



A Vision for the Aging Church: Renewing Ministry for and by Seniors

Available

November 2011

\$24, 265 pages, paper

978-0-8308-3948-3

Reflections from Michael Parker, Ph.D., Coauthor (with James Houston) of *A Vision for the Aging Church*

On the costs of failing to address the needs of our aging population:

Without adequate resources for mobility, many elders face isolation, depression and poor health, and society faces increased costs of care and a loss of the vital contributions of older generations. The first step toward improving this situation comes through gaining insight into the issues and creating a vision for change in which the church is a clear stakeholder.

On a Christian vision of the elderly and disabled:

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 initiatives, and strategies for successful aging, and they should uphold the inherent value of dependent, disabled people.

On caregiving as a test of character:

Dr. Houston and I think caregiving will be the great test of character this century. Almost half of those eighty-five and older, one of our fastest growing age groups, face the probability of dementia (about two-thirds will be diagnosed with the dreaded Alzheimer's disease). Recipients of such a diagnosis are virtually guaranteed years of dependency on others. Traditionally, families have provided most late-life care. Very few churches provide systematic help to familial caregivers; community-based, ecumenical partnerships will become a necessity.

On how churches benefit from the seniors in their midst:

The ever-growing aging church is no burden; instead, this burgeoning reservoir of accumulated experience and talent can provide a lasting legacy of God's love to the younger generations. Churches that foster the rich, intergenerational connection available only through our elders will ensure that older and elderly believers can leave their unique legacy of faith and

AUTHOR Q & A

James M. Houston

(M.A., Edinburgh; D.Phil., Oxford) is founding principal, former chancellor and emeritus professor of spiritual theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. He is the author of some forty books, including *I Believe in the Creator*, *The Transforming Friendship*, *In Search of Happiness*, *The Heart's Desire*, *The Mentored Life* and *Joyful Exiles*.

Michael W. Parker

(Ph.D./DSW, LCSW, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army Retired [AMEDD]) is associate professor in the School of Social Work and a board member for the Center for Mental Health and Aging at the University of Alabama in Birmingham. He's also an adjunct associate professor in UAB's Division of Gerontology and Geriatric Medicine.

love. The lives of the younger set are enriched, and seniors who become more actively engaged with life also benefit by aging more successfully.

On the needs met by this book:

While serving overseas [in the military], I faced a variety of distant caregiving issues with my father and my wife's father and mother. After my father's funeral in the States, I returned to my duties where I learned about how common these experiences were for my brothers and sisters in uniform. Moreover, members of the Baby Boomer generation are concerned about their aging parents, their own aging and, perhaps, their calling during their retirement years.

Few seminaries offer an elective course on aging and ministry, though all pastors will have older persons in their congregations. Only a very small number of seminaries offer solid, accredited courses on the implications of a graying church for ministry. In our research, we could not locate one American seminary that has conducted a comprehensive review of its curricula to insure that it is "geriatrically enriched" and truly reflective of our aging congregations and population.

On the potential of *A Vision for the Aging Church*:

Hopefully the publication of this book will challenge the church to examine and evaluate the place of elders in its congregations, to consider the sample state-of-science recommendations made in this book concerning seniors, and to advance the status, purpose and health of all senior members. These gains can be made in the midst of fostering relationships that connect older persons to younger people.