

Two thirds of people in human history who have reached the age of 65 are alive right now. Most of you here today are over 65. People over 65 make up about 12% of our population right now. In 2050 people over 65 will make up about 20% of our population. But the aging itself is not the problem – aging is great! It is the hard parts about aging – decreasing physical and mental capacity we enjoyed earlier in life, and coping with chronic disease – that demand our attention. 70% of people 80 and older live with disability and/or a chronic condition. For people over 65 it is 35% of us. That is a lot of us. And it will soon be even more of us.

And in our yearly meeting we hear friends lamenting about the aging and graying of their meetings. While outreach and advancement is important in attracting younger friends, I can speak from my own experience when I say that the opportunity to be a part of a meeting of vibrant older Friends who care for one another and value each other – even when they forget one another’s names or can’t make it up the stairs – this is what really drew me to you, and is why I am with you now. When we grow our capacity to care for one another, that growth naturally expands to include new people.

An older member of one of our meetings has a disability that makes it difficult for him to stay focused and make decisions, so he has an ARCH Visitor sit with him for an hour every week to sort through this mail and papers to make sure nothing is missed.

Another ARCH Visitor organizes a caregivers support group for the meetings in her area.

Another man was facing a fast moving terminal illness, and when the ARCH Visitor at his meeting asked how she could help, he asked her to look out for the stray cat he had been feeding. She had the cat cleaned up, got the cat its shots and fixed, and that cat spent the remaining days of that man’s life purring on his chest.

The goal of the ARCH program is for all the seniors and differently-abled in our meetings to be cared for appropriately by their community of Friends. To do this we need every meeting to have a team of ARCH Visitors. ARCH Visitors are Friends who have attended our weekend training and who return to worship with us at our deathbed, to organize care teams when we find we need help, to help us complete our advanced care directives, and much more.

We dream of meetings where ARCH Visitor teams are well integrated with and utilized by their meetings, and where our places of worship are 100% accessible to people of all ages and abilities. For when we have become sensitized to the needs of those who are aging or live with disability, we begin to be aware of the needs for all of us. If a wheelchair can’t get through that doorway, a stroller probably can’t either!

120 of us from 29 meetings have attended at least one ARCH Visitor training. Which leaves still leaves 35 meetings with no Visitors. While some meetings have vibrant and active teams of Visitors who are called on to serve one another in our ongoing and urgent care needs, other meetings who have Visitors don’t know they have Visitors, or what they can do, or how to activate their service. And while some meetings have actively undertaken accessibility issues, others struggle just to keep the roof in one piece. We have all come a long way towards implementing these dreams, but we still have some distance to go.

We are very sad to say good-bye to one of our founding coordinators Barbara Spring at the end of 2015. But we are taking this loss as an opportunity to reconfigure our program staff. We are consolidating and centralizing the administrative tasks of our program with a new director position that I am excited and grateful to be taking on. At the same time we are developing a number of decentralized local coordinator positions, distributed geographically around our yearly meeting to work closely with the local teams of Visitors and provide coordination and resource support for their area. Anita Paul has agreed to stay on with the program through this transition and continues to offer workshops, consultations, and facilitates the growth of programs like ours in other yearly meetings.

To fund this additional staff time we are actively investigating additional funding possibilities, from selling our own *End of Life* workbook, to grant opportunities in addition to the funding we receive from the Friends Foundation for the Aging, to welcoming individual contributions to our program from those who are touched by it.

Many of you don't have an ARCH Visitor in your meeting This is how you can help. In the next three years ARCH will train an additional 100 Visitors or more – ideally at least two for every meeting in our yearly meeting. So if you haven't yet, consider sending a pair of Friends to our next training in October.

And many of you don't know if your meeting has an ARCH Visitor. Between now and 2018 we'll also meet with each meeting's ministry committee, or whoever holds a concern for pastoral care, to listen to your aging concerns for your meeting and to learn how the ARCH program could help. So come talk to us or send us an email to set that up.

Do you belong to a meeting that could use some intimacy and community building? I think we all do! Invite us to facilitate a workshop, because that is what workshops do.

And most importantly, if you or someone you know is not getting the care that they need, let us know, and we will work together to connect you with an ARCH Visitor from our network.

An incarcerated Friend was suffering from a terminal illness and was granted compassionate release, only to learn that no nursing home would take him. The ARCH staff was able to reach out to a Visitor who worked at a hospice facility who was able to secure him a bed there.

Tonight I've shared with you just a very few of the stories our Visitors have to tell. If you want to hear more, come listen to Visitors tell their stories during the Wednesday morning committee time. And please come to the Committee on Aging Concern's ice cream social on Wednesday evening after meeting for business to celebrate this incredible program, with the people who make it happen.

We know that what we do matters to you, because you tell us it does. We are so grateful to serve this body and for all of the ways that you enact the ministry you are each called to, and for your support of our ministry. Thank you.