

CARLISLE INSTITUTE FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

By Charles Spears

The Carlisle Institute for Lifelong Learning was created to provide opportunities for intellectual stimulation for older members of the greater Carlisle area. After several initial conversations with church members, Pastor Jennifer McKenna convened a group of interested individuals to explore possible ways of pursuing this endeavor. An advisory group was eventually established, milestones established and tasks agreed upon.

After exploring several models, the group agreed to start with a modest offering, with one session in the fall of 2014 and a second in spring of 2015. After a time of brainstorming, the group identified five areas that would most likely be of interest to potential participants:

- Eliminating Clutter in One's Life and Surroundings
- Mysticism
- Appreciating Classical Music
- Understanding the Geology of Central Pennsylvania
- Gardening with Native Plants

The format was designed to best meet the needs of the potential audience, one that would offer convenience of location, frequency and time. It was decided to hold the first session on the Tuesdays and Thursdays of October. Classes would be 75 minutes long, with some being offered in mid-morning, some in late morning and some in early afternoon.

In looking for a convenient location for the program, the group decided to explore the possibility of using Second Presbyterian Church. The building was ADA-accessible and offered a number of meeting places for the various classes. The church's Older Adult Ministry team agreed to sponsor the Institute, which then exempted the program from building rental expenses. The Session was briefed on this proposal and gave its blessings. Coordination between church staff and advisory group members took place in order to ensure the timely use of meeting spaces and technical equipment.

With the format determined, the advisory group then began to identify possible instructors for the classes. After another brainstorming session, possible presenters were identified and group members volunteered to make contact. Former professional colleagues, church members, family members, local college faculty and community resources were among the resources identified and contacted. It was decided to offer the instructors a small stipend for their services, with funds coming from registrations fees paid by participants.

Once the instructors were established, publicity materials were prepared and a great deal of personal recruiting began. Thirty-five people participated in the pilot program, 20 percent of whom were from the greater community. Based on feedback and

evaluation, the advisory group is working to present another series of classes in April 2015 and hopes to double the number of participants.

Charles Spears is a native of Lexington, Massachusetts and has been married to his wife, Jean, for nearly 50 years. He graduated from Eastern Baptist College, with a BA in history, and from Andover Newton Theological School, with a Master's Degree in Religious Education. He served as Director of Religious Education at Fort Monmouth, NJ for nearly 40 years, where he was responsible for the religious education of soldiers and family members of all faith groups. Upon retirement, he and his wife moved to Carlisle, PA to help his son with the care of their two grandchildren. He is an elder at Second Presbyterian Church in Carlisle and currently serves as chair of the Older Adult Ministry team.