawas, Kambaris, Koma people groups and a host of others.

Panya Baba, a former Missionary, Director of this Department and President of ECWA says,

Since EMS was established in 1948, hundreds of African missionaries have been sent out to preach the Gospel of Christ as Saviour. God continues to use EMS missionaries towards the expansion of the Kingdom of God in Nigeria and in other parts of Africa and beyond. They continue to participate in the vision established long ago, that all may have the opportunity to hear the Good News of Salvation in Christ.\(^{45}\)

The EMS Department today is ECWA’s major vehicle for the realization of her entire mission activities. It is responsible for recruiting, training and sending out missionaries to unreached areas within and outside Nigeria for evangelism and church planting. It also motivates Local Boards, Fellowship groups and individual Christians to support missions’ efforts by prayer, giving and sending forth labourers into Christ’s vineyard.

Radio Ministry: Eternal Love Winning All (E.L.W.A.) Department. ELWA stand for Eternal Love Winning Africa. The transmission covered West African Countries. It served several useful purposes apart from preaching the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Over the years other areas have been identified and explored, with the aim of healing wounded hearts; restoring broken homes, and pointing the way back to Christ, for true peace and hope for mankind. Targeted listeners are both Urban and Rural dwellers, whether Christians, Muslims, traditional worshipers or other religions. Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba being the three major Nigeria Languages are used over a relatively large area in the country. Through the years, many of the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Kanuri, Nupe and Shuwa Arab listeners have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ over the radio. A good number have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ over the radio and have responded to the call and many more are being reached in the privacy of their homes. Some missionaries in rural settlements have also informed the radio ELWA Management of the positive impact of the transmissions on rural dwellers all over the country.

People Oriented Development (POD) Department. This Department is very significant in realizing the goal and objectives of ECWA. Therefore, it promotes Sustainable Holistic Community Based Development (i.e., physical, spiritual, and social, in the areas of health, Agriculture, Sanitation and Water Supply, Environmental control, Women and Gender, etc.) activities through effective animation and capacity building. POD is also engaged in empowering Communities and Women’s activities to raise their standard of living, promoting the concept of participatory leadership and to strengthen Church Growth and her outreach.
Companies

ECWA Productions Limited (E.P.L.): This Company is owned and operated by ECWA. The Company serves ECWA in producing, reprinting, procuring, selling, distributing and publishing Christian materials (books, records, cassettes, films, filmstrips, etc.) that convey the Christian faith so that non-Christians believe the gospel, and Christians grow to maturity. It also contributes to the development of nations as it can reach through the supply of wholesome secular, religious and stationery requirements and through maintaining a clear Christian testimony.

ECWA Rural Department Limited. As it is with the aforementioned, this company is wholly owned and operated by ECWA. The company strives to improve the image of farming and stimulating interest in this occupation because of its importance and potentials to individuals and Nation. The department is responsible for improving the quality of life of those already involved in agriculture (physically, socially and spiritually). It emphasizes the accompanying responsibilities, produces, procures and distributes appropriate quality agricultural inputs and products to farmers to help increase their agricultural production.

ECWA Guest Houses (E.G.H.): Because ECWA has such facilities around Nigeria, this Company has been established to coordinate and supervise all ECWA Guest Houses in Nigeria and to facilitate planning and development of such Guest houses for the provision of convenient and comfortable accommodation and services to guests.

ECWA Central Pharmacy Ltd. (E.C.P.L.): One of the very precarious health challenges that Nigeria has suffered is the manufacturing of fake drugs and other medical products that has led to the unfortunate deaths. However, the E.C.P.L. being a Company
that was established by the Pioneering Missionaries has carved a niche for itself as a pharmaceutical company that manufactures, procures, distributes, sells, pharmaceutical and food products to all ECWA units and other health institutions. The company analyses drug samples for ECWA Medical units and other health institutions make available community based pharmaceutical and food products to the general public as deemed feasible.

Ministries

One of the cardinal pillars of the Church is to minister to the needs of the world it finds itself. As noted in the introduction, God has always shown deep interest in the holistic needs and welfare of His creation. Thus, He ministers to them in diversities of ways by meeting those needs from one generation to the other. Jesus Christ in an unambiguous way introduced His ministry and tailored it from start to end on the pattern of ministry (Lk.4:18-19). The apostles nonetheless followed suit. The church afterwards has always been building on the pillars and foundation of ministry. It was on this that the SIM founded ECWA. Therefore, as a core ministry-based denomination, ECWA has established within her framework some very important ministries that seek to meet the peculiar spiritual needs of her members. The ECWA Constitution states that these ministries function, “To glorify God through Christian fellowship and activities, edification of one another, evangelism, teaching sound doctrines, charity and other objectives of ECWA.”

Thus, the ministries below are the ministries and their

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contributions to the edification of the entire members of ECWA articulated in the Constitution:

Discipleship Ministry: The Discipleship ministry exists for the training of the Church and its leadership at various levels in the principles of Discipleship, so they can continue to grow in their relationship to God and to reproduce so that the vision of Discipleship (Matt. 28:18-20) will pass from one generation to the other. They also produce Discipleship manual for the use of the Church.

ECWA Children Ministry: This ministry mobilizes parents and Churches to teach and build children with the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The ministry also provides sustainable teaching materials and visual aids for systematic Bible teachings to enable parents and Churches reach and build up the child in faith and way of the Lord. Recently the ministry is making effort to inculcate in the hearts of the children passion and giving for Missions and Evangelism. Thus, they have taken out some children out for mission outreaches in rural and urban areas away from their comfort zones. They are also engaged in raising support for the payment of the salaries of missionaries.

ECWA Students Ministry (E.S.M.): The E.S.M. promotes the work of the Great Commission in post primary schools particularly in ECWA Secondary Schools/ECWA Christian Academies, Campuses of Institutions of higher learning and environs, so that students and people can be saved and disciple unto maturity in Christ. It also provides a very good forum for fellowship and equipping the saints for the work of ministry. This ministry has vigorously engaged in raising support for missions, visiting missionaries in the interiors and engaging in evangelism and church planting.
Prayer and Church Renewal Ministry: This ministry functions to instill the prevalence of prayer among believers and Churches, by conducting prayer and church renewal seminars, teaching spiritual warfare, etc. It is also involved in praying for those who submit themselves or their relations to be prayed for at any given time and place as the need arises.

Fellowship Groups: ECWA as a denomination believes that people function and perform easily and maximally when they are grouped according to their gender. This contributes immensely in meeting their unique spiritual needs. Therefore, within ECWA, there are three basic fellowship groups which strictly gender in nature. They are the Men’s Fellowship, Women Fellowship and the Youth Fellowship. Like the ministries, the fellowship groups basically exist for and are engaged in activities that will promote fellowship, spiritual growth, mutual support, encouragement, spiritual direction, guidance, instruction, etc. The fellowship groups over the years have been a veritable means of supporting the work of missions, evangelism and church planting in ECWA. They are involved in supporting missionary families within and outside the shores of Nigeria. ECWA achieves most of her objectives through the fellowship groups because of their strong and widespread grassroots presence at all levels of the church. They also contribute, support and participate immensely in social and community initiative programs and projects in holistic ways that will not infringe on the goals and objectives, articles of faith and practice of ECWA.

This chapter has succeeded in presenting a synopsis background information about the conception, birth and nurture of a missionary organization (SIM) through the sacrificial and selfless effort of the three pioneering missionaries namely, Walter
Gowans, Thomas Kent and Rowland Bingham. Their various attempts to break into the land called the Sudan, the challenges they encountered both at home and in the Sudan and their successes were reflected upon. One of the greatest successes achieved by the missionary efforts of the three pioneers and the subsequent missionaries is the emergence of the church known today as the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA). Just like any other organization, ECWA has evolved from its inception in 1954 till date. Therefore, the processes of evolution, organizational structure of hierarchy and leadership, her goal and objectives and the various departments, units, ministries and companies were highlighted. Worthy of note is the fact that, these entities within ECWA were set up to minister to the needs of her members and the society they find themselves. Over the years, ECWA has enjoyed tremendous growth despite the various challenges she faces (Persecutions which always leads to the death of her pastors and members, destruction of church buildings and other properties belonging to the church and members, financial challenges, tribalism or divisive ethnicity, leadership tussles, etc.). Also, ECWA has been a force to reckon with in almost every sector of human development and endeavour in Nigeria and beyond. It is on this note that this research predicking the need for the church to consider addressing the peculiar need of the older adults within her context. Moving forward, ECWA should consider using the enormous capacity and the resources within her by establishing a formidable ministry that will facilitate the promotion of the holistic welfare of the older adults in the church.

Therefore, the above stated history of the great sacrifice of Rowland Bingham, Walter Gowans and Thomas Kent reminds the church of the kind of sacrifice Jesus Christ made to save it and to challenge the church towards making the needed sacrifice to
ensure that the needs of every segment of its membership are adequately made. The older adults are significant members of ECWA with enormous gifts and needs. The church should sacrificially find concrete ways of ministering to those needs to close the gap in the ministries it provides for its member.

More information about the rich historical legacy of SIM/ECWA can be found in the appendixes A-D at the end of the thesis.
CHAPTER THREE
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This chapter seeks to make an exploration of some theoretical frameworks that form the basis for the need for older adults’ ministry in the church. In doing so the chapter considers the Biblical, theological and sociological frameworks. Within this chapter some very important issues and principles were reflected on the three different frameworks identified about the older adults. However, since this is a thesis that is primarily focused on the church, the Bible and theological frameworks about the older adults were given more space than the sociological framework. That is not to negate the importance of the sociological framework. It is believed to have a lot of vital resources about the older adults as well.

**Biblical Framework**

The Bible is believed to be the final authority for life and practice of the individual believer and the church as a community (2Tim.3:16). It has within its framework all the subjects of life here on earth and eternity. Thus, engaging in ministry generally and particularly that of older adults, requires that its foundation be on nothing but the Bible. Ian Knox, a lawyer turned evangelist, reiterates this by saying that,

In considering the church and the older people, it is essential at this juncture to go to the source of the church’s thinking, the guidelines, as it were, which shape its views. I refer to the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, the Bible. This
collection of books and writings is the primary basis for the church’s actions, and it gives the benchmark for the church’s behavior.¹

The foundation upon which every area of life is built is very important. Failure to give close attention to the foundation leads to untold disaster. The Psalmist alludes to this fact by saying that, “When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps.11:3). Jesus also alludes to this same principle in His parable about the wise and foolish builders (Matt.7:24-27). When building on the foundation, some caution must be taken that the right materials are used to build (1Cor.3:10-15). Hence the Bible is divided into two (the New and the Old Testaments), the researcher brings out some selected metaphors across the two testaments about older adults. Reflections were made on how they were engaged in ministry as seen in the relationships that existed either between God and humanity or between humanity themselves. Christian educators Kenneth Gangel and James C. Wilhoit assert by saying that, “Essentially the Bible is an adult book written by adults, for adults and about adults, almost all of it however, falls within the context of the family or congregation in which the adults carry out the ministry.”² This however does not preclude the place of other groups of people (young people and children), but looking at the bible critically, one cannot but believe the fact that the focus of God in His divine ministry and mission with mankind centers with the adults, particularly older adults. The researcher believes it is due to their level of maturity and understanding of deeper things and that God counts on them to transmit such things to their children (Gen. 18:19; Deut.

¹ Ian Knox, Older People and the Church (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 129.

This can be deduced from the experience of Samuel as a young boy in the temple. He could not discern the voice of God. He needed the age, experience, knowledge and wisdom of the elderly Priest, Eli to properly guide him into distinguishing between divine and human voices. When he finally heeded to the older person’s counsel, it worked out so well for him (1Sam.3). However, on the other hand, King Rehoboam wisely sought the counsel of the older adults on how to go about responding to the requests of his people. Using their years and experience with his parents as kings, they gave him the proper and wise counsel. But he ignored and rejected theirs and heeded the counsel of young people like him. That singular action landed him into his waterloo and the unfortunate division of the united nation of Israel (1Kings 12).
These two stories set the grounds of underscoring the place of the older adults within the community of God’s people.

God as the Yardstick for Ministry
The whole intention of ministry is service and the assurance of meaning in the lives of people. To realize a very meaningful and successful ministry at all levels of the church, it is equally necessary to take a cue from God’s demonstration of the science and art of ministry towards His creatures. God as the Creator has been involved in different forms of ministry towards His creation right from the beginning. Genesis 1:2 presents a very chaotic, disillusioned, empty, hopeless, meaningless, gloomy and sad earth. The narrator describes it thus: “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” This situation raises the very need to bring back order to it. Since there was a need to be met and a problem to be solved, the Creator, who cares for His creation identifies the need and uses
His divine ability to minister to the need and to solve the problem at hand. Wiersbe says, “Scripture doesn't reveal why God chose to start His creative work with a chaotic mass that was dark, formless, and empty; but the Holy Spirit, brooding over the waters, would bring order out of chaos and beauty and fullness out of emptiness. He can still do that today with the lives of all who will yield to Him.”

This is the heart of ministry and the heartbeat of a minister. It is indeed to bring hope where there is hopelessness, light where there is darkness and gloom, encouragement where there is discouragement, joy where there is sadness, meaning where there is meaninglessness, fulfilment where there is emptiness and purpose where there is purposelessness. As noted in chapter one, some describe the life of the older adults as one that is full of chaos, confusion, emptiness and meaninglessness. However, they still remain God’s creatures; the Spirit of God indwells those of them that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He quickens and empowers them to be active participants in fulfilling God’s purpose in both their lives and those of others. Thus, they have the potentials of bringing forth out of the wealth of their deposits, beauty, order, wisdom, hope, joy, meaning and purpose, productivity to the community of God’s people and the world that is in chaos now. It is the same Spirit that is in other members of the community of faith. He is empowering them with gifts to minister to those that are considered to be weak, unproductive, confused and invaluable due to their circumstances.

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Joseph S. Exell, quoting G. D. Boardman, who graphically describes the activity of the Holy Spirit in ministering order and beauty in the chaotic state of humanity, says that,

Is there any hope here? Thank God, there is. That same breath of God which moved over the face of those ancient fluids is moving today over the soul of humanity. Ah, this is the blessed energy by the chaos of our moral nature is being organized into order and beauty. Observe: as, in shaping the material earth out of the old chaos, the Spirit of God added no new elements, but simply fashioned into order the old; so, in organizing the spiritual chaos, He adds no new faculties, but simply quickens and organizes the old.4

He continues to say that,

What man needs is not creation, but re-creation; not generation, but re-generation. And this which the Holy Ghost is achieving. Brooding, incubating as God’s Holy Dove over the chaos of humanity, He is quickening its latent forces, arranging its elements, assorting its capacities, organizing its functions, apportioning its gifts, perfecting its potentialities: in short, completing, fulfilling consummating man in the sphere of Jesus Christ.5

Subsequent verses beginning from verse 3 up to verse 25 give the detail description of how God creatively and purposely brought order to the hitherto chaotic earth. God brought about the existence of everything needed to make the earth beautiful, habitable, functional, productive and comfortable by verbal declaration. This is seen in God’s repeated and popular statement of satisfaction about what God created, “And God saw that it was good” (4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). God did this prior to the creation of humanity whom God blessed and gave dominion over all the other creatures (28). This is viewed as God’s show of concern over the general and specific wellbeing of humanity by ensuring that all they needed were made available even before their existence. God

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5 Ibid.
knows their needs which are primarily, good environment for their pleasure, rest and relaxation; good food for their nutrition and good health; companionship for the curbing of loneliness and for procreation; laws for their restrain and total trust in God (3-31; 2). Here God is seen actively setting the prototype for ministering to the needs of both humankind and other creatures. God was so intentional in making sure that they did not lack the basic and fundamental necessities of life. To this respect, Gordon J. Wenman adds by saying that,

Also evident in this account is the focus on those realms that have the most impact on human existence: as the days elapse, the description of God’s activity becomes fuller, because the things He made later in the week tend to be the most vital for man. The fullness of the description of the sixth day with the doubling of various formulae and especially the last comment, “God saw everything . . . it was good,” highlight the place of man in the divine program. The creation of mankind is the climax of creation.6

Therefore, the essence of ministry is the restoration of order and meaning in the life of humanity. The activities of God in bringing order in His creatures are both examples and a challenge for the church to utilize all that is within it towards bringing about order and meaning in the lives of its members, particularly the older adults who are also God’s precious children.

Aging and Older Adults in the Old Testament

The Bible says that, there is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die (Eccl.3:1). There is a time that someone was conceived in his mother’s womb. With the conception, the foetus matures up to the

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period of nine months. Then the child is given birth to and everybody rejoices. But as
time goes on the baby begins to go through the process of change up until when he or she
becomes an adult, a father or mother and even grandfather or grandmother. Within this
period of his or her life, they are engaged in meaningful activities that are supposed to be
of immense blessing and benefit to the kingdom of God and the community they find
themselves. God has earmarked for humanity time to live from birth to death right after
the fall (Gen.2:15-17; 3:19, 23). Of particular reference is the command for Adam and his
wife Eve not to eat from the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil and that
the day they disobey that command, they will die. When they finally disobeyed the
command, while pronouncing the judgment on Adam who is the head of the family, God
made a profound statement related to the destiny and end of mankind’s life. He says, “By
the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it
you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” To this end Ian Knox
succinctly says that,

As soon as the pages of the Bible are opened, it is apparent that growing old,
ageing and dying are the normal pattern of life. By the chapter of the Genesis,
after the first human beings have disobeyed God He tells them, “Dust you are, and
to dust you will return” (Gen.3:19); words which find echo in many funeral
service, “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

With this divine pronouncement, aging to humanity became inevitable human
experience. To ensure that man does not live forever, the bible says that,

And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good
and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree
of life and eat and live forever." So, the Lord God banished him from the Garden
of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the

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7 Knox, *Older People and the Church*, 129.
man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:23-24).

Chapter four of Genesis introduces us to the first procreation in humanity; the birth of Cain and Abel (4:1, 2) and the subsequent births of all other children. These series of births in humanity followed the process of aging. Others were born, they got married, gave birth to children, became older and finally died. Chapter five of Genesis interestingly presents to the keen reader the genealogy of Adam and their ages. Indicating the time, they were born, their growth, activities and then their subsequent death. Methuselah broke the unprecedented record of living the highest number of years, making him the oldest among all humankind (V.27). Worthy of note too is the description of Enoch who lived up to some good old age just like all the others. But his life got some spiritual significance when he lived up to the old age of 65 years until his death at the age of 365. This indicates the fact that, even at the twilight of one’s life, one can decide to set proper spiritual and godly goals, rewrite the wrongs or bad choices made early in life, and to live satisfying, meaningful, purposeful and fruitful life. Unfortunately, chapter six offers the sad narrative that indicates that, with the increase of humanity, wickedness increased. Thus, God had to cut short or set limit to humanity’s longevity to 120 because of their callous disregard for Him and their enormous wickedness (Gen.6:3). Afterwards, the longevity of humankind was reduced to the age between 70-80, but full of trouble and sorrow, they quickly pass and fly (Ps.90:10).

Having established the above facts, the author would delve into bringing out some examples and metaphors of older adults who were involved in ministry in the Old Testament.
The Metaphors of the Older Adult in Ministry

As earlier noted, the Bible has records of people that God engaged in ministry during their old ages. As far as God is concerned, being old is not a barrier to ministry. God can decide to raise whoever He considers fit to use at whatever age. Therefore, within this framework an attempt was made to select some few instances in the Old Testament where God is seen actively engaging older adults in some form of ministry.

Adam and Eve

The Bible does not give us the age of Adam at the time of his creation. But one thing is sure, God created Adam as a full-grown adult with all that they needed to fulfil God’s purpose of creating them (Gen.1:26-31). Therefore, after God had created Adam, He never left Adam to sit idly in the Garden of Eden. As one created in God’s image and likeness and enabled to bear God’s communicable attributes (love, goodness, justice, wisdom, mercy, peace, truthfulness, righteousness, faithfulness, grace, holiness, patience, knowledge, etc.), God got him engaged and involved in a proper and responsible partnership with God for the caring and ministering to the other creatures of God. God blessed Adam and gave him dominion over all God created (Gen 2:15). He is to be a blessing and to make it his occupation to improve the lot of the environment and it inhabitants. Frame adds by saying that,

Man blesses every place to which he comes, appreciating and enhancing the good. To an extent, that means, man’s making the world a fit habitation for himself. But that does not mean exploiting the earth in an exploitative way. But God has made the world for His glory, but the glory of God is also what is best for the world
itself. So, man seeks to humanize his environment, but not in a way that trashes the beauty and integrity of the creation.  

God was using the mundane things to teach Adam the science and art of caring for himself, others and how to be cared for later in life by those he would initially care for. This would be seen unfolding as humanity begins to increase and in the development of interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, God as a Minister who cares and as one who is also concerned with what concerns His creatures, sees through the heart and the face of Adam a deep sense of loneliness. This made his life so empty and unsatisfying like it was with the earth in Genesis 1:2. Therefore, God ventured into providing a therapy to that emotional need in Adam. Thus, the Bible says,

> The Lord God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him. But for Adam no suitable helper was found. So, the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man (Gen.2:19b, 21-22).

God saw the dire need in Adam’s life and took the initiative of finding solution to the need in a divinely creative way. However, Adam was left with the responsibility of accepting and appreciating the person God has graciously presented to Him as a companion for the journey of life and ministry towards the generations to come. Adam indeed used the appropriate and gratifying words needed by and toward the gift presented to him by God. He says, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man” (Gen.2:23). This leaves no doubt that

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Adam was absolutely satisfied with the entire personality of the partner God gave him. As a master name giver (Gen.2:19, 20), he wasted no time giving her the proper name she actually deserves, “woman.” What Adam says can lift the downcast, encouraging the discouraged, motivating the demotivated, inspiring the uninspired, boosting the low self-esteem person into high self-esteem. It is so interesting to note that this is the first human relationship that ever existed. It is also worthy of note that, the manner in which they related, treated and ministered to each other would form the bedrock of all other relationships and ministries among humanity. As free moral agents, they were given the liberty decide on how to relate in the best way they could to bring out the best out of each other. For Adam, God had already schooled him in the art and science of caregiving, interpersonal relationship, and leadership. Thus, it became very easy for him to engage into a loving, caring, compassionate, encouraging and inspiring conversation with his new-found partner.

Chapter 4 of Genesis presents the reader the consummation of this wonderful relationship with the first births in the first family; the births of Cain and Abel. The coming of these two kids brought indescribable joy and satisfaction in the first family (4:1). It also sets the ball rolling for the fulfilment of the blessing and cultural mandate to be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth (Gen.1:28). However, the sorrow of sudden loss of Abel into the cruel hand of Cain and their subsequent births form part of the catalysts for their getting older. As time went on the process of tear and wear began to catch up with them. Prior to the unfortunate death of Abel, the first two children to be born were engaged in the act of worship of their Creator. It is obvious that this did not emanate from their idea. They must have been taught by their parents who were older and who must
have been practicing it in their family. This subsequently becomes the pattern as God requires parents and all older adults to teach and train children or younger ones about God (Deut. 6:7; Prov.22:6). Genesis 5 presents the genealogy of Adam and the ages each member lived on earth with Methuselah emerging as the one that lived the longest among all humanity. But of more interest is the life lived by Enoch. He lived 65 and became the father of Methuselah. Afterwards, he walked with God, 300 years and died at the old age of 365. The fact that He walked with God shows that, at a point in His life as an older adult he found it necessary to commit his life to God and service to Him in whatever way necessary. Thus, perhaps Adam and Eve as older persons, being the first persons to have had the first contact and experience with God, as ones who knew God’s requirement of his people, also as ones who suffered the consequence of disobedience, must have taken time to teach their children generally about God, the value of obeying His command and the consequences of otherwise. Some have decided to disregard their instructions out of their choice, while others complied. But here Enoch distinguished Himself to have made a choice to walk with God, perhaps because of what He had heard his great grandparents passed through generations. Crowther makes a very striking statement to this effect about the effort Eve made in teaching her children. She said, “Eve is the dutiful and diligent housewife and mother, raising her children in the fear of God; she is a veritable paragon of Reformed womanhood. She has a set of model, obedient and respectful children, with a few bad apples thrown in.”

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9 Kathleen M. Crowther, Adam and Eve in the Protestant Reformation (New York: Cambridge University, 2010), 228.
Therefore, the researcher strongly believes that, all older adults ministry has its foundation from this first family. The story of their relationship with God, how they took care of God’s creation entrusted into their hands, their fall, how God treated them afterwards, the formation of their family, the lifestyle of their genealogy and all that followed bequeath us with great lessons on older adults. In other words, reflecting on the lives of the individuals that form the first family and how they related with one another gives us the picture of relationships between God and humanity and between humanity themselves. Crowther elucidates by saying that,

The account of the creation and fall of Adam and Eve occupies only a few pages in the Bible. Despite its brevity, for generations of Jews and Christians, this story has been crucial to defining human nature and to understanding relationships between human beings and God, between men and women, and between the sacred and the profane.\textsuperscript{10}

Noah

Noah was one of the few older adults that found favour before God after the fall because he has decided to follow and walk with God amid prevailing rejection of God and outright wickedness. Noah was the son of Lamech, the first recorded polygamist in human history (Gen.4:19). He was named Noah because, “He will comfort us in the labour and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed” (Gen 5:29-30). Perhaps the father saw in him someone that was going to make a positive difference in his family and generation compared to the other children of his. Besides, he must have seen in him a beacon of hope that will bring a turn of event in the history of mankind. Thus, the name was prophetic. Wenham buttresses this by saying that, “His

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 9.
name expresses the hope that Noah will counteract the curse placed on mankind for Adam’s sin. The description of his character in 6:8-9 leads the reader to hope with Lamech that his birth will bring in a new age for mankind.”

True to his name Noah indeed made the positive difference within the community he found himself. God was grieved and pained by the level of the wickedness and evil that preoccupied the heart and the inclination of the thought of man. Therefore, God threatened to wipe mankind from the face of the earth and all the other creatures (Gen. 4:5-8). However, as noted earlier, Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord. The basic reason was, “Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God” (Gen. 6:9). Even though Noah lived in the generation that had incredible lifespan, however Noah was considerably an advanced older adult, because he had his three sons after he was 500.

It is very obvious that God was frustrated with the people of Noah’s generation, particularly the older adults who were supposed to be models and patterns that the younger generation will follow in serving God. They chose an entirely different path, which is wickedness. But Noah who equally was within the category of the older adults put smile on the face of God by deciding to go God’s way. God will always have a witness for Himself no matter the rottenness and the corruption of a generation. God is interested in upholding His standards and raising a godly generation. Therefore, God chose Noah to relate with in fostering a ministry that will utilize his character, experience, wisdom, age, skill and sense of dedication to reach out first to his family and the larger society.

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11 Wenham, “Genesis,” 42.
Regardless of Noah’s age God found in him someone He could reveal His plans to. God believed in Noah’s impeccable integrity and maturity to understand, manage and properly communicate His message to humankind. Noah lived up to God’s expectation. He was consistent in keeping and obeying God’s command which was unfortunately flouted by the people of his generation. To this end, he became a model older adult not only to his immediate family but the future generations of God’s people. Therefore, Wenham summarizes Noah’s life thus,

Noah is portrayed as a model Israelite. He is “righteous,” the normal term for a moral person who keeps the law. More than that, he is “blameless,” that is above reproach (like Job in Job 12:4; cf. 1:1, 8), and he walked with God putting him on a par with Enoch (5:22). Throughout the story he does exactly what God tells him (6:22; 7:5, 9, 16). He is also in covenant with God (6:18; 9:9), distinguishes clean and unclean animals, keeps the Sabbath (at least he works on a weekly circle), and offers acceptable sacrifice (7:3; 8:10, 12, 20-21).12

God rewarded him and his family whom he had painstakingly taken his time to teach and direct in the ways of the Lord. God also spared their lives with the other selected animals in the ark Noah and his family obediently built (Gen. 6:13-22; 7-9:18).

However, the last part of Noah’s life as an older adult who needed to set an example for others, had a moral and spiritual decline. That act brought about some unfortunate results, the cursing of his youngest son and consequently his grandson for seeing his nakedness and not covering him, but telling his brothers, who fortunately covered his nakedness with a garment (Gen. 9:20-28). There are a lot of theological interpretations on this very unfortunate scene. However, the researcher chose to reflect on the initial act of drunkenness which led to the tragic end. His act of drunkenness rendered

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12 Ibid., 44.
him unable to have control over himself to the extent that he appeared naked. The Bible has a very serious criticism of drunkenness and its effects on people who are supposed to be role models to others particularly leaders (in this context, older adults are viewed as leaders). Wenham opines that, “Priests had to abstain before officiating, and Nazirites were teetotalers for the period of their vow, which indicates that drunkenness is incompatible with holiness” (Lev. 10:9; Num. 6:3-4; 1Sam. 1:14; Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; Isa. 5:11; Hab. 2:15; Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 5:18).\(^1\) We have in the scripture how the wine was used to lure people into drunkenness so as to unconsciously make wrong decisions or judgments due to its strong effect on the human mind. One clear example of such situation is the scheme of Lot’s daughters in making their old father drunk and both had sex with him to procreate (Gen. 19:31-32).

Another classic example is David’s scheme to cover his sin with Bathsheba by making Uriah to be drunk, thereby provoking a strong desire for him to unconsciously have sex with her. To his mind, once Uriah slept with his wife, the pregnancy that resulted because of his illicit sexual relationship with Bathsheba would be credited to Uriah. Unfortunately for David, Uriah refused to fall into his trap (2Sam. 11:12-13).

Within the context of the writer, there are a lot of older adults who have soiled and destroyed their dignity, respect and honour in the community due to the negative influence of drunkenness in their lives. This also have negative effects on the socio-economic life of their families. The Proverb writer concludes by saying that,

> Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise. Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it

\(^{13}\) Gordon, “Genesis: Introduction,” 45.
sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. "They hit me," you will say, "but I'm not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I wake up, so I can find another drink?" (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35).

Wiersbe lamentably states that,

Both his drunkenness and his nakedness were disgraceful, and the two often go together (Gen. 19:30-38; Hab. 2:15-16; Lam. 4:21). Alcohol isn't a stimulant, it's a narcotic; and when the brain is affected by alcohol, the person loses self-control. At least Noah was in his own tent when this happened and not out in public. But when you consider who he was (a preacher of righteousness) and what he had done (saved his household from death), his sin becomes even more repulsive.\(^1\)

The story of Noah bears a lot of lessons for older adults as they seek to be engaged in ministry in the church and the community at large. The older adults are to strive to distinguish themselves among all others. Their life of integrity will earn for them favour before God and showcased as people others can learn from. The older adults’ proven life of obedience to God will serve as a source of blessing not only for themselves as individuals but generations beyond them. They are endowed with skills, wisdom and other abilities that could be utilized to achieve God’s own purpose in their lives despite their age. Thus, they should be willing to release themselves, their skills, wisdom and other abilities they are endowed with to God to be used.

Their age is not a barrier for them to be used of God at any point in time and at any place. Therefore, they deserve to be treated with respect and honour by all. They may make mistakes or even fall into sin. That does not give anyone the right to disrespect

\(^{14}\) Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, s.v. Gen 19:30-38; Hab. 2:15-16; Lam 4:21.
or dishonour them. Honouring them brings about blessings and doing otherwise brings calamity to the society. The disrespectful treatment of Ham towards his erring father cost him and his lineage a great deal.

However, it is of utmost importance for the older adults be careful about what they do or how they behave before the younger ones. Their lives go along with either blessings or curses. They must live in such a way that will dispense blessing to others and not curse. They must live in a manner that their lifestyle will be worthy of emulation by others. If what they do will amount to a stumbling block to others, no matter the pleasure they derive from it, they should be willing to let it go (cf. 1Cor. 8:7-13).

Abraham

Another quintessential Old Testament figure who serves as an example of older adults that God used to fulfil His purpose is, Abraham. Abraham is the first patriarch of the Hebrew or Jewish race. Therefore, all other models of relationships and or ministry either between God and man or man and man prior to the formation of the nation of Israel began with Abraham. Abraham has been described as the friend of God and the father of faith. God found in Abraham a man who was willing and ready to let go all that was so dear to him in order to serve the purposes of the Almighty God. In fact, that is the basic requirement of God from anyone who desires to be in ministry. The story of Abraham is one that substantiates the fact that, God can choose whoever He wants to regardless of the circumstance they are in. Furthermore, the call, relationship and journey between God and Abraham debunk one of the myths or stereotypes about the older adults. It is that which describes them as intellectual and psychological spent forces. They are often times seen as people that have lost every sense of purpose, capacity, and direction in life. Also,
as folks who have nothing significant to offer. However, Psychologist and
psychotherapist Gustav Dreifuss and Israeli sculptor and artist Judith Riemer in their
book, “Abraham: The Man and the Symbol,” differ on their opinion on that. They
pictured Abraham as one who came into a relational limelight in his with God as an adult
who was very conscious and mentally active. They succinctly say,

Abraham, whose life, path to God, and path to himself are the subject of this
book, is known to us only as an adult. The Bible provides us with no information
about his early years. It simply presents his lineage in terms of his direct descent
from Shem, one of the sons of Noah (Gen.11:26-31). It is the adult Abraham who
hears the divine command, “Go forth from your native land” (Gen. 1:21). It is he
who is chosen to impart the belief in one God to the Pagan society in which he
lives and to beget a new nation on the soil of the Promised Land. The biblical
account gives us no information whatsoever about how Abraham was trained for
this immense. It is no simple matter to assume the burden and attendant
obligations of being chosen.\(^\text{15}\)

As far as God is concerned, there is no human being that is neither dispensable
nor indispensable. As the Omnipotent Creator of everyone, God knows their capacity and
what He can accomplish through them. Thus, their age or any supposed human
limitations cannot limit His utilization of them. It is very likely and obvious that based on
the stigma, and or stereotype attached to the older adults, no one could have given
Abraham the chance and opportunity to bear such enormous tasks that God confidently
and graciously bestowed on his old shoulders. Once Abraham heard the voice of God, he
clearly understood and distinguished it from the voices of the other so-called gods he was
used to, unlike the young at heart, Samuel as we saw earlier (Gen. 12:1-3). Having
clearly heard, understood and distinguished the voice, he got the message it conveys and

\(^{15}\) Gustav Dreifuss and Judith Riemer, *Abraham: The Man and the Symbol* (Wilmette: Chiron
the enormity of the demand upon him. Abram never got into asking questions of psychology, logic and science for God to proof the veracity and feasibility of what God was asking him to do and what He promised to do for him, in and through him. But with a deep sense of purpose, hope and urgency, he believed in the message Giver (God) and the message, he risked it out, forgetting his age limit, forgetting the losses, defying human pessimistic opinions, he took the needful and left in obedience to his God (Gen. 12:4).

One of the gifts of the older adults is the ability to listen and to get the message therein. They can do so because they possess the maturity and inherent propensity to process, digest and utilize the import of the message that is either transmitted spiritually, psychologically and experientially for the benefit of all. Little wonder, God intentionally chose an older adult in Abraham to be the channel of blessing to the whole world. God freely revealed His plans to Abraham without any inhibition. Besides, God made covenants and reviews such covenants to Abraham to confirm His commitment to keep them (Gen. 15; 17; 18; 19). As an older adult who has gone through a lot in life, it was not so difficult for him to know that the demand placed on him was a difficult and enormous one. But beyond himself, his personal comfort and convenience, he considered the greatness of the message Giver (God) and future generations yet unborn who transcend his immediate community to the entire universe.

One can comfortably say that beyond the gift of listening, the older adults as seen in the life Abraham have the ability to make calculated and accurate decisions for themselves and others, courageously make incredible sacrifice, exercise unshakable faith in the divine, dare to take risks and to demonstrate selfless love considering the urgency
of the matter and the joy that lies ahead. In view of these Abraham did not take light the
command of God for him to leave. Older adults as seen throughout the life of Abraham,
ever take things for granted. They are apt and always serious in handling any matter that
is before them because of their deep awareness of the fact that they are custodians of
destinies of generations. A mistake from them will affect generations.

Thus, the way and manner Abraham went about handling and treating matters that
appertain to his relationship with God and others can simply be understood by his
personality and conviction as summarized by Dreifuss, et al. They say,

Only a highly courageous individual can hear such a voice and heed its
commands without repressing it, without evading the responsibility it imposes. Only a great individual can cope with a demand unparalleled in history and alien
to his world. Only such an individual can convey to the world the message of
belief in one God—an individual endowed with such personal strength, and such
total conviction of truth that issues from the innermost depths of his being. In
other words, Abraham is an archetype, the collective symbol of the believer.\textsuperscript{16}

His personality and deep conviction were demonstrated in his obedience to God,
his willingness to let go of what is dear to him for others for the sake of peace and
harmony and to stand up for those he believed were marginalized and taken advantaged
of in the society. We has been seen as one who was willing to give up his right of the
choice for the best land for his nephew, Lot (Gen. 13), fighting to rescue his nephew Lot,
the men of Sodom and their properties, demonstrating generosity in giving one tenth to
the King of Salem (Gen. 14), advocating and interceding on behalf of the cities of Sodom
and Gomorrah doomed to be destroyed by the Lord because of their wickedness (Gen.
19) letting go of Hagar and Ishmael for the sake of his beloved wife Sarah and his son

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 2.
Isaac (Gen. 21), demonstrating hospitality to strangers (angels) (Gen. 18), his unprecedented willingness to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac (Gen. 22), his wise decision to ensure that a wife was not chosen for his son Isaac among the heathen maidens but among his kith and kin and finally his decision to marry another wife (Keturah), (Gen. 25) after the death of his beloved wife, Sarah. The aforementioned are some basic qualities expected to be seen exhibited by older adults who intend to be useful in the hands of the Almighty God to minister to the needs of members of the community of faith and the larger society they find themselves.

It is can be obviously noted that, even though the life of the older adults may constitute very serious challenges with the passage of time, they are able to weather the storms that life presents to them, pull themselves together and move on. They have the capacity to trust God, their keeper, sustainer and helper in ages past, to keep His unalloyed covenants with them and to bring to fulfilment all He promised regardless of their circumstances. This kind of faith in God that was demonstrated by Abraham resonates with the lyrics of one of the songs of Isaac Watts (1674-1748), which was written based on Psalm 90 in 1719. The song reads thus:

Our God, our Help in ages past,
Our Hope for years to come,
Our Shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal Home!

Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.
A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone,
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

Thy word commands our flesh to dust:
"Return ye sons of men!"
All nations rose from earth at first
And turn to earth again.

Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly forgotten as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

Like flowery fields the nations stand,
Pleased with the morning light;
The flowers beneath the mower's hand
Lie withering ere 'tis night.

Our God, our Help in ages past,
Our Hope for years to come,
Be Thou our Guard while troubles last
And our eternal Home!

Abraham is a direct example of an older adult whose faith is not daunted in the face of challenges. This is also one of the strengths of older adults. They can dissect the situation, get the lessons therein and pull through it. He believed that one loss in life can open another opportunity for many gains (This he demonstrated in the test for him to sacrifice Isaac. He was ready to lose Isaac, but God saved him, provided an alternative and blessed him with many other children). This is also evident in his matured decision to put the loss of Sarah behind him (even though he so much loved her) by initiating the process of getting a godly wife for his inexperienced young adult child, Isaac (Gen.24).

This decision brought about joy and comfort to Isaac on the death of his mother (Gen. 24:67). Abraham also took a wholesome and clear decision to marry for himself a wife and bear many other children through her and the other concubines he had (Gen. 25:1-4). Furthermore, he took the conscious and wise decision to leave everything he had to the covenant child, Isaac (Gen. 25:5). But characteristically of a God fearing and responsible older adults and in the spirit of equity, fairness, and justice, Abraham made sure that while he was alive, he gave gifts to the children and all his concubines and sent them away. It is probable that he did this to avoid unnecessary tussles over his property after his death, which is typical of polygamous families.

It is interesting to note that the above far reaching decisions were taking when he was well over one hundred years of age. As noted earlier, based on the stereotypes attached to old age, it could be assumed that, someone within that age limit might not be able to take any serious decision of such magnitude because, they might be confused. However, his ability to organize himself and successfully put his house in order is worthy of note. This guaranteed a very sweet end of life for him even though his life went through some unfortunate detours, twists, challenges, failures, sorrows and battles. The biblical narrator describes his life end this way, “Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people” (Gen. 25:7-8). This was in fulfilment of God’s promise to him in Genesis 15:15. What a way for an older adult to come to the end of their life! And the wise King Solomon says, “The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride” (Eccl. 7:8). Assohoto and Ngewa summarize Abraham’s end of life decisions by saying,
Abraham wisely settled the matter of his property while he was still living and sent the concubines’ sons away from Isaac to the land of the east (Gen. 25:6b). Therefore, when he died, an old man and full years (Gen. 25:8), his house was well set to avoid disputes. This is what a good father should do. By giving Isaac all that he owned to Isaac, he was not expressing favouritism but doing the Lord’s will. The Lord had specified that Isaac was to inherit Abraham’s estate (Gen. 17:19b; 21:13b).  \(^{18}\)

Therefore, the life of Abraham like the life of every other human being comes along with strengths and weaknesses. He had his failures and displays of some human limitations. Thus, his life can generally be said to be characterized by, ups and downs, fears and failures, faith and courage, sacrifices and selflessness, battles and peace. But God graciously honoured the end of his life, which shows that, he died a happy and fulfilled man. This was made possible because, he was not abandoned or left to suffer alone. All the people that matter to him were there for him and gave him the needed support. He left behind great nuggets of lessons for all categories of people, but most especially the older adults to learn on how to fulfil and actualize the purpose for which God allows them to live up to the age that can be categorized as “old age.”

The end of his life can be a great encouragement for caregivers, particularly those working at hospice to know that they are doing a noble job (Gen. 25:7-11). Without their services, many older adults would die miserably. As one who serves as a Hospice Chaplain Intern in a Presbyterian Homes and Services here in the Twin Cities (Minnesota), one appreciates the joy that is exuded by the older adults because of the sacrificial and selfless services rendered by the Hospice Care Team and other staff of the

company. Sometimes if not most of the times, they are the only ones that accompany the patients or residents to their final moments here on earth. They stand by and with them, offering them the compassionate presence that their families might not be there to give them. It is possible for older adults who have gone through a lot in life to die joyfully and peacefully at a good old age when they have around them people who demonstrate genuine care and love to them. This can be confirmed by what the researcher sees at the various Presbyterian Homes campuses across the Twin Cities, Minnesota. It is heart-warming also to note that, the older adults recognize and appreciate the services rendered to them. Even though some of them may not be able to verbalize it, they know the caregivers that genuinely serve them. They show this by the smiles on their faces and the sense of relieve or relaxation as soon as they sight such caregivers coming. They hold the hands of the caregivers firmly and will not want to let go of them and they keep mumbling, “Please come again.” One cannot count the number of times a particular fellow among them that will point to either his wife or children with a very powerful smile on his face saying, “He is a nice and great boy, please come again!” Working with those older adults affords the caregivers the inestimable opportunity to be blessed by people that they have no biological relationship with. The researcher cannot ever forget the inestimable laying of hands, voiced and none voiced words of blessings those older adults always bestow on him every time he goes there to either offer compassionate presence, companionship, preach or casual visits just to make them smile and laugh. Such moments are so encouraging and motivating.
Naomi and Ruth

As earlier noted, ministry is service to others. It is using one’s divinely endowed giftedness to meet the needs of others. This research as already indicated seeks to challenge members of the community of faith to use all that God has endowed them with to serve or minister to others within the space created by God and the community. Furthermore, the emphasis is also to help the church to know that every member has something to offer in the effort to see that the community is ministered to. Therefore, the story of these two biblical women presents to us the perfect example of intergenerational, multicultural and mutual ministry between the older and the younger generations.

There is this fact of life about the older adults that can never be overemphasized. The fact is that, their life comes along with a lot of challenges and crises that must be faced, managed and navigated either for success or failure. Some of these challenges are life threatening, yet they must be faced. Such was the case with the family of Elimelech and Naomi. Their story began with famine, transition to a new nation in search of greener pasture, suffering, death, loss, sorrow, pains, hopelessness and tough decision making in view of a seeming precarious future. Kandy Queen-Sutherland succinctly paints the life of this family in this manner,

Attempting to elude famine, a family of four from Bethlehem in Judah travels to east to the neighbouring country of Moab, aiming for life in a new land. The father dies, however, and some ten years and two weddings later, the sons die too. A theme of emptiness that operates at the national level by reference to a famine takes on personal dimensions in the exclamation of Naomi, the mother who turns back to where the journey began, home. A woman who left full with a husband
and two sons returns back a decade later empty with a foreign, widowed daughter-in-law (1:21).\textsuperscript{19}

As devastating and hopeless as this story sounds, embedded within it are salient rays of hope and light. Having insisted that her daughters-in-law should go back to their mothers’ household, hence she would not be able to give birth to other children to give them husbands, Orpah turned and left, but Ruth cleaved to her. Herein is a very significant paradigm for ministry. It is the convergence of individuals who have found themselves in a vicious circle of misfortunes and in desperate need for the ministry of care, love, comfort, compassion and hope. Fortunately for them, they were the very right people to offer such to themselves using their individual experience and giftedness.

Therefore, within the framework of this very heart moving and emotion laden story, some very important lessons from the response of Naomi and Ruth toward their circumstances and themselves have been identified thus:

Ability to be real with God in the storms of life: The story clearly shows that the circumstances that befell Naomi were some of the worst anyone can go through in life. This can be likened with Job’s experience. Carolyn Custis James further explains by saying that,

This was the worst possible scenario for a widow. The light had gone out in the Elimelech household—extinguished on Naomi’s watch. The deaths of Mahlon and Killion bereaved Naomi of her beloved children, wiped out her life’s work as

\textsuperscript{19} Kandy Queen-Sutherland, \textit{Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary: Ruth and Esther} (Macon: Smyth & Helwys Publishing Inc., 2016), 43.
a woman, and brought the curtain down with merciless thud on the future. When they buried Naomi’s sons, they were essentially burying Naomi too.\textsuperscript{20}

Therefore, one of the great lessons one can learn from Naomi is her ability never to pretend either before God or human beings that what she was going through was part of life or she must accept it with thanksgiving and never express how she really felt. That was not how she treated the situation. She was honest enough to express how hurt she was and how the situation negatively twisted her life and world. She faced it and named it as it was without any shred of pretence. This is obviously seen in her response to the welcoming statements of the women of Bethlehem (1:19b-22). To this effect, Frederic comments saying that,

\begin{quote}
Admittedly, in both responses she openly voices her complaint in blunt and bitter terms that it is Yahweh Himself who is the cause of the death and emptiness that have afflicted her life (1:13, 20-21). But, our narrator uses Naomi’s honest and forthright lament and complaint not to portray her character in negative hues but rather to depict the affective dimension of the desolation and emptiness of a woman “left alone without her two boys and without her husband” (1:5) in a world where life depends upon men.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

She is an example of an older adult whose life goes through diverse tests; she never bottled her feelings within her, which eventually could have some devastating effects on her emotional, spiritual and physical life. In the midst of her pains she found a channel of expressing her old beaten voice to God whom she believed was listening and understanding all she had to say. The lesson therein is relevant not only for Naomi or


older adults and those who minister to them, but to all Bible believing people. James says that,

Her story and Job’s are in our Bibles, so we will learn to be honest as they were about how badly we are hurting, to go ahead and ask the questions that are smouldering inside. Naomi’s story invites us to admit we’ve been flattened too, that we don’t understand what’s happening to us, and that even after walking with God for years, we still struggle to trust Him. By spotlighting Naomi’s ordeal, the narrator gives us permission to voice the thoughts and questions we are fighting desperately to suppress. And in some mysterious ways we meet God in our desperation.  

One of the very critical things that characterize the life of the older adults is their history and stories of some very horrible things that had happened to them in life. Some of them have been harbouring such experiences very close to their hearts. They feel talking about such things will further hurt them and others or make them be seen as failing, faithless and weak Christians. They keep pretending that all is well and showing a superficial bold faith, whereas right within them they know that all is not well. Contrary to that shallow argument, Frederic opines that,

Naomi here does not evidence little faith; rather, with freedom of a faith that ascribes full sovereignty to God, she takes God so seriously that, with Job and Jeremiah (and even Abraham, Gen. 15:2), she resolutely and openly voices her complaint. With this robust honesty and forthrightness of the OT’s “theology of complaints,” our author depicts in sombre and expressive hues the desolation, despair, and emptiness of the life of a woman “left alone without her two boys and husband” (v. 5) in a world where life depends on men.

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22 James, The Gospel of Ruth, 44.

Unfortunately to further add salt to the already precarious situation, some churches preach and promote such pretentious and dishonest façade. James puts up an indictment against Christians who show such attitude of gross pretence. She says,

Christians are great pretenders. We tell ourselves it’s not supposed to be this way for Christians, and so we resort to cover-up. For the sake of the gospel, we don’t want to let on (especially in front of the watching world) that things aren’t working well. We try to smooth things over for God, send in our best damage-control team to deal with these embarrassing questions and polish up God’s reputation. We feel it’s our Christian duty to look our best. We can’t afford to show our flaws. Let’s show the world (and each other) the airbrushed version of ourselves as proof that Christian life really works.\footnote{James, \textit{The Gospel of Ruth}, 44.}

It is therefore very important for all (older adults, young people, the church, those involved in older adults’ ministry, etc.) to take a cue from this Old Testament honest older adult, Naomi by always being honest with ourselves, God and others about our situation. People must be helped to find means of expressing their hurt and laments instead of suppressing them because of the fear of being labelled and shamed. Even the Bible itself encourages this very important fact. Frederic Bush quoting Campbell says that, “In the OT, not only is complaint tolerated by God, but it can be the proper stance of a person who takes God seriously! Anyone who ascribes sovereignty to a just and merciful God may expect to encounter the problem of theodicy, and to wrestle with that problem is no sin even when it leads to an attempt to put God on trial.”\footnote{Bush, \textit{Word Biblical Commentary}, 95.} As they wrestle with God on the reality of their situation, they might find God showing up like He did in Naomi’s and Job’s life. James adds that, “Their stories coax us to get down to the
business of wrestling with God instead of chasing rainbows and to employ the same kind of brutal honesty they did, if we dare.”

Decision-making: Here comes another example of an older adult who found herself in a situation that required her to audaciously make a decision that was meant to change the story of the entire humanity. Life always gives us reason to decide either for good or for bad, in good or in bad times. Most often than not, tough decisions making process is left in the hands of the older adults. It is believed that, the decisions they make are not always from emotions but from their deep insights, thoughtfulness, experience and wisdom acquired over the years. Therefore, in such a hopeless and precarious situation this family had found itself, a life changing decision had to be made to move forward. Incidentally, here in the book of Ruth we see both the older adult and younger adult combining their God given thinking faculties in making far reaching lifelong decisions that eventually changed the destiny of the entire humanity.

A critical study of the book from the first chapter to the end gives the reader a clear metaphors of collaboration, mutual understanding and harmony, respect, loyalty, love, concern for the welfare of one another, commitment, devotion, obedience, counseling, honesty and sincerity, risk taking, sacrifice and a combined demonstration of faith in God, resilience and hard work in solidarity to a common cause; a search for meaning and purpose out of a shattered and battered life. Their mutual decision to go back to Bethlehem, to cling one to another, continue in conversation, listening, finding ways to be of help, and to be solution providers one to another not only brought relief,

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26 James, The Gospel of Ruth, 37.
healing, comfort, succour, provision, but a far much lasting restoration and replenishment of all they had earlier lost in life (Ruth 1:7-19a; 2; 3:1-18; 4:1-22; ). Their mutual decision eventually paved the way for the coming of the future Saviour of the World, Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5-16).

Intergenerational and mutual support: It is very important to note that this impressive story combines the mutual efforts of both the old and the young. They understood that none of them could bear the burden that life had thrown on them alone. This is seen as Naomi would lamentably say, “Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.” (Ruth 1:20-21). The coming together and the active participation of each member of this beautiful intergenerational team comprising of Naomi (Older adult), Ruth (Younger adult) and much later Boaz (Older adult).

Imagine a scenario where one of them refused to bring their giftedness, strengths, experiences, wisdom and stories. The story would not have been as epic as it is today. They all took a decision to come together, bring their giftedness and actively participate, thereby making the life of each one of them comfortable and fulfilled. It is of importance to acknowledge that, above all else God was at the center and behind the scene orchestrating every step of the moves taken toward a successful and happy ending. Bush succinctly underscores the important role everyone played which paints out the beauty and the necessity of ministering one to another in fulfilment of God’s plan, purpose and will. He notes that,

Indeed the loving commitment and obedience of Ruth the Moabitess to her mother-in-law, which transcended the claims of national origin and national
religion (2:6); the sagacity of Boaz and his faithfulness to his family responsibilities to both Ruth and Naomi, which transcended the claim of self-interest; the concern and care of Naomi for the welfare of her daughter-in-law, which prompted the risky scheme on the threshing floor; and Yahweh’s gracious provision of fruitfulness for field and womb—all have afforded home and husband for Ruth, the restoration of life and fullness for Naomi and, now we learn, inestimable benefit for all Israel.27

He adds,

For the son that has resulted from such faithfulness on the part of man and God was to be the grandfather of the great King David and as—the genealogy at the beginning of Matthew (1:5-6) notes—the distant ancestor of great David’s greater Son. In this way the original point of the narrative is extending in showing God’s providence and care in the life of one family. It now concerns the life of the entire nation, for in the son born to Naomi the history of God’s rule through David has begun. By concluding with this “coda,” the book is brought into relationship with the Bible’s main theme of redemption history.28

Therefore, above mentioned stories try to draw home some very important lessons that are aimed at helping players in the older adults’ ministry to know that God is so interested in such a very important ministry in the community of His people. The old Testament sets the basis for such ministry. We have seen from the stories of Adam, Abraham and the two women (Ruth and Naomi) a prototype of the very important issues that need to be considered in carrying out older adults’ ministry within the community of faith. The ultimate lesson for the ministry is the show of selfless, sacrificial and unconditional love and care for one another regardless of age, race and creed. God desires that the community of faith will embody the Trinity for mutual support, upholding the dignity of the human person in everyone. It is also expected that such community bring


28 Ibid.
into fulfilment His plan, purpose and will in the lives of His people regardless of their status.

**Older Adults in the New Testament**

The Bible is a coherent and consistent divine document. It has been seen as, New Testament concealed in the Old Testament and Old Testament revealed in the New Testament. Thus, it will not be very uncommon to see similar themes and subjects consistently running from the Old Testament and terminating in the New Testament. Just as there were examples of older adults who were engaged in ministry and how they were also ministered to in the Old Testament, the New Testament is not dearth of such examples. J. Gordon Harris elucidates this fact by saying that,

> Early Christian and Jewish literatures record how Israel’s theology of aging impacted each community. Though each claims to have accepted Israel’s Scripture as its own, each faith community also deals with aging issues in its own way. Nowhere do ideological similarities and differences appear clearer than in the particular approaches to community attitudes toward the older generation.\(^{29}\)

Therefore, this subsection like the others selected few examples from the NT and drew out lessons for ministry with the older adults in the church.

**Older Adults in the Gospels**

At the time of Jesus, there was some tension between the teachings of Jesus and the social structure. The elders at that time were seen as self-serving and exploitative basing their behaviours on popular traditions and practices. Jesus’ teachings were

radically opposed to such behaviours of the so-called elders of the society. However, Harris says, “Though the synoptic Gospels reject parts of the traditions of the elders, Luke demonstrates that the Gospels do not reject elders themselves or old age in general.”

It is of great interest to note that the Gospels give very concise examples of some elders that were involved in ministry and divinely engaged in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ right from his birth till His ascension to heaven. Harris says that, “Birth Narrative of Luke records events centering on faithful elderly persons who anticipate and joyfully welcome the infant Messiah. Elizabeth and Zechariah, the aging parents of John the Baptist were case in point” (Luke 1:18-25).

He adds that, Luke also tells of Simeon a God fearing person facing death (Luke 2:36-35). He recognizes that the child Jesus is the promised one who will bring about the “salvation of people in Israel.” Likewise, Anna, a prophet and widow of at least eighty-four years of age, thanks God for the child (Luke 2:36-38). Her old age does not keep her from becoming an early witness of the Messiah. These positive images of older people show that the synoptic Gospels do not demean old age when they reject the doctrines of ancient traditions.

The lives of the aforesaid, though old and advanced in age goes a long way to debunk the negative disengagement myth and stereotypes attached to the older adults. It is necessary to state that, their life of service in the house of the Lord has great lessons to be gleaned and learned. These lessons so gleaned will provide some values that will help in building a very strong older adults ministry within the church.

30 Ibid., 79.
31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., 80-81.
Zechariah and Elizabeth

A reflective look into the life of Zechariah and Elizabeth will bring out obvious lessons that should characterize the life of every older adult who intentionally desires to be engaged in ministry. This couple were described as: righteous before the Lord (Lk. 1:5), blameless obedient to the commands/word of God (Lk. 1:6, 15b), patient and persevering in the face of trial. Though they were childless, they trusted God and stuck to each other even up to old age (Lk. 1:7). Furthermore, Gospel narrator presents them as being dedicated to duty and service to God and to the people of God (Lk. 1:8-10, 23), emotionally realistic as human beings (Lk. 1:11-13a), prayerful (Lk. 1:13b), realistic with the circumstances and state they found themselves without pretence (Lk. 1:18). Finally, they were willing to accept the consequence of their actions or choices without complaining (Lk. 1:20, 22-23) and acknowledging God’s marvellous deeds in their lives with deep appreciation (Lk. 24).

Therefore, the above listed virtues are very critical and pertinent to the life of every older adult that desires to intentionally participate in the life of the church. They need such qualities to contribute meaningfully and positively in ministering to impact the lives of others positively. Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth modelled a life of integrity both before God and their fellow human beings. Looking critically into the text, one could see that, the concern and reaction of the people while waiting for his return from the temple, indicates that they had high respect and regard for him (Lk. 1:21-22). This could be possible due to the kind of life they (Zechariah and Elizabeth) lived among their people. To attract the needed respect and honour before others, the older adults must endeavour to watch their lifestyle closely. There is a Hausa proverb in Nigeria that says,
“Mutunci madara ne, idan ya zuba a kasa, zai zama da wuya a kwashe shi.” When translated it means, “Integrity is like milk, if it is spilled to the ground, it will be difficult to take it back.” In other words, whatever it will take the older adults who are expected to be models, worthy of emulation by the younger generation in the church or even in the larger society, they must diligently guard their integrity. It is both for their good name and the benefit of the future generations.

Therefore, the life of Zechariah and Elizabeth stands out to be a shining light to all older adults who are members of the body of Christ who desire to be involved in ministry in the church. Though their life was challenging, yet they focused on God and He faithfully answered their prayer and granted them the desire of their heart, the gift of John the Baptist. Faithful ministry to the Lord and His people does not in any way immune participants from the challenges of life. However, it enables them to remain focused and stable as they consistently serve, trusting the Lord whom they serve to perfect His will in their lives.

Simeon and Anna

Luke’s narrative of these two older adults is so enriching and heart-warming. Luke presents them not as unproductive, unfruitful and below value people who are just occupying space waiting for their inevitable exit from the stage of life. However, he was very meticulous and specific in telling his readers in unambiguous terms of who they were and their functions in the spiritual life of the Israelites and that of the baby Jesus. Thus, like the other older adults earlier discussed, their lives were individually analysed to pull out some valuable lessons for ministry.
Simeon

His name was mentioned in the narrative but unlike Anna, little was said about his age or office in the temple, but that did not obstruct him from participating in the life of the temple. Regarding his age as an old man, John T Carrol states that, “Simeon is usually regarded as an old man because of the Spirit’s promise that he would not die before seeing the Lord’s Messiah, the words of dismissal with which his prayer opens (v.27), as well as his pairing with the old woman Anna.” Furthermore, William Hendriksen keenly observes that, “Little is known about Simeon. The passage does not state that he was conferred with any particular office; for example, that of a priest. He was apparently what we today would call a ‘layman.’” Hendriksen emphasizes the importance of the all-inclusive participation of members in the affairs of the church. He further says, “The church needs laymen as well as clergy. Not only Moses and Joshua occupy important place in the affairs of God’s kingdom but so do Eldad and Medad (Num. 11:26-29).” This truth is a clarion call for all regardless of their placement or categorization in the church to pull up their sleeves and get into the onerous task of the Master, ministering to others in their unique ways. Simeon, being an older layperson like the older adults Eldad and Medad who though not prophets, prophesied as empowered by the Spirit of God, is a trail blazer who set an example for others to follow in active participation in the various areas that God is calling them to serve. Luke paints some very

35 Ibid.
salient attributes of Simeon that are also needed in the life of older adults for impactful ministry.

He was described as righteous and devout (Lk. 2:25a; cf. Acts 2:5; 8:2; 22:12). As for being righteous and devout, Hendriksen sees Simeon and all others described in this manner as people, “With utmost circumspection such men take hold of the duties God has assigned to them. They are conscientious in their planning, aiming always to advance their own and their neighbours’ welfare, to the glory of God.” 36 He adds, “The combination, ‘righteous and devout’ may well indicate that Simeon conducted himself in such a manner that his behavior both with respect to men (he was righteous) and God (he was devout) was the object of God’s approval.” 37 For an impactful ministry in the lives of others, God is searching for people who are so intentional in committing themselves to living lives that are worthy of their calling before God and men. Such ones are undoubtedly conscious of God’s opinion of them and their need to be blameless and well thought of by men to whom they are called to minister directly or indirectly. These qualities are desirable in the lives of godly older adults as can be seen throughout the Scriptures. The researcher in his journey of life observes such in the lives of those he has had the rare opportunity to know and closely relate with. Older adults who intentionally live righteous and devout lives like Simeon have had great impact in his life and ministry.

He was a person that was waiting for the consolation of Israel (Lk. 2:25b). Luke at this point presents to His readers an older adult who is not despondent about the promises of God to His people and life generally. Life at that time was full of terrifying

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
challenges. Hendriksen affirms saying, “To be sure, conditions were bad, very bad, in Israel at the time of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. Think of loss of political independence, cruel Herod, externalization of religion, legalistic scribes and Pharisees and their many followers, worldly minded Sadducees, the silence of the voice of prophecy, etc.” Yet as old as he was, he held firmly to the promises of God, he did not allow himself to be daunted and impatient. Hendriksen adds, “But in the midst of all of this darkness, degradation, and despair there were men who were hopefully looking forward to, and earnestly expecting, ‘the consolation of Israel.’ There were such men . . . and women too!”

The Nigerian prolific writer, Chinua Achebe says, “Things fall apart because center can no longer hold.” In this light, when life is no longer at ease in Zion, when life is based on the survival of the fittest, it behooves upon the remnant godly older adults (center of life) in the church and the society to emerge, rise to their feet and beam out hope to their despairing people. Carroll says that Simeon, “Gives voice to Israel’s hopes and to the divine promises upon which they rest. The hopes of a people find embodiment in this man whom God now draws to the temple to worship.” To this effect, the older adults are supposed and expected to be the voices of comfort, hope and restoration at every point in time and in every place they find themselves.

38 Ibid., 165.

39 Ibid.


Simeon was an older adult filled and inspired by the Holy Spirit (Lk. 2:25c-27). It is obvious from this narrative that Simeon was a man that was living under the absolute influence and leadership of the Holy Spirit of God. Luke states that, “The Holy Spirit was upon him.” Luke further says that, “It has been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Christ,” and finally, “Moved by the Holy Spirit, he went into the temple courts.” These statements show his relationship with the Holy Spirit. He was sensitive, discerning, responsive and obedient to the leading, guidance and promptings of the Holy Spirit. Little wonder he was able to identify the One he was expecting and hopeful to see since the Holy Spirit had hitherto revealed to him. The Holy Spirit does not operate in a vacuum. He operates in the hearts of those that surrender their life and will to Him to work and perfect God’s plan in their lives. This means that, whoever desires to participate in the older adults or any other form of ministry in the church must be willing to be influenced, directed, guided and led by the Holy Spirit of God. Ministry to others cannot be done with human strength (cf. Zech. 4:6). Human beings are naturally selfish, self-seeking and self-promoting, they think of no one but themselves. However, doing ministry requires divine transformation from such negative human tendencies (Rom. 12:1-2). It is only the work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of humans that can bring about the transformation from selfishness to selflessness, from self-seeking to self-giving and from self-promoting to promoting others and their welfare. He reveals to those who submit to Him, the need in others and how to adequately meet those needs. He also empowers God’s people for effective and impactful ministry for God and in the lives of others (Acts 1:8). Through the power of the Holy Spirit Simeon was able to discover and fulfil His purpose in life. So also, when
older adults allow the Holy Spirit to influence their lives, they can discover God’s calling in their lives, maximally function and fulfil God’s purpose in their lives and in the lives of others. At the end of their lives, they will be able to say like Simeon, “Sovereign Lord as you have promised, you can dismiss your servant in peace” (Lk. 2:29).

He was full of praises to God and prayerful (Lk. 2:28-33). At this point, Simeon responded to all that God has done for and enabled him to experience in his journey in life. He first and foremost resorted into praising God. Praising God according to Davis is, “A prominent part of man’s many-sided response and approach to God through worship. God is essentially the object of man’s praise (Deut. 10:21), and thereby the superiority and uniqueness of God in His divine person and activity are set forth.”42 And in the spirit of praise, Hendriksen says, “Simeon is thoroughly conscious of his surroundings. His soul is, however, flooded with thoughts of thanksgiving and praise.”43 Therefore, the contents or the reasons of Simeon’s praise to God were God’s fulfilment of His promises (indicating God’s faithfulness) and his ability to see God’s salvation (Jesus, the Messiah, a light to the Gentiles and the glory of the people of Israel) which was prepared in the sight of all nations. These were no mean reasons to praise God. It was an honour that God had spared his life as promised to see and embrace in his feeble arms the Messiah of the world. He was indeed a fulfilled older adult. Truly, the life of the average older has a lot that are capable of making them to complain, grumble and be bitter. But it is also true that there are much more to praise God for in their lives. They need to pause and reflect


on how far God has brought them through life, what He has done for them, and what He has enabled them to accomplish in their lives. They may not have had it all going for them. However, they should be pacesetters for others in praising God, just as the song writer says by counting their blessings and naming them one by one. Surely, it will surprise them and others of what the Lord has done. Because of the content of his praise to the sovereign God, the father and mother of baby Jesus were marveled. Whenever godly older adults praise God by sharing the stories of their experiences of the demonstration of His faithfulness in their lives, they leave their hearers marveling and wondering about who their God is.

He was full of blessings and prophecy (Lk. 2:34-35). Among the many values of the older adults in every society are their ability to utter blessings to the younger ones and to declare what they are convinced will occur in the lives of those they are blessing. This is a very strong belief held by African and Jewish communities. Thus, it was not surprising that the older adults are always looked upon to bless the younger ones because it is believed that in their tongue lies the power to bless or to curse. This is seen in the blessings of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to their children. When it was time for baby Jesus to be consecrated (Lk. 2-22-24), God through His Spirit moved Simeon as a godly older adult to come at exactly the right time to do what was customary of people like Him to do. With God there is no coincidence. He works out His purpose at the right time, right place and with the right people. Simeon being a godly older adult fits the kind of person needed for the ministration. He blessed Joseph and Mary (as younger ones to him) for being favoured to be the human parents of this amazing child. He interestingly prophesied about the destiny of this child; He would cause the rise and fall of people in
Israel, He will be spoken against, and He will reveal the thoughts of many hearts. Simeon also prophesied about the sorrow Mary will go through because of the kind of death her child would be subjected to.

Given the prominent role Simeon played as an older adult in the fulfilment of God’s purpose in the life of this young family, Michael Card sees him as one connecting the old world and the new world. He says, “Simeon represents an important line in the world of faith. Before Simeon, faith meant waiting. After him, faith will mean following. At this moment, the old world is meeting and embracing the new.”

It is heart-warming to note that, most of the times God wants to bring together the old and new into seamless ministry; He looks for a committed and available older adult. The researcher believes that there is no better time that the older adults are needed to be fully engaged, integrated and involved into ministry than now when there seems to be discouragement in ministry all over the world. Using their experience and journey with the Lord, they would encourage and steer hope in the hearts of God’s people in their moments of despondency.

Anna

Luke was very generous and sensitive to give sufficient space for the detail of the life and experience of this older widow. Even though Luke never recorded her words like he did with Simeon, he nonetheless outlines her value and worth in the life of the temple and her contribution relating to the baby Jesus. Luke’s reflection about the life of Anna in his gospel is a clear indication of God’s interest in not only using males for the ministry but also females too. She is a shining model and a challenge for female older adults to

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rise to the occasion and be counted as God’s hands and feet for ministry. Though a widow from her younger age, she did not allow her circumstance to becloud her deep sense of God’s calling for her life. One can see from Luke’s description of her situation, losing her beloved husband after just seven years of marriage (Lk. 2:36) was terrible. It is capable enough to have sent her into the life of obscurity, bitterness, self-pity, blame game, redundancy, dependence and begging. This is commonly seen in the lives of the vulnerable and the weak of our society. However, she was able to free herself from any form of inhibition and carved for herself a niche in the scheme of things in the house of the Lord. Like Simeon, she discovered God’s purpose for her life and she activated it into practical ministry in the temple for the glory of God and the benefit of humanity. She never hid herself; she never allowed the discrimination of her time against females or the so-called myth of ageism to debar her from functioning and actively participating in the mission of God in her time. Therefore, Luke’s description of Anna in the text is so enriching and with relevant nuggets for life and ministry. The following are her credentials and way of life.

Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher, was a prophet: Luke gives an unambiguous background of who Anna was. She came from a family that belongs to one of the tribes of Israel. But beyond that, she had a prophetic calling or vocation. God called her into the ministry of prophecy at the time the voice of God was scarce. She could be seen as one of the lonely or few voices that were speaking for God at that time. As a prophet, she was speaking the words she received from God to the people of Israel who as noted earlier, were obviously discouraged and disillusioned with life because of the Roman domination and their spiritual derailment from the path of God (Deut. 18:18).
In such a very precarious time, God raised an older female adult, Anna to be His voice. Participating in ministry requires that one should be in constant communication with God; receiving revelation from Him and declaring it to God’s people as received. This was the vocation of Anna. This is a very important challenge to older adults. They should not fold their hands and say that, there is nothing for them to do or resort into saying that, they cannot do anything in the church because their time is up. There are a lot for them to do. They need to reflect on God’s gifts and other endowments upon their lives and channel those for the benefit of others in the community of faith.

She was a very devoted old widow: Her age has been a point of controversy among some scholars. Some considered her to be 84 years, while others thought of her as being 105. Whatever, the case might be, Luke being inspired by the Holy Spirit, describes her as, very old. Despite the vivid description of her age and marriage status, her different engagements and preoccupation in the temple (consistent worship, fasting and praying) point to the fact that, she was not just an idle and ordinary spectator in the temple, but an active participator. Hendriksen reiterates this by saying that, “This marks her as a woman who did think highly of herself, was concerned about others, about God’s kingdom, Israel’s hope, etc., and remembers all of these matters in prayer.”45 Similarly, DeeAnn Klapp opines that, “Likewise, neither Anna’s widowhood nor age of 84 years prevented her from serving ‘night and day with fasting and prayer’ in the temple (Luke 2:37).”46 As noted earlier, old age or any supposed weak status in life should not be a


barrier to ministry. God is very interested in using people of different age groups and life status and to be partners with Him in the ministry of building His kingdom and serving others here on earth. Therefore, hence older adults are very less busy in the mundane affairs of life, like Anna, they can engage and utilize their energy, time and other resources into fruitful, meaningful and productive activities in the house of God. Doing this will add value to their spiritual formation and boost their self-esteem, dignity and respect.

She was a thankful person: One of the most difficult things to do is to express genuine appreciation in difficult times. For Anna to find herself in such a precarious situation and still saw reason(s) beyond it to be thankful to God, says much about her character, her depth of understanding about God and His workings. It means that she has accepted and learned from everything that happened to her. She also left behind her past, losses, pulled herself together and moved forward with a grateful and hopeful heart. She acknowledged that what God was doing at that very time of her life was far much better than any other negative thing happening to her. Thus, God deserved to be thanked and praised. She appreciated God for the opportunity to see the Christ child, the symbol of the restoration and redemption of Israel. This attitude and response enabled her to speak well about the child. This goes without doubt that, a person with a grateful heart sees clearly the good in life, in others and their mouth is full of blessed and gracious words.

Therefore, in ministry, thankfulness is very necessary. It enables participants, particularly the older adults who have been through a lot of negative issues in life to take away their thoughts from all the negative things, in others and in themselves. It also helps them to focus on God the owner of the ministry and how to impact the lives of others positively.
Older Adults in the Pauline Epistles

One of the key issues that are discussed and emphasized in the Pauline Epistles is the household relationship and responsibilities among the members of the church.

Therein is the clarion call for children to care for, honour, obey and respect their parents (who could be categorized as older adults) in the Lord, (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). This goes with a blessing, that it may go well with them and that they may enjoy long life on the earth. Harris reiterates this by saying that, “The family code in Colossians particularly encourages children to obey parents because such behaviour pleases God as well as their parents. In this sense the passages sanction filial obedience with divine promises and the exhortations as does the common theology.”

He adds,

The Haustafeln (household codes) also teaches clearly that, filial obligations absolutely bind all children for life. Faithful offspring obey both powerful and feeble parents, even when they may be losing their strength. The passages provide recognition for those whose normal status may be slipping. Ephesians and Colossians move beyond the voluntary submission. The verses command offspring to do what parents ask them to do. Such obedience secures respect which parents of all ages cherish but which aging ones especially desire. Filial service and religious devotion in that context provide a social structure for cushioning the mental and social anguish of aging.

It is also necessary to bring to the fore the fact that, the call is not only for the children to obey their parents (both strong and the weak), but Paul was quick to call on the parents not to overly use their authorities on their children in a manner that will exasperate them. Rather, they are to bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21). This instruction is very necessary because in the church, all

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47 Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, 85.

48 Ibid., 85-86.
are viewed as children of God, heirs and fellow partners in the divine mission. Thus, no entity should be unduly taken advantage of. All deserve to be treated with compassion, dignity and respect. Harris notes that, “As the epistles command children to obey parents, so they balance this concern by instructing parents to consider the feelings of children.”

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Here it is obvious that, the family is a microcosm of the church and the society. Whatever is seen displayed either in the church or the society is likely to have its foundation from the family. This adage says, “Charity begins at home.” The family is the bedrock of the church and all societies; it is the entity that produces the persons that make up those entities. Therefore, it is important that, members of this very important entity learn the arts of exhibiting mutual care, support and encouragement towards one another before they venture out to the larger entities. Garland emphasizes this truth saying that,

Caring is not something innate but learned, and we learn it in our family life from our parents and their everyday small acts of kindness—how they treat one another, their children, and others. These small acts show children that kindness is not something exceptional but a natural part of life. Youth associate their parents’ kindness with their personhood that is just a part of who they are. In a world that is becoming increasingly indifferent and uncivil, parents need to inculcate in their children the spirit of kindness and compassion by setting good examples, beginning with the way they discipline their children.50

Therefore, in the light of Paul’s admonition, members of the family should be very sensitive how they treat one another. They play a very important role in moulding and forming characters for ministry in both the church and the larger society. Every effort should be made to create an enabling environment where every member of the family

49 Ibid.

(the parents—older adults and the children, young ones) will feel accepted, cared for, esteemed, loved, respected, safe and valued. Besides, the family should not only ensure positive feelings are cultivated therein, but also create the platform and space where these positive feelings would be translated into practical service toward one another. This will launch them into an incredible and effective ministry in the larger body of Christ and the society.

Older Adults in the Pastoral and General Epistles

Just like the other parts of the scriptures, The Pastoral and General Epistles highlight some very important aspects that concern the life of the older adults. The writer of the Pastoral and General Epistles being led by the Holy Spirit believes that the older adults are integral parts of the church. Thus, their various concerns and needs were given the proper placement in the scheme of things. Within the framework of these Epistles, Harris observes that, “The increasing incidence of teachings about widows and older leaders indicates an aging population in the early church. As the church leadership ages, it needs more support.”51 In such a dire time of need of the aging, church leadership and the energetic, strong, and vibrant young members of the church need to lend their supportive hands to them like the young Joshua and Hur offered to the old Moses during the battle with the Amalekites (Ex. 17). Such collaborative support led to a huge success for the Israelites. This obviously brought an indescribable joy to the entire inexperienced Israeliite nation that stood the chance to be annihilated by their more experienced and

51 Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, 87.
sophisticated enemies. One would expect that in the church more of this relationship would be found. But sad to say, Harris laments saying that,

Unfortunately, certain younger church members appear to be heavily criticizing some of the elders. These epistles deal with such aging crises by restating the principles of obedience and honour, reinforcing them with strong religious threats and motivation clauses. In this way the materials reflect anew what has become a Christian form of the common theology on aging and family responsibilities.52

Reading through the pages of the epistles, one can see how the different issues that affect relationships between the younger generations and the older generations were seriously addressed. That helped to curb the impending danger those incidences would have paused to the ministry and the testimony of the church.

Paul in the pastoral epistles of Timothy and Titus gives a vivid description of how the older leaders were viewed and should be treated within the church. The descriptions could readily be applied to the older adults in a relational basis. Harris outlines them thus: First, a body of leaders who bestow spiritual gifts on young church members through prophecy and laying on of hands (1Tim. 4:11-14).

Second, such “elders” enjoy some official position, financial support, and authority, for Timothy deems, “elders who rule well” as worthy of “double honour” and “worth their hire” (1Tim. 5:17-18). Third, congregational members are not to accuse them of wrongdoing unless they can support the charge with two or three witnesses (1Tim. 5:19-20). Fourth, Titus likewise describes similar leaders who function as church overseers (Titus 1:5-9). The epistles commanded Titus to appoint (ordain) elders in every community (Titus 1:5). The passage directly equates such an office with that of bishop or

52 Ibid.
overseer in title, in task, and requirements (Titus 1:6-9; 1Tim. 3:1-3). Nothing in the specific in the text directly states that elders must be older, but it is implied by the dual meaning of the term *presbyteroi*—πρεσβύτερος (Titus 1:5). To this regard, Arichea and Hatton opine that, “The word for ‘older man’ is the same word for ‘elder’ (see 5:17, 19; Titus 1:5). A man advanced in age.”

Furthermore, Harris states that, “Other passages in the pastoral epistles that address elders as older persons, deal with society’s attitudes towards aging and the expectations on them.” Therefore, he pinpoints the different attitudes thus:

In 1Timothy 5 a young leader is ordered not to rebuke an older man (presbyteros, 1Tim. 5:1); instead the younger should encourage an elder by granting him the respect and honour of a father. This younger leader also is commanded to treat younger men as brothers, to honour older women (presbyterai) as mothers, and to respect in purity younger women as sisters (1Tim. 5:2).

Timothy deals with aging issues by discussing “giving” support to widows. Widows with living children should be taken care of by them. Adult children should support their widowed mothers motivated by religious duty and a sense of gratitude. Such care pleases God (1 Tim. 5:3-4). A person who does not care for such dependents denies the faith and is “worse than an unbeliever” (1Tim. 5:8). When does a widow without children qualify for church support? She must be sixty years old, have been married only once, be a good mother, possesses a reputation for good deeds, and have performed many

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53 Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, 87.


55 Harris, *Biblical Perspectives on Aging*, 87.

56 Ibid.
kinds of services (1Tim. 5:14). Harris concludes by saying that, “Such care indicates that at this stage in the life of the church, a concern for social structure like that of the theology of the aging now dominates church practices.”

Epistle to Titus describes the leadership responsibilities of the older generation thus: they are to act as the teachers of the younger generation and models of the Christian life style so that no one maligns the “word of God” or condemn its adherents (Titus 2:5-8). Elderly members remain a key to the success of the Christian movement. Old age brings some transitions but decreasing responsibility is not one of them. Instead, the reputation of the Christian movement depends on their examples, teaching, and soundness of their speech. Titus suggests that soundness in these areas alone will silence those who would say bad about the new movement (Titus 2:8b).

Within the general epistles, 1Peter stresses a household concept of relationships between the generations. Such responsibilities again are reciprocal for the household of God. That section begins with a statement appealing to church elders from “one who is an elder himself” (1Pet. 5:1). On the authority of this eldership, the author appeals to other elders to work as willing shepherds with a desire to serve. As the Haustafeln warns fathers to consider the feelings of their children, so 1 Peter commands elders not to rule over a flock but to lead by example (1Pet. 5:3-4). In the same way the epistle commands younger men to submit themselves to the elders. The passage teaches submission (hypotagete) to the leadership of the older elders (presbyterois) as if the young are wearing an apron of humility (1Pet. 5:5).

57 Ibid., 88.
The epistle supports no youth movement to displace older leaders. Rather, the passage reinforces the submission of younger members to their leaders by quoting a motivational maxim, “Because God resists the arrogant but gives grace to the humble” (1Pet. 5:5c; cf. Prov. 3:34). Harris says,

Good reciprocal relations between the generations may be accomplished by elders who “shepherd willingly,” not “exercising lordship” (katakurieuantes), and when youthful members, “submit themselves to the authority of older leaders and in humility to one another. Responsibility rests on both generations to imitate this wise instruction.”

Explaining what eldership means in the book of James, Harris says that,

The epistle of James describes eldership as a church office. The letter mentions local elders who pray over and anoint the sick with oil. As a result, their prayer made in faith could restore the sick to health and forgive sins (James 5:14-15). Such a group may be primarily older members but does not exclude mature younger ones.

The pastoral and general epistles delineate the responsibilities of each group of people represented in the church and what their attitude and treatment should be towards one another. The epistles underscore the need for a seamless or intergenerational relationship between the older and younger generations that allows them to operate in their unique peculiarities for mutual benefit without hurting the feelings of the others. The epistles also encourage the continues support for the vulnerable and weak members of the body of Christ. If the church of today painstakingly follows the principles outlined within the epistles, there will be a radical decrease in the unhealthy bickering and competition that currently exist between the older adults and the young people. On the

58 Ibid., 87-90.

59 Ibid.
other hand, the members of the church will joyfully, willingly, respectfully and committedly in healthy manners compliment and serve one another using their diverse giftedness.

Older Adults in the Johannine Literature

John the apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ who was the last to die among all the apostles of the Lord Jesus lived to a ripe old age. He was a practical example of one that feels, knows and understands what it means to be an older adult. Thus, his writings have a lot to teach the church about the older adults, their importance and the role they play in the formation and growth of the church. Harris affirms that, “This literature places new Christian elders and their message about Jesus in a place of honour which they merit for devoted service to the cause. In the sense the literature reflects a full appreciation for the elderly and a developing Christian structure of the early centuries in the Common Era.”

John gives no impression that being old indicates being out of date or obsolete as insinuated in contemporary times, unfortunately even in the church as earlier noted in this study. Harris affirms by saying, “Nothing in the material implies that age is undesirable. Old age does not imply that something, some tradition or someone is out of date or worthless.”

In this light, John introduces himself as “the elder” in second and third John (2 John 1; 3 John 1). Matthew Henry comments saying that,

The saluter not expressed by name, but by a chosen character: The elder. The expression, and style, and love, intimate that the penman was the same with that of the foregoing epistle; he is now the elder, emphatically and eminently so; possibly the oldest apostle now living, the chief elder in the church of God. An elder in the ancient house of Israel was reverend, or to be reverenced, much more

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60 Ibid., 91.
61 Ibid.
he who is so in the gospel Israel of God. An old disciple is honourable; and old apostle and leader of disciples is more so. He was now old in holy service and experience, had seen and tasted much of heaven, and was much nearer than when at first, he believed.62

John having been with Lord from his youthful age, has grown to the status of a full fledge older adult, he was so satisfied at this stage of his life to address himself in these very important and weighty letters with the title of an elder. He knew that, by his age and lifestyle, whatever he has to tell the church was that which his life will not contradict, it was something coming from someone they knew to be an elder in words and in deed. He was an embodiment of dignity, honour, integrity, and value that deserved their keen and rapt attention at this critical time of the life of that church and his life too. Harris notes that he calls them children, “As one who incorporates the past and wishes the best for the younger Christians.”63 Older adults, should feel honoured and revered for attaining this stage in life and not ashamed regardless of the challenges life poses unto them. They embody resources that require the attention of all. To ignore them and what they have to say at any point in time is to do that at the peril of the present and future generations. Thus, wise churches and individuals draw closer to them to tap from their inestimable fountains of resources for life and ministry before they bid this world farewell.

The theme of love has been a key message of John the apostle who was also known as, John the beloved or the one whom the Lord Jesus Christ loved (Jn. 13:23-25;

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62 PC Study Bible, Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, (2006), s.v. 2 John 1; 3 John 1.

63 Harris, Biblical Perspectives on Aging, 93.
19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20). This can be noted in his gospel and the three epistles he wrote. He had been with the Lord Jesus Christ, heard Jesus taught them about love, experienced what true love for all means as demonstrated and exemplified by the Lord (Jn. 3:16; 11:5, 36; 13:1-17, 34-35; 14:21, 28; 15:9, 12; 16:27; 17:23). He taught and reiterated the importance and the need for the members of the body of Christ to demonstrate the same practical love toward one another throughout his letters (1Jn. 3:1, 10, 11, 14, 16, 17; 4:7-21; 5:2-3; 2Jn.1, 3, 5, 6; 3Jn. 1, 5-6). Therefore, as far as ministry is concerned, the need for love among players can never be overemphasized. For John, like Jesus Christ his Master, love is that which distinguishes believers from any other kinds of people, it is the yardstick for any Christian ministry and that which makes it effective. Any ministry practiced devoid of love will never stand the test of time or achieve its mission. Older adults, who are also parents, truly know what love is and how it influences relationships. Hence, they are expected to exemplify and to encourage the demonstration of genuine love as they engage in ministry like the elder, John did. Other members of the church on the other hand, should endeavour to demonstrate the same love to the teaming older adults who usually feel abandoned, unloved, isolated and ignored in the church. Love knows no bound and it breaks all barriers among God’s people. John’s emphasis can be summarized as, love is for all, and all should love all.

John acknowledges the prominent role the elders play in the apocalypse. He begins by describing the Messiah as the one with hair as white as wool (Rev. 1:17). His appearance as an elderly person entails the idea of one full of wisdom and glory. The writer of Proverbs refers to grey hair as a crown of honour and splendour for the old
Later John mentioned the twenty-four elders surrounding the throne of God, the glorious ruler. Harris observes that,

These elders worship the exalted one (Rev. 4:10), narrate salvation events (Rev. 5:5), answer questions of the writer (Rev. 4:13-17), sing songs (Rev. 5:8-14), pray for justice for the martyrs (Rev. 11:16-18), listen to the new song sung by one hundred and forty thousand redeemed from the earth (Rev. 14:3), and pronounced the final “Amen, praise God” (Rev. 19:4) for the burning of Babylon. Adoration from prominent persons such as elders adds to the impression of power and might possessed by the eternal ruler.\(^64\)

Harris concludes by saying that,

Though the text mentions nothing about the age of the elders in these passages, the presbyter imagery lends itself picturing older persons surrounding the throne of God. The vision of elders gathered around the throne of God reminds Christians everywhere that older persons remain significant members in the inner circle of God’s kingdom. In the Apocalypse they represent the archetype of all leaders for the church. The value attributed to the elders in the final consummation of the kingdom of God lends even more significance to the command: “Do not rebuke elders.” Truly the Apocalypse reinforces common respect for aging elders.\(^65\)

Therefore, this subsection, “Biblical framework of older adult ministry” has undertaken a journey that is in no way exhaustive on the theme of older adults around the Old and New Testament. Some very salient lessons were unravelled from God’s involvement in the ministry with older adults, His call and engagement of a good number of older adults into His mission of raising nations and generations of people that will exclusively serve Him. Some few older adults were chosen across the Bible and their journey in life and ministry were highlighted to draw out some very significant principles that will help the church take the older adults ministry more seriously. It was noted and

\(^{64}\) Ibid., 93-94.

\(^{65}\) Ibid.
recommended that being older adults from biblical point of view is never a burden, curse, problem and undesirable. Older adults are very important people who are divinely endowed with enormous resources and play significant roles in the formation and accomplishment of God’s overall plan in every generation from Genesis to Revelation. Thus, they deserve to be regarded and treated with absolute respect, honour and dignity.

Theological Framework of Older Adults Ministry

This subsection like the earlier sections within the theoretical framework utilized the excellent work of some theologians who have undertaken some meticulous research on the life, value and needs of the older adults and how the church can minister to and be ministered by them. Older adults’ ministry is one of the very important ministries of the church which has some theological implications. Therefore, for the church to really fulfil its mandate as spelt out by apostle Paul which is, “To prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13), it must not look the other way when it comes to the theological aspect of older adults ministry. Given the increasing number of the older adults in the churches all over the world today, the church needs to take this ministry as very important and find very sound theological ways of addressing this challenge. Unfortunately, the church seems not to be making much progress to that regard. Charles T. Knippel laments saying that, “We have done too little and need to do much more in the
area of service among the older adults.”66 It is on this note that the church is challenged to be theologically intentional in its effort to ensure that this aspect of the church is given the needed attention as being advocated by this study. According to Knippel, for the church to be intentional toward the older adult ministry, “Means that we must thoughtfully and carefully plan and carry out ministry among the older adults.”67

Christology

Different societies and fields of learning have their different ways of viewing people of different status in life. Likewise, theology has its own unique ways of viewing people and in this context, the older adults. This subsection looked at the older adults’ ministry within the doctrine of Christology. The doctrine of Christology defines and presents us with the life (birth, passion, death, resurrection and ascension to heaven) and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ from beginning to end which is deeply rooted in the love of God for all of humanity (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:6-8; 1Cor. 15:3). Owings concisely affirms that, “Across the span of two millennia, the life of Christ continues to speak of uncommon love and transforming acceptance.”68 The Christian church sees Christ as the pivot around which it builds its entire theology and ministry. Frame says, “So Christians of all times and places have professed that Christ Himself is the center of our preaching, our gospel, and our theology. He is our Lord, Saviour, Redeemer, King, Friend,


67 Ibid.

Shepherd, Leader, Teacher."\(^{69}\) Owings adds, “Jesus is the one person in history around whom the human family still finds hope, inspiration, courage, and joy, His life, death, and resurrection stand as the singular moment around which our calendar revolves and for Christians, our lives turn.”\(^{70}\) Having the right theological viewpoint on how the Lord Jesus Christ tailored His life and ministry among people of different status and background in the contexts He ministered, will go a long way to engender a very germane relationship between the older adults and other groups of persons in both the church and the larger society. The older adults just like any other group of persons have a very significant place in Christ’s heart and in the church where He models out His ministry while on earth.

Christ the founder and foundation of the church intends that every member of the church should be given a space to feel belonged, loved and to participate in the life and mission of the church. This is demonstrated in the non-segregated outpouring Holy Spirit and in the distribution of the spiritual gifts among believers of all ages (Acts 1:8; 2:4; 4:31; 8:17; 10:45; 19:6; 1Cor. 6:19; 12; Eph. 1:13; Titus 3:5; Heb. 2:4). Christ through the Holy Spirit gives the gifts to all believers for the common good of all members of the church (1Cor. 12:7). Thus, the Holy Spirit is empowering the older adults to be who Christ their Saviour intends them to be. Even in the face of physical decline, they can be active contributors in fulfilling the mission of God in their lives and the lives of others through the power of the Holy Spirit. Long affirms this fact saying that,

Physical decline may limit productivity, but the activity of the Spirit continues through shifting the central focus of personal identity from doing-in-the-world to

\(^{69}\) Frame, Systematic Theology, 877.

\(^{70}\) Owings, For Unto Us, 3.
being-in-the-world, from what one does to who one is. As physical activity diminishes, the movement of the Spirit is toward an emphasis upon the nonphysical aspects of life. We all know individuals who in the face of seemingly overwhelming physical disintegration still face life with vitality that clearly is not based on their physical wellbeing. This vitality is evidence of the Spirit at work. It is plainly recognizable in the later years of life. 71

Therefore, in this light, Knippel identifies the following as the theological view of the older adults:

First, they are part of all the people God loves. The Bible affirms that God loves all the people of the world and therefore loves all older adults. God is the Creator of human beings of all ages and in Jesus, His Son, He has made available eternal salvation for both young and old (Jn. 3:16; Titus 2:11). As one who preserves all His creation, God in His love for people, gives good gifts to all and certainly to all older adults (Matt. 5:45; Ps. 145:16)

Second, the Scripture esteems them. The Bible holds older people in high esteem. The Sacred Scriptures show how God Himself regards older adults and how He wants us to value them. The Bible demonstrates how God used older persons to carry forward His plans (Gen. 12-25; Ps. 92; Is. 46:3-4; Lk. 1:7; 2:25-38; 1Tim. 5:1-10; Titus 2:1-5; Phile. 9).

Third, they are restored and renewed. Like every Christian, older adults Christians are people restored and renewed by God. They are restored from their alienation from God to a relationship with Him. The Holy Spirit renewed them to turn away from a life

71 Ibid., 109-110.
controlled by disobedience to God toward Christian living and serving (Rom. 3:21-26; 4:5; 2Cor. 5:17, 19, 21; Gal. 4:4).  

While being old is seen within the secular perception as an undesirable and necessary evil in life, believers see it in a different way, christologically. It is seen as a gift from God. It has a lot to teach about God and His love. God’s love for humanity is seen demonstrated in the agape love as spoken and lived by our Lord Jesus Christ. Donald R. Koepke affirms by saying that, “We know in our hearts and spirits that aging might just be God’s greatest gift, a time of growing and surrendering to God’s presence and learning to fall into His love.” Koepke further describes God’s love in this succinct manner:

That love is the greatest human need and God’s greatest gift. That God’s love is unconditional and complete. That God’s love is broken on the cross and broken through bread and wine, just like the broken lives that we live. That we are more than the sums of our part. That we are spiritual beings whose greatest challenge is to trust in someone who cannot be seen, touched, tasted, or felt but who can be deeply experienced.

Everyone has the innate need to love and to be loved. Thus, every ministry that is Christocentric and theologically sound must be founded and hinged on God’s unselfish, unconditional and sacrificial love. The source of this kind of love is Jesus Christ. He started His ministry based on love. Jesus’s love was seen first and foremost in the presentation of His ministry manifesto in Luke 4:18-19 within which everyone regardless

72 Knippel, How to Minister among Older Adults, 23-29.


74 Ibid.
of their status in life has a place. DeeAnn Klapp affirms by saying that, “Jesus’ life and teachings serve as the foremost example of Godly love and duty toward the aged and infirm. Jesus’ great empathy for the poor, the plight of the widows, the infirm in body, mind, and spirit attests to the infinitely broad horizon of His love, call and anointed ministry.”

The church cannot engage in any effective and meaningful older adults ministry unless it is founded on love for the older adults as people created in God’s image (imago dei), loved and redeemed by Christ. Therefore, Win and Charles admonish the church on its responsibility to hone this message to its members. They say, “The church of tomorrow will be helping members to focus outside their own problems and concerns by learning to about the and practicing agape love. Love is a great lifesaver for senior adults who experience it. Without love, all else seems incomplete, purposeless, empty of any meaning.”

Jesus in His teaching enjoined His followers to love one another, their neighbours and to a large extent, their enemies. This is seen in our desire to serve others as Christ Himself served us to the extent of dying on the cross for us. Kellie A. Shantz says that,

As Christians who are gifted with the Spirit of Christ, we are called to discipleship with a mission patterned on the way of Jesus Christ. Jesus asked us again and again to love one another as He had loved (John 13:34). Out of love for us He went to the cross. He continues to suffer in solidarity with us. We are called to do likewise in His memory: “As often as you do this, do it in remembrance of me” (1Cor. 11:24).

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What this means in the context of older adult ministry is that, in view of the sacrificial love modelled by Christ, the church should be willing to make all the needed sacrifice by valuing the older adults as integral part of those Christ died for and by creating a space in the church for them to be served and loved and also for them to reciprocally serve and love the other members of the church. Shantz passionately adds saying that, “A theology of service that takes seriously the charge identified in Matthew 25:31-36 calls upon us to love God through all our neighbours-particularly those considered to be “the least of those among us.”

Implications of Christology on Older Adults Ministry

There are different branches in the doctrine of Christology that have relevant lessons that can challenge the church to take the issue of older adults’ ministry with deep passion and commitment. As noted above, the life of Jesus in its entirety leaves behind for the church all it needs to showcase His love and to value human life regardless of circumstances or state. It also encourages the church to create space for ministry in the lives of its members and others, and for the members to participate actively in the various vocations they are called to within and outside the church. One of the branches of Christology has been carefully selected to help the church model an older adults’ ministry that is Christologically sound.

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78 Ibid., 61.
Incarnation

The doctrine of incarnation is very core to all the other branches of theology and ministry. Stephen Sapp quoting Emil Brunner affirms that Incarnation is, “the fundamental Christian truth.”\(^79\) He adds that,

Christianity as the world has known it for twenty centuries is difficult to imagine without this central doctrine. One can argue that everything else could go, but if this tenet remained, the basic faith would be intact; if, on the other hand, the truth of the “Word made flesh” no longer were accepted, all other Christian doctrines would be emptied of their theological and religious impact.\(^80\)

Even though it has attracted a lot of controversies both within and outside the church, however, the focus of this work will not delve into those controversies other than gleaning from its abundant lessons and implications for ministry. In defining incarnation, J. I. Parker says that it is, “The union of Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus.”\(^81\) Dantas adds, “Jesus is fully God and fully man in one person. In other words, He is God incarnate.”\(^82\) The scriptural facts about this very significant doctrine are found in Matthew 1:18; Jn.1:1, 14; 1Cor. 15:47; Galatian 4:4, among many others. Dantas further says that, “The incarnation simply means God came to be a man. He was fully man while remaining fully God. That way He could identify with our plight in life. As He lived a normal human existence for over thirty years, He experienced all that we experience,


\(^80\) Ibid.


including emotions, relationships and temptations.” Therefore, for Dantas, the simple implications of incarnation for ministry are outlined as follows:

First, the incarnation makes God tangible. It tells us that the God, with whom we are dealing, is no distant ruler who remains aloof from the affairs of His creatures, but one who is passionately concerned with them to the extent that He takes the initiative in coming to them.

Second, God is made tangible through the embodiment of Jesus’ message and life in the church. In the incarnation not only has God’s true self been revealed, but also the true identity of women and men. This means that humankind discovers its authentic identity in Jesus Christ and comes to know the true God through Him.

Third, perhaps more than ever before, the church is called to witness to the gracious and transforming lordship of the incarnated Christ through a blended witness of word and deed. If our faith does not transform our lives to reflect Jesus Christ, no one will listen to us. If we do not find creative ways both to point to and to exhibit the radical, shocking and subversive love of Christ, no one will pay attention to us at all.

Fourth, it means that to identify himself with sinful man in a sinful world does not compromise goodness and holiness. For He is God who gives Himself to be known in the man Jesus, born in a stable, tried and condemned in a courtroom, and executed at public execution ground. If you want to know what it means to be a human being and to stand for the humanity of man, look at Jesus Christ. If you want to know God, look at Jesus Christ.”

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83 Ibid., 3.
As far as Sapp is concerned, the incarnation means a lot for the Christian thought and its implication to the worth and value of humanity. He says, “For Christianity the clearest confirmation of the value and the dignity of every human being comes from the Incarnation, from the fact that, God took human form (Jn. 1:1, 14). The Incarnation shows unequivocally that human nature is worthy of the most intimate union with the divine nature.”

Root adds his voice to the very importance of incarnation as he sees it as a ministry of sharing with God who He is and in turn share with us who we are. He says, The incarnation is the ultimate act of sharing as the giving of the relationship that makes us persons. God becomes incarnate that we, through Jesus’ humanity, may share in the relationship of Father to Son, the relationship that makes God. God becomes enfleshed person in the incarnation so that through relation with the person of Jesus Christ we might share in God’s life, and God might share in our life.

Root further contextualizes incarnation within the church and ministry perspective by saying that, “The church and ministry then become about being a community of persons that shares in each other’s lives as a way of sharing in God’s own.” Just as the church and ministry are inseparable, so should the members of the church be seen relating symbiotically one to another in all situations and circumstances.

God in Christ came down to earth to be with us, to eat with us, to weep with us, to suffer our pains, to bear our burdens, and to bear the cross that we would ordinarily have had to bear. God incarnated the human body in Christ so that He would attend to our felt and immediate needs and live our kind of life, experience our kind of experiences even.

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85 Ibid., 99-100.


87 Ibid.
though without compromising His divine essence (Heb. 4:15). This made Him real and practical to humanity. The incarnation removed the barrier that stood between the divine and the human, corporal and the incorporeal. It is in this incarnational presence of God in Christ, that humanity feels the touch of God’s acceptance, abundant life, care, compassion, grace, love, kindness, gentleness, goodness, mercy, forgiveness and all that the divine offers to humanity to feel esteemed, cherished and valued. Root affirms,

Seeing our needs, how exposed our personhood is to fear, loss and death, God acts. The best gifts are given to those in need and by those empathetically drawn into another’s personhood by this need. God gives us the gift of sharing in God’s life because God desires to be with us; in seeing our need God longs to embrace us as persons. The incarnation is the gift of Jesus’ person given in response to our yearning humanity.88

The incarnation of our Lord calls for all the members of the church to condescend from their perceived lofty and transcendent postures and positions, to live out those stated virtues by identifying with and putting themselves in the situation of the older adults and feeling their feelings. Root describes this kind of incarnational life among God’s people as empathy. He says, “This is why I called empathy an impulse towards incarnational action, because through empathy we find ourselves feeling our way into another person’s, sharing in their person. To be empathetic is to indwell another, to encounter his or her person through the doorway of feeling this person’s need.”89 It is also significant to say that, the first and real Christ the older adults would ever encounter is the church. Therefore, the incarnation teaches the church to set all differences aside and to

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88 Ibid., 127.
89 Ibid., 118.
intentionally discover the areas of needs in one another particularly among the vulnerable and the weak members. Having discovered such members and their needs, it also inspires the church to make the effort of meeting such needs and walking along with them on the path of bringing out the best in them and making them realize how dignified, worthy and valuable they are. The Lord in the incarnation restores our lost glory, hope, meaning and purpose in life. In the incarnation we saw God emptying Himself and becoming everything for the sake of humanity. He accepted to go through all kinds of gruesome humiliation for the sake of the ones He loves. Paul paints this truth in His epistles to the Philippians chapter 2. Packer elucidates Paul’s submission saying that,

We see now what it meant for the Son of God to empty himself and become poor. It meant laying aside of glory (the real kenosis); a voluntary restraint of power; and acceptance of hardship, isolation, ill-treatment, malice and misunderstanding; finally, a death that involved such agony—spiritual even more than physical—that His mind nearly broke under the prospect of it. (See Lk. 12:50 and the Gethsemane story). It meant love to the uttermost for unlovely human beings, that they through His poverty might become rich. The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity—hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory—because at the Father’s will Jesus Christ became poor and was born in a stable so that thirty years later He might hang on a cross.  

Therefore, the implication of the incarnation for the older adults’ ministry calls for the church to inculcate in the lives of her members the Christ-like attitude of self-giving, self-sacrificing, and self-submitting for the good of older adults among them. It also behooves on the older adults to empty their giftedness, their wisdom, experience, stories, values, dreams and vision in life for the benefit of the other members of the church. It is in that spirit that Packer says, “The Christian spirit is the spirit of those who

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90 Packer, Knowing God, 63.
like their Master, live their whole lives on the principle of making themselves poor—spending and being spent—to enrich their fellow humans, giving time, trouble, care and concern, to do good to others—and not just their own friends—in whatever way there seems need.”91 If truly they are members of His body, they will do as Christ did, towards the older adults and vice-versa. The parable of the sheep and the goats readily comes to mind. And Christ says, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me . . . I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did not do it for me” (Matt. 25).

Sociological Framework on Aging and Older Adulthood.

According to Kenneth F. Ferraro,

Sociology may be defined as the scientific study of social life, including interpersonal relationships, groups, institutions, and societies. At the heart of a sociological investigation, regardless of the scope of the social activity, is the examination of social processes and structures—reflections of change and stability, respectively.92

It is on this note that the older adults are considered as very important integral part of every human society and sociological contexts in which they belong. Besides, they play very important roles in the lives of the people they have one relationship with or the other directly or indirectly.

Therefore, within this framework, some sociological literatures were utilized in exploring the life of the older adults sociologically. These helped in giving a general understanding of who the older adults are, how they are perceived, the negative or

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91 Ibid., 64.

positive treatment they experience, their problems and possibilities within the society they find themselves, among other concepts. It is hoped that the lessons to be learned will challenge the church to have a balanced and clear understanding of the older adults within the sociological context, to properly minister to their holistic needs. Delving into the sociological framework of aging and older adulthood is necessary because religion and social sciences and their practitioners are not rivals, neither are they competitors. Rather, they are complements towards the betterment of the spiritual and social life of humanity, and in this context, the older adults. But at the heart of this study, the goal is that all should know that, the older adults are precious and wonderful creatures of God and legitimate bearers of the image (imago dei) and likeness of God regardless of how each field of human studies or endeavour considers them. Melvin A. Kimble and Susan H. McFaden make a very profound statement regarding the complementary and symbiotic understanding and relationship that should exist between the various fields of learning to make the life of the older adults’ worth living. They say,

There has been a heightened in the role of religion and spirituality in aging and a general recognition that aging touches all the basic questions of life and dimensions of being. Aging is a multidimensional reality that demands a truly interdisciplinary approach that includes the arts and humanities. Consequently, there is a growing recognition that a wider frame of reference is required to more fully explore the multifaceted and complex questions about older adulthood and its meaning.93

At this point, it becomes necessary to note that, the terms, aged, aging and older adulthood were interchangeably used for the sake of convenience. Aging and older adulthood are undeniable part of human existence and cycle of development. A lot of

studies have been made by gerontological, medical, psychological, sociological and theological experts on older adults, aging and old age. Each of these experts has different perception about the concept of aging and older adulthood. Old age, aging and or older adulthood have been perceived either positively or negatively, traditionally or contemporarily. Aiken opines that, “Traditionally old age has been perceived as the stage of development when decrements outweigh increments, when capacities and opportunities decline rather than expand.” This is the general and normal perception of who the older adult is. Within this particular understanding and mindset, old age is a stage where the older adult is perceived negatively and considered to have reached the point of diminishing return. According to those holding this perception, no matter what you try to do for the one in the older adulthood stage of life is like planting a seed on a very hard rock. The proponents of this perception believe that, nothing positive or progressive will emanate from the older adults. However, Aiken gives a contrary view to that. He presents a positive perception about the older adults. He says,

Equal in importance to chronological age is determining whether or not a person is “old” is his or her attitude toward life and aging. A constructive attitude toward aging is one that recognizes advantages as well as disadvantages in growing old. Among the advantages or at least possibilities, of older adulthood are decreased responsibilities, increased discretionary time and income, an opportunity to attend less to trivial matters and focus most on things of greater importance, less susceptibility to the anxieties of social pressures of youth and middle age, an increased acceptance of life and death and less preoccupation of what other people think.

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95 Ibid.
For Aiken, it is not completely true to consider the older adults as people whose life has no concomitant value. It is true that as people grow older, there is the reality of decrease in some aspects of their lives as noted by Aiken, but they of course have added value in some other very important areas. They actually have a very deeper understanding of issues of life than any other stage in life. Even though other people’s perspectives about them most of the times are negative, yet they see life and issues of life far much differently. Thus, having a very balanced perspective about them, will help shape the society’s attitude and treatment towards them. In understanding the perception of aging and older adulthood, it is important to consider the various theories that are perceived to shape people’s opinion about the older adults and characterize their social life. Thorson\(^\text{96}\) describes the following as the theories of the socialization in old age:

The Activity theory: This theory sees aging in many ways as an extension of middle age. It says that the best way to approach aging is similar to the rest of adult life: a full life will find the individual engaged in many different statuses, roles, and activities. A status that is lost through retirement, such as being a worker, will be replaced by things such as being a volunteer.

Similarly, in Africa, there are some older adults that still believe that if one lives regardless of their age, the best way to make themselves relevant and to keep fit is to try to engage in different activities that suit their age and capacity. For example, even in their old age, some still engage themselves in small scale farming, gardening, raring of local

chickens, petty trading, etc. This is in the bid to keep being active. Others after retirement, get themselves involved in community services, politics and establishing Non-Governmental Organizations, etc.

Disengagement theory: On the other hand, this theory sees old age as a separate period of life, not as an extension of middle age. Values and norms change, and people in later life are more willing to pull back. Some role and status loss are normative and consistent with the physical slowing down that is inevitable among the elderly. Separation from society is seen as more mutual; society has less need for the older people just at a time in life when older adults feel that it is appropriate to be taking on less in life. Society and the older person withdraw from each other. Older people desire less interaction. Social withdrawal is accompanied by increased preoccupation with self and less investment in others.

In Nigeria, there are two proverbs that resonate with this theory. It says, “Komai da lokacinsa” and “Jiya ba yau ba.” They mean, “Everything has its time” and “Yesterday is not (like) today.” These proverbs have a biblical leaning. The writer of Ecclesiastes states that, “There is time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens” (Ecc. 3:1). In some African societies, including the church, whether the older adults want to disengage in some activities or not, they are politely told that, their time is up. For respect, some use body language and some gestures to suggest to them that they have over stayed their welcome. For example, they would be told that, “Daddy, can you please allow me to help you do this or that?” “Daddy, please let me help you with this so that you can rest.” Politically, socially and religiously, there is a very strong agitation among young people that, the older adults have “Eaten their portion and
are now eating the portion of the youth. Therefore, they should be satisfied with what they have eaten and allow the young people to have the opportunity to eat theirs.” They are simply told that, “You cannot eat your cake and have it again.” This is a call for the older adults to surrender and bow out from the scene while the ovation is high. Because of this attitude, some older adults as a mark of self-respect, disengage themselves from active participation by taking the rare sit and offering advice when contacted. Unfortunately, some of them are frustrated and forced out of the scene directly or indirectly. And in extreme cases, others are frustrated afterwards to the extent of facing different kinds of terminal diseases and eventual death.

Continuity theory: It holds that people do not change as they age, their personalities remain pretty much the same throughout adult life. Thus, their likes and dislikes will also remain pretty much the same. Those who prefer to remain active will do so, given certain physical limitations; those who desire a lower level of interaction may finally achieve it in later life, just when the society places fewer demands upon them.

In Africa, this theory may not have a strong base like the above stated theories. Even though the older adults are still held as people of high value who have the power of blessing and curse in their tongue and are treated with dignity, some still believe that, as they grow older they diminish in capacity. In fact, there is a notion that says, “When one grows older, he/she behaves like little kids.” Therefore, Africans believe that there is change in the personality, ways of interaction with the reality of life and the energy needed to survive. Instead of continuing with the activities they were actively engaged in, they slowly and gradually retire and become the grandparents that their age has bestowed on them. In most cases if not all, once they disengage, they do not continue for whatever
reason. They instead, become the best friends and playmates of their grandchildren or automatically get engaged in other less stressful activities that suit their capacities.

Exchange theory: This works as a sort of mental calculation of costs and benefits of social interaction. People engage in social relationship that they find to be rewarding, and they withdraw from those relationships that they see as too costly.

Really people relate with others based on the pecuniary benefits they derive from them. A song writer in Nigeria sang a song that underscores this fact. His song reads, “When the going is smooth and good, many many people will be your friends. But when the going becomes tough, many many of them will run away. When the going is very good, you will have many friends, they will call you many names, they will say they love you, they will say they need you, they will say you are great and so on and so forth. When the going gets tough, must of them will disappear and may never come back. But when they come back, they have come back to help in knocking you down, down, down, down” (William Onyeabor). This is a satire to the African societies who place premium and value on people based on what they can get from them and not on who they are. This occasions the reason why a lot of the older adults are abandoned, rejected and treated in some extreme cases, with disdain and like beasts of burden. This is unfortunately displayed in the denial (or embezzlement) of their retirement benefits by some unscrupulous government officials after meritoriously serving the nation. As a result, some of them resort to begging in the streets and some die in the course of fighting and struggling for their rightful benefits. This is also seen in almost all sectors of the life of most African societies. Therefore, since the older adults are considered as unproductive, they obviously have nothing to give in exchange of continued active
participation the activities they were involved when they had what the society needed. However, they should be considered and treated as sages in every society who have so much to offer to the society beyond what the society can afford to pay. Experience is said to be the greatest teacher and wisdom is much more than gold. Thus, they have these in enormous measure. They should not be treated as useless folks. They have what other members of the society do not have. All segments of the society need to give them the platform to function using these enormous assets to add value to them.

Modernization theory: Notes that in traditional societies, the aged tend to retain their status and serve important role as elders of the tribe. As societies become more modern, elders’ roles are less important. This is modified with the realization that in historical term, relatively few people actually lived into old age, and that there are now many more aged people in contemporary society.

In as much as modernization brings along with it increasing change in values and dispositions of people, most African societies still believe that, “There is wisdom in not throwing the baby with the bathing water.” In order words, while they embrace the progress modernization brings, they also make frantic efforts to sustain their very good and valuable societal norms and mores. They strongly believe that such values will curb the excesses of modernization. Thus, the presence and voices of the older adults in every African society preserve and serve such purposes. Furthermore, some societies have shifted grounds and allowed some rooms for modifications and others have discarded some traditions that are found to be detrimental to the societies’ common good. Therefore, in the midst of the changes that modernization brings to African societies, there is the need for Africans to embrace those changes that are not antithetical to those
valuable traditions and customs that make them treat older adults with utmost dignity and respect.

Role theory: Roles and statuses may be discarded as people leave one period of life and enter another. The giving up of a treasured status such as “worker” is often traumatic. But it is also to be seen not so much as a period of role loss, but as a period of role transition. Particularly, with an issue like aging, it is a time to get ready to shed old roles and statuses or to assume new ones.

Role theory sounds acceptable to most African societies where being older adults is considered as a status that people look forward to attaining. There are roles that are only exclusively preserved for people that attain to certain numbers of age. Older adults are considered to be the conscience of their communities except if they abuse such rights. People see them as leaders, counselors, mentors and guides to them, particularly during periods of critical decision making. As people grow older, it is believed that, they are more honest, responsible and content. They can be trusted and relied upon to assume the responsibility of offering leadership that demands deep wisdom and experience. Thus, the saying, “Old wine is sweeter than new wine. The sweeter, the better.”

Looking critically at the above theories, one would argue that, the reality of each one of them depends on the society or social context that the older adults find themselves. It is a different stroke for different folks. However, the theories paint a vivid picture of how the older adults are viewed or how they view themselves given their context and circumstances in life. In some societies the older adults are viewed with much respect and dignity, highly valued and cherished regardless of their physical, psychological or social status. Unfortunately, in others, no matter how productive and sound they might be, they
are treated with contempt and degradation. This negative perception affects how they perceive themselves. In such contexts, old age is a very serious deficit. This leads to the emanation of the so-called myths and stereotypes meted at the older adults in our societies. Above stated theories play some very important roles in African societies as noted. Knowing them and how they affect people’s perception of older adults will go a long way to help in applying those that promote the dignity, respect and honour (the hallmarks of older adults in African societies) of the older adults in the African Societies.

Myths and Stereotypes against the Older Adults

According to Kausler, Myths and stereotypes are known as, “widely held false belief, usually from hearsay and casual inaccurate evidence.” Myths and stereotypes have great influence in how people interact with the older adults. Therefore, older adults through all generations have had and are still having their share of some negative treatments from different people in different societies and social contexts. Their age determines how they are viewed and regarded or otherwise. Blackwell poignantly observes that, “Age is one of the first features that we observe about other people and the information is used to guide how we behave and interact with them. We also tend to form immediate impressions of people based on additional attributes (e.g., age, sex, race, physical characteristics), which shape our attitudes towards other people.”

Ironically, most of the people treating the older adults with such negative treatments forget that they too are aging and are sooner or later going to experience the same stage and treatment

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within the same society or social context. This is true because, what goes around comes around and one good or bad turn deserves another. Blackwell adds, “Biases against older adults are particularly unique considering that most individuals will eventually become part of the aging population.”

Even though these myths and stereotypes against the older adults are prevalent in the society, the church could be directly or indirectly caught up in the web of meting out the same treatments towards them. However, though the church is also a product of the society she operates, it needs to behave differently. Such myths and stereotypes if not identified, well defined and understood by the church, they will continue to distort the minds of its members and hinder them from loving and responding to the needs of the older adults as Christ would.

There are so many types of myths and stereotypes towards the older adults, but due to limitation of space, few were identified. It has been observed that myths and stereotypes are found playing themselves in virtually every social setting. For example, in the work setting, Thorson says,

A number of stereotypes have influenced common perception of older workers. Commonly accepted attitudes hold that all older workers are sick of the job and just waiting to retire, are less productive, are more interested in personal benefits than in the good of the organization, are less creative and show less initiative, are more likely to have accidents, use all of their sick leave for real or imagined illnesses, show less willingness to cooperate with supervisors, and are generally slower, especially in terms of learning new things such as applications of technical innovations.

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99 Ibid.

As far as Thorson is concerned, the labelling of the older adults with such a very uncharitable and uncomplimentary attitude is not being fair and true to who they really are. While these apply to some workers in some contexts, they are not true in some others. He says, “But these stereotypes are not true for older workers. On the contrary; older workers are less likely to be characterized accurately by any of these stereotypes.” ¹⁰¹ It could also be argued that such characterization can be true or more in some very younger workers than the older adults. Thorson concludes saying that,

So, in terms of attitudes and loyalty, a variety of studies indicate more positive characteristics among older workers than among younger workers. Senior employees are more committed to work ethic, take greater pride in their work, are less interested in monetary rewards, have greater satisfaction with both their jobs and the work involved in them, and are more willing to respond positively to supervision, are more involved with their jobs, and have greater commitment to the organization. ¹⁰²

Some of these negative myths and stereotypes are unfortunately produced, promoted and propagated by the marketers and media for their own selfish and or economic reasons. Lawrence R. Samuel affirms saying, “Marketers and media have encouraged the idea that aging does not and should not have to happen, further entrenching the peculiar idea that getting older should be avoided at all costs.” ¹⁰³ Because of its wide coverage in the society, the message the media decides to let the society know about any subject remains virtually indelible in people’s minds, and it influences their attitudes and behaviours. Blackwell further affirms saying that, “People generally view

¹⁰¹ Ibid.
¹⁰² Ibid., 315.
late life negatively as it is often portrayed by the media as a period of decline and disengagement rather than a period of creativity and contribution.”**104** Aiken adds, “The fact that television has an impact on the attitudes and values of the entire population of viewers, which includes a large percentage of the American population, is undeniable.”**105** Thus, what the media says about the older adults continues to ring bell in the minds of those that pay close attention to it. They desire to know more on what the media has to say about the older adults and aging. Another unfortunate thing about the propaganda of the media against the older adults is that, some or most of the information they give is ambiguous. Thus, the more negative information people acquire the more influential and manipulative they are in their treatment of the older adults within their context.

Lamenting the negative impression, the media gives to the generality of its viewers about the older adults, Aiken graphically says,

> Unfortunately, on prime time programs in particular, the elderly have tended to be shown as “more comical, stubborn, eccentric, and foolish than other characters.” Older people have also been depicted as narrow-minded, in poor health, foundering financially, sexually dissatisfied, and unable to make decisions. When entire country sees a cranky, out-of-touch, caned-wielding older woman (perhaps backing her Edsel into a tree) on a night-time TV show, what attitude will viewers demonstrate toward older women the next day?**106**

Haim Hazan further says, “The information received about old people is often ambiguous, and because of this the stereotype overrides our perception of them even in face-to-face interaction. Stereotypes govern our behaviour by obscuring characteristics

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**105** Aiken, *Aging and Later Life*, 231.

**106** Ibid.
which, to an unbiased observer, would be clearly visible. Therefore, Hazan in pointing more of the stereotypes against the older adults says,

One of the most deeply rooted stereotypes of the aged is that, they are conservative, inflexible, and resistant to change. The aged are perceived as incapable of creativity, making progress, of starting afresh. Only in art and the domain of the spirit are they licensed to continue to be creative. ‘Ordinary’ old people are seen to have entered the state of intellectual sterility and emotional impotence.

On the contrary, experience and studies have shown that, it is not also true that all older adults are conservatives, inflexible and resistant to change. Rather, they are in some instances initiators, innovators and motivators of progress and change. They are open to learning and pursuing things that will better their lives. They believe such things will not only guarantee a better tomorrow for them alone, but also for their offspring.

Closely related are the biological and mental stereotypes which depict the older adults as physically incapacitated. They are perceived as people that cannot function on their own, incapable new learning and that their memory overall deteriorates greatly in late adulthood. Thus, the age long adage loaded with falsehood which says, “You can’t teach old dogs new tricks.” However, Hazan was quick to debunk the stereotypes depicting the aged as sterile and incapable of learning and open to change. He says,

Studies examining this hypothesis inevitably demonstrate that, notwithstanding motoric and sensory deficiency associated to aging process, there are no significant differences between older and younger people in their capacity to learn. Indeed, when equal opportunities are granted to elderly students and personal motivation meets with social approval, they are capable of pursuing any course of study.


108 Ibid.

109 Ibid.
This is very true, because, as a student here in the United States and back in Africa, one has had the opportunity of studying very difficult courses with people as old as sixty years and beyond. Here at Luther Seminary, one sees some older adults taking Hebrew and Greek courses with all the enthusiasm and seriousness they deserve. These are courses that are dreaded by some young people. In fact, some older adults got their bearing in life in their late life and decided to pursue those goals they had missed while they were younger. Thus, their determination, persistence, presence and voices in such different areas of learning have been both a challenge and a motivation to the younger ones.

It is also necessary to note that, these and many other types of myths and stereotypes have created a lot of wounds in the lives of the older adults. These unfortunately, have contributed in making people to overaccommodate and treat them as infants thereby slowing them down in all areas of their lives. To this effect, Cory Bolkan and Karen Hooker state that,

Infantilizing and patronizing speech when interacting with older adults is just one example of how overaccommodation results in undesirable outcomes for older adults. Overaccommodation can undermine older adults’ ability to function effectively. In fact, it has been demonstrated in several studies that older adults often internalize social aging stereotypes that can have negative consequences.\footnote{Cory Bolkan and Karen Hooker, “Self-Regulation and Social Cognition in Adulthood,” \textit{The Wiley Blackwell Handbook Adulthood and Aging}, ed. Susan Kraus Whitbourne and Martin J. Sliwinski (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012), 371.}

On the other hand, Kausler, et. al state that, “Unfortunately, myths about aging are held not only by many young adults but also by many older people. Such beliefs could have
serious negative consequences. For example, those elderly people who believe that new learning is beyond their present capabilities are unlikely to participate in new learning experiences.”

These myths and stereotypes have inflicted very serious emotional and, in some instances, physical wounds and pains to the older adults. Identifying such wounds and pains and naming them as they are will alert the society to be cautious of how they treat the older adults within their social contexts. Elspeth Stirling identifies some of the common wounds inflicted on the older adults as follows:

Firstly, loss of control, autonomy and individualism: They have lost their ability to achieve their chosen state or goal—with whatever degree of support required.

Secondly, being viewed as fiscal and social burden: The most common public image and belief about old age is as a social and an economic burden. They are at the risk of construed as bored, idle or dependent.

Third, rejection: When older persons’ own feelings about where they want to live their life are in some way ignored or minimized.

Fourth, treachery: They face the use of deception to manipulate or force them into compliance. They are being treated with hidden intent.

Fifth, segregation: This happens when the older citizens feel that they are side-lined, and their needs are inadequately provided for in the mainstream community.

Sixth, dehumanization: When they are treated as if they were a piece of dead matter, to be pushed, lifted, filled, pumped or drained without proper reference to the fact that they are sentient beings. They are seen as less than human.

Seventh, invalidation (Denial of true feelings): The failure to acknowledge the subjective reality of the older person’s experience, their feelings. Their feelings are termed as having no meaning to anyone at all.

Eighth, blamed for the problems, and intimidated: The tendency for the preceding generation to be blamed for the ‘evils’ of the world inherited by the next generation.112

The above listed are few of the wounds that the older adults battle with in the society they had being integral part of as productive contributors. Lamentably, they have become victims of the same society that is supposed to excitedly honour and revere them for their contributions. Stirling summarizes the above listed wounds saying that, “Ultimately, they are subjects of ‘age cleansing’ and ‘age apartheid’, with the attendant, weakening effects that these processes have (in any forms) on both the society and the individuals.”113

**Growing Old Successfully**

Having taken time to look at the life of the older adults within the different theoretical frameworks in this chapter, it is obvious to acknowledge that, the life of the older adults is a mixed grill. It is a life that is full of all kinds of experiences that one can possibly imagine. As earlier noted, their lives could be characterized by the bad and good, beautiful and ugly, courage and fears, pains and gains, successes and failures, problems and prospects. Stirling further states, “Old age in one’s eighties and nineties

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112 Elspeth Stirling, *Valuing Older People: Positive Psychological Practice* (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., 2010), 18-28.

113 Ibid., 23.
brings with it new demands, reevaluations, and daily difficulties.”

Life has been in cycles and in psychosocial developmental stages as propounded by Erik Erikson. Human lives are evolving from one stage to the other. They evolve from the day one was conceived to the day they breathe their last breath. Each stage of the development comes along with its commensurate problems (conflicts) and prospects. But as the person grows to the next stage, such problems and prospects overlap. Bringing out the best out of each problem or prospect depends on how they view, utilize and resolve them. To this effect, Anne-Claire I. France and Victor S. Alpher further explain thus,

In Erikson’s theory, a different psychological issue constitutes the conflict for ego at each developmental stage, but the same issue is always present in the preceding and later stages. For example, the problem of trust and mistrust is predominant in infancy, and it is also present in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Resolution of conflict at each stage of ego development has implications for the development and resolution at subsequent stages. An individual cannot successfully resolve issues such as generativity (middle adulthood), whether the solution is positive or negative, until issues pertaining to ego identity (adolescence) and intimacy (young adulthood) have been resolved.

Therefore, Erikson outlines these inevitable stages of psychosocial life development of humans in this manner:

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114 Stirling, *Valuing Older People*, 106.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGES</th>
<th>PSYCHOSOCIAL CRISSES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage I- Infancy:</td>
<td>This stage has the psychosocial crises of basic trust vs. basic mistrust. Its strength is, hope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage II- Early Childhood:</td>
<td>This stage has autonomy vs. shame, doubt as its crises. Will is its strength.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage III- Play Age:</td>
<td>Here it has initiative vs. guilt as the crises and purpose as the strength.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage IV- School Age</td>
<td>In this stage, the crises are identity vs. identity confusion and the strength therein is fidelity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage VI- Young Adult</td>
<td>The crises in this stage are intimacy vs. isolation, while love is the strength.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage VII- Adulthood:</td>
<td>This stage has generativity vs. stagnation as its crises and care as the strength.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage VIII - Old Age</td>
<td>At this last stage of life, Integrity vs. Despair are the crises, while Wisdom stands out as the strength.</td>
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The basic reason for including the above in this section is to underscore the need to know the various crises people face at every stage of life and to also be aware of the strength each stage comes along with. This will go a long way to enable the persons at each age to look for ways of harnessing both the crises and the strengths to better their lives and the lives of others. Since the focus is on the last stage of life, which clearly has integrity vs. despair and wisdom as strength; it is necessary to note that, the older adults are innately endowed with the capacity to channel both their crises and strengths in ways that will help them to successfully grow old and enjoy their last stage of life. It is also interesting to note that, growing old successfully does not entail that everything about the older adults’ life will be positive all through when they utilize the resources available to them. However, even the negative issues in life if rightly and wisely managed have enormous potentials of yielding pleasant results at the end of the day. France and Alpher referring to Erikson rightly note that,

It should be noted that Erikson does not believe that the proper solution to a psychosocial conflict should always be completely positive in nature. Some exposure to a negative resolution is often inevitable and sometimes helpful. For example, resolution of the conflict pertaining to basic trust versus mistrust (infancy) in a somewhat negative way may aid in survival. Persons who resolve in the direction of mistrust may benefit because of the unfortunate fact that not all people can be trusted.  

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Since the lives of the older adults are inevitably challenged by all kinds of negative tendencies, to weather these storms and successfully navigate within and through the cycle of old age, they need to resiliently look inward and use their innate capacities with all that is required. Putting this into perspective, the counsel of Erikson comes handy. Joan Erikson succinctly says,

Even the best cared-for bodies begin to weaken and do not function as they once did. In spite of every effort to maintain strength and control, the body continues to lose its autonomy. Despair, which haunts the eighth stage, is a close companion in the ninth because it is almost impossible to know what emergencies and losses of physical ability are imminent. As independence and control are challenged, self-esteem and confidence weaken. Hope and trust which once provided firm support, are no longer the sturdy props of former days. To face down despair with faith and appropriate humility is perhaps the wisest course.118

Growing old successfully begins with the conscious acknowledgement of not only the attendant challenges that this very critical and important stage life has, which many have emphasized and focused on, but also the enormous potentials it possesses. Bearing this in mind brings equilibrium in the life of the older adult. Erikson emphasizes on the need at this last stage of life for the older adults to apply their arsenals of hope and trust in order to successfully combat every debilitating challenge they may encounter. They say,

Should you be living and coping with all the hurdles and losses at ninety or more, you have one firm foothold to depend on. From the beginning we are blessed with basic trust. Without it life is impossible, and with it we have endured. As an enduring strength it has accompanied and bolstered us with hope. Whatever the specific sources of our basic trust may be or have been, and no matter how severely hope has been challenged, it has never abandoned us completely. Life without it is simply unthinkable. If you still are filled with the intensity of being

118 Ibid., 106.
and hope for what may be further grace and enlightenment, then you have reason for living.\textsuperscript{119}

Furthermore, to successfully grow old, there are so many other things the older adults can invest their time and energy doing which can also go a long way to add value to their lives. Firstly, Chittister advises the older adults thus, “Avoid brooding over your past mistakes and failures.”\textsuperscript{120} This is the handwork of regret. At this stage of their life, their focus should be on who they are, where they are and what they are presently doing, not on the reverse. What happened in the past is gone; they should learn the lessons and move on with their life. Aiken further says,

Individuals who have developed effective solutions to the major tasks and crises of life during the preceding stages of development can look forward to old age as the capstone of a life well lived. Having acquired the wisdom to accept the cards they have been dealt and not to wring their hands and wrack their brains with regrets of what might have been, such people have no overwhelming regrets and would be willing to go through it all again. However, they think less about the past and more about using their remaining time wisely.\textsuperscript{121}

Secondly, they are to embrace and love their old age. Chittister further states that, “It abounds with pleasure if you know how to use it. Knowing what to do with this new sense of time and space is what determines in the end how happy, fulfilling those years will be. The gradually declining years are among the sweetest of life . . . Even when they have reached the extreme limit they have pleasure still.”\textsuperscript{122} Thirdly, cultivating healing

\textsuperscript{119} Erikson, The Life Cycle Completed, 113.

\textsuperscript{120} Joan Chittister, The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully (New York: BlueBridge, 2008), 1.

\textsuperscript{121} Aiken, Lewis R. Aging and Later Life, 139.

\textsuperscript{122} Chittister, The Gift of Years, 27.
relationships will help them a great deal. Vaillant buttresses this saying that, “They are facilitated by a capacity for gratitude, for forgiveness and for taking people inside. (By this metaphor I mean becoming eternally enriched by loving a particular person).”123

Fourthly, the older adults should consider celebrating their retirement and not lamenting it. To make retirement worth celebrating and rewarding rather than being stressful, Vaillant suggests the following as necessary,

Retirees should replace their work mates with another social network. Retirees must rediscover how to play. Play permits a person to maintain self-esteem while giving up self-importance. Retirees should be creative. Creativity requires protected time—even solitude. In retirement, creativity should be a primary goal. Retirees should continue lifelong learning. The challenge in retirement is to combine the fruits of maturity with the recovery of childlike wonder. The capacity to take a fresh look at things makes a young person out of an old person.124

Fifthly, growing old gracefully involves, cultivating the culture of adaptation and adjustment. As people grow old, the tendency of reminiscing and memorizing past events is more or less inevitable. This calls for the need for them to make intentional effort to adapt and adjust to the current realities of their social roles and status. In this light, Morgan says,

The key element is that of adaptation—how persons make adjustments over time to new personal and social conditions. But in order to make adjustments, freedom of choice remains a powerful positive force. Individuals who have learnt to adapt, and who perceive a measure of self-dignity arising from personal choice, will tend to age successfully.125

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124 Ibid., 224.

Kaufman further elucidates saying,

Successful adaptation takes place when individuals symbolically connect meaningful past experiences with current circumstances. Adaptation in late life must be conceived as more than striving for contentment; it is also the process by which a person creates meaning, organizes the past, explains events, and communicates with others.¹²⁶

Therefore, adaptation and adjustment help the older adults to be both students of their past and teachers of their present. This means that, they learn from the events of their past, while using those events to teach themselves in the present how to live within the condition they find themselves beneficially, happily, meaningfully and productively.

Therefore, this chapter has painstakingly taken a long journey interacting with resources that deal with different aspects of the life of the older adults. The older adults have generally been viewed within this chapter as people who are created in the image of God (they are bearers of the imago dei). They are a blessing to every society, church and organizations that are blessed to have them. Such entities will do themselves good if they hold them with high respect and honour. Regardless of how the older adults are perceived biblically, theologically and sociologically, they are not and should not be seen as people that have come to the end of the road. Rather they should be regarded as a community of people that are very important and necessary for the growth and development of each and every society and the church in particular. Very important lessons were derived from carefully selected sections of the Bible and the life of some older adults from the scriptures that will help both the church and the older adults engage in a seamless and

mutually beneficial relationship and ministry. Of importance too is the subsection that has highlighted the sociological aspects of the older adults. This subsection studied the way they are perceived, the different theories about them, the myths and stereotypes attached to being old and how they can navigate through the life of older adulthood successfully.
The previous chapter (three) concentrates on the general perspectives of the older adults. The emphasis is virtually Western in nature; however, this chapter discusses the status of older adults from African point of view. This is very important because it helps the readers to appreciate and have a comparative knowledge of both the Western and African perceptions on the older adults. Therefore, it gives attention to issues like, how the older adults are generally perceived in Africa, attitudes toward the older adults, critical roles older adults play in African communities, roles of the family and community towards the older adults and the contemporary challenges facing the Older Adults.

**General Perception about the Older Adults in Africa**

In Africa it is very difficult to give a hard and fast definition of the older adults by chronological number. They are not only seen as just being old people because of their age, but they are seen as the custodians and bearers of the culture, customs and tradition of their various communities. However, Egunyomi says, “The most traditional African definitions of the ‘elderly’ or aged person correlate with the chronological ages of 50 to 65, depending on the setting, the region and the country.”

Thus, they are also addressed by their age group, which is a very important aspect of their life in African communities. Egunyomi in her monograph “The Adults and Age: The Nigerian Situation,” describes the importance of age groupings in Nigerian society. She states that “the age groupings are not just chronological categories, but are also culturally defined categories that reflect the social and cultural norms of the society.”

Thus, African society places a great deal of importance on the older adults, and their contributions are highly valued. They are respected for their wisdom, experience, and cultural knowledge. They are often involved in decision-making processes and are consulted on important matters. Their contribution to the community is invaluable, and they are considered to be the cornerstone of the family unit.

In conclusion, older adults in Africa play a crucial role in society. They are respected for their wisdom and experience, and their contributions are highly valued. Their importance is evident in various aspects of African life, whether it be in decision-making processes or in the cultural and social norms of the society. Therefore, it is important to give them the attention and respect they deserve, and to ensure that they are able to continue to make meaningful contributions to society.

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as elders. In order words, in African societies it is not everyone that is addressed as an elder even though they have attained certain number of years. But they are normally addressed as elders when they have lived a life of proven and unquestionable integrity, braveness, courage and add significant value to their community and society. Egunnyomi further explains saying that,

In Africa and Nigeria in particular, the ageing process is a biological reality which has its own dynamics, usually beyond human control. However, it is also subject to the constructions by which each society makes sense of old age. In the developed world, chronological time plays a paramount role. The age of 60 or 65, is roughly equivalent to retirement age in most developed countries. In many parts of the developing world and in the traditional Nigerian society especially, chronological time has little or no importance in the meaning of age.  

He adds saying that,

Other socially constructed meanings of age are more significant such as the roles assigned to older people; in some cases, it is the loss of roles accompanying physical decline which is significant in defining old age. Thus, in contrast to the chronological milestones which mark life stages in the developed world, old age in traditional Nigerian society is seen to begin at the point when active contribution is no longer by an individual.

Therefore, within this context, the words older adult(s) and elder(s) would be interchangeably used; hence they refer to the same personality(ies).

Africa is generally known to be a continent that holds the older adults or the elderly with a high sense of esteem, respect dignity and honour. Mba affirms, “Africa has long been considered a society that revered its older citizens and the tradition of reverence has been an integral part of its value system. In most traditional African

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
societies older persons were highly respected and honoured.”

Doumbia equally adds saying, “We hold in high esteem those who come before us and possess more experience and wisdom; these are our elders.” In view of the high esteem and respect accorded to the elders, some very salient courtesies and gestures are accorded to them. Doumbia et al describe the courtesy and gestures in this manner,

We always greet our elders. To ignore an elder is a sign of great disrespect. If one passes an elder who is carrying or transporting something, one must offer help. We always relieve them of their loads. We do not look our elders directly in their eyes, but keep our heads bowed as a sign of respect. When we sit before our elders, we sit at a distance to give them their space and show our reverence. We also take off our shoes in their presence.

Doumbia et al. further add,

When we make inquiries of our elders, we present ourselves modestly and in gratitude. We do not address our elders with excitement and curiosity. We approach them respectfully, quietly, and sincerely. We do not show our elders what we know, only what we do not know. We listen to their counsel without interruption. We save our questions and expressions of appreciation until the end of their teachings.

Furthermore, because of the strong belief that the Africans have about the economic, social and spiritual powers and authorities older adults wield, no one dares to ordinarily undermine them. They are revered particularly by the younger ones. They occupy a very high status in the eyes of the younger ones in the society as people that

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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 87.
hold within them the power to bless and to curse. In fact, they are perceived as custodians of the destinies of the younger generation. Any young person that desires to have a very bright future and a desirable destiny, long life, prosperity and peaceful end of life, he or she works so hard to have a reverential and cordial relationship with the older elders at home and the community at large.

One does not wake up in an African society and is recognized as an elder who deserves to be to be respected. They have to go through some stages. Rwezaura gives a vivid picture of the process of transiting to the position of eldership saying that,

It is recognised, for example, that a person's status as an elder in many African societies was dependent on certain social and political factors besides the mere accumulation of lived years. Even then old-age and social status appear to be associated in defining the status of an elder in many traditional societies. For example, from the time of birth to maturity, to old-age and timely demise, an individual went through a series of recognised stages, each being higher man the previous one, until such a person reached formal retirement.  

Even though elders in all African societies are revered, yet each society has its different ways people ascent to the status of eldership. Rwezaure explains saying,

Although many African societies had different ways of marking an individual’s ascent to a higher social status, the ultimate consequence of these procedures were to enhance the individual’s chances, as well as ability, to gain power and authority over their people. Therefore, at the level of the family and neighbourhood, the head of the family was a highly respected individual whose accumulated wisdom, experience, control over family property, as well as ritual power, made him an undisputed leader of his extended family.

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9 Ibid.
He adds saying that,

His authority over his family was legitimated by custom, religion and different forms of social control, including public opinion. Within the wider community of the lineage and sub-clan, relations between elders and juniors were marked by similar respect for the elderly and a recognition of their authority over the juniors. It is in the acceptance of the status position of elders by the juniors that one must look for the basis of the elders’ economic and social security in traditional Africa.\(^\text{10}\)

To ensure that the custom and tradition of respecting and honouring the elders in the society continue from generation to generation, the idea is taught and inculcated into the hearts of the younger ones from infancy through different methods. Thus, they grow with the knowledge that doing so is a norm that must be adhered to and failure to do so comes with undesirable consequences. Rwezaure notes that,

In most cultures children were trained from an early age to obey and respect their parents and other elderly members of the community. There is a wealth of ethnographic data showing different ways in which the young were taught to submit to the authority of the elders, for example, in respect of the Ashanti of Ghana children were taught to honour and respect their elders and to keep silent in their presence. Swazi children were trained to regard the father as the legal and economic authority in the home. They were taught from infancy to obey the father’s word and even married sons were never regarded as free from his control.\(^\text{11}\)

The above assertion is equally true within most of Nigerian traditional societies. For example, in a typical traditional community in Nigeria, young ones were never allowed to sit within the gathering of the older adults. People sit within their age limits. In circumstances where the young persons (those that are seen to possess some remarkable

\(^{10}\) Ibid.

\(^{11}\) Ibid.
qualities among their equals and add value to their communities) are given the privilege to sit in the presence of the older ones, they are to listen and to learn from the experience, stories and wisdom of the elderly. This is a way of teaching them the art of communication, interaction and leadership. They are not to make comments even if they have something meaningful to contribute to the discussion. As earlier noted, they are to sit in silence with their heads bowed down and their legs bent, symbolizing the level of their respect in the presence of the older ones. Furthermore, the young ones are taught to regard the elders as custodians and repository of truth. Whatever they consider as the truth remains so regardless of how others who are not in that category feel about it. Thus, it was a taboo for the young ones to tell the older adults that what they say is a lie or untrue. Abanyam further gives other privileges the elders enjoy saying,

Another privilege enjoyed by older people was freedom from criticism while they themselves freely criticized. This is because in African society, old age was regarded as wisdom hence the saying that, “when the society loses older person it loses the present when it loses young person it is said to lose the future”. Due to their reservoir of knowledge and wisdom, older people were free to criticize the younger ones.\textsuperscript{12}

He adds,

One of such status or privileges was the right to receive respects from the younger ones who in some ethnic groups must prostrate or kneel down (squat) to greet them. Younger persons were not expected to call older person by their names. If they meet at a narrow road, younger ones were obligated to enter inside bush to clear way for older person. In this meeting, only elder person has the moral rights to extend hand of friendship. Young ones were not even allowed to look inside the face of older people.\textsuperscript{13}


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
This gives a general picture of how individuals that are worthy to be referred to as elders or older adults are perceived within the traditional African society. Even though some of these perceptions are gradually losing their grips in some African societies, they still have some significant place in some.

**Roles of the Older Adults in African Societies**

The older adults who are equally described as elders in the traditional African societies have very clear and significant roles that they play in every community. As earlier stated, even though with the recent so-called globalization and modernization, some of these roles have suffered some setback, yet they still have some very basic significance. The roles they play in the society add value to them and form part of the respect and privileges they enjoy. Abanyam affirms saying that,

> In the traditional African society, older people were highly esteemed because of the important roles they played by helping to integrate the society, preserve its cultural values, transmit knowledge and skills, settle disputes and educate the young. People in the traditional African society hold positive views about older people. They got the best available food, drinks and their judgments were highly valued and respected.\(^1\)

Thus, attaining the status of older adult or an elder is something that everyone looks forward to. The older adults serve as stabilizers and catalysts for the sustenance of peace, unity, progress and development of their families and communities. Rwezaure validates this assertion saying, “The control maintained by elders over strategic resources, such as land, livestock, women and children, enabled them to ensure relative

\(^{14}\) Ibid.
stability in junior/senior relations. Such stability was essential for the functioning of the traditional social order."\textsuperscript{15} Any community that lacks a good number of older adults suffers the collapse of those integral parts of the human society. They also play the roles of settlers and arbiters over conflicts and disputes among members of the society. Their judgement was normally accepted as right and incontestable due to their pedigree in their communities. Karuiki confirms saying that,

\begin{quote}
Amongst most African communities there are frameworks that are in place for the resolution of conflicts and for preventing their escalation into violence, thus threatening the social fabric. The institution of elders is one of the crucial institutions for conflict resolution in most African societies. Even in countries with no formal state recognition of the institution of elders, it has remained resilient and continues to exist outside the spheres of state influence.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

He adds,

\begin{quote}
In dispute resolution, the institution of elders can be organized in two main ways: the council of elders or a single elder. The council of elders usually consists of more than one elder and thus acts as a form of third party collegiate dispute resolution system. The second form of organization is where a single elder presides over the dispute resolution process. The most basic example of this organization is where a patriarch or the eldest individual in an extended family resolves the disputes relating to that family.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

In the typical African traditional societies, the elders are also regarded as the educators and trainers of the younger ones. They are believed to have deeper understanding of issues pertaining the norms and mores of the society. Thus, they are looked upon to inculcate such to the young ones through different means of the societies’

\textsuperscript{15} Rwezaura, “Changing Community Obligations,” 5-24.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

life. They ensure that young ones are brought up according to those norms set by the elders from one generation to the other. Dosu affirms this saying that, “The elder plays the role of societal upbringing of the young and thereby becomes the educator and the guiding spirit behind many initiatives of the young.”

One of the ways they teach the young kids is to gather them in the night round about fire by telling stories and tales to them. Also, in Africa, children are made to have total loyalty to whatever their elders tell them. They are the fountain of knowledge that the young ones need to know before they find themselves anywhere other than their immediate community. The elders strive to empower the young ones with all they need to stand tall wherever they find themselves. Thus, as they are released out to the larger society, they go out with an already formed way of life which is influenced by what the elders hitherto taught them. Abanyam further underscores the importance of storytelling by older adults to children saying that,

In most traditional African societies, elders or parents gather the younger ones by foreside or moonlight, inside or outside the compound and tell them stories of how a personality outsmarted another, stories of exploitation of a group by another group and how God liberated those exploited group were all recounted to the younger ones. Some of these stories drive most children into tears or strengthen their hearts to withstand any hardship in their potential social encounter (instil fear or confidence). Songs were composed in those stories to stir children into action and to control most socially unapproved behaviours. Lazy ones, deviants, terrorists and those who perpetrate injustice in the community were ridiculed. From such stories, folkstale, songs, etc important lessons were drawn.

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Another very interesting role the older adults play in Africa is that of mediating between the physical world and the spirit world. This may be weird to the Western mind. The Africans believe that the spirits of their dead ancestors are alive, very close and still communicate with the living. The elders in every community are the only ones that possess the privilege to have access to these spirits. They communicate with them to seek for favour, protection and attract blessings or invoke curse where necessary. They also beseech for guidance and answers on some very difficult and humanly incomprehensible issues bothering their families or communities. Eboiyehi further explains that,

In traditional African society, the aged are perceived to be the mediators between this world and the next, the representatives of the ancestors and creators and the guardians of the cultural traditions. This belief made people cater for them and hold them in high esteem. Africans believe that old age was an ancestral blessing bestowed on those who live righteously.  

Doumbia, affirms the roles the ancestors play in the lives of their living families or communities thus,

Our ancestors are the closest to us of all intermediary spirits; they are our guardian spirits. Our ancestors maintain their role in our families and lives, more significantly than when they were physically present. They are always available to us, offering their guidance and protection. At times when we are neglectful or unaware, they send us signals to capture our attention. They provide us with our names, our trades, and our knowledge. Every family receives its own set of rules and teachings from its ancestors.

The ones that are considered as ancestors are people who were older adults and regarded as elders with high record of integrity and nobility while they were alive. Even after their death, they are still revered and considered as part and parcel of the family or the

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community for very obvious reasons. The foremost African writer John Mbiti further explains saying,

The older a person was before dying, the greater was his sasa and the longer he is remembered and regarded as an integral part of the human family. People give offerings of food and libation to the living—dead because they are still part of the family. The food and libation so offered, are tokens of the fellowship, communion, respect and hospitality, being extended to those who are the immediate pillars or roots of the family.²²

According to Mbiti, Sasa is a Swahili word that “Covers the ‘now-period.” Sasa has the sense of immediacy, nearness, and ‘now-ness’; and in the period of immediate concern for the people, since that is ‘where’ or ‘when’ they exist.”²³

Mbiti adds,

The living-dead solidify and mystically bind the together the whole family. People say that they see departed members of their family coming and appearing to them. When they do, the living-dead enquire concerning the affairs of the human family, or warn against danger, rebuke the living for not carrying out particular instructions, or ask for food (usually meat) and drink. If the departed have been offended, it is often said that they will take revenge or demand a rectification.²⁴

However, with the advent of Christianity and Islam on the African soil, some of these beliefs and practices have waned over time only held by few in almost every community. They are mostly believed and practiced by people who still believe and adhere to the tenets of African Traditional Religion (ATR). For Christians, it is believed

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²³ Ibid., 22.
²⁴ Ibid.
that all human beings are given the opportunity to die once and after that he or she will face judgment (Heb.9:27). The adherents of ATR blame the breakdown of morality, respect for the older adults or the elderly and social corporate responsibility on Christianity and Islam. Whereas, the ATR tenaciously hold unto strict observance of the rules, norms and mores passed on by their ancestors and failure to do so is always visited by severe retribution, other religions promote grace, compassion, forgiveness, love and mercy. This is an unending debate among the adherents of the various religions as to who is responsible for the downturn in the areas of adherence to the societal morality, norms, and respect for the elders.

Sadly, in the wake of the spread of HIV/AIDS in most African countries where the youths are mostly affected, the older adults have to assume the responsibility of becoming caregivers to their inflicted children and their grandchildren. According to HelpAge International,

> The role of older persons in caring for the vulnerable has become ever so important in the face of the ravages of HIV/AIDS. Participants in ALL focus groups discussions lamented that older persons face the multi-faceted tragedy of losing economic support of their children who are infected, economically having to support their children who are infected (and their children’s families), nursing their children when infection turns to full-blown AIDS, losing their children and having to care and support their orphaned grandchildren.25

This role comes along with so much economic, emotional, health and psychological burden on the older adults in Africa. Thus, due to the poverty rate and stigmatization of the disease, they are left alone to carter for their inflicted children and

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their grandchildren. They go extra miles in order to see that the needs of the sick and or the orphans left for them are met. Even though this is a very serious problem to them, they bear the responsibility with a very high sense of responsibility characterized by love, compassion, grace, mercy and forgiveness to their inflicted children. This is done with this traditional axiom in mind, “No matter how rotten your finger is, you can’t cut and throw it away.”

In recent times, the leadership and participation of the older adults in the socio-economic and political life of most African Nations is seen as a set back toward the fulfilment of the dreams of young people to take over the reins of leadership. However, it is also an indicator that old age is not a disability or burden. It is heart-warming to have many older adults playing key roles in their countries including but not limited to being heads of governments of their countries; in some cases, stabilizing the political and economic life of their countries. Even though some of the leaders are not performing as expected, yet concession must be given to the fact that they have immensely contributed and are still contributing towards the growth and development of their nations.

Therefore, it is obvious from all indications to state that, the elders or older adults still enjoy some level of honour and respect in African societies. Besides they still play very significant roles due to their experience, knowledge and wisdom. It will be highly inimical to any African society to ignore them and their place in almost all areas of their life. It is also of great importance to note that, the older adults who are deeply involved in the socio-political and economic life of their nations need to begin to train the younger ones in the art of leadership, encourage intergenerational relationship and gradually begin to bequeath some of their responsibilities to them. Thus, the Nigerian proverbs which
says, “Idan ba makoya, gwanaye za su kare.” This literally means, “Without amateurs or learners, professionals will be finish.” Other significant roles the older adults play within the family and the community in the African context include entrepreneurship to contribute to the economic condition of the family through participating in farming, business, handcraft, trade and formal employment. They also play the role of local healthcare providers in the family and the community. HelpAge explains this very important role the older adults play saying that,

With the paying system introduced in government hospitals in the country, many citizens cannot afford formal healthcare. The first form of healthcare that the majority of the sick seek in the villages is from traditional healers. These roles of traditional healers, midwives and serving as African traditional religion’s specialists are usually carried out by older persons.26

**Family Roles towards the Older Adults**

The family is a very integral part of the life of the older adults. The older adults have been the founders and pillars of their families. They have toiled and worked very hard to see that they raise very responsible, hardworking and united families where everyone is given a deep sense of belonging and their needs adequately met. In Africa family bond is very important. Being without a family is like being a living death. The family is the first place where individuals derive their identity. In a traditional African society, the first and most important identity that an individual bear and is known with is not his personal or individual identity but his family’s identity. Normally, individuals obtain favour or are denied of it courtesy of their family’s name. That is why family names are more prominent than the individual’s name. Therefore, the family is an

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26 Ibid., 7.
essential part of the life of every African. Mbiti describes the traditional African family saying that,

For African peoples the family has a much wider circle of members than the word suggests in Europe or North America. In traditional society, the family includes children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children, and other immediate relatives. African concept of family also includes the unborn members who are still in the loins of the living. They are the buds of hope and expectation, each family makes sure that its own existence is not extinguished.  

This is an explicit picture of the traditional African family. It means that no one exists alone; neither do they live their lives for themselves. Every member of the African society lives and exists within the parameters of the whole family or community. They form part of the contributing forces for the common good of the family or community.

Within the traditional African society and particularly the family, no one is left to enjoy or suffer alone. The members are bound by common and corporate destiny for good or bad. Thus, they owe every member, particularly the vulnerable members like the children, women, and older adults, the duty of ensuring that life is bearable and comfortable for them as much as possible. Every individual is both the asset and liability of the whole. That is the more reason why the concept of individualism does not exist in the African traditional contexts. Mbiti further drives this fact home saying,

In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of the past generations and contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore, make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group. Physical birth is not enough: the child must go through rites of incorporation so that it becomes fully integrated into the society. These rites continue throughout the physical life of the person, during which the individual passes from one stage of corporate existence to another. The final stage

is reached when he dies and even then, he is ritually incorporated into the wider family of both the dead and the living.  

All members are always conscious that they are burden bearers along with their other people. Thus, they are always ready to carry out any role in the lives of others as the need arises. Mbiti underscores the reality of the fact that no individual is expected or allowed to suffer or to go through any kind of circumstance alone by saying that,

Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards other people. When he suffers, he does not suffer alone but with the corporate group; when he rejoices, he rejoices not alone, but with his kinsmen, his neighbours and his relatives whether dead or living. Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group, happens to the individual. The individual can only say: “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.”

Therefore, it is against this backdrop that the family where the older adults are integral members play some very vital roles in their lives. Normally in traditional African societies, parents invest in the lives of their children so that in their old age, the children will now play the role of taking care of them. The children are akin to their retirement benefits. The corporate nature of the African society makes it so inseparably mutual for the parents to train their children so that their children will not find it as a burden to carter for them when they need them, particularly in their old age. To the Africans, the art of taking care of parents within their homes until they die is a sign of appreciation, honour, respect, love, and reciprocity. Furthermore, it affords the family members the rare opportunity to learn from them, know their final will, have rights and privileges

\[28\] Ibid., 108

\[29\] Ibid., 108-109.
bequeathed on them and to receive their final words of blessings. This is necessary, because it is believed that, it is only through the simple act of taking care of them that one can ever be blessed. They have the monopoly of blessing. Mbiti affirms saying that, “The pronouncing and requesting of formal blessings play an important role in the social and religious life of African peoples. Formal blessings are another aspect of prayer, but as a rule, the person who pronounces the blessing is older or of higher status than the one who receives it.”30 Once they feel well taken care of, they profusely pour out their words of blessings on the ones that so take care of them. Mbiti gives example of the words the elders use to bless those they find worthy of their blessings. He says,

Words used in blessings are very much alike throughout Africa. For example, “May God go with you!” “God preserve you and keep you until you see your children’s children!,” “May God help you!,” “May God bless you!,” “God give you fruit!” (to a childless woman or couple), “May God make your feet light!” (i.e. protect and speed you along your journey), “May God give you clean face!” (i.e. may you have good fortune) or “May God make your forehead big!”31

The family members do not take these words for granted. Rather, they serve as catalysts that inspire and motivate them to offer their old parents willingly, generously and cheerfully the care and last respect they need and deserve to access such words of blessings that are only said to the deserving and exclusively by the older ones.

Another basic role the family plays in the life of the older adults in Africa is the provision of an environment that will give them a high sense of belonging and support. Every human being needs to be made to feel that they are important and that they are

30 Ibid., 65.

31 Ibid.
needed within an entity no matter what challenge they face in life. When they feel that they are esteemed, cherished, loved, appreciated, valued and their opinion counts; then their life is enhanced, their confidence boosted and their human personality blossoms.

The very primary place that the older adults are assured of this is the family. This is important because in any case, they founded and built the families and their socio-economic life. Therefore, at this twilight of their lives, they deserve to still enjoy all the good that is there. The average African family is fully aware of this role and they strive to judiciously play it in the lives of their older adults.

Michael Battle uses the “Ubuntu” concept to underscore the importance of belonging to the community. The family is the microcosm of the community in validating and bringing out a healthy self in individual members. He says,

Ubuntu recognizes that our need to be seen for who we really are is an existential reality in which we need to be part of something larger than ourselves. Ubuntu also helps us to see that we need to be part of a community with a measure of mutuality and like-mindedness. To become a healthy person, we must be fully human both as a person in a community and as self-differentiated person. My argument, however is that the very act of self-differentiation is itself the beauty of Ubuntu. You cannot know you are unique or beautiful or intelligent without the reference point of a community in which such attributes become intelligible. We need to become communal selves.32

Thus, the family and the larger community where these older adults belong play very essential role in helping them to have not only the real sense of belonging but to discover who they are in other to be happy throughout their lives. Battle says, “. . . happiness is where you can be fully yourself.”33

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33 Ibid., 9.
It is important to note at this point that some roles the family plays in the lives of the older adults traditionally, like caregiving have experienced some changes over the years. Traditionally, older adults live with their children particularly for those in the rural areas, to be taken care of and be given the support they need (physical, emotional, social and financial supports) until they finally die. And as noted earlier, it gives the children the opportunity to be blessed. However, currently there are some serious shifts from the traditional ways of taking care of the older adults in most parts of the Sub-Saharan Africa. The major factors that are constantly affecting and influencing the change from the traditional ways of taking care of the older adults are migration, modernization, urbanization, poverty, unemployment and the ever-growing population of the older adults. The quest for greener pastures and better life (in search of white collar jobs, social amenities and education) has made adult children to move to the cities. Lumum affirms this fact saying that,

Growing old in the olden days in African society was quite different from what is obtainable in contemporary African society. Traditionally, elderly care was the responsibility of the family and was provided within the framework of the extended family system at home. However, changes in the structure of African society resulting to the geographical dispersion of the extended family system and the tendency for family members to be educated and work outside the home affected older people. Culture contact with the Europeans through colonization marked the beginning of change in the African perspective of taking care of their elderly ones.34

Okoye further adds saying that,

However, in Nigeria, with its ageing population and the contrasting pressures of modernisation, economic growth and mobility of education, location and employment as against traditional cultural imperatives and local and customary values, it may be that the empathetic impulses to care for elderly parents by busy

adult daughters will not be enough, especially if they have restricted budgets and/or if they live at a distance. It is a multi-dimensional problem.\textsuperscript{35}

Thus, other methods are being used to keep up with the old tradition of the role of the family members in taking care of their parents regardless of their condition. In some cases where the children have moved to the cities and the parents are faced with some health challenges, the children normally bring them over to stay with them to enjoy better and proper medical attention which is lacking in the rural areas. In other cases, some older adults resist the idea of going to the cities to stay in the homes of their children no matter what. They will prefer to stay in the village because they are used to the rural areas; they desire to stay attached to their farms, relations, friends, the tranquility and fresh air of the village and the deep desire to maintain their sense of independence and self-worth.

Another very typical way of ensuring that the elderly ones are well taken care of within the traditional African society is the initiation of marriage by the children for their widowed parents, especially widowers. This is done to guarantee the holistic wellbeing of the older adults. Thus, the children in collaboration with another relations search for either responsible spouse to be for them. They take the responsibility of all the logistics involved. On the other hand, those children that are financially practical hire some local helpers or workers from the cities and send them to the village to take care of their parents on their behalf to the end of their lives. Okoye notes that, “In Nigeria, cultural norms are that children are expected to provide care to their parents both materially and

otherwise. In some instances, the parents may be living with an adult child and in others the adult child may hire a paid care-giver to reside with the parent/s usually in the home village.”

On rare occasions some of the children send their children to stay with the parents. But due to poor education in the villages, this method does not receive a wide acceptance. There are other different ways that family members respond to their roles of taking care of the older adults given their different situations. Okoye in an interview conducted in Nigeria got the following eye-opening responses,

One male (50 years) exclaimed:
‘If my mother comes to stay with me, she and my wife will be quarrelling and I don’t want to die young so she is in the village and we see her when we go home for something or during Christmas, but if it becomes necessary for her to live with someone, I am sure any of my sisters will bring her to their house and I will be visiting her there too.’

Females took a contrary position. One (46 years) called regularly:
‘Although it is a bit expensive, but I must call my mother every two days to check on her. You know they like hearing our (their children) voices and it will make her happy.’

Another (41 years) looked ahead:
‘Why not, when my children are of age I can send them to live with my parents. That way I don’t have to get house helps that even maltreat them and disrespect them.’

However, a male (45 years) said that he would not send his children to his parents’ home:
‘My children’s education is very important to me and I can’t afford to send them to the village to live my parents because the schools in the village are not up to standard’ (Male, 45 years).

He adds,

A male respondent (52 years) commented on how often he visited his parents:
‘My parents live in the village and I see them whenever I go to the village for a function’. A female respondent (48 years) had this to say: ‘I visit my parents every other week or if I don’t have time because of work, I send my cousin who is living with me to see them so that my mind will be at rest.

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36 Okoye, “Family Care-giving for Ageing,” 146.
37 Ibid.
Another female respondent (aged 49 years) said:
‘My mother is currently staying with me and I don’t mind at all, she is even helping me do some house work.’ 38

These are few from the different ways that families are playing their roles towards the older adults among them. Although, times and situations are changing, the family remains the most very dependable and viable place for the taking care of the older adults in the African societies. Thus, new ways of taking care of the older adults are being adopted by different families to ensure that under normal circumstances, the older adults’ needs are well catered for by their family members wherever they are.

**Contemporary Challenges Facing Older Adults in Africa**

Once the issue of older adults is mentioned outside the shores of Africa, people feel so happy that, at least, Africans have high respect for the older adults, elderly or seniors. It is true from the foregone submission on the general African perception about the older adults. However, it is said that for every law, there is an exception. In as much as older adults are generally honoured and respected in Africa, they still face some very painful challenges in contemporary times. These challenges are increasingly enormous and are usually displayed through different life’s circumstances, negative attitudes and treatments towards them. Unfortunately, there seems to be no intentional means of solving them. Nhongo notes that,

The range of problems that older people in Africa are facing is constantly increasing as societies are locked up in conflicts, experience huge economic problems, natural disasters, disease and a deterioration of family relationships.

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38 Ibid.
The negative attitudes that society has towards older people has meant that solutions are being sought for all other population groups except older people.\textsuperscript{39}

Even though the challenges vary from country to country and from community to community, yet there are very general challenges that permeate the entire sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, the following are identified as some of the challenges:

Age Discrimination: It could be recalled that, the older adults have earlier been generally noted to be stereotyped as people that are inefficient and unproductive. With this notion at heart, they are constantly faced with the challenge of being discriminated against because of their age. Nhongo lamentably says,

The discrimination of older people and the denial of their rights is a worrying phenomenon in Africa, a continent famed for the respect and support provided to older people. There is a continued denial of the fact that older people deserve the same attention and support as other population groups; denial of the fact that they must enjoy the protection and assistance from the state as other population groups and denial of the fact that they must participate (as they did in building their nations) in the development debates, processes and activities that shape their countries. Older people's rights as human beings are neither recognised nor valued.\textsuperscript{40}

Furthermore, Araromi, Marcus Ayodeji notes the Nigerian situation saying that,

Older people are often denied access to services, jobs, treated without respect because of their age, gender or disability. For instance, there are some banks in Nigeria that have it as a matter of policy not to grant loan facilities above certain amount to people who are advanced in age. This is a form of discrimination


\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 3-4.
against the older people in enjoying the same economic benefits as people who are younger in age.\textsuperscript{41}

Abuse: The abuse of older adults in Africa is highly complicated and multifaceted. A World Health Organization (WHO) report defines elder abuse thus,

It is generally agreed that abuse of older people is either an act of commission or of omission (in which case it is usually described as ‘‘neglect’’), and that it may be either intentional or unintentional. The abuse may be of a physical nature, it may be psychological (involving emotional or verbal aggression), or it may involve financial or other material maltreatment. Regardless of the type of abuse, it will certainly result in unnecessary suffering, injury or pain, the loss or violation of human rights, and a decreased quality of life for the older person.\textsuperscript{42}

This definition is further explained and categorized by the WHO report thus,

Physical abuse—the infliction of pain or injury, physical coercion, or physical or drug induced restraint.  
Psychological or emotional abuse—the infliction of mental anguish.  
Financial or material abuse—the illegal or improper exploitation or use of funds or resources of the older person.  
Sexual abuse – non-consensual sexual contact of any kind with the older person.  
Neglect – the refusal or failure to fulfil a caregiving obligation. This may or may not involve a conscious and intentional attempt to inflict physical or emotional distress on the older person.\textsuperscript{43}

From an African perspective, Nhongo graphically puts it this way,

As such, older people suffer abuse, assaults and murders at the hands of those from whom they should expect support and protection. They are accused of all forms of witchcraft, from causing deaths, HIV/AIDS, traffic accidents, too much or too little rainfall. They are denied the opportunities for employment and access to property. They are disinherited of or killed for their land and property and are


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
not given adequate legal protection. There are no policies or legal frameworks that can protect the rights of older people in the majority of African countries.\textsuperscript{44}

Araromi, Marcus Ayodeji, gives a graphic scenario of how the elderly are abused in Nigeria, the context of this research by saying that,

Some of the various ways old people are abused in Nigeria need to be addressed here. These include psychologically abusing the aged. The aged may be abused through the words of mouth, acts or gestures that demean, dehumanize, intimidate or threaten them. Forcing the elders to refrain from participating in the spiritual religious ceremonies of their choice or forcing them to participate in ceremonies they do not believe in are also abusive of the aged. Another form of abuse of the aged in Nigeria is physical abuse, which include intentionally causing pain or injury to them. The older people’s right to be free from torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments is also often threatened.\textsuperscript{45}

Abandonment: During very critical situations, for instance, emergencies, disasters, serious sicknesses, etc. the older adults are unfortunately abandoned and left at the mercy of God. This renders them so lonely, depressed and vulnerable to all kinds of danger. In a studied carried out by HelpAge International, this startling report was highlighted,

The African family structure has changed and as such, fewer younger people are willing to care for the older family members. This has led to an alarming number of older persons being abandoned in hospital without any family member responsible. This has serious healthcare implications for older persons given that they (or their families) are expected to pay for healthcare before it is provided.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{44} Nhongo, “Age Discrimination in Africa,” 4.

\textsuperscript{45} Araromi, “Protecting the Rights of Old People,” 136-137.

Accusations: Sadly also, older people have been subjected to very cruel and inhumane treatments because some individuals or people perceptibly accuse them of one evil or the other. In some instances, these accusations are raised even by their close relations. Such accusations are made with no empirical or legal proves for any conclusion. In some instances, no one is ready to listen to their side of the story. Because of the myth that older adults possess some supernatural powers, they have been accused to be the cause of some calamities or death in some communities. Even though men are often accused of witchcraft, however some very vulnerable older women experience much of it. The WHO report further states that,

In some places, accusations of witchcraft, often connected with unexplained events in the local community, such as a death or crop failure, are directed at isolated, older women. In sub-Saharan Africa, accusations of the practice of witchcraft have driven many older women from their homes and their communities to live in poverty in urban areas. In the United Republic of Tanzania an estimated 500 older women accused of witchcraft are murdered every year.47

Friday A. Eboiyehi further explains the attendant consequences of the accusation of witchcraft in Nigeria. He says,

Witchcraft accusations also draw a lot of anger and vexation from the families of the victims against the accused person. The accusation justifies their killing, maiming, abandonment, maltreatment, stigmatization, and banishment by the family or community members in the name of exorcists. This paper therefore argues that witchcraft accusations and the consequent exposure to degrading and inhuman treatment is one of the ugliest forms of discrimination that older women are subjected to in Nigeria without being given the opportunity for a fair hearing.48

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Poverty: One of the major problems Africa faces today is the level of poverty among its people. But the most affected by the poverty level are the elderly people. The reason for this is very obvious to the curious mind. According to Oluwabamide and Eghafona,

Studies have shown that older people are usually the poorest in every society. This is particularly so in African societies. Generally, the aged do not have access to a regular income and majority do not benefit from any social security provision. Older people are discriminated against and denied employment opportunities once they reach retirement age and after retirement.49

Ogwumike and Aboderin also note these prevalent factors as responsible to the poverty of the elderly in both Nigeria and Ghana,

Even the small minority of former mostly male public or military sector employees, who are entitled to formal pension benefits, often receive insufficient payments to sustain themselves. In Nigeria, defective pension and gratuity management, has led to severe delays—up to several months—of pensions, and to non-payment of terminal benefits to retirees. In both Nigeria and Ghana, moreover, annuities, eroded by inflation, are often insufficient to meet pensioners’ needs.50

Health Issues: “Health is wealth.” No matter how rich one is, if they lack good health, life will not be very convenient to them. Despite the advancement of medical sciences in the developed parts of the world, Africa is still grossly backward when it comes to the issue of medical services. Government pay lip service to the matter of health


50 Fidelis O. Ogwumike and Isabella Aboderin, “Exploring the Links between Old Age and Poverty in Anglophone West Africa: Evidence from Nigeria and Ghana,” Aboderin
care delivery. There is no adequate provision of quality health programmes in African countries, particularly for the older adults. Where proper medical services are offered, the cost is extremely expensive. Therefore, the elderly who suffer from very chronic medical conditions and general health decline encounter difficulty in accessing the needed attention. Araromi, Marcus Ayodeji affirms that,

Accessing healthcare is posited to be one of the most challenges faced by old people in Africa. The reasons for this may include the concentration of hospitals or clinics in urban areas far from where most older people live; inability to afford fees for medical services; the cost of transportation; lack of information about services and entitlements; poor management of health services; lack of trained medical personnel in care of old people; negative attitude of medical staff; and shortage of supply, among others.51

Therefore, the above stated seriously affects the general and medical well-being and life expectancy of the older adults in Africa and Nigeria in particular.

Poor food and nutrition: Proper dieting is essential for the general well-being and sustenance of the older adults. However, in view of the erosion of the traditional African way of taking care of the older adults, they are often left to carter for themselves particularly in the rural areas. Also due to the telling effects of disasters, wars and poverty that are ravaging the rural areas in Africa, access to sufficient food and proper diet is difficult for the elderly. Thus, they survive on the popularly known cliché, “Anything goes, since disease does not kill Africans.” Therefore, whatever is called food is eaten to survive without considering the health hazards it portends. Thus, HelpAge International report indicates that,

In emergency situations, older people may find it hard to access food. For example, when they are displaced, older people may face difficulties in registering for the general food rations, meet challenges in accessing food

distributions (waiting in queues for long periods, competing with younger more aggressive beneficiaries), and difficulties transporting the food. These obstacles potentially undermine equal access.\textsuperscript{52}

Furthermore, HelpAge says,

Additionally, older people may face difficulties eating the food provided, which might be different from their usual diet. They may be unable to chew the food, or unable to cook due to a lack of fuel. In droughts and food crisis situations, where the price of food is generally high, older people, who are often among the poorest, are frequently unable to afford enough food for themselves or their families. Furthermore, in cases of food insecurity, older people may choose to give their ration to younger members of their family.\textsuperscript{53}

The above-stated and many other forms of challenges the older adults face in Africa are in gross violation of the Human Rights of the older adults as enshrined in all extant laws and charters of the United Nations and the Constitutions of many African countries. It is unfortunate that even with these legal instruments available and signed into law, the cruel treatments of older adults, particularly, older women are perpetrated and still on the increase. It is also sad to note that, some of these treatments are meted to these older adults even in some churches and by church members. This calls for more efforts by all and sundry, but most especially the church to be united to curb the ever-increasing challenges the older adults face. Doing this will help to make their lives bearable.

As stated earlier, when the society fails in meeting its social and moral responsibilities towards the older adults within its jurisdiction, the church should also not


\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
shy away and behave as if nothing is happening. The church in Africa should be the last recourse and the bastion for the older adults. Being an institution that upholds the dignity of life of every individual as enshrined in the Holy Bible, the church is expected to do all it can within its capacity to empathize, empower, encourage, energize and enrich the older adults to cope with the bashings of the society.

The church in Africa stands the best chance to understand the cultural value and benefits of older adults and of honouring them. It will certainly do good to both the church and the older adults to work together in advancing, contextualizing and modifying those traditional qualities relating to older adults for the common good of the body of Christ. However, both the church and the older adults must eschew from transporting and promoting any traditional practice into the church that will be unbiblical and detrimental to the good name of the church. There are things that the church can learn from the traditional African perspective of older adults. And there are very many things it can convey to the society within which it ministers that will be generally beneficial to the older adults. Therefore, the church should be on the lookout for such great opportunities to impact the society for the sake of the older adults. This is part of its wider ministry to the older adults.
CHAPTER FIVE

PROPOSAL FOR OLDER ADULTS MINISTRY IN THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH
WINNING ALL (ECWA)

Looking critically at the history of the Evangelical Church Winning all beginning with the sacrificial and selfless efforts of the three pioneering missionaries, (Walter Gowans, Thomas Kent and Rowland Bingham), the subsequent efforts of other missionaries that came after them and up to the its inception till date, one cannot but concede that, it is a church that was conceived and given birth to from the womb of ministry. In order words, ECWA is a ministry-oriented church. A good portion of this thesis has been dedicated to showcase the history of SIM and ECWA and their ministry strides. SIM and ECWA right from inception till now have been engaged in different kinds of sacrificial and love related ministries that had and are presently adding both temporal and eternal value in the lives of the people of the communities they operate. These ministries were and are still aimed at holistically enriching and empowering the beneficiaries towards being the best that their Creator intends them to be. Thus, ECWA over the years has been very conscious and conscientious in identifying the needs of her members and looking for relevant and realistic ways of meeting these needs.

It has been mentioned within this thesis that almost all the age groups have different ministries or fellowships catering for their needs and giving the opportunity to meet the needs of others. For this reason, ECWA is commended. However, it is necessary to note that, there are stages in life where some categories of people need to be given
some peculiar attention due to the complexity of their particular stage. One of such
categories of people is the older adults. In as much as ECWA has so much ministries
catering for different categories of people, where in some cases the older adults happen to
find themselves by default, there is the dire need for the church to take an intentional bold
step to start an Older Adults Ministry. According to Knippel, being intentional towards
older adults’ ministry simply means that,

Our responsibility is to take time and opportunity in an intentional program of
action to plan and carry out ministry among older adults. We need to periodically
evaluate what we are doing and make adjustments as necessary. We must not let
such important ministry simply “happen as it will happen” or be satisfied with
less than the best that we have to offer.¹

Therefore, this chapter looks at the motivations for the older adults’ ministry in
the church, the methods of formation, the programs and activities that will characterize
the ministry, the roles the older adults play in the church and the obligations of the church
towards the older adults. This is to contribute in encouraging the church to consider the
necessity for such a very important ministry which will enrich and empower the older
adults for a meaningful living and service to and by the church.

The Motivations for the Older Adults Ministry in the Church

Talking recently with a clergy friend about the need to form an older adults’
ministry in ECWA, he categorically said that, “There is no need for that since they
participate in other activities of the church. After all, no one stops them from
participating.” This is the general notion in the mind of average clergy and church
members about the need for older adults’ ministry in ECWA. To respond to such notion,

¹ Knippel, *How to Minister Among Older Adult*, 55-56.
the church needs to pause for a while and ask this pertinent question, “Why do we need the older adults’ ministry in the church?” This raises the question of motivation. To start and also achieve success in this effort, it is important that some very clear and well-defined motivations be identified that should be the driving force for such a ministry. In responding to the issue of motivation for older adults’ ministry, below are some suggested motivations.

The increasing number of older adults worldwide: This is a known fact even in ECWA. The number of the older adults in ECWA churches is so significant both in the rural and urban areas. The church needs to find an intentional way to cater for their needs. The church needs to have older adults’ ministry because, it sets the template for compassion and love for people just as they are with no regards to whether they can produce anything or not. As the world dispenses of them for being unproductive, the church should be a place where they are made to feel welcomed, esteemed and cherished. Koepke says, “People of any age need to hear that they don’t have to produce to be loved and worthy. For the elderly, the diminishments of age make that belief not just important to life but essential for life. The words, ‘you are loved just as you are' take on a life-giving meaning.”

The affirmation of the value of tradition: Churches have people and events they celebrate annually as a tradition due to their significance to them. Therefore, establishing older adults’ ministry in the church affirms the fact that the church is affirming the ancient tradition of celebrating and valuing the older adults within her by creating a

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2 Koepke, “What do you Want the Older Ministry Program to Accomplish,” 3-4.
special space for them to intentionally function by ministering to themselves, others and by being ministered to within their peculiar space. Therein, they make the sense out of their lives and preserve their sense of self in a fast-changing world.

The example of many Christian denominations: Today around the world, particularly in the USA, many denominations have established various ministries that meet the needs of the older adults within them through many different practices that are relevant and affordable to them. For example, the Lutheran Social Services, Catholic Charities, Presbyterian Homes and Methodists Groups have initiated one program or the other just to carter for the spiritual, social, psychological and emotional needs of the older adults. They provide basic needs of life for the older adults (Housing, foodstuff, clothing, legal services, etc.). ECWA as a denomination should begin to think of finding a way of ministering to the various basic needs of life for the teaming older adults within it. They can learn from the practices of other denominations that are really impacting the lives of the older adults in very practical ways. Serving in a Presbyterian home for a while helps one to appreciate how the church considers the need of its older adults and initiates ways to address those needs.

Spiritual development: The church is the foundation and pillar of the spiritual development of every member. Thus, the concern to meet the insatiable spiritual need of the older adults in their peculiar space should motivate it to consider establishing such a ministry. Within the context of the older adults’ ministry Koepke quoting David Moberg notes that, the older adults are offered, “. . . a fertile place where things of the spirit can be explored more fully and a framework for the development of one’s own spirituality is
constructed in which questions of our life are pondered, explored and engaged.”³ Therein, the older adults learn the arts of discovering, pondering, integrating, growing and companionship.

Continued education: Older adults’ ministry offers the older adults the peculiar opportunity to enlarge their understanding of the world around them and connects them to previous learning and life experiences. They learn ways to continually discover how to create their reality and how they can use it for the best.

Opportunities for service: Earlier it has been noted that, one of the aims of this thesis is to encourage the Church to see the older adults as assets not a liability. Thus, given their enormous wealth of experience, wisdom and other giftedness, creating a ministry related to them will give them a platform from which they can be well coordinated to serve others within the church and without. Once they know that they and their gifts are valued, it becomes easier for them to volunteer to offer their giftedness for the service of common good. Furthermore, David B. Oliver counsels the church thus,

We should be the first to reach out, latch-on, and make room for older persons so that they may bless our presence with their wisdom, experience, and stories. More than anything else, the church needs to open up to the sages of its older members. Only by listening to the lived moments of our elders will we ever be able to see the beauty of their being. God’s presence in their souls will bless us again and again. The church can become an extended family; utilize the experience, skills gifts and graces of its elders.⁴

Furthermore, Win and Charles Arn add their voices reiterating the of the importance ministering to the older adults by giving the opportunity for services saying


³ Ibid., 59.
that, “The church/or denomination that desires to minister to the new seniors will provide opportunities for retirement age-seniors to minister to others. In so doing they will advance the cause of Christ and His church in the world and bring joy, purpose, and fulfillment to those participating.” On the other hand they are quick to caution the church on the adverse effect of not offering opportunity to the older adults. To minister to others They say, “Churches that do not present such a challenge and opportunity will lose lay membership skills and training that could be significantly used in their mission.” Thus, the church has a choice and decision to make to that effect.

Opportunities to serve: This platform undoubtedly offers the church the enormous opportunities to strategically identify and know its older adults and their spiritual, physical and social needs to serve them. This will also help the church to easily conduct needs assessment of the older adults within its context to find relevant ways of meeting those needs as identified and assessed.

Going forward, David Gallagher gives nine other benefits or motivations for the establishment of older adults’ ministry. They are presented thus: senior adults’ ministry expands the church’s existing ministry by reaching entire families, including grandparents and homebound seniors, senior adult ministry shows the community that the church is a vital part of community life, senior adults’ ministry increases worship attendance and senior adults’ ministry builds the Sunday School. Furthermore, senior adults’ ministry instills biblical truth in the lives of seniors and helps them face the challenges of today’s deteriorating society, senior adults’ ministry provides enriching

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5 Arn, Catch the Age Wave, 16-17.

6 Ibid.
experiences close to home, senior adults ministry helps meet the need for senior care. Finally, senior adults’ ministry provides an opportunity for mature adults to serve and it also provides opportunity for young adults to serve. There are far more that the older adults’ ministry can do in the church. The church needs to open its eyes and see how ripe the harvest is out there.

Roles of the Older Adults toward the Church

This thesis from inception tries to establish the fact that, older adults are integral part of the church. They do not only come to take, receive or be served as those who are desperately in need. They come as people who have so much to offer to the church. The Scriptures and contemporary stories abound with examples of older adults who regardless of their age are tremendously playing very key roles in both the church and the society. It is very important for the church (both members and leaders) to realize and accept this profound fact. The older adults also need to know and acknowledge the enormous role they must play in the growth and development of the body of Christ. Where this is realized, the testimony of the growth of such a church would be so tremendous. It is heart-warming to note that in his research Knox discovered that some members and church leaders have such realization. He states that, “Both leaders and members of churches, along with many older churchgoers, believe that older people can and must play an important part in church life.”

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8 Knox, Older People and the Church, 186.
There are so many practical and non-practical roles that the older adults can play in the life of the church depending on the support they have and the context in which they find themselves. But, it is believed that once given the platform to function, as people who are endowed with the ability to think deeply and discern the needs of the community they live, they would function relevantly towards meeting such needs. One of the strengths of the older adults is the life-giving stories they have about their lives and their walk of faith with the Lord. Thus, sharing these stories will in no doubt encourage and build a strong faith in God in the life of the church. Knox notes that, “Older people, therefore, do not only enthuse each other with their life-stories but, as members of a church fellowship, encourage faith in others.” 9 Gentzler further notes that, “The church would do well to tap this maturity of faith and find ways older adults can model and share their faith with others.” 10 Older adults in all cultures and traditions are known to be people of great wisdom, knowledge and understanding. This has also been underscored above. Their age confers on them that special ability. Knox reiterates this fact saying, “There are certain things which only time can give. The wisdom of years is one. The wisdom of years is meant to be a blessing to the wider community.” 11 Knox quoted the Late Pope John Paul who was an older adult full of wisdom, knowledge, understanding and also of great blessing to the church, saying that, “Elderly people help us to see human affairs with greater wisdom, because life’s vicissitudes have brought them knowledge and

9 Ibid., 200.

10 Gentzler, Designing an Older Adult Ministry, 28.

11 Knox, Older People and the Church, 195.
maturity.”

12 This resonates with a Hausa adage that says, “Inda tsogo ya zauna ya hanga, ko yaro yan hau bisa tsai, ba zai iya gani ba.” This means that, where an older person sits down and envisions, even if the younger person climbs the tallest mountain, he will not see it. Therefore, the church will derive immense benefits when it gives them the platform to share from such inestimable qualities. Another critical role that the older adults can strategically play which is direly needful today in the church in general and ECWA in particular is mentoring and discipling of the younger adults and children in the church. Houston and Parker challenge the elders to take such roles seriously, saying that,

Christian elders should be prepared to mentor others less advanced in the spiritual life of faith, teaching them to live in the light of the eternal. Christians look to spiritual directors as such senior exemplars who embody spiritual maturity, being both Christ like and genuine human beings, well-educated and consistent in faith and practice.  

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The church is the embodiment of worship of the Most High God. The worship of God knows no bound. Therefore, the older adults, can add value to the worship life of the church through their presence and active participation using their various spiritual gifts. Gray and Moberg in reiterating the importance of their presence in worship say, “The mere presence of the ageing is an educational and liberating influence.” 14 Another very key area that the older adults can be of immense service to the church is prayer. They spend quality time praying for the needs of the church and those of its members. Commenting on the role older adults play in praying for the members of the church, Houston and Parker state that, “Indeed as long as the history of the church, believers have

12 Ibid., 196.

13 Houston & Parker, A Vision for the Aging Church, 89.

14 Gray and Moberg, The Church and the Older Person, 177.
regularly asked spiritual father or mother to pray for them before undertaking critical decisions or tasks.”15 Gray and Moberg also state that, “Ageing members can participate actively when they are called upon to lead in public prayer.”16 A clear example is the prayer of Mrs. Gowans who asked God to raise missionaries to the Sudan. Her prayer brought about the conception and birth of ECWA. The older adults undoubtedly use their various experiences on how they navigated through life’s painful circumstances to encourage and to set godly examples for others to emulate. Houston and Parker add, “Seniors can play the significant role in providing hope, in light of their own narratives of grace. They can also facilitate relational rebonding where wounds within family life have been so damaging, not by anything they do, but by simply in acting in kindly and caring ways.”17 They are also generously supporting the noble cause of the church and helping members that are in need financially as they are able. Gallagher affirms this assertion saying that,

We must consider that people in their retirement years, as a segment of the population, have more discretionary financial resources than any other age group and that their disposition to donate to worthy causes is greater than of all other age groups. Stewardship of time, talent and resources is an important part of senior adult ministry.18

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16 Gray and Moberg, *The Church and the Older Person*, 178.
As people of different skills and professions, the older adults can joyfully offer to
serve the church in areas that require their skills and professional experiences. Since they
are retired, they have more time to spare. Gray and Moberg affirm saying that,

The aging who have clerical, teaching, and or other white collar or professional
experience often can use their abilities for writing and editing a church paper or
church bulletin, keeping detailed church-school records, compiling missionary
records, building historical archives which record the establishment and growth of
the church, maintaining church history, conducting surveys or other research, and
similar activities.¹⁹

This will go a long way in saving the church huge sums of money and possible
loss of valuable documents and information. The older adults can also play the significant
role of helping with numerous minor tasks in the church. Gray and Moberg summarize
these minor tasks in this manner,

The aging can help in routine church tasks by offering (or being asked) to help
usher, decorate the church with flowers, direct traffic in the church parking lot. Or
they may help in such jobs as counseling young people in their selection of
vocations, speaking to various church groups on relevant topics, including the
customs of the days gone by, representing the congregation at denominational or
ecumenical conferences and assemblies, and representing the church at meetings
of civic organizations in the community.²⁰

They conclude with this thought provoking statement, “In these and countless
other ways they can provide the small and seemingly insignificant services which are
seldom noticed when they are performed well but which usually are very obvious when
they are left undone.”²¹

¹⁹ Gray and Moberg, *The Church and the Older Person*, 183.
²⁰ Ibid., 186-187.
²¹ Ibid., 187.
Therefore, given these and many other very significant roles the older adults play in the church, formulating an intentional ministry for them across board will help in organizing and galvanizing them for strategic ministries. It will also help the church in tracking and appreciating their physical and spiritual progress and the impact they create in the entire life of the church.

**Obligations of the Church toward the Older Adults**

As noted earlier, the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA) has always been a ministry-oriented church body. It seeks to promote the holistic well-being of its members. By so doing, it is fulfilling the obligations bestowed upon it by the Lord Jesus Christ.

After abdicating his obligation of fishing for men to going back to his former profession (fishing), Jesus Christ appeared to Peter and his other colleagues by the Sea of Tiberias (Jn. 21:1-3). Soon after the miraculous catch of fish and meal, in His conversation with Peter, Jesus Christ puts upon the shoulder of Apostle Peter a very heavy obligation toward other believers (lambs and sheep). The obligation was for him to feed the lambs and the sheep of the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 21:15-18). This was a call to a demonstration of agape love towards the people of God that would be entrusted in His hands. It is in doing so that he would prove the genuineness of his love for Christ. In that light, the church today has the obligation to also demonstrate its love for its Master and Owner, Jesus Christ by considering the practical and non-practical ways in which to impart and impact the lives of the older adults under its watch. The church’s treatment of the older adults shows how much or how less it loves the Lord Jesus Christ (1Jn. 3:17-20; 4:20; cf. Jam. 2:14-18).
It is important for ECWA at this threshold of its success stories in almost every area of its ministry in the twenty-first century to equally give its attention to this very significant group of people in the church much more than it has ever done before. Thus, Gallagher draws the attention of the church in the twenty-first century to the responsibility it has towards meeting the holistic needs of the numerous and ever increasing older adults within its domain. He notes that,

The church in the twenty-first century has a responsibility to help and care for senior adults. We’re called to help all people, including mature adults, achieve the highest possible level of the abundant life Jesus came to offer (John 10:10). While the church is primarily concerned with the spiritual, it is impossible to separate the spiritual from the other aspects of life. Senior adults need the attention of our ministry efforts, as do other age groups under our care.  

Therefore, one of the very important needs of the older adults that the church needs to consider as an obligation is the very basic need of every human being which is, care. Care can be demonstrated in different ways that will touch and create positive impacts in the lives of the older adults that are within the confines and custodianship of the church, particularly at this vulnerable period of their lives. Knox comments saying that, “The church needs to see itself as a community which will care, listen, explain its changes and respect the feelings of older people. It needs to provide good activities, visit on a regular basis, give vital spiritual help and be the sort of environment where older people feel comfortable.”  

It is possible for someone to say that, the church has been trying to do such to the older adults. But the person with such a thought may not be able to pinpoint exactly how these are done in intentional and organized manner. Most at

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22 Gallagher, *Senior Adult Ministry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 36.

23 Knox, *Older People and the Church*, 211.
times, such show of care is done sporadically when it seems that a need arises and depending on whom it affects. Comparatively, the church places very high intentional premium in attending to the needs of other groups (children, youth, etc.) of people and even makes policy statement to that effect. In the same manner, the church also needs to make an intentional decision with concrete policy statements regarding issues affecting the older adults. This will clearly show that, it is giving serious attention to the general care of the older adults in view of their importance and vulnerability. Knox further reiterates this by quoting Carlson and Seicol who say that, “Congregations need to examine their programs and policies to determine how elder-friendly they are.”

Beyond general care, at the core of the ministry of the church to the older adults is pastoral care and counseling. As noted earlier, at this stage of the life of the older adults, they are dealing with so many issues and losses ranging from spiritual, psychological and physiological which come with serious attendant consequences. Cassel affirms saying that, “Later life can be a time of great loss—job, social status, independence, friends, and family, all seem to disappear or diminish. These may cause stress at a time when the individual is least to cope with it. As a result, many older people often feel lonely and empty.” Even though helping them to cope requires an interdisciplinary attention, the church as a religious body is their final resort to access such critical attention where other fields have failed. Kimble and McFadden make a profound statement to that regard saying that,

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24 Ibid., 215.

The natural sciences with their positivistic empirical approach are too narrow and unidimensional in their study of aging and its meaning. Insights of the medical and psychosocial sciences need to be brought into dynamic dialogue with religion and theology in order to address the phenomenological and hermeneutical structure of later life and the profound multidimensional issues of aging.26

Koenig and Weaver further attest that, “Research indicates that churches and synagogues are widely used to provide services for older persons.”27 Pastoral care and counseling comes in as a tool that the church has to fill the gap created by those factors (spiritual, psychological, physiological) in the lives of the older adults in order to offer them hope and courage to move on. The goal of pastoral care and counseling is to offer hope to people. Lester says, “Pastoral care and counseling has one of its goals the nurture of hope, so one of its responsibilities is attending to the hoping process. We are responsible for helping people evaluate their travel story, identify where they are going, and access the adequacy of their horizons for supporting hope.”28

Playing this significant role requires knowledge of gerontology, pastoral care and counseling as fields of study and the role they play in the lives of the older adults. The key players in providing pastoral care and counseling to the older adults in the church are the pastors. This is because people find it much more comfortable and effective discussing their personal issues with the clergy than other professionals. Koenig and Weaver affirm using America as an example saying that,

Most people who seek pastoral counsel report that they find clergy effective when offering emotional support and encouragement. In fact, when Americans are

26 Melvin Kimble and Susan McFadden, Aging, Spirituality, and Religion, 1.


asked to compare psychologists and psychiatrists to clergy on interpersonal skills, they rate the clergy as warmer, more caring, more stable, more professional, and similar in listening skills.\textsuperscript{29}

This is true when looking at the relationship that exists between people who suffer from some emotional challenges and practitioners of different professions within the context of the writer. However, from the researcher’s knowledge of ECWA on this critical matter, it is only realistic to say that, its pastors lack adequate training in these areas. This trend is not only limited to ECWA or Africa. It does seem to be a global problem. Koenig and Weaver, confirm saying that,

\begin{quote}
Given the important function the church serves in the personal support system for older Americans, and given the large numbers of older persons seeking clergy counsel, pastors require high level of knowledge about issues affecting persons in this age group. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the clergy (70 to 80 percent) have received no seminary course work in gerontology-related topics.\textsuperscript{30}
\end{quote}

To effectively help their teaming members, particularly the older adults among them, ECWA needs to mandate its Seminaries and Theological Colleges to develop curriculums on pastoral care and counseling and gerontology to train both pastors who are already in the fields and the seminarians. This will equip them to competently and effectively address this ever increasing and demanding task. Furthermore, ECWA Seminaries and Theological Colleges need to consider including in their curriculum Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). This program will give them a wider range of knowledge working with a team of medical and social workers in hospitals, seniors’ home, prisons, addiction recovery centers, etc. This will help them learn how to manage

\textsuperscript{29} Koenig and Weaver, \textit{Counseling Troubled Older Adults}, 19.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 18.
people dealing with different emotional challenges by integrating it with their theological knowledge. The researcher finds it very helpful here in the USA for Seminary students. During this training, pastors and students are helped to understand the basic emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of the older adults. This helps them to appropriately provide the needed pastoral care and counseling and make referrals where necessary. Hence their major area of training and expertise is spiritual, knowing the spiritual needs of the older adults will be of great benefit to them as they seek to help them. Following are the fourteen spiritual needs of the older adults that the church and the pastors need to pay close attention to as cited by Otterness and Mundahl: a need for meaning, purpose and hope; a need to transcend circumstances; a need for support in dealing with loss; a need for continuity; a need for validation and support of religious behaviors; a need to engage in religious behaviors; a need for personal dignity and sense of worthiness; a need for unconditional love; a need to express anger and doubt; a need to feel that God is on their side; a need to be thankful; a need to forgive and be forgiven and a need to prepare for death and dying. This is not an exhaustible list. They have other needs that church will do well by working closely with them to discover and render the needed support.

Other very important areas that the church can demonstrate how serious it considers its obligation towards the older adults are, encouraging members to show practical love, support and comfort towards them, assist them financially where necessary and consider helping them in the area of their health as much as possible. The church can also make their buildings and facilities (entrance steps, restrooms, altar, pews, sitting

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arrangements, sound systems, lighting, floor, etc.) older people friendly. This is to make it easy for the older people have access to such facilities with much ease and convenience.

Another critical obligation of the church towards the older adults is advocacy. Since it is generally observed that the older adults fall within the category of the vulnerable, it is much easier for them to be taken advantage of by others. In some instances, this unfortunate treatment is committed by their close relations. From the researcher’s interviews and interactions, it was discovered that, there have been cases where older adults were forced out of their homes to the seniors’ facilities. In Africa, some are taken to some other very inconvenient places against their wishes. Because they could not defend or speak for themselves, they were left to live the rest of their lives in bitterness, depression, unforgiveness, decline in physical and mental health and constant tears. Thus, just like Jesus and the Holy Spirit play the role of advocating and speaking on our behalf (Jn.14:19, 26; 15:26; 16:7; 1Jn. 2:1) where we are incapable, the Bible enjoins the church to speak as the voice to the voiceless and for the vulnerable. It says, “Speak up for those who can’t speak for themselves, for the rights of all who need an advocate. Speak up, judge righteously, defend the cause of the poor and the needy” (Prov. 31:8-9). As a voice to the voiceless, the church should be ready to stand for and with the older adults in the times that they cannot afford to fight for their rights and reclaim what has been unjustly taken away from them. The church can seek for redress on their behalf even if it means instituting a legal action when all other available means fail. Houston and Parker passionately emphasize on the enormity of this obligation on the church saying that,
We believe the church is obligated to act as a countercultural, biblically based advocate on critical matters with regard to aging. Churches can and should promote the care and employment of seniors, healthy caregiving practices, caregiving support, late life planning, aging-in-place (the ability to live in one’s home and community safely, independently, and comfortably, regardless of age, income, or ability level) initiatives, and strategies for successful aging, and they should uphold the inherent value of dependent, disabled people.\(^{32}\)

The church can effectively and joyfully fulfill its obligation when it sees the older adults as people that deserve to be honored and valued by all and sundry (Lev.19:32; 1Tim.5:1). Hence, it emphasizes and encourages every member to participate in the effort (s) to make them feel as such. It does that by going to every length to give priority to whatever affects them.

**Programs for Older Adults Ministry in the Church**

The older adults have been a very peculiar group of people in the church. Therefore, this fact must essentially be in the mind of the church leadership when considering starting the older adults’ ministry. The programs that would be conducted are expected to be such that are relevant and appealing to them, meet their needs and desires. Furthermore, the key to planning any programs for the older adults is the need to get them involved in the planning. Since the ministry is peculiarly theirs, they should be involved from the beginning in articulating the kinds of programs that would be part of ministering to them. This is important, because, he who wears the shoe knows where it pinches. In other words, by their experience and needs, they know what is important to them.

\(^{32}\) Houston & Parker, *A Vision for the Aging Church*, 43.
The programs the church will design for the older adults’ ministry, should be the ones that are aimed at encouraging, enriching, empowering and equipping them to live the abundant life in Christ (Jn. 10:10); also, to be tools that God will use for the work of service in impacting His kingdom here on earth. In designing the programs that will meet these needs and many others, firstly, the church needs to consider its goal, which is to glorify God. All programs in the older ministry must focus and lead towards helping participants to glorify God which is also the chief end of man according to the Westminster creed. Secondly, John Roberto and Cathy Mickiewicz in their article titled, “Best Practices in Adult Faith Formation” further advice saying that, “Paying attention to what is on the hearts and minds of adults, what is going on in their lives, is crucial and cannot be overstated. This happens in numerous ways both formally and informally. It is not about what we think they need but rather what they say they need.”

They add saying that,

Listening carefully means tuning into the predictable learning needs in the lives of adults that we draw from adult developmental research, as well as the transitions and milestones in adult lives, such as becoming an empty nest household, retirement, and geographic relocation. It also means being aware of current events and important social, political, religious, and moral issues affecting the lives of adults.

Therefore, since ECWA as a church does not have an intentional older adults’ ministry, using the work of John Roberto and Cathy Minkiewicz, some models of

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34 Ibid.
programs are proposed to help the church start the older adults’ ministry on a good foundation in order meet the needs of the older adults in the church.

First and foremost, Small Group Learning Opportunities. The small group learning formats provide an excellent way to address the diversity of adult learning needs by organizing variety of small groups with each one targeted to a particular learning need or topic. Small group learning formats also provide lots of flexibility in schedule and location. Groups can meet at times and places that best fit their lives, such as group that meets for breakfast weekly. Small groups create an accepting environment in which new relationships can be formed. Congregational leaders can provide resources, support, and training for leaders, thereby enabling adults to organize their own small groups. Small group learning can take many different forms. Examples of small learning include: Discipleship or faith sharing groups or study, Bible Study groups theological formation study groups, theme or issue-oriented study groups, sharing groups and book study club, the Practice-focused Groups. These groups will have programs like, Prayer meetings, service/faith in action and teaching on older adult parenting. Thirdly, the special interest groups. These will serve as support groups for mothers with young children, people dealing with critical illnesses like cancer survivors, diabetes, High blood pressure, etc. Ministry groups (engaged in leadership and ministry within the congregation or to the community of which study is a part of their work).

Secondly, Large Group Learning. Large group learning formats provide a way to serve a large number of adults with learning needs and topics that appeal to a wide audience. Large group learning programs can be offered jointly with other churches (at the Local Church Council or District Church Council). Here is a sampling of large group
learning formats: Multi-session programs (e.g., offering multi-week courses on theological themes, books of the Bible, parenting at particular stages of family life, older adult life issues), one-session program (e.g., offering a monthly session on theological or spiritual formation), speaker series (e.g., offering multi-evening or multi-week program focused around a particular theological themes, Christian practices, current events, etc.) and workshops (e.g., offering one day programs targeted to specific life issues and aging).

Thirdly, Spiritual Formation: Spiritual formation programs are specialized programs that nurture the spiritual life of adults. While spiritual formation can utilize individualized, small group, or large group learning models, there are several formats that are particular to spiritual formation, for example, mentoring, prayer group, prayer breakfast, church-based retreats (evenings, one-day, weekend), retreat programs at local retreat houses.35

Another program of significant importance that will help in encouraging and boosting the morale, worth and self-esteem of the older adults in the church is the Annual Older Adults Day. This annual celebration will give congregations an opportunity to honour the older adults among them and to promote harmony and understanding between all age groups of the church. In its Manual titled, Senior Adults Ministries Manual, the Church of God USA outlines the following as the purposes of the Senior Adult Day Celebration: firstly, awareness. An Older Adult Day can help provide an opportunity to inform those in your congregation that later years can be both meaningful and fulfilling. It is certainly a time of celebration. Secondly, recognition. Senior Adult Day provides an

35 Ibid.
opportunity to recognize the accomplishments—both past and present—of senior adults.

Attitudes. Senior Adult Day can help church members form positive attitudes toward older persons, as well as toward their own aging process. The fact that 85 percent of senior adults are living happy and fulfilling lives is cause to celebrate and can help dispel negative stereotypes of growing older. Thirdly, personal Growth. Senior Adult Day should emphasize the positive aspects of growing old in the Lord. The common bond that believers of all ages share should be emphasized with special attention being given to the faithfulness of God in the lives of your seniors. This day is a celebration of the victories that God has done and is still doing in the lives of senior adults.\textsuperscript{36} The church can get the older adults engaged in mission trips, personal evangelism and other social services within and outside the church.

As noted earlier, the programs listed above are not expected to be adopted indiscriminately without considering their relevance in relations to the needs of the older adults in ECWA. However, ECWA can tremendously learn from the already designed programs of those that have gone ahead in establishing older adults’ ministry. Given the enormous human capital that ECWA has, it can study the situation, design relevant programs or even contextualize some of the programs listed above for the older adults’ ministry.

Proposed Procedures for the Establishment of Older Adults Ministry in ECWA

Having painstakingly taken the time to comprehensively discuss about the dire need for older adults ministry in the church in general and ECWA in particular in the light of the different frameworks (Biblical, Theological and Sociological), historical background of ECWA, African concept of older adults, this subsection proposes some practical steps that are useful for the Church to take note of while considering the proposal to intentionally establish the ministry across the denomination.

The researcher believes that, given ECWA’s giant strides in the various forms of ministries it has established as a denomination over the years, it does have the required capacity and resources to establish the older adult ministry without any stress. Therefore, in starting the ministry, there are three basic things to consider. Firstly, the church needs to seek God’s face and will in prayer. This is very important because the success or failure of the ministry depends on the premium the church attaches to God in the whole process. Gallagher adds saying that, “It’s important to seek God in any venture, especially one as important as senior adult ministry in the local church.”37 The Bible says, “To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue. All a man's ways seem innocent to him, but motives are weighed by the Lord. Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and your plans will succeed” (Prov.16:1-3). Secondly, the church needs to count all the costs involved in forming the ministry. The church needs to know that, being a unique ministry within the context, there would be a lot of challenges and criticisms from all angles. The formation of this ministry will disrupt some already established status quo; it certainly will cost time, energy, emotions, finances, etc.

37 Gallagher, Senior Adult Ministry in the 21ST Century, 39.
Therefore, in the light of Jesus’ counsel in Luke 14:28-30, the church needs to meticulously count every cost and be ready to pay the price in view of the anticipated gains. Thirdly, the church needs to make a wide consultation with stakeholders across the denomination to create awareness on the need and importance for such a unique ministry for the aging demography of the church. This will also enable it to sample the opinions of members to move forward.

Having taken the above stated steps, the church through the ECWA Executive (EE) is expected to present the need of establishing the older adults’ ministry to the General Church Council (GCC) which is the highest policy making body of the denomination. During the GCC meeting the EE will seek for the approval to set up a high powered and diverse committee for that purpose. The committee should consist of people from a cross section of the denomination (e.g., professionals in gerontology, psychology, theology, medical, sociology teachers, clergy, etc.). The committee should also include older men and women (married, single, widowed, etc.), the representatives of the Fellowship groups and Christian Education Department (the Department that oversees the denomination’s Christian Education and ministry related agencies). For intergenerational concerns, young people who are concerned about aging issues should be involved.

The committee is to be saddled with the responsibilities of articulating a mission statement and setting goals and objectives for the ministry. It is to develop a survey instrument of gathering information about the older adults and their needs in the church. It is to form other sub-committees that will assist in analyzing the findings and designing relevant curriculum and or programs for the ministry. The committee should also be able to review the existing programs relating to the older adults in the church to avoid conflict.
of interest and duplications. This will also help to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs and determine whether they should be adopted, discontinued or changed. The committee should consider consulting other denominations and agencies that have already started the intentional older adults’ ministry to learn from their experience.

The committee should be given a timeline on when to submit their comprehensive and workable report to the ECWA Executive (EE). Upon the receipt of the committee’s comprehensive report, the EE will study it and come up with a white paper which will form what they will present to the General Church Council (GCC) for ratification and implementation. Once the EE obtains the ratification of the GCC, it is expected to set all machineries in motion for the establishment and implementation of the committee’s report and the white paper. It is important to note that, The EE is at liberty to go about the establishment of the ministry using the best and relevant procedures it deems fit.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSION

The motivation for this thesis, which is titled “The Need for Older Adults Ministry in the Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA),” arose because of the passion the researcher has towards seeing that the deficit or gap the church has in lacking an intentional older adult’s ministry is filled. Therefore, the need for the establishment of older adults’ ministry in the church cannot be overemphasized. The ever-increasing number of older adults globally is a food for thought for the church in every part of the world to take the issue of finding relevant approaches towards addressing their various needs and offering them the opportunity to utilize their giftedness. The older adults over the years have being victims of stereotypes and myths in both the society and the church which is a product of the society. These attitudes have rendered the older adults within these entities to be treated as burdens instead of blessings; liabilities instead of assets and pains instead of gains. Thus, the church has not been able to accomplish its enormous obligations towards the older adults or to offer them the opportunity to unleash their abundant giftedness for the common good. This has caused both entities and the older adults a colossal loss of capital from all angles.

Therefore, this study encourages the Evangelical Church Winning All to consider organizing, galvanizing and engaging all and sundry (leadership and membership) in an intentional ministry in the lives of the teeming older adults that constitute a major percentage of its membership. The church will derive greater advantage if it establishes
the older adults’ ministry. Among the advantages are: fulfilling God’s mandate upon her of meeting the needs (spiritual, physical, psychological, etc.) of other parts of the body, feeding His sheep and or lamb, empowering and equipping the saints for the work of service. Others are, the church will succeed in creating for itself a strong and unified body with joyful and fulfilled people who feel valued, respected, honoured and appreciated. Besides, by so doing the older adults will have the confidence and courage to offer themselves and their incredible giftedness for the general growth of the church.

The studies unravel the unfortunate fact that, due to the myths and stereotypes attached to aging, the older adults are made to feel left out of the equation in the scheme of things out there in the society. However, the church is expected to provide a conducive atmosphere for them to nest, rest, zest and to zoom out of the cocoon that stifles them into feeling the sense of unworthiness, thereby failing to fulfil their God given purpose while aging. Thus, they need to be given an intentional platform to function in their exclusive and unique ways towards accomplishing God’s purpose in their lives for their own generation and for the younger generation before they exit the face of this earth like King David (Acts 13:36). This is the challenge before the church today regarding its relationship with its teeming and ever-increasing living older adults. The church must brace up and position itself in more creative ways to intentionally get involved in the lives of the older adults by knowing their needs, ministering to those needs and releasing them for ministry within the church and perhaps, outside the church. Gallagher reiterates the importance of this saying that, “Seniors are fully capable adults who are able to
navigate their own lives and ministries. As we find innovative ways to release them into ministry, they’ll discover the joy of being members of the body of Christ. “\(^1\)

Knowing the needs, meeting those needs and helping the older adults to come into the fullness of life (Jn. 10:10) that God intends for them require deeper knowledge. This knowledge helps in discovering who they really are, their capacities regardless of their ages and the diverse dynamics of aging. However, a study of this nature which is limited in space and time cannot exhaustively offer the needed knowledge on the subject matter. Therefore, this calls for further research by other scholars to take up study on other aspects of the older adults not covered by this study. An empirical study can be carried out to really know the present situation of the older adults in ECWA. Such a study will help in finding more ways to help the lives of the older adults who are great assets to the church in so many areas. It is also important to note that, research can be conducted on exclusive ministries for older adult males, females, singles, widows and widowers. This is necessary to help the church know the peculiarities of their needs, challenges and opportunities. Thus, the church would be able to reach out to them where they are at without assumptions or prejudice.

The researcher concludes with these scriptural passages on older adults and old age to further validate their value. They are:

“Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you” (Isaiah 46:4).

\(^1\) Ibid., 36.
“Gray hair is a crown of splendour; it is attained by a righteous life” (Proverbs 16:31).

“Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly” (Leviticus 19:32).

“Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom” (Job 32:7).

“I have created you and cared for you since you were born. I will be your God through all your lifetime, yes, even when your hair is white with age. I made you and I will care for you” (Isaiah 46:3b-4a).

“I remember the days of old; I meditate on all thy works; I muse on the work of thy hands” (Psalms 143:5).

“They shall still bring forth fruit in old age” (Psalms 92:14a).

“Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength fails” (Psalms 71:9).

“Oh God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works. Now also when I am old and gray headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to everyone that is to come. Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come” (Psalms 71: 17-18).

“Wisdom is with aged men, with long life is understanding” (Job 12:12).
APPENDIX A

FURTHER SYNOPSIS OF THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF EVANGELICAL CHURCH WINNING ALL (ECWA)

This portion of the thesis is dedicated to make available very vital additional historical information to the reader not provided in chapter two. This historical data is as much important as the one in chapter two. It carries detail statistical and structural information absent in chapter two. Therefore, the writer enjoins readers to pay keen attention to the information contained in this appendix because it forms part of the heritage and legacies of the founding fathers of ECWA.

All-SIM Conferences

Below is the synopsis of the conferences held to chart the way for the growth of the church and its later indigenization as outlined by Turaki:

The first All-SIM conference was held from the February 23-27, 1949 at Kagoro.


All-SIM Conference, Kaltungo, February 14-18, 1951.

All-SIM Conference, Karu, February 7-10, 1952.

All-SIM Conference, Igbaja, January 15-18, 1953. This conference was a special one in the sense that it was devoted primarily to the constitution of the new Church Constitution. For the first time indigenous leaders were appointed to lead the conference. Pastor David Ishola was nominated to Chair and Mr. Koladade the Secretary.
All-SIM Conference, Kagoro, January 7-10, 1954. This conference was devoted to constitutional matters.\textsuperscript{1}

\textsuperscript{1} Turaki, \textit{An Introduction}, 272-274.
APPENDIX B

DEVELOPMENT OF A CHURCH CONSTITUTION

The following approaches were followed toward achieving this feat: The first was setting up of a Committee on Church Laws in 1949 to study the proposed Church Laws and the recommendations submitted to them of the proposed Church Laws. The work of the committee was later incorporated into the Draft Constitution. Secondly, registration of an Indigenous Church. A Committee was set up in 1950 to make investigation and research in relation to the incorporation and organization of SIM Churches.

The result of the above-mentioned Committee led to the appointment of a Church Constitution Committee. The Draft Constitution was approved during a Field Council meeting of the SIM on 18th -25th June, 1952.

Two significant All-SIM Conferences were held to consider the Constitution. The first was at Igbaja on 15th-18th January, 1953. At this meeting the discussion on the Constitution did not go far. The preoccupation of the delegates was on why SIM was too slow in registering the Indigenous Church. At this Conference, two names were suggested for the Indigenous Church namely, Nigerian Church of the Sudan Interior Mission and West African Church of the Sudan Interior Mission. The second Conference was held at Kagoro, 7th 1954 where Constitutional matters were discussed fully. At this Conference, the name Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) was decided upon.
Also, at this Conference the Constitution was unanimously approved. The Constitution was to be sent to all Churches in the Districts. They were then to express their acceptance or non-acceptance of it by 1st of April, 1954. The Conference resolved that: a meeting of the new General Church Assembly under the proposed Constitution should be held at Egbe, May 18th-20th, 1954.
APPENDIX C

FIRST GENERAL CHURCH ASSEMBLY, EGBE, 1954.

At this point it is important to state that, this meeting is very key and fundamental to the subsequent development and progress of the ECWA Church as we can obviously see today. The first General Assembly of ECWA was held at Egbe, May 18th-20th, 1954. The following number of delegates were present from seven different Districts as follows:

Table 2. Delegates at the First General Assembly.¹

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>DISTRICTS</th>
<th>NUMBER OF DELEGATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tangale-Waja</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bauchi-Bornu</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Zaria Plateau</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gwari</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nupe</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kano-Katsina</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were about 12 SIM officials at the meeting. The meeting was presided over by the Rev. Raymond J. Davis, the Acting Field Director of the SIM. The Constitution was the major subjects of discussion. Several minor amendments were made such as:

¹ Ibid., 274.
The name of the “The Evangelical Church of West Africa” was amended to read “The Association of Evangelical Churches of West Africa.”

The reason for this amendment was stated as, that each Church is an Evangelical Church of West Africa which is to be governor by the new Constitution.

Another very significant decision of the General Assembly was that the new Constitution given a trial for one year before the Trustees could be appointed and registered by the Government. At the end of the deliberations on the Constitution, Pastor David Olatayo moved for the adoption and was seconded by Pastor Bagaiya. Members of the General Assembly all stood up to show their unanimous acceptance. Therefore, the climax of the General Assembly was reached with the election of the first Indigenous leaders of ECWA. The following were elected:

**Table 3. The First Indigenous leaders of ECWA.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME OF OFFICIAL</th>
<th>RESPONSIBILITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Pastor David Ishola Olatayo</td>
<td>President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Mr. D. N. Blunt</td>
<td>Vice-President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Mr. P. Koladade</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Pastor Bagaiya Nwaya</td>
<td>Treasurer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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2 Ibid., 267-276.
Table 4. The Church Statistics Presented at the First General Assembly.³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>DISTRICTS</th>
<th>CHRISTIANS IN GOOD STANDING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>3500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nupe</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gwari</td>
<td>943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Zaria-Plateau</td>
<td>4050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tangale-Waja</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bornu-Bauchi</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Kano-Katsina</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sokoto</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Niger Colony</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dahomy</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

³ Ibid., 276.
APPENDIX D

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF ECWA

For the smooth and uninterrupted running of organizations, every organization from its inception gives premium importance to the organizational structure it wants to adopt. Therefore, Eric Devaney precisely defines organizational structure saying that,

An organizational structure describes how a company, division, team, or other organization is built; how all of its various components fit together. Or, to get more precise, an organizational structure is a framework that organizes all of the formal relationships within an organization, establishing lines of accountability and authority, and illuminating how all of the jobs or tasks within an organization are grouped together and arranged.¹

He adds that, “Ideally, the type of organizational structure your company, division, or team implements should be tailored to the specific goals you’re trying to accomplish. Because ultimately, even if an organization is filled with great people, it can fall apart (or fail to operate efficiently) if the structure of the organization is weak.”²

It is in that regard, ECWA from its inception along with the SIM critically and prayerfully chose an organizational structure that will enable her to galvanize and utilize

her resources towards achieving her objectives which are encapsulated in her ultimate
goal, “To Glorify God.”

The SIM considered other models of structures in the 1950s like the Episcopal
model, this vests powers on some specially selected individuals, for example, the
Bishops, Archbishops, etc. (Roman Catholics, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutherans, and some
Pentecostal Churches), and the Congregational model wherein powers is centralized in
the hands of a local congregation or Church (Baptists, Congregationalists, Independent
Churches, etc.). However, Turaki says,

The third is the Presbyterian model which centralizes powers in a Council or
Assembly. SIM chose a modified form of this Church polity and incorporated
some aspects of the Congregational model, powers, decision-making and policies
were formulated by the Assembly or Council. The Biblical basic for this modifies
model was taken from Acts 15, the Jerusalem Council.

Organizational Structure of the ECWA 1893-1954

The organizational structure of ECWA from inception evolves through several
considerations. Therefore, Maigadi gives the clear evolution of the organizational
structure of ECWA from inception till date. Maigadi observes that, “The pyramid model
of organizational structure was that the General Church Assembly (GCA), the District
Church Council (DCC), and the Local Church Council (LCC) would play a supporting
role so that the Local Church Board (LCB) could fulfill the mission of Christ on earth.”

This indicates that, the local church has the mandate of making and taking very important

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4 Turaki, An Introduction, 281.
5 Ibid., 139.
decisions pertaining evangelization, church planting, social services, etc. for the church with the people at the lower level. These decisions taken will trickle down to other levels of the church. Maigadi explains that, the above structure never saw the light of the day. Dombong adds saying that, “What this implies, is that the local churches are in the centre of decision-making. This is an important issue in indigenization, allowing local people to take control of church affairs.”

Figure 1. Structural Framework of the ECWA 1893-1954.

Organizational Structure of the ECWA 1954-1967

Despite the aforementioned intention of the founding fathers of ECWA, Maigadi categorically states that, “The original intention namely to give local churches decision

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7 Ibid., 138.
making power was never realized.”

He further explains saying, “The first ECWA Constitution was approved and immediately became operational after the amendments were made at the Egbe Conference. With the adoption of the Constitution, Maigadi notes that the ECWA was now partially an autonomous church in Nigeria.”

Following the amendments made at Egbe Conference, Maigadi says that, “The General Church Assembly (GCA) was then established as an advisory body to the Association of the Evangelical Churches of West Africa, which comprises four levels of administration.” They are as follows:

1. The Local Church Board (LCB)
2. The Local Church Council (LCC)
3. The District Church Council (DCC)
4. The General Church Assembly (GCA).

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8 Maigadi, *Divisive Ethnicity*, 139.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 139
Structure of ECWA from 1967 Till Date

John Nancwat Dombong quoting Peter Korosi who describes the most current structure thus, “The ECWA comprises of the General Church Council, Incorporated Trustees, the District Church Council, the Local Church Council, the Local Church Boards, the Departments Units/Institutions, the registered members and elected or appointed officers of the different government bodies.”

This gives a clear picture of the levels of leadership of the ECWA as enshrined in her 2010 Constitution which is presently operational. The Constitution further explains the above structure saying, “The General Church Council (GCC), shall be the highest policy making body. It shall normally convene once a year in April at Jos Headquarters, but may convene for extra-ordinary sessions as the need arises within a year.”

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11 Ibid., 140.
participants at these council meetings are ECWA Executive, ECWA Trustees, the District Church Council (DCC) Chairmen, secretaries and delegates. The departments and units are there as observers.”¹⁴ Each of these levels of leadership has officers who are constitutionally designated with responsibility or roles that they are expected to perform for the growth and development of the Church.

**Figure 3. Levels of Administration.**¹⁵

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**Hierarchy of Leadership**

The leadership of ECWA is structured in a hierarchical order from the General Church Council (GCC), District Church Council (DCC), Local Church Council (LCC) down to the Local Church Board (LCB). As stated above, within these hierarchical entities, there are various offices that are held by elected officers to carry out various administrative responsibilities as designated to them by the ECWA Constitution and Bye-Laws.

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¹⁵ Maigadi, *Divisive Ethnicity*, 155.
The ECWA Executive

Dombong describes the ECWA Executive thus,

The ECWA leadership exercises an executive role in the organization. The ECWA leadership comprises the ECWA President as the leader, the ECWA Vice President is the number two, and the ECWA General Secretary is the number three, the Assistant General Secretary is the number four and ECWA Treasurer is the number five. The first four leaders are ordained ministers but the ECWA Treasurer is a layman.16

Figure 4. The ECWA Executive (EE).17

The District Church Council (DCC)

The leadership at the DCC level includes, the DCC chairman, the DCC vice chairman, the DCC secretary, the DCC assistant secretary, the DCC delegate and the DCC treasurer. The DCC delegate and the treasurer are laymen, while the rest are ordained ministers.

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17 Ibid., 23.
The Local Church Council (LCC)

The leadership of the local church council comprises of the following functionaries: The Local Overseer as the Chairman, the assistant local overseer, the LCC secretary, the assistant secretary, and the Christian education secretary are positions occupied by the ministers while the position of the LCC delegate, financial secretary, and the treasurer are positions occupied by laymen.

\[18\] Ibid.
The Local Church Board

The pastor is the chairman of the Board while the elders assist the pastor in the ministry. The elders assisting the pastor are the church secretary, the financial secretary, and the church treasurer, while others could be elected when the need arises.

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19 Ibid., 25.
Figure 7. Hierarchy of Leadership at the LCB.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
APPENDIX E

PICTURES OF THE THREE SIM PIONEER MISSIONARIES AND THE LOGOS OF SIM AND ECWA

Pictures play a very vital role in African societies as well as they play in other parts of the world. Pictures authenticate what is being said about people, places and events. They give a clear sense of who, where and what is being talked about. The story of the three SIM Pioneer Missionaries (Walter Gowans (23), Thomas Kent (25) and Rowland Bingham (21), has been narrated to many, but not many people have access to their picture(s). Therefore, it becomes necessary to include them in this research for the benefit of readers and future researchers to see the images of the ones that risked their lives and made the selfless sacrifice to bring the light of the Gospel to the people of the Sudan. Seeing these pictures will challenge the young people to see the need to offer themselves to be used of God for whatever service and wherever He calls them to serve Him in their youthful stage (Eccl. 12:1-8). It will also serve as a reminder and a wake-up call for ECWA to heed by making an intentional and selfless sacrifice to establish the older adults’ ministry.
Figure 8. Coloured Picture of the SIM Pioneer Missionaries in 1893.

![SIM Pioneer Missionaries: 1893](image)

Figure 9. The Black and White Picture of the SIM Pioneer Missionaries in 1893.

![SIM Pioneer Missionaries: 1893](image)
Figure 10. The Official Logo of SIM (Now Known as the Serving In Mission).

Figure 11. The Official Logo of ECWA.


Church of God USA. *Senior Adults Ministries Manual*. Cleveland, TN: Church of God USA Missions, 2012.


