A Mission-shaped Church for Older People?
Practical Suggestions for Local Churches

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As one reaches what the experts define as 'Pre-Senior' (55-65 years) one tends to convince oneself that age is purely a state of mind. If I still think of myself as 23, then 23 I am. Unfortunately, that doesn't stop the bus pass dropping through the letterbox and considerations of pension weighing more heavily each year!

In these islands, the average age of the population is growing markedly as better health care raises the average life-expectancy of an adult. Contrary to what is often thought, growth in church attendance among the older age-groups is not keeping up with these demographic changes. So the writers of this extremely helpful book have set about to help us think of the issues, problems and opportunities posed by an ageing population and to inspire us into action.

The way the book is set out will be warmly welcomed by busy and hard-pressed church leaders. In the first part, three modules (thirteen sessions including an introduction) are explained and planned - the leader has simply to familiarise themselves with the content and provide supportive material for each session. The second part contains a whole range of helpful related material which should be placed in the hands of anyone who ministers among older people: the range is quite extraordinary.

What shines through this book is the first-hand experience of those who have written it. I am grateful to them for sharing this experience more widely.

When you have read the book, don't pass it on. Buy some more copies to put into the hands of those engaged in any form of mission and ministry among adults today.

Dr John Sentamu, Archbishop of York
This publication for churches who wish to respond to the challenge of the growing numbers of older people in their congregations and in society as a whole had its origins in a training manual Older People and Evangelism produced by Church Army during 1997 (Third Edition 2001).

This new resource has now been published as a joint venture through close collaboration between Church Army and the Leveson Centre for the Study of Ageing, Spirituality and Social Policy. It includes some of the material from the earlier manual, revised and updated, together with a considerable number of newly written chapters covering a wide range of relevant topics resulting from the first hand experience of the authors. We hope it will meet the needs of members of churches of all denominations who take seriously the role of older people within church, as well as evangelism to those beyond.
The church must take account of the needs and gifts of older people. In an ever expanding ageing population where youthfulness is fashionable and trendy, they must be given a higher profile for a number of reasons.

Firstly, we must take older people seriously because they make up a significant percentage of our existing church congregations and therefore we have a responsibility to nurture and develop their spiritual life. Hazel Southam in Idea July/August 2007 reports that:

The number of retired people in Britain’s churches is growing every year. According to Christian Research, of the 3 million people who regularly attend church, a third are over 65, up from just 18% nearly 30 years ago. And as the baby boomer generation ages into retirement, that number is only going to increase.

Obviously, it depends which pew you’re sitting in as to how many slightly older heads you’ll see, but the national picture is an ageing one. There are 200,000 more older people in church than teenagers and children.

Secondly, work with older people must be given a higher profile because although church attendance of this age group appears healthy, it is not keeping up with the massive population growth of older people in general. The mission task is still considerable. In the next 20 years it is anticipated that older people will represent a significant percentage of the population in the UK. This changing mission context will need response; finance and training of specialists in this ministry will be required.

Thirdly, older people must be taken seriously because as a significant percentage of church attenders, they are one of our largest assets in terms of people resource in this mission. The stereotypical images of older people as frail and ‘over the hill’ need to be challenged. They are not passive receivers but people with gifts, wisdom and skills to share with others. They are our most precious resource in reaching out to older people outside our churches.

Lastly, work with older people must be given a higher profile because this term is used to describe a group of people of more diversity than ever before. Clearly working with older people is no longer a simple task given the age span covered, ranging from 55 to 105! When working with older people, it is useful to consider the target age group in the planning of services, various activities and mission strategies as their cultural background will be different. It might be helpful to consider these three cohort groups:

- Pre-Senior – (55–64) Working independent;
- Senior – 3rd Age (65–80) Retired independent;
- Older Frail – 4th Age (80+) Dependent.

It is likely that no one way of doing church or evangelism will fit all three cohorts. New approaches will be needed alongside existing ones, especially as we seek to connect with an increasing proportion of younger-old who have never had any meaningful contact with church in their lifetime.

If you are ministering in a rural or seaside area, as you are no doubt already aware, national statistics show these contain the highest percentage of retired people and the highest percentage of older people attending church. The mission task may be more daunting but it is possible that you will be helped by working in a culture that embraces the lifestyles of older

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1 Bimonthly magazine published by The Evangelical Alliance.
people and is prepared to put resources towards this ministry. If you are working in town and cities, especially new and developing areas, older people will be in more of a minority with hidden needs and thus work with them might feel more marginalised.

Along the spectrum between these two extremes, the responsibility to take seriously the work with older people remains the same. It is hoped that this resource will be adapted for local needs of older people whether they make up a large or a small proportion of the population in your area. It is intended as a starting point to encourage work with older people as we believe that engagement with and valuing older people is a sign of a healthy church.

This resource exists to help churches make small steps towards addressing all the above issues. It is made up of two main parts. Part 1 is intended to raise awareness of the issues relating to older people, encouraging greater involvement by the church by offering three training modules to suit different local needs.

Part 2 offers a range of suggestions for practical application in more detail. The lack of engagement is seemingly such that awareness should be encouraged at different levels within church structures: diocesan, deanery, inter-denominationally, multi benefices, parish and existing local older people networks.

The resource is designed to examine and explore our own perceptions and feelings in the ageing process as well as enabling others to do the same. The starting point will depend on local training needs and previous experience. No prior knowledge of working with older people is necessary for ministers, pioneers and other leaders. For those already accustomed to running events for older people such as luncheon clubs and other established events it might be worth looking at ideas for developing these. A fresh expression of church for older people or running a Holiday at Home event might be developed.

For further information and reading, there is a bibliography.
As we have seen in the introduction, many churches are not as aware as they should be of the spiritual, practical and social needs of the many older people with whom they are involved nor have ideas for where involvement does not exist at present. In this part we look at some of the ways a local church might raise awareness and we provide some practical resources to do so.

This part therefore includes a suggested introductory presentation that might be used for a PCC, deanery synod or wherever the social, practical and spiritual needs of older people needs to be promoted in order to encourage interest and action.

Secondly, a training course is included; this is intended for those who desire to work with older people. It is meant to help church members understand attitudes to older people and the value we place on ageing. There is a choice of three modules depending on the appropriate training needs of the group:

- Ageing and attitudes towards older people;
- Engaging with older people;
- Practical evangelism among older people in partnership with other churches or agencies.

These resource ideas can be used to suit local situations and needs. The introductory presentation might be a useful resource when working in partnership with neighbouring churches or other agencies to raise awareness. If you want to carry out a survey to determine where the needs of older people lie, the questionnaire in the Area Audit of Module 2 may be a useful starting place. In a similar way, to survey your own congregation’s attitudes to older people, the Church Audit in Module 2 will give some ideas. As well as for training courses, material from Modules 1, 2 or 3 can be used as one-day workshops, depending on the training and learning needs.

A session designed to raise awareness of the spiritual, practical and social needs of older people at a PCC, deanery synod or other suitable place where people can get together.

This material has been used by a variety of groups and takes about 30–40 minutes. Of course it needs to be adapted for local circumstances.

Opening prayer

Grant that the churches may use the vocation that older Christians have to nurture the faith of young and old alike. Help us, Lord, to have a clearer vision of older people’s ministry, using their experience, wisdom, understanding and love for the extension of your kingdom. Amen.

Introduction

Play a short piece of music or use a poem or scripture passage to set the scene. For example:

- When I’m sixty-four (The Beatles);
- Fanfare for the common man (Aaron Copeland);
- The best is yet to be (Robert Browning).

Group work

Break up into small groups of not more than eight.

What are both the positive and the negative attitudes to older people?

Ask them to brainstorm on to flip chart paper. Allow 5 minutes.

Ask each group to hang up its lists and invite brief feedback. Allow 5 minutes.

Allow time for silent reflection.
Individually

Think about and write down your own attitudes to ageing, your hopes and fears and good points about getting older.

After five minutes suggest that these reflections might become part of their daily prayer life.

Group work

List on a flip chart possible areas of ministry with older people.

Allow 5 minutes followed by brief feedback.

Large group discussion

After groups have reported back hand out the following statements about ageism and invite comment.

‘Ageism is discrimination against older people on the basis of chronological age.’ (Maggie Kuhn, founder of the Gray Panther movement. See No Stone Unturned: The Life and Times of Maggie Kuhn, Ballantine Books, 1991)

Robert Butler first coined the term ageism in the 1960s. He defined it as a process of stereotyping and discrimination against people just because they were old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this for skin colour and gender.

Ageism has a number of dimensions: job discrimination, loss of status, stereotyping and dehumanisation. Ageism is about assuming all older people are the same, despite their different life histories, needs and expectations. Ageism not only affects the lives of older people, but, like ageing itself, it affects everyone from birth onwards, putting limits and constraints on experiences, expectations, relationships and opportunities.

Ageism is important because it affects workers and carers at a personal level. Contact with older people may be avoided because it is viewed as unrewarding or it reminds younger people of their own ageing. This is partly because younger people have no direct experience of old age and therefore have to rely on social stereotypes, which may be quite negative (think of the many negative images of older people we see on TV and in film). These negative images may create perceptions of a future old age as a time of dependency, poor health, poverty and vulnerability, even though this may bear little relationship to the lived experience of many older people.

Ageism is not obvious. Sometimes you may not be aware it is happening. But it may result in you having different treatment at your local GP’s surgery or your local hospital. It may affect you when applying for holiday or car insurance. It may even stop you getting a job.

Ageism has a dramatic, detrimental effect on older people but this is often not acknowledged. Age Concern is highlighting this as a major issue that needs to be addressed in order to ensure the fair treatment of older people.

Some of these situations may be familiar to you:

• Being refused interest-free credit, a new credit card or car insurance because of your age.
• Finding that an organisation’s attitude to older people results in you receiving a lower quality of service.
• Age limits on benefits such as Disability Living Allowance.
• A doctor deciding not to refer you to a consultant because you are ‘too old’.

(These observations on the nature of ageism come from the website of Age Concern Eastbourne, http://ageconcerneastbourne.org.uk/ageism)

Final group work

As a group, list the main needs of older people as you see them in the light of the previous considerations.

In closing

Draw together the lists of needs of older people and finish by asking a volunteer to read Psalm 71.
Lord God, you have shown us through many great men and women who have lived and given their lives to you that we do not retire as Christians when we reach sixty-five. Our work and our service for you continue until we leave this earthly world for that heavenly world which you have prepared for us to enjoy. Help us, therefore, to use our gifts and our potential in old age to bring others, whether they are young or old, into your kingdom. This we ask for your honour and glory. Amen.

**Modular training course**

The modular training course is designed to help people examine their attitudes towards older people. They explore the church and society’s attitudes towards ageing so that evangelistic efforts can be better informed about the value we place in working with older people. They are also intended to raise the issues and concerns that older people experience. The hope is that by doing this people may be inspired to engage with work for and with older people and to value them as people with gifts to offer. This can be translated in the context of both traditional church and fresh expressions of church in reaching out to the many de-churched and non-churched.

Each stand-alone module is intended to span four or five weeks for church groups. Select the module appropriate to your local training needs. The first module, *Ageism and attitudes towards older people*, is arranged in five sessions. The second module, *Engaging with older people*, looks at some facts and figures related to our ageing population and assessing local need and is arranged in four sessions. The third module, *Practical evangelism in partnership with other agencies*, is focused on meeting the spiritual needs of older people in five sessions.

**Module 1 Session 1:**

*Our own attitudes to ageing*

As believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of Glory you must never treat people in different ways according to their outward appearance. You will be doing the right thing if you obey the Law of the Kingdom, which is found in the Scriptures: ‘Love your neighbour as you love yourself.’ But if you treat people according to their outward appearance you are guilty of sin. (James 2).
Exercise 1

I would like you all to get into pairs, preferably with someone you don’t know or don’t know well, and for the next ten minutes spend five minutes each discovering all you can about each other. Include what gives joy to your lives and what makes life really worth living.

After ten minutes call group back together and ask each member to tell us something about the person with whom they have spent the last ten minutes.

I would now like you to go back into your pairs and together write down what growing older and old age means to you. What do you most dread about getting old and what are you are looking forward to as you grow older?

Give another ten minutes for this exercise and then call the group together again.

Write answers on a flip chart and discuss – bringing out the positive sides of growing older. You could at this point tell them about someone who did great things in old age, for example, Pope John XXIII.

Pope John was in his 70s when he was made a Cardinal in 1953. It was five years later that he was elected as Pope and two years after that that he convened the Second Vatican Council that would change the workings of the church – God often uses older people to do great things for his glory.

Exercise 2

Have a volunteer read

How to know when you are growing old

Everything hurts – what doesn’t hurt doesn’t work.
The gleam in your eye is the sun hitting your bifocals.
You feel like the morning after but haven’t been anywhere.

Your children begin to look middle aged.
You join a health club but don’t bother going.
You know all the answers, but no one asks the questions.
Your house is too big and your medicine chest isn’t big enough.
Your birthday cake collapses from the weight of the candles.
You stick your teeth into a steak and they stay there.
Your knees buckle but your belt won’t.

You sit in a rocking chair and can’t make it go.
You turn out the light for economy instead of romance.
You need glasses to find glasses.
You get winded playing cards.
Your back goes out more than you do.
You look forward to a dull evening.
You just want to live long enough to be a problem to your kids.

(Source unknown)

• Is this what growing older means to you?
• Is this what growing older means to the world?
• Is this what growing older means to the church?

Encourage open discussion

As a child, you may have had the experience of being taught by teachers who seemed old to you at the time even though they were only in their forties.

Exercise 3

In groups of three or four discuss

What do you call old?
When do you believe someone is old?
Do you think of yourself as being old, and why?

Discuss their answers in open session for two or three minutes
Age Concern England defines an older person as any person over the age of 55! Herein lies the challenge because there are huge cultural differences between the ages of 55 and 105.

Broadly speaking their cohort groups are:

• Pre-Senior – (55–64) Working independent;
• Senior – 3rd Age (65–80) Retired independent;
• Older Frail – 4th Age (80+) Dependent.

We are living in an increasingly ageing population. 11.4 million people are now of pensionable age. People are living longer. In the UK there are 9,000 people now over the age of 100. When the Queen came to the throne there were just 300! By 2031, this figure could reach 36,000. Older people are no longer a minority group within society; they are fast becoming the majority of the population.

Suggested homework

1 What age do you consider as old? During this week, try to get answers to this question from people in each of the following age groups: 8–12, 13–16, 17–20, 21–40, 41–60, 61–70, over 70. You might find representatives in your church congregation. You will soon find out that the answers will differ greatly.

2 Compile a list of ten well-known people of differing ages and ask your friends and families how old they think those people are. Please bring back answers to this and the previous question next session.

3 Please bring a selection of popular magazines with you next week and also the Radio or TV Times.

Closing exercise

In your groups read Psalm 71 and answer the following questions:

• What does the psalmist fear about growing old?
• Do we have the same fears?

• How do the attitudes of the psalmist’s enemies cloud his understanding of how God feels towards him or her in later life?
• Have the attitudes of the world and the church towards older people helped to bring about these fears?
• What are the good things God has prepared for those who are getting older?
• What good things do you think we have to look forward to?

Concluding prayer

Father, help your church throughout the world to see again the value and potential of older people. Grant that they may discover anew your spiritual power in their active ministry.

Grant that the churches may use the vocation that older Christians have to nurture the faith of young and old alike. Help us, Lord, to have a clearer vision of older people’s ministry, using their experience, wisdom, understanding and love for the furtherance of your Kingdom.

Take from us all that hinders our acceptance of older Christians as those who can minister to our needs and the needs of those in our congregations, that the day may surely come when your whole church, whether young or old, or middle-aged, may be seen as one united loving family, all serving you and one another with joy. Amen.

Module 1 Session 2: Society and media attitudes to old age

The group should have brought with them a selection of magazines and the Radio or TV Times.

Exercise 1

In groups of two or three, go through the magazines that you have brought with you and mark those advertisements that are specifically geared towards older people.

What are they advertising?

List responses on a flip chart.
• How are older people perceived in these adverts?
• Identify negative and positive stereotypes.

It is more than likely that most of the advertisements are for funeral plans, insurance, beds and chairs which are made to enable older people to get out of them more easily.

What about beautiful clothes, soaps, perfumes, and activity holidays? What age are their target groups? Why aren’t these things advertised for those over sixty? Does this say something about how advertisers view older people? What message do they convey about older people?

Exercise 2

In your groups go through the TV and Radio programmes and answer the following questions:

• How many programmes are for older people?

In your experience

• How are older people portrayed on TV?
• How many advertisements on television are targeted towards older people?
• When are these adverts screened and what are they for?

They are usually screened in the afternoon and again they are for funeral plans and so on.

• How could you as a group change the way older people are portrayed in advertisements on the television?

Exercise 3

In pairs, make up a list of words which you believe best describe older people, for example frail.

Give the group ten minutes for this. Call the group back together and go through their lists writing the words on a flip chart.

Looking at this list, how many of the words could describe someone who is middle aged or younger?

In your pairs, make a list of words which could describe someone who is between the ages of twenty-one and thirty (Give the group ten minutes for this.)

Call the group back together and go through their lists, writing the words on the flip-chart. Looking at this list, how many of these words could describe someone who is over the age of sixty-five?

Comment

Research has shown that older adults are more likely to be consumers of news media than younger adults and that newspapers and magazines are used more by older people than TV. Given the popularity of printed material over that of TV, older people are under represented in magazine advertising. This was especially true of women. In advertisements, older men were found to appear more frequently in a work environment than older women who were often shown in a social or family setting. The research also found that older people are often depicted unfavourably in adverts, appearing as impaired, weak or naïve, whereas a positive portrayal of active, healthy older adults can be found in magazines and newspapers targeted to older people!

Under-representation of older people occurs in television advertising and they are given minor roles. However on a positive note, the role of advisor was frequently assigned to the older men and women, presumably for their greater experience and perceived wisdom. Also older people were most often seen in transgenerational ads, that is, in multiple age groups, primarily in the home related to food products. Fewer older models were used in the advertising of travel services and the sale of cars, thus reinforcing stereotypical assumptions that cars and travel are for younger people in the main.

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Exercise 4

Facts about life for older people.

Hand out the questionnaires below and ask people to work alone. Allow 15 minutes for this exercise. On completion of the exercise read out the answers to the questions. How many people got full marks?

Answers

1 FALSE – Over three-quarters of older people will tell you that they consider themselves to be in good health or even excellent health.

2 TRUE – A study has shown that the first three years of retirement pose no greater risk of someone developing ill health than at any other stage of life.

3 FALSE – If we are in good health our brains work just as well as when we were younger.

4 TRUE – If the heart is healthy it works just as effectively as a younger healthy heart.

5 FALSE – The majority of older people are either married or live with a friend although it is worth noting that people over 75 are more likely to live alone.

6 FALSE – 75% of older people who have children have been visited by at least one of them during the past week.

7 TRUE – Most health care provided in the home is provided by relatives.

8 FALSE – Those over the age of 65 suffer from poverty more than any other age group.

Ageism and attitudes towards people over the age of 55

Questionnaire No1

Are the following statements TRUE or FALSE?

1 When talking to older people more often than not they will start complaining about their health.

2 When we retire from work we are no more likely to suffer from ill health.

3 As we get older our brains don’t work as well as they did when we were younger.

4 The heart continues to work effectively as we get older.

5 Large numbers of older people are either widowed, live by themselves or are divorced.

6 Most children very rarely visit their elderly parents.

7 It is usually family who look after their elderly relatives when they become ill.

8 Nowadays older people are less likely to suffer from poverty.

9 Those over the age of 65 are not really interested in politics.

10 Those over the age of 65 are more likely to commit suicide.

11 The older we get the more likely we are to be victims of criminals.
Module 1 Session 2

9 FALSE – Those over 65 are more likely to vote and show an interest in politics.

10 TRUE – More older people commit suicide than any other age group.

11 FALSE – Older people are less likely to be the victims of criminals than younger people are.

Hand out the second questionnaire below and ask people to work alone. Allow 15 minutes for this exercise. On completion of the exercise read out the answers to the questions.

Answers

1 Age 95.

2 Age 9 months.

3 Age 75.

4 Age 36.

5 Age 88.

6 Age 89.

7 Age 73.

8 Age 81.

Agism and attitudes towards older people

Questionnaire No 2

In this country we have discriminatory attitudes towards older people and, like it or not, this attitude has spilled over in the church.

Described below are a number of real individuals. How old do you think they are?

1 A man driving a sports car loves speed; in fact he is stimulated by speed. Age … ?

2 The patient has had his eye removed, following the diagnosis of a tumour. Age … ?

3 She is looking forward to starting her 'A' level in psychology. Age … ?

4 He has got dementia and hasn’t got very long to live. Age … ?

5 The bride looked radiant in a white lace dress. Age … ?

6 After suffering heavy bleeding for several months the doctor performed a hysterectomy. Age … ?

7 The proud father paced up and down as he waited on the birth of his first child. Age … ?

8 The neighbours complained about the loud music coming from his flat. Age … ?

9 He ignored advice from the person in charge and deliberately stepped into the cement and got stuck. Age … ?

10 Following his ‘work out’ and a shower, he joined his mates for a game of pool. Age … ?

11 She was ordained priest by the Bishop of Edinburgh last year. Age … ?
We stereotype all kinds of people – older people included. John went into his local bank the other day and saw a young man dressed in black. He had close-cropped hair and wore a pair of dark glasses. He looked very menacing. It wasn’t until he came up and spoke to him that he realised that he knew him. He is one of the politest and kindest people he knew. Until he spoke to him, John wouldn’t have gone near him because he looked so dangerous. Has that ever happened to you?

In addition the roles often held by older people have negative stereotypes associated with them. Labels such as ‘spinster’ or ‘widow’ conjure up weak or pathetic images. The same might apply to aged care institutions like ‘nursing home’ or ‘supported housing’. The mass media has helped to perpetuate these negative characterisations.

We do indeed stereotype all kinds of people.

How would television portray these characters?

A boxer, soldier, school teacher, bus driver, vicar, window cleaner, bishop, or someone who lives on a pension.

Older people are more likely to be stereotyped than any other member of the public.

How would you get rid of stereotyping older people? Discuss.

Closing exercise

Read Exodus 10:9, 1 Timothy 5:1–2, Titus 2:2–5.

Throughout the Bible we learn that God has a deep concern for older people. He even says that they should continue to be guided in the church, so that they too learn more and more about God as they get older.

In old age we are, or will be, still part of his people – part of his church. Although older people may have weaknesses and at times feel like outcasts of society, God never forgets them. He values them and regards them as a vital part of his church.

How can we make older people more aware of God’s love and concern for them?

Listening to older people is important – do we spend enough time listening or are we too busy to be bothered?

Closing prayer

We praise you Lord for life and for all that you have given to us, which makes this life so worthwhile. We are grateful that you care for us our whole life long, and that you are loving us through this life into that glorious life where there will be no divisions of any kind.

We praise you especially for all those older people within our church who are signs of your great love and have shown us through their wisdom, care and love, something of your fatherly care for each one of us. Help your whole church to discover and use the potential, experience and gifts that older people have. Help us to respect their life histories and learn from them something of their spirituality, which they have nurtured over the years.

Show us ways in which we can encourage and help older people to discover their ministry within the church, showing them that they still have a vocation to serve you. And Lord, please give your whole church the courage and generosity needed to allow older people to practice their ministry amongst us and those whom they meet outside the church through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
Module 1 Session 3: Attitudes and Ageism

Introduction

Either read the text below to the group or if preferred, circulate it so that each person can read it quietly for themselves (allow 10 minutes).

Older People in Today’s World

It is often implied that older people have nothing to offer to society. In fact they have a great deal to offer. Our older population has lived through some great trials, and has experiences from which we would do well to learn.

In this country we have discriminatory attitudes towards older people: this is called ageism. These attitudes often divide us and we treat older people as second class citizens. They are often seen by society at large as being sick, confused, useless, complaining, unintelligent and lonely, which is totally untrue. The result is that society adopts negative views about older people.

A major factor which can feed younger people’s negative attitudes towards older people is their fear of death. Associating old age with death reminds them of their own mortality. Ageism is a defence put up against the day when they too will be old and nearing death.

As Christians, the central message of our gospel is the resurrection and our Lord’s victory over death, and all the fear this brought before his sacrifice. Yet the world’s attitude towards older people seems to have overflowed into the church itself and many Christians have the same view of old age as the world. What does this say about our faith?

In recent years there has been an emphasis on the importance of young people and children in the church. Of course it is right that we should do all we can to encourage young people to become Christians, but we should also remember that not only do older people sometimes need conversion, they also have an important ministry to perform within the church. In the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1–16) some are sent to work for our Lord at the eleventh hour.

God through his word in the Bible shows us that the older Christian has an important and honoured place within his church. Throughout the Bible we read of connections between age and maturity. The older Christian can look back on a life of experience and use those experiences to further God’s kingdom. Unfortunately the church, like the world, often places little value on experience and it is grievous to see the church copying the world.

Jesus said, ‘I came that they may have life and have it more abundantly.’ The church, therefore, needs to work towards breaking down the barriers of ageism if we are to have abundant life. Older people have a great contribution to make both within the church and within our communities. We should no longer be satisfied with presenting a gospel which encourages people, when they reach a certain age, to opt out and to think they have reached the position where they no longer need to practise a ministry and be ministered unto. Jesus talks of ‘abundant life’, and that means a life which is satisfying and fulfilling right to the very end.

The church must take a positive approach to providing spiritual care for older people. Ageism should become a word of the past. It needs to be abolished within the church so that we, as Christians, can learn from the experiences that our older people bring to us, and enjoy with them that abundant life, both here and beyond death, which our Lord himself promised for all those who follow him.

Exercise 1

In groups of three or four people ask them to answer the following question.

Do older people have anything to offer to society in general?
Write your thoughts down and bring back into the large group to share. (*Allow 30 minutes for the whole exercise.*)

**Exercise 2**

*In the same groups*

Take five minutes to think about older people who have influenced your lives (*it doesn’t matter if they haven’t known them personally*) and write down how.

Ask each person, in turn, to share his or her experience with the group without comment from other members. Then in open discussion within the group share your combined experiences. (*Allow 30 minutes for this exercise.*)

**Exercise 3**

*In the same groups*

Bring to mind older people who have influenced the world and changed the way we live during the past 50 years. What did they do? How did they make changes and what effect are those changes having on the world today?

*Allow a further 30 minutes for this exercise. List (on a flip chart) some of the people the groups have come up with. These might include:*

- Winston Churchill;
- Pope John XXIII;
- Nelson Mandela;
- Mother Teresa.

**Closing exercise**

Read 1 Kings 12:6–19.

What might have happened if Rehoboam had taken the advice of the elders?

What are the parallels in today’s context? We so often don’t use the experience of older people. They have had a lifetime of experience and yet we don’t take advantage of that knowledge.

Is this a good thing or a bad thing?

**Prayer**

Lord, you are the Alpha and the Omega – the beginning and the end of all things. From the very beginning, older people have been very special in your sight and you have used them in many ways for your honour and glory. We only have to read of Abraham and Moses and all those great leaders in the Bible to see that this is indeed true.

In our own age too, you have used older people to show us the ways to peace, love and care. We know that at the very end of time, older people will continue to be used by you. Grant that your church may see again, and with fresh eyes, the value of older people and use them to further your kingdom here on earth.

This we ask for your name’s sake. Amen.

**Module 1 Session 4: Older people, the church and the Bible**

**Exercise 1**

Ask the group to break up into pairs and answer the following question.

Do older people have anything to offer the church and if so what?

Ask the group to come together and share their findings. *Allow 30 minutes for this exercise. You might want to list their contribution on a flip chart.*

**Exercise 2**

God has used older people since the world began to do his work and guide his people.

*In groups of three or four*

Call to mind older people God has used in the Old and New Testaments. Record their calling and mission and how they have influenced or inspired you. How many did you discover? (*Allow 30 minutes.*)

Ask the groups to share their findings.
Comment

Throughout the Bible there are many references to older people. The aim of the next exercise is to help participants to realise the extent to which older people are referred to in the Bible and how it also acknowledges both the strengths and weaknesses of old age. A few other issues might emerge in their groups.

Materials required:

- A Bible for each participant
- Pencils and paper for each group
- Felt-tip pen for writing on posters

Prepare in advance three poster-sized sheets of paper. Put these up somewhere suitable for people to write on. Each sheet of paper to be headed as follows:

- Aged biblical characters, with references, noting their level of ability and competence.
- General observations about old age in the Bible, with references.
- References to instructions regarding old people in the Bible, for example in their relationships with others and how others should behave towards them.

Exercise 3

In groups of three or four people think about and note down responses and references from the Bible that fit into the three headings on the posters. From your findings agree on three or four examples to put on the wall charts. Try not to duplicate contributions from others.

Allow 45 minutes and 15 minutes for feedback. Note that there are over 300 references to old age in the Old Testament alone.

In feedback, invite members of the groups to comment on special points to note from their contributions, for example:

- God used Elizabeth and Zechariah – two very holy older people – to bring up the forerunner of Jesus Christ.
- The first Christian evangelist was Anna, an 84-year-old woman.
- The fifth commandment suggests that the Jews found it just as difficult to respect age as we do sometimes.
- The Bible shows us that the Jews had a balanced view of old age; it could either be a time of wisdom or foolishness.

Finally give out the handouts on pages 19 and 20 and encourage people to do more work at home.

Closing exercise


The advantage that older Christians have is that they are able to look back over their lives and very often see the hand of God at work. We lose so much if we are not prepared to listen to the older members of our churches.

In your groups discuss the following questions:

- Does your church pay enough attention to the life histories of the older members of your congregations?
- How can we encourage older members of the congregation to share their life experiences with us and witness to Christ’s working in their lives?

Closing prayer

Lord God, you have shown us through great men and women who have lived and given their whole lives to you that we do not retire as Christians when we become older. Our work and our service for you continue until we leave this earthly world for that heavenly world which you have prepared for us to enjoy. Help us, therefore, to use our gifts and our potential in old age to bring others, whether they are young or old, into your kingdom. This we ask for your honour and glory. Amen.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biblical references to particular old people and their capacities when old</th>
<th>General observations about old age in the Bible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lot</strong> Genesis 19:31</td>
<td>Exodus 10:9 No one was being left, however old.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abraham</strong> Genesis 24, 25:8</td>
<td>Exodus 23:20 and 26 Obedience to God will lead to long lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Isaac</strong> Genesis 27:1</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 28:50 Foreigners will take no notice of age when they kill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jacob</strong> Genesis 43:27; 44:31; 46; 47:29; 48; 49:33</td>
<td>Proverbs 17:6 Old men are proud of their grandchildren just as boys are proud of their fathers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joseph</strong> Genesis 50:24</td>
<td>Proverbs 20:29 We admire the strength of youth and respect the grey hair of age.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aaron</strong> Numbers 20:28; 33:39</td>
<td>Proverbs 30:17 Anyone who makes fun of his father or despises his mother in her old age ought to be eaten by vultures or have their eyes picked out by wild ravens (see also Micah 7:6; Deuteronomy 27:16 and 19; Deuteronomy 28:30; Exodus 21:15 and 17; Ezekiel 22:7; Lamentations 5:12; Isaiah 47:6; Isaiah 3:5; Deuteronomy 28:50; Proverbs 30:11).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moses</strong> Deuteronomy 31:2; 34</td>
<td>Job 12:12–13 Men have wisdom, but God has wisdom and power. Old men have insight; God has insight and power to act. (See also Job 32:6–7; Proverbs 20:29; Proverbs 23:22).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Joshua</strong> Joshua 13:1; 23; 24; Judges 2:8</td>
<td>Job 21:7 Why does God let evil men live, let them grow old and prosper?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gideon</strong> Judges 8:32</td>
<td>Job 32:9 It is not growing old that makes men wise or helps them to know what is right (see also Ecclesiastes 4:13).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Samuel</strong> 1 Samuel 8:1; 9:14; 10:17; 11:6; 12:2; 15:34; 17:12; 19:18; 25:1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jesse</strong> 1 Samuel 17:12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>David</strong> 2 Samuel 5:4; 1 Kings 1:1, 15; 2:1; 1 Chronicles 23:1; 29:28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Barzillai</strong> 2 Samuel 19:32</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Solomon</strong> 1 Kings 11:4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rehoboam</strong> 1 Kings 12:6–19</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ahijah</strong> 1 Kings 14:4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Asa</strong> 1 Kings 15:23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jehoiada</strong> 2 Chronicles 24:15</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Eli</strong> 1 Samuel 2:22; 4:15</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Anna</strong> Luke 2:36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>John</strong> Revelation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How many more can you find?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*I am your God and I will take care of you until you are old and your hair is grey.*
Jeremiah 31:13
Older people (literally bearded ones) included in outreach reflecting their age, experience and influence. See also Jeremiah 19:1–2 where elders are commissioned for mission.

Joel 2:16
Bring the old people to the solemn assembly to be sanctified.

Joel 2:28
Afterwards I will pour out my Spirit on everyone. Your sons and daughters will proclaim my message; your old men will have dreams and younger men will have visions.

Zechariah 8:4
Once again old men and women, so old they use a stick when they walk, will be sitting in the city squares.

Psalm 71
The prayer of an old man…

Psalm 92:14
They will still bear fruit in old age. They will stay green and strong.

Psalm 119:100
I have greater wisdom than old men because I obey your commands.

Psalm 148:12
Praise him, kings and all people, princes and all rulers; girls and young men, older people and children.

Ecclesiastes 12
Men and women are creatures of time.

Acts 2:17
A repeat of Joel’s prophecy – note the inclusiveness.

Elizabeth and Zachariah – older role models.

Simeon as a role model.

Luke 2:36–8
Anna as an early witness of the Messiah.

Luke 21, Mark 12:43–44
Widow as example of virtue – true piety.

Galatians 3:28–29
No discrimination

James 1:27
Looking after orphans and widows

Instructions about old people in the Bible

Exodus 21:15
Death sentence for hitting father or mother.

Exodus 21:17
Death sentence for cursing father or mother (see also Leviticus 20:9).

Exodus 20:12
Honouring parents (see also Deuteronomy 5:16 and especially Ephesians 6:2–3).

Leviticus 19:32
Honouring all older people.

Leviticus 27:16
Third year tithes for widows.

Deuteronomy 24:19
Curse on those depriving widows.

1 Timothy 5:1
Treat older women as mothers.

1 Timothy 5:1, 19–20
Do not rebuke an older man.

1 Timothy 5:3–8
Show respect for widows.

Titus 2:2
Old men, be sober, sensible and self-controlled. Older women should live a holy life.

1 Peter 5:5
Younger men must submit to older ones.
Module 1 Session 5: Older people and the church today

Older people too often feel that they haven’t much to offer the world or the church. How can we encourage them to realise that they are an important part of the church and that they have much still to offer the church and the world?

Exercise 1

Discuss in groups of three or four people. (Allow 30 minutes.)

- Do you believe that we retire as Christians – if so at what age?

- What gifts do you think older people have in your congregation that could be used to further God’s kingdom?

  One of the gifts they may have is time.

- Should we actively encourage older people to use their gifts and how?

Each group to report back in open session.

Exercise 2

In the same groups

Many older Christians have a spirituality from which we would do well to learn. How can we encourage them to share their knowledge of prayer and meditation?

Discuss responses in open session after about 30 minutes.

Closing exercise

Read Matthew 20:1–16

Many older Christians have much to offer the church in later life and yet often no attention is paid to them, whilst the views of younger people are sought. How do you think they feel when this happens?

How do you feel when you are devalued? Do you think older Christians would feel the same?

Older people are often seen as a group which is ‘provided for’. How do you think they react to this? How can we as Christians allow our older people to provide for us, for example in teaching those who are younger, thereby helping them to feel wanted and helpful to society?

Prayer

Lord God, throughout history you have seen the potential of older people. They have been a rich source of obedience, wisdom and love and they have always had a special place in your heart.

We have been taught through your holy word that you use older people to make your great name known. Help your church throughout the world to use them in the work of mission, that through their love and dedication many people, whether old or young, may be brought into your kingdom. We ask this for your great love’s sake. Amen
Module 2: Engaging with older people

(This module is based on material supplied by Paul Whiteley CA)

The aim of this module is to gain some understanding and knowledge of the local ageing population and the sort of activities and services available for them in order to identify where the church could begin to make connections with isolated de-churched and non-churched people. The object is to prepare an informed presentation for the parish or local group of churches to get people interested. This should be done in a creative way by using home-made video if possible or slide show in order to convert interest into reflective and practical action. Researching an area in this way will also reduce the possibility of engaging in projects that others are already doing and hopefully will encourage partnership with other local organisations!

This module has four sessions:

Session 1 Challenges of an ageing population
Session 2 Mapping exercise
Session 3 Building up a resource list
Session 4 Parish walk

Module 2 Session 1: Challenges of an ageing population

National statistics show\(^5\) that the UK has an ageing population. The total population grew by 8 per cent in the last thirty years or so, from 55.9 million in 1971 to 60.2 million in mid-2005. The percentage of people under age 16 fell from 25 per cent in mid-1971 to 19 per cent in mid-2005. Over the same period, the percentage of the population aged 65 and over increased from 13 per cent to 16 per cent. Within the population aged 65 and over, the proportion of people aged 85 and over has increased from 7 per cent in mid-1971 to 12 per cent in mid-2004.

Population ageing will continue during the first half of this century since the proportion of the population aged 65 and over will increase as the large numbers of people born after the Second World War and during the 1960s baby boom become older. The working age population will fall in size as the baby boomers move into retirement and are replaced by the relatively smaller generation of people who have been born since the mid-1970s.

Older people these days are generally active and fit for a considerable time after the official retirement age; they have life experience, skills and time to offer. Many will be handling great changes in their lives and will want to take opportunities to learn and do new things. Older people should not be seen as old first and a person second, but as a person who just happens to be older. Sadly older people do receive a great deal of bad press. You only have to look at the media to witness negative stereotypical images of age. Those who are dependent and needy are often seen as a problem rather than a challenge. Their emotional and spiritual needs go unmet by church and society.

The church’s pastoral ministry is often focused on the elderly frail churched and de-churched older person. In fact they only represent a very small proportion of our ageing society. Figures show that only 4.1 per cent of people aged 75–84 are in aged care institutions.\(^6\)

The big question is: How as a church are we responding to the challenges of an ageing population?

‘Churches need to affirm the value of older people to the whole life of the church in its worship, work and witness; the church is an all-age community.’\(^7\) Sadly, for many the term all-age in relation to worship means services for children and young people.

In this module it is hoped that as a parish or group or community, you will begin to get to

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6 Key Facts and Statistics 2007, Age Concern.
know the older people in your area a little better. It will help you to achieve four things:

- design and carry out a parish audit;
- discover some of the resources and skills already potentially available;
- have a heightened awareness of the needs of older people within your area;
- develop a strategy or plan for evangelism with the whole person in mind.

**Exercise 1**

How well do you know each other? Spend 10–15 minutes in small groups of two or three doing the following activities:

- Share something about yourself. What are your feelings about growing older? Why are you interested in ministry with older people?
- Read and reflect on 2 Corinthians 4:1–18 (look especially at verses 16–18).

It is interesting to think about how God prepared individuals before they began their respective ministries. It seems that many of the characters in scripture had to be tempered by their own experience of God and by being faced with the realities and shortcomings of their own humanity before becoming leaders of his people. Peter comes to mind in this respect. Can you think of others, not least Jesus himself? What depth of commitment do we need before engaging in ministry?

The New Testament not only points us to the way that God used individuals but, if we look carefully at the writing of Paul, we can see a link between the ageing process and a life of faith. The apostle did not seem to separate the two. This can be seen when reading through chapters four and five in his second letter to the Corinthians.

Paul meditates on the fact that our outer nature is wasting away; in particular the tribulation of his work as an apostle seems to be taking its toll, and he is afflicted in every way. Ageing seems to be taking place. Yet at the same time another process is evident: his inner nature is being renewed every day (2 Corinthians 4:16). He sees God as being creatively at work within him and the losses he seems to be experiencing in natural strength are counterbalanced by this new life.

Paul, however, is not just balancing gains with losses in coming to terms with the process of ageing. He is so strongly aware of God’s creative activity, that he welcomes the losses as evidence of the gains that are taking place.

_Spend some time in silence, and then have a time of prayer, where you remember the older members of your church and community._

**Exercise 2**

This exercise is about discovering what you already know about older people in your church and area. Try to build up a picture of what you already know from your experience. Do not worry if your knowledge is very limited, as the next exercise is to find out more concrete information.

_In small groups of two or three people_

- Write down all the things that you know about the older people in your area.
- As an estimate, what percentage of your congregation is aged over 60 years?
- What voluntary and statutory bodies work within your area? Make a list, for example Age Concern day centre.
- What groups do you have for older people in the church? List them.
- If older parishioners are ill, are they visited? If so by whom?

If you have ever watched the musical _The King and I_ you may remember the song that Mrs Anna sings when she meets the children for the first time: ‘Getting to know you, getting to know all about you’.

If we are to seek to discover some of the resources and skills potentially available, and
identify some of the needs of older people, we have to get to know a little more about our own situation.

There are several different ways of finding out; one quite effective way is by means of a parish audit, profile, or appraisal.

Planning and seeking to carry out a parish audit can seem a pretty frightening task but it is well worth the effort. An audit can be extremely helpful in identifying what is happening in your area and discovering the needs of people before you begin to plan a way of meeting those needs. It will provide a good starting point as you find out and discover more about older people in your area. You may like to work in partnership with other churches and agencies.

Getting started with an audit

It is important to discuss the following questions before engaging with this project.

• Who is going to be involved?
• Is there a planning group?
• Is the group representative of the whole congregation?
• What are your aims and objectives?
• What will happen to your findings?
• In what time scale?

Having addressed some of these questions, and gathered a team of committed and enthusiastic members together, you will need to think about the methods you intend to adopt in finding out. These can be divided into two categories: formal and informal. You will need to choose a method that will be suited to your own situation. You may like to include a mix of formal and informal.

Informal methods

These may include walking around the parish, asking the opinions of others, identifying types of housing. Where are the sheltered housing and residential homes? You may want to consult with your own congregation.

Formal methods

These may include: mapping out your area, using statistical data such as census material, surveys, interviews, questionnaires, and writing to members of statutory and voluntary bodies in the area.

Decide which methods you will adopt, and who will carry out the different tasks of collecting information and data, and get to work.

The following sessions contain a few ideas to get you started.

Homework

This is an exercise in preparation for next week’s session.

To gain a general idea of what is available for older people in your area ask people in your congregation or parish. This could be done via a questionnaire or by means of individual conversations with leaders and contacts or by walking round the area and making a note of meeting places such as bingo halls, social clubs, places of worship, care homes or hospitals.

Module 2 Session 2: Mapping exercise

Before the session, try to get hold of a large map of your parish or area in preparation for Exercise 2. If not, try to draw a sketch of the area.

The mapping exercise you have conducted helps to build a picture of your congregation(s) and community. Now is the time to co-ordinate your findings.

Exercise 1

In small groups of two or three people share what you have discovered about your area during the past week. Make a list of your findings. (Allow 10-15 minutes for this.)
Exercise 2

In plenary session using coloured pens or stickers, mark on the map:

- Where the older people in your parish live
- Where they spend a lot of their time
- Residential and nursing homes
- Sheltered accommodation
- Social clubs
- Pubs
- Bingo halls
- Shops
- Post Office
- Places of worship and details of services and activities on offer
- Health centres, doctors, hospitals
- Public transport routes
- Local statistics on population ageing

The map could be displayed at the back of the church for others to add to it. You may even find places you never knew existed!

Module 2 Session 3: Building up a resource list

By now you should have gained some knowledge about your local area and its main features. The next step is to build some kind of resource list that you can call upon when trying to serve the needs of older people you come into contact with in groups or networks.

The aim of developing a resource list is to gather together as much as you can about the statutory and voluntary organisations that are within the parish, or that are available to people in your area. A resource list together with the mapping exercise you have undertaken will broaden your knowledge greatly. This next exercise will also provide you with valuable information as well as giving you an insight as to what is already being provided by others.

Exercise

In preparation for the homework that follows, in small groups of two or three people discuss what sort of content would be useful for a resource pack and where this information can be obtained. What format should it be in and how can it be accessed?

Homework

Visit your local library and make some telephone calls to various organisations. You will find the Yellow Pages or Telephone Directory helpful. Enquire at your local Social Services Department (it is best to share the different tasks to avoid duplication of effort). It may also be worthwhile contacting the Diocesan Office Board for Social Responsibility, MHA Care Group or Churches Together to see what may already be operating in your area. You may also wish to put a list at the back of the church to see if members of the congregation can fill in the gaps.

Some of the things you should be finding out may include:

- What other local community bodies provide, for example day centres, lunch clubs and drop-ins. It seems a total waste of resources if, as a church, you are considering a lunch club when a number are already running in your area.

- What other churches are doing and providing.

Module 2 Session 4: Parish walk

Most parishes can be walked around in a few hours. If your parish is too large devise a manageable and suitable route through various areas. It is advisable to do this at least in pairs. As you walk around notice the housing and what sort of people you are passing: old, young, gangs? Is there a meeting place? What are the nice features? Where are the problem areas? What evidence is there of social problems, graffiti, vandalism, run-down estates? There can sometimes be a fear in certain older people, a fear of coming out of their homes.

As well as a parish walk, it might be helpful to interview local people, either an informal chat or a structured questionnaire.

As indicated earlier, there are many other ways of finding out, too many to mention here.
Whatever way you chose to collect information you will need to analyse your research.

You may like to use these questions to help you.

**Analysis**

- What is life like for older people in the area?
- What provision is already being made in the community for older people?
- What do you see as people’s needs?
- What opportunities are there for us as a church?
- Are we tapping into the resources (human and financial) that are available?

You may want to develop this further. It is only a guide. You will need to present your conclusions from your findings.

**Conclusions**

Base your conclusions on the following list

- Needs
- Potential
- Opportunities
- Issues
- Gaps
- What concerns you most?
- What do you think you must respond to immediately?

**Presentation**

Having come to some conclusions you will need to present your findings to the wider church. This should be done in a way that will get people interested, in order to turn interest into practical action. Try to be as creative as possible. You may want to make a video recording or use slides, tape recordings or a powerpoint presentation.

**Reflections**

Having presented your findings and highlighted what you perceive as the issues and needs, you will need time for discussion, reflection and prayer. You will also need to ask a number of questions as a whole church such as:

- Are we developing and using the gifts and abilities of our total membership?
- Are we equipping members for Christian witness with older people?
- What is our evangelistic strategy for the parish, and how does it work?
- Will older people fit in, or not as the case may be?
- Has our local church got a significant influence within the community?
- What do we need to be doing to reach out?
- Are we tapping into the skills and gifts of existing members?

**Practical action**

We’ve tried it before and it didn’t work!
We’ve always had high ideals and lots of good ideas, but the problem is we’ve never achieved very much!
We know we should be doing something, but never got round to it!

Sound familiar? It is one thing to find out more about the older people in your area and identify needs and opportunities, but when it comes to implementation, this is where many churches fall down.

Yet we should never be put off, as many problems can be addressed. It may mean you call upon the resources in your diocese or district or ecumenical partnership such as Churches Together or other resource agencies such as Church Army. As you identify the possible way forward in your work with older people, it is important that you have very clear aims and objectives.

An aim is a general statement of purpose. It will establish the directions of a particular project, but it does not spell out how the principles and the sense of direction will be achieved, by when, and what resources to use. Therefore you will also need clear objectives. Be realistic, honest and work within a reasonable time scale.

Module 3 will hopefully encourage you in practical evangelism among older people in partnership with other agencies, some of which you may have come across in your parish audit.
Module 3: Practical evangelism among older people in partnership with other agencies

(This module is based on material supplied by Colin Rudge CA)

The aim of Module 3 is to consider aspects of practical evangelism among older people in partnership with other agencies.

It often seems that low priority is given to evangelism both among and by older people, with so much emphasis in the church on children’s and youth work.

In the past there was a widespread opinion that social action is not ‘real’ evangelism and that those who are involved in Christian care and concern are not ‘real’ evangelists. Hopefully such divisions are a thing of the past as partnerships between community agencies and the church are encouraged by engagement in community ministry.8

The sessions in this module are designed to explore further some of these issues, and to give opportunity for discussion.

This module has 5 sessions as follows:

Session 1 Evangelism for the whole person
Session 2 Evangelism – reaching out to the community
Session 3 Evangelism as belonging
Session 4 Evangelism for the marginalised
Session 5 Evangelism – meeting the spiritual needs of older people

Each session is expected to take 1½–2 hours.

Module 3 Session 1: Evangelism for the whole person

Introduction

Have a volunteer read:

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
His greatness no one can fathom.
One generation will commend your works to another;
They will tell of your mighty acts.
They will celebrate your abundant goodness
And joyfully sing of your righteousness.
The Lord is gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger and rich in love.

The Lord is faithful to all his promises,
And loving towards all he has made.
The Lord upholds all those who fall
And lifts up all those who are bowed down.
The Lord is near to all that call on him,
To all who call on him in truth.
He fulfils the desires of those who fear him,
He hears their cry and saves them.
The Lord remains faithful forever.

He upholds the cause of the oppressed
And gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free,
The Lord gives sight to the blind,
The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
The Lord loves the righteous.
The Lord watches over the alien
And sustains the fatherless and the widow.

The Lord reigns forever,
Your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord.

(From Psalms 145 and 146)

8 See Beyond the Good Samaritan, Ann Morisey, Mowbray, 1997.
Exercise 1

Discuss in pairs: ‘If I were stranded on a desert island, what three things would I most miss?’

Feedback to the group, though if the group is very large this may need to be limited.

Exercise 2

What is important to me? What are my personal values? Handout on page 29 to be completed individually, then shared in pairs or with the group. Leader to take comments, and illustrate that some important things to us may be:

- Friends and family
- Home, possessions
- Independence
- Financial and personal security
- Being valued and fulfilled as individuals

Our values and needs fall into categories such as these:

- Physical
- Mental
- Emotional
- Social
- Psychological
- Spiritual

Reproduce the diagram below to illustrate how our basic needs begin at the base with our physical needs and that as these needs are met we move up the ladder.

Figure 1
Maslow’s hierarchy of needs

![Maslow's hierarchy of needs diagram](Based on diagram in Abraham Maslow, Motivation and Personality, Harper & Row, 1970)

9 See Approaches to Psychology, John Medcof and John Roth (eds), Open University Press, 1979, page 244.
## What is important to me?

### Questionnaire for Session 1

Tick in the appropriate column according to how important it is to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
<th>Fairly Important</th>
<th>Not Very Important</th>
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<tr>
<td>Being able to meet with friends</td>
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<td>Having a warm and comfortable home</td>
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<td>Looking after my own financial affairs</td>
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<td>Going on holiday</td>
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<td>Spending time with my family</td>
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<td>Wearing smart, fashionable clothes</td>
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<td>Having a well paid job</td>
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<td>Shopping</td>
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<td>Being able to go to a church of my own choice</td>
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<td>Going out when I like</td>
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<td>Having a close friend</td>
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<td>Enjoying hobbies</td>
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<td>Eating good food</td>
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<td>Being valued for who I am</td>
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<td>Having a telephone</td>
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<td>Doing voluntary work</td>
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<td>Furthering my education</td>
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<td>Enjoying good health</td>
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<td>Receiving presents</td>
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<td>Watching television</td>
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<td>My Christian faith</td>
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<td>Being well known</td>
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<td>Making my own decisions</td>
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<td>Time on my own</td>
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<td>Reading books and magazines</td>
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<td>Being listened to</td>
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<td>Feeling that I belong</td>
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<td>Being there for other people</td>
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<td>Using my gifts and abilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling safe in my home and community</td>
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Comment

How do our needs and values change as we get older?

Some of the common stereotypes about older people suggest that they are poor, lonely, depressed, in poor health, a drain on society and, if not totally senile, then at least beginning to ‘lose their marbles’.

In fact, as shown in Module 1, many of these stereotypes are based on false understandings, and are in many ways far from the truth. However, as people age their needs and values do change; things that are important to us when we are younger no longer seem so important, and things that were not important to us in our younger years become increasingly important in old age.

There may be a tendency as we get older to feel more physically and mentally tired, with the need for short sleeps during the day and less sleep at night. Studies of people at work have shown that older people function best in the earlier part of the day, whereas younger people function best later in the day. Far from being more rigid in old age, many older people become increasingly tolerant, and in fact relate better to young people than to the generation in between.

Pleasant experiences become more important in old age, and disagreeable experiences matter less, often with less bitterness about the past, but the ability to enjoy the present to the full. Whereas physical confidence declines with growing frailty and mobility difficulties, moral, social and spiritual confidence increase as older people become more certain of their own beliefs and values.

Younger people rarely talk about death, and place great store by possession and material gain, whereas for many older people possessions matter less as they anticipate the end of life and consider the life to come, depending on their beliefs. These are perhaps generalisations – you might like to discuss some of these views.

Whether you agree or disagree with what has been said above, the fact is that we are all made up of many parts – we have spiritual needs as well as physical and emotional needs as well as mental and social needs. Jesus recognised this, and in his ministry saw people not just as having bodily needs, or spiritual needs. In fact he did not make this division, but ministered to the whole person. Jesus claimed that he had come to ‘preach the good news to the poor’, and by ‘poor’ he meant those who suffered any kind of hardship or handicap, whether it was spiritual, emotional, mental, social, physical, financial or political. Jesus saw no distinction between social action and evangelism, because he saw people as whole people.

Exercise 3

Bible Study: Mark Chapter 6 – The Feeding of the Five Thousand.

This passage illustrates Jesus’ concern for physical, social, spiritual and physiological needs. Read the passage. Refer back to the list of needs in figure 1.

How does the church respond to the needs of older people?

Make lists under each of the headings: physical, social, spiritual and physiological.

What changes could we make to respond more effectively?

How do we see older people as individuals, not just as a group?

Suggest:

- Respecting differences
- Opportunities for older people to share their faith experiences
- Listening
- Seeing a person who is growing older, not an older person
- Empowering and enabling
- Opportunities to contribute to worship
- Integration of individuals rather than segregation of a group.
Closing prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you that you see us not just as a group of human beings, but as individuals, each with our own personality and characteristics, joys and sorrows, abilities and talents, needs and problems. We thank you that each of us can have a special relationship with you, know that we are accepted and loved for who we are, with all our faults and failings, our successes and triumphs, whether we are old and experienced in life, or young with much yet to learn.

We pray that we may learn to see other people through your eyes, and with your compassion and understanding. Give us wisdom and insight so that we may be sensitive and perceptive in our dealings with people. Help us to look beneath the veneer and the masks, which we all wear, in order that we may be enabled to help those in need of help and to respond to those who need our love and care. Grant that we may also be ready to accept the understanding of others that youth may learn from age, and inexperience from experience.

We ask this in the name of him who knows and understands us all.

Amen

Module 3 Session 2: Evangelism – reaching out to the community

To start, re-cap on previous session.

Exercise 1

Discuss in pairs: How I see myself in old age, and how I want to be treated.

Leader to take feedback after 10 minutes.

Comment

Geographic distribution of older people

In the United Kingdom, in 2004 according to estimates based on the 2001 Census of Population, there were over 11 million older people (11,125,000): 9,280,000 in England, 968,000 in Scotland, 602,000 in Wales and 275,000 in Northern Ireland.

The Office for National Statistics (May 2004) shows that the areas with a high proportion of people above state pension age (more than 20 per cent) are Wales and Cornwall, and along the coast. Three Local Authority Districts had over 30 per cent in 2001: Christchurch in the South West (33 per cent), Rother, in the South East (32 per cent), and East Devon (30 per cent).

The areas with a low proportion of older people are in Northern Ireland and in London with less than 12 per cent.

These differences in geographic distribution are thought to be due, in part, to many older people choosing to leave congested urban areas to settle in coastal and rural destinations. On the other hand, urban and surrounding areas draw younger people due to employment opportunities and other reasons.

Major cities like London have a high proportion of people from non-white minority ethnic groups, who have a younger age structure than the overall population. Northern Ireland has higher fertility than Great Britain overall, so its age structure is younger.

Some facts about older people

• The majority of older people over 55 do not live alone but with a partner or family. However the number of people over 65 living alone is increasing due to higher incidence of divorce. Fourth agers (over 75) are more likely to be living alone.

• Contrary to popular belief, fewer than 5% of older people (75–84) live in residential care, which means that more than 95% live in the community.

• About 50% of older people own their own home.

• Women live longer than men and there are twice as many women aged over 65 as there are men.
Many people over 60 are caring for older relatives, parents or spouses, and sometimes their grandchildren while their own children work. The majority of these are women.

A growing percentage of older people are from ethnic minority groups and their needs will have implications for health and welfare services.

Although many older people enjoy a reasonable standard of living, owning their own homes and receiving occupational pensions, the problems of inequality in our society are exacerbated in old age. Older people who have suffered poverty and deprivation in earlier years are more likely to be in poverty in old age. It is estimated that one million UK pensioners are needlessly living below the breadline because they are not claiming benefits to which they are entitled. The benefit system is complicated and the forms are confusing.

There is an increasing problem of homelessness among older people, which in many cases is the result of traumatic life events, for example mental breakdown or domestic violence. (This topic will be considered in more detail in Session 4.)

**The concept of ‘Community Care’**

We hear a great deal these days about ‘Care in the Community’ and ‘Community Care.’ What does it mean?

This is a concept which has been around for many years but was only formalised by the National Health Service and Community Care Act, which was implemented in 1993. This now forms the basis on which Social Services, voluntary organisations and private companies operate their social care policies.

Under the legislation, Social Services Departments are required to make assessments of individuals requiring care and provide a package of service. In its first years of operation, this tended to prioritise physical needs, such as practical help with mobility and personal care, but Social Services Departments are gradually beginning to realise that people also have social, emotional and spiritual needs. Resources however are stretched to the limit, and a number of local authorities are having difficulty providing services even for the most needy.

There are many people who do not have high level physical and medical needs but maybe suffer isolation and loneliness, or who would manage quite adequately in their own homes with some domestic help, or someone to shop for them or help them with bathing. There are many gaps in social services provision, and many opportunities for churches to become involved.

**Exercise 2**

*Divide the group into smaller groups of four or five and ask them to read the following case studies and then answer the questions below.*

1. **Sam Broadbent** is 78 years old. He lives on the fifth floor of a block of flats in suburban London. His wife died two years ago after a long illness. Sam has a married son living in the north of England and his daughter lives in Australia with her husband and three children. Both his son and daughter are in regular telephone contact with him, but distance means he only sees his son about twice a year.

   Sam suffers from arthritis and is finding it harder to walk very far. He used to visit his local pub most days, but now he cannot get out every day, although he manages to do his shopping. He is desperately lonely, missing his wife and social contacts. Much of his time is spent alone watching TV. Social Services have provided him with various aids in the flat, and meals on wheels. Sam is on the waiting list for sheltered housing but has been told that he might have to wait two or three years. Most of his neighbours are now quite frail and are also in need of help and the ones with young families have problems of their own.

   Sam used to attend a local mission hall as a boy, but has had very little church
connection for many years, apart from weddings and funerals. He is fiercely independent, but is well known in the area as someone who used to be very friendly and willing to help anyone out. Sam now feels useless and unwanted.

2 **Jim and Eileen Connolly** moved to a southern seaside resort three years ago from a town in the Midlands. Jim was the manager of a motor company and they enjoyed a good standard of living. Their dream of retirement was to own a bungalow by the sea where they could pursue their hobbies of gardening, walking and other outdoor activities. Sadly, Jim was diagnosed with lung cancer six months ago, and he is not expected to live very long. They have always been a very close couple, not needing many friends, and Eileen is devastated that their dream of a long and happy retirement has been shattered. They have two married daughters still living in the Midlands and five grandchildren who all visit fairly regularly for holidays.

Jim and Eileen used to attend a church together, but stopped going as Jim’s job became more demanding and weekends were taken up with their family and leisure interests. Eileen has never worked; her gifts and abilities were put into building up their home. She has always been very dependent on Jim for making financial and other decisions, and although money is not a problem her life has revolved around Jim.

3 **Mary Sutcliffe** is a retired teacher, living in a country town. She is now 82, and until two years ago shared her home with another retired teacher, Joan, her companion for many years. Joan died following several strokes, and Mary nursed her for a number of months. Mary has no family at all, apart from a niece in Scotland, who visits her only very occasionally and shows very little interest in her. Mary has always been a very out-going person, very active in the local community, with many interests and hobbies. She has enjoyed many trips and holidays abroad, and has lived a very interesting and fulfilled life. Mary would consider herself a Christian although her church attendance has been limited to Christmas, Easter and other special occasions.

Mary is devastated by Joan’s death and misses her greatly. She is finding it very hard on her own and is realising that she is no longer able to go abroad or live the active life she has always enjoyed.

4 **Jessie Turner** is 75 years old, and lives with her husband Bob in a terraced house in a large city. Bob retired from his job as a bank clerk ten years ago and they have one son who lives in America with his wife and three children. Bob has Alzheimer’s disease, which began about three years ago and he is now unable to do anything for himself. Jessie is finding the strain of caring for him extremely demanding and wearing, although she is devoted to him. Social Services and the doctor have arranged for Bob to go to a day centre for one day a week, which is the most they could offer, and this gives Jessie a break, although she feels very guilty. She is in reasonable health, but at times feels very isolated and at the end of her tether.

Questions:

- If you were Sam, Jim, Eileen, Mary, Jessie or Bob, what would be your greatest needs?
- What would you want or expect from the church? Is it in touch with the reality of your life?

**Exercise 3**

In small groups, read Matthew 5:13–16 about salt and light.

- Is your church visible? Accessible? Influential?
- How can the church work in partnership with other agencies and build bridges to the community?
Module 3 Session 3

Exercise 4

(This exercise is the same as the exercise in Module 2, Session 2. Therefore omit this exercise if Module 2 has been completed by participants.)

Make a map of your church locality. Highlight where older people live, activities, amenities, clubs and so on. Draw lines of connection to and from the church. Make a list of all organisations working with or for older people in the community.

• How are needs met?
• What are the gaps?
• What can the church offer, which other agencies cannot?

Closing prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, who came to live amongst us, and who understood all human needs, show us how to share your love with those who are living in the last years of their lives, and who feel that life has very little to offer them. Give us hearts of compassion that we may reach out to the bereaved, the lonely, the sad, and the dying. We pray for those who care for others, and who are tired and exhausted. Reveal to us your vision of how we may work to relieve the suffering and needs of older people in our community, that all may know the riches of your love and compassion and discover life in all its fullness, both now and in the hereafter. In the name of him who gave his life in the service and care of others.

Amen.

Exercise 2

Individually, make a list of all the people you have spoken to:

• today;
• in the last week.

Ask for feedback but point out that this is not a competition – we all have different kinds of lives. If we are at work, we may meet many people in the course of a day, and some jobs involve more social contact than others. Some people may talk to very few people in the course of a week depending on where we live or with whom we live, but all of us will have some kind of social interaction. We all belong to groups or social networks, in our family and domestic settings, in our community, at work, with our friends, or in clubs or leisure settings.

Exercise 3

In small groups, discuss and list all the kinds of groups we belong to through life.

For example:

• family;
• geographical location;
• educational setting;
• leisure, clubs;
• work;
• social – friends.

If possible, encourage individuals to draw a diagram of their own social network, showing which are the most important (this might be done in ever expanding circles with self at the centre and the people or groups you have least contact with on the perimeter).

What are the factors or signs that show we belong to a group?

Allow time for groups and individuals to share their thoughts and findings. Ask why it is important for people to have a sense of belonging.

Module 3 Session 3: Evangelism as belonging

To start, recap on previous session.

Exercise 1

In pairs, recount one good thing, which has happened to you this week. (Leader to take some feedback, but not prolong it.)
Comment

We need different kinds of relationships and belong to different groups for different reasons. We may even behave differently in different settings – people who live with us may see us very differently from people with whom we work or with whom we worship!

Belonging to a family or domestic group may fulfill our need to be cared for or care for others; belonging to other groups may give us a sense of self-worth, or meet our need to receive help, information, knowledge or emotional support. Meeting with friends may enable us to talk through difficulties and sad experiences, as well as being able to share a joke or the latest gossip. We also need to discover more about ourselves and to find meaning and value in life, which for many is fulfilled by religion and corporate worship.

Of course the meeting of these needs is not confined to any one type of group as, for example, many people live alone and have no close family, or cannot easily leave their home to go to shops or clubs. However, it is being increasingly recognised that for psychological well-being, older people do need social contacts and close friends can become particularly important in old age. Brothers and sisters often become more important as people become older, as a link with childhood, growing up, and memories of parents. Women in particular gain much emotional support from friendship and company, and often have a confidant with whom to share personal problems and joys. Men sometimes find it more difficult to make close social contacts, and also may face more challenges in joining older people’s clubs, which tend to be dominated by women.

A sense of belonging is also engendered by being involved in activity and by contributing to its planning, development and operation. Churches are not alone in sometimes mistakenly providing activities and groups for older people without consulting the older people themselves, or even encouraging them to make decisions and run the activities. The more people are involved and can own what they are participating in, the more they will feel they belong, and the more they will gain a sense of purpose.

For many people, a sense of purpose and belonging is gained from their working life, and thus they can experience a significant loss on retirement. Retirement now can be increasingly semi-retirement, with the possibility of part-time paid work, while some people are forced into early retirement through redundancy, ill-health or having to care for a dependent relative. Retirement can also offer many opportunities for leisure, self-development, travel and the pursuit of new activities and interests, as well as church and voluntary work, which is to a very large extent carried out by older people.

Whilst many older people enjoy good pensions and living conditions, enabling them to enjoy all the advantages of retirement or semi-retirement, there is an increasing number of older people who are marginalised by poverty, ill-health, isolation and less than adequate housing. The inequalities in our society, which exist throughout life, become exacerbated in old age. Surveys show that between 11% and 14% of people over 65 suffer from depression and the suicide rate, particularly among men, is much higher than for younger people.

Living alone does not necessarily mean that a person is lonely, since they may have many social contacts in which to find fulfilment. However, research has shown that individuals living alone are more likely to feel isolated and lonely, with a sense of being forgotten and useless.

Social contact is important to all of us, whether we are the kind of person who thrives on the constant company of others, or whether we prefer to spend more time on our own. The sense of belonging is essential to our psychological being, self-worth and fulfilment. John Finney has demonstrated that most people come to faith, not by evangelistic missions, the distribution of Christian literature, or door-

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knocking, but through relationships and the friendship of other people. Most people encounter the gospel not through buildings but through people.

John Finney quotes from Professor Robin Gill’s book *A Vision of Growth*, that ‘belonging comes before believing’ and that ‘Evangelism is about helping people to belong so that they can believe.’ It is said that many older people attending church are uplifted by the company rather than by the doctrine although, as we shall see in Session 5, sometimes the church is criticised for attending to the physical and social needs of older people while ignoring the spiritual needs.

**Exercise 4**


Questions

- What were the characteristics of the early church?
- How did people have a sense of belonging?
- How were needs met?
- How can we ensure that older people are enabled to feel that they belong?
- Are we sometimes patronising or condescending in our attitude, doing things for older people instead of allowing and encouraging them to contribute or make decisions?

**Homework**

At the end of the session, ask each participant to bring with them for the next session an object which means a great deal to them and to be prepared to talk about it briefly (could be a photograph, piece of jewellery, ornament, toy or book.)

**Closing prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we belong to your family and to your kingdom. We know that we are accepted and loved for who we are, and that you have a plan and purpose for each one of us. We pray for those older people who feel lonely, isolated, depressed and forgotten. We pray for those who feel that life no longer has any meaning for them and that their years of usefulness are over. Forgive us for our selfishness that while we rejoice in the love of friends and families, we pay little heed to those who are alone or who may be unable through ill-health, frailty, or bereavement to enjoy the company of others. Show us how we, as the body of your people, can share the love of God and the glorious news of your gospel with older people in our communities, enabling them to feel that they belong and are accepted and loved.

We ask this in the name of him who died to show his love for us all, and that we might belong to him for ever.

**Amen**

**Module 3 Session 4: Evangelism for the marginalised**

**Introduction**

*Explain that in this session we are going to think about whether we really try or even want to communicate the gospel to those older people who are on the margins of society.*

**Exercise 1**

*Participants were asked at the end of the last session to bring an object with them. Allow each person (unless the group is very large, in which case just select a few!) in turn to speak for about half a minute about their object and why it is important to them.*

**Comment**

Our possessions are important to us for a number of reasons – a memory of a particular place or person, or time in our life; maybe a gift from someone or something we particularly...
enjoy doing; or perhaps something which has helped us through a difficult time.

Think of your favourite room at home – what is in it? Why are things arranged as they are? Do you have a favourite chair? Do you collect particular items? What could someone tell from your room about you as a person if they had never met you? Our homes and possessions are an extension of ourselves, reflecting our personality and what or who is important to us. We all need our own home, whether it is a mansion or a room, or even part of a room. We need somewhere of our own for our security, privacy, independence – our own space.

Remember that one of the important concepts of community care is that people are better cared for in their own homes wherever possible, amongst familiar surroundings with their own possessions. Older people who go into residential care are encouraged to take their own possessions with them and sometimes their own furniture, although this depends on the space available. For many older people moving into residential care or smaller accommodation, it can be very traumatic having to part with possessions.

Imagine your own home again – the warmth, the comfort, the privacy, the freedom to be yourself, to be able to make a cup of tea, or get a meal, your comfortable bed. Perhaps you have a garden to enjoy (even if it is hard work at times!) For many people in this country, to have somewhere like that to live is only a dream or a memory. Homelessness is still an enormous problem, despite the welfare state. There are many myths and false ideas about homelessness, and to see how much we all understand about the problem, it might help to spend a few minutes looking at a questionnaire.

Give out the questionnaire on page 38 and allow people time to complete it, either individually or in pairs.

Some facts about homelessness

The answers to the questionnaire on page 38 are as follows:

1 FALSE. We hear a great deal about young people who are homeless, and this is also a matter for great concern, but the limited research that has been done about homeless older people suggests that about 30% of people sleeping rough are aged over 50, and between one quarter and one third of those in hostels are over 50.

2 FALSE. The reasons for homelessness are wide and various. Although it is true to say that some homeless people are unable to fit into conventional styles of living, most homeless people would prefer their own independent accommodation.

3 FALSE. Older people, even if they have been on the streets for a long time, find it very difficult to beg or to ask for help. They tend to feel more self-conscious and demoralised than younger people do, and much more acutely aware of failure and uselessness. Sometimes they gain mutual support from each other, but are often more isolated, and may be victimised by younger people. Older people are much more vulnerable than younger people, both on the streets and in hostels.

4 TRUE and FALSE. Alcoholism is a factor in homelessness, but it is not always possible to say whether it is a cause or a result. It is not surprising if people turn to drink as a means of comfort and oblivion, but there is undoubtedly a significant minority who have lost their homes, jobs, or family as a result of alcohol. Older women are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless through alcoholism, but generally there is less alcoholism among older people than among younger homeless people.

5 FALSE. There has been an increase in numbers of homeless people and a decline in the number of direct-access hostel beds. This means that older people are more vulnerable because some hostels have upper age limit restrictions, and also older people are less assertive and may be in poor health. Some large emergency hostels have closed, and have not been replaced by smaller hostels as planned. Hostels are reluctant to accept older
people because of their increasing frailty and need for care. Provision for older homeless women is particularly scarce.

6 TRUE. Most older homeless people are poor, and have a background of low income and poverty. They often do not know how to claim state benefit, and are reluctant to seek help. But some homeless people are not poor.

7 TRUE. Relationship breakdown is one of the most common causes of homelessness in later years.

8 FALSE. Some older people remain in good health despite their lifestyle, but on the whole older homeless people tend to be in poorer health than homeless people of other age groups, particularly suffering from respiratory conditions, malnutrition, and dermatological problems. Life expectancy is considerably lower among homeless people, who are at increased risk of TB, infectious diseases, exposure and hypothermia. Generally older homeless people are reluctant to seek medical help. A significant minority of older homeless people suffer from a mental health problem and that
number is increasing. Older people who might previously have received care in a psychiatric unit are now much more vulnerable to homelessness.

9 FALSE. Many residential care homes are reluctant to accept older homeless people because they may not fit into the lifestyle of the home, or they may have particular needs which the home cannot meet. The cost of residential care is also a problem for Social Services, as well as their inability to provide on-going support for older people who have difficulty adjusting to permanent accommodation.

10 FALSE. Surveys of older homeless people have shown that while many have been homeless for a number of years, about 20% have become homeless in later years, and may have been on the streets for only a few weeks or months.

11 FALSE. Figures suggest that the number of older homeless people is at best static, and is probably increasing.

12 FALSE. Marriage breakdown, physical or mental illness, unemployment and financial problems may cause homelessness as may loss of tied accommodation, bereavement, alcoholism or addiction – a variety of life experiences which could happen to any of us.

13 FALSE. There are not enough day centres where older homeless people can receive medical care, food and advice. Services tend to be patchy, and older people are often reluctant to compete with younger ones.

14 FALSE. This is a common attitude from people who do not understand the problem.

15 TRUE or FALSE. This might be a subject for discussion.

**Exercise 2**

Read through the following case studies in small groups and then answer the questions.

**1 John** is 84 years old and lives in a hostel in central London. He moved to London at the age of 26 when he was made redundant from his coal-mining job in South Wales. For many years he found a variety of casual jobs in restaurants and hostels and lived in private rented accommodation.

At the age of 50 he was forced to leave his rented accommodation after an argument with the landlady. He spent a number of years living alternately in hostels and private rented accommodation. He also spent two months sleeping on the streets. Immediately prior to his present accommodation, John had lived for nine years in a bed and breakfast hotel. He was told to leave the hotel after he complained about bed bugs falling into his bed from a crack in the ceiling.

John is not registered with a GP and up until a year ago he had not seen a doctor since his army medical. Now he suffers from bad circulation in his legs, which makes it painful for him to walk any distance. His painful legs mean that he spends most of his day in the hostel where he likes to read newspapers and do crosswords.

John says that he would not like an independent flat of his own but would prefer to live with other people in a shared house. His biggest fear is that he should end up sleeping rough again. He says, ‘I realise that if I was out on the streets now, I would be finished after a week.’

**2 Joe** is 72. Covering himself with cardboard, he sleeps on top of bread crates in a doorway in The Strand. He has been sleeping on the streets for at least eight years. Joe was born in Ireland, and came to England when he was 18 years old. He travelled all over England finding casual work, for example on building sites, as a farm labourer and as a railway porter.

His last job was in a food shop in the East End of London for which he was given tied accommodation. When his employer died he was forced to leave the accommodation
and moved into a hostel. The hostel closed down and Joe moved into an emergency night shelter for homeless people. He did not stay there long because there was too much fighting and violence; with nowhere else to go he started to sleep on the streets.

Joe is not registered with a doctor and has not seen a doctor in ‘many years’. He gets pains in his legs and is unable to walk long distances. Waiting for the food runs at night means that he is able to sleep only for two or three hours and he must get up again at five o’ clock when the street cleaners come to clean the pavements.

Joe does not use day centres as he complains that they are too crowded and he finds it difficult to walk to them. He spends much of his day sitting in the parks in central London or in betting shops if the weather is bad.

Joe would like to have a home of his own, but is unsure about how he could go about finding accommodation. He does not want to live in a hostel as he thinks they are too restrictive and violent.

George is registered with a GP. About a year ago he was suffering from chest pains and was admitted to hospital following a heart attack. Occasionally he still suffers from breathlessness.

George spends the day visiting different day centres for homeless people. Every evening he wanders around the Victoria area, as he does not like to return to the hostel too early. He tries to spend as little time as possible in the hostel as he finds the atmosphere noisy and intimidating.

At one point George had his own flat in central London but he was unable to manage on his own. He would not like to live in a flat on his own again. George’s attitude is that he does not have long to live, so he puts up with living in the hostel even though he does not really like it there.

Mary is a 70-year-old widow who has been sleeping on the streets in the Victoria area for about five years. She wears very ragged, torn clothes and an old pair of shoes that are falling off her feet. She is extremely dirty and her nails are very long and black. Mary used to live in a housing association flat in Victoria and spent most of her life working in various hospital kitchens. She became homeless in retirement when she says people began plotting against her and ‘everything went wrong’.

Mary spends each day wandering around the Victoria and Westminster areas, pushing a railway trolley laden with her belongings. She goes to a day centre for breakfast in the early morning but leaves before it becomes too ‘crowded’. Sometimes she rummages through litter bins looking for food.

Mary is not registered with a GP. She believes that being on the streets has hardened her to the weather. She has sores on her arms, face and neck. She appears to hallucinate and constantly talks to herself, sometimes repeating one phrase over and over again.
She says that she would like her own independent accommodation. She has never tried to secure accommodation apart from one short stay in a hostel. She misses being able to watch television and making a cup of tea before going to bed. Most of all, she misses having access to her own bathroom and toilet.

Taken from *Older Homeless People in London*, Age Concern Greater London, 1991.

Questions

• Does the gospel have anything to say to people like this?
• Are there organisations, agencies, and churches working with the homeless in your area?
• Could your group or church link in with them?

Exercise 3

Read Luke 14:1–24, the Great Banquet.

Questions

• Are we too ‘respectable’ and ‘safe’ in our approach to evangelism among older people?
• Do we set limits on God’s grace to those who do not fit in with our lifestyles, standards of behaviour, and patterns of worship?

In closing

*Have a volunteer read the following poem.*

A CELTIC POEM

Remember the poor
when you look out on fields you own,
on your plump cow grazing.

Remember the poor
when you look into your barn
at the abundance of your harvest.

Remember the poor
when the wind howls and the rain falls
as you sit warm and dry in your house.

Remember the poor
when you eat fine meat and drink fine ale
at your fine carved table.

The cows have grass to eat,
the rabbits have burrows for shelter,
and the birds have warm nests.
But the poor have no food except what you feed them.
No shelter except your house when you welcome them,
No warmth except your glowing fire.

(*Celtic Fire*, Robert Van der Weyer, DLT, 1990)

Module 3 Session 5: Evangelism – meeting the spiritual needs of older people

Introduction

In the final session of this module, we shall be considering how our spiritual needs change as we get older and how we can meet the spiritual needs of older people. The church is sometimes accused of being preoccupied with caring for older people socially and providing meals, clubs or transport but ignoring their spiritual needs. There is often a great deal of emphasis on work with young people, and on designing and promoting worship for young people, but what about older people? Do they want or need something different?

Exercise 1

Complete these statements individually, and then either share in pairs or feed back to the whole group.

• My idea of a perfect day is …
• There was a time when …
• Young people never think about …
• I really dislike it when …
• I hope I never have to …
• I wish older people would …
• The one thing I could never do without is …
• Why don’t churches …
• What I want most from life is …
• My biggest fear about getting old is …
This exercise may produce some amusing answers, as well as some serious ones. Feedback needs to be handled sensitively. Allow some discussion about how our needs and values change as we get older – what is important to us when we are young may not seem so important as we get older and vice versa. The spiritual dimension may change as faith and spirituality develop, and people who have shown little interest in religion through their lives may be looking for a meaning of life as they face death and the possibility of any life beyond death.

Many older people in our society were sent to Sunday school as children, and received religious education in school. For many, the church and basic Christian beliefs or Bible stories are a part of their experience, and this background may provide a support and comfort in old age. Older people who never go to church may tell you that they pray every day, particularly when faced by problems of ill-health and loneliness and prayer becomes an important means of support. In fact for many older people their private religious and prayer life becomes more important than corporate worship and church attendance.

Research has found that older people who have a Christian or other religious belief are better able to cope with the difficulties and stresses of old age, particularly those who are at greater risk of short term memory loss, dementia and other mental ill-health conditions. Christian belief provides a purpose and meaning to life, a motivation to live or an acceptance that while earthly life is ending, death is not the end.

The importance of spirituality in old age is beginning to be recognised by the statutory agencies that in the past tended to be concerned only with physical needs, as we saw in Session 1 of this module. Churches and religious groups are also sometimes so concerned with observable needs such as transport, food, health, and social relationships that they fail to minister to spiritual needs.

With so much emphasis on youth and adult evangelism, outreach to older people is often not considered, yet there are so many older people who are looking for answers to the problems of life and the reassurance of God’s love.

A Counsel and Care report *The Fullness of Time* (1997, [http://www.counselandcare.org.uk/](http://www.counselandcare.org.uk/)) highlights the fact that hundreds of residential homes do not provide any opportunity for residents to attend worship, either in-house or in local churches. Many in-house services are conducted by ‘ill-prepared ministers or lay people, [with] no proper music, and little or no staff support’. Ministers tend to place a low priority on providing services to homes in their areas, some arguing that residents are often too confused to understand what is happening. However, studies have shown that for older people with dementia, worship can provide valuable memory cues and bring a level of peace and calm.

**Exercise 2**

What would you suggest is the church’s attitude to older people? What are some of the statements or comments made about older people in the church? These might include ‘The congregation consists mainly of old ladies,’ or ‘Older people don’t like modern hymns.’

**Comment**

*Have a volunteer read Psalm 92.*

This psalm gives a wonderful picture of spirituality in old age: not of people who are ‘past it’ or written off, but of people ‘getting older, but still growing’. This concept should underlie all our work with and for older people. In her book *Wholeness in Later Life*, Ruth Bright points out that when Jesus instructed his followers ‘Be ye perfect’, he was not referring to moral goodness, but the Greek word ‘teleios’ meaning ‘fully developed’, ‘whole’ or ‘mature’. Wholeness includes not only meeting our physical needs, social needs, emotional needs,

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12 *Spiritual Growth and Care in the Fourth Age*, Elizabeth MacKinley, Jessica Kingsley, 2006, chapter 7.
and mental needs, but also our need for a spiritual life, to participate in religious worship, or to be assured that we are valued and accepted by God for whom we are.

Exercise 3

Participants in this study group may be at varying stages of experience in working with older people, so a variety of topics are suggested. Select the ones most appropriate to your group, or those in which people have a particular interest.

In small groups, choose one of the following tasks to work on.

• In Session 2, it was suggested that you made a map of your locality, highlighting where old people live, and including clubs, amenities and so on. Discuss how you might plan a programme of evangelistic outreach to older people, bearing in mind the particular needs in your area. Draw up a list of events, projects and so on which you might want to arrange.

• Make a list of the residential homes in your area. How many of them hold regular worship services? Could your group or church offer any help in leading services or running discussion or bible study groups in the homes? How would you go about making contact?

• Plan a worship service to be held in a nursing home, which has some residents who are physically frail and some that are very confused.

• Many churches have successfully held a ‘Holiday at Home’ event as a form of outreach, lasting two or three days or more depending on local support and resources available (for further information on this see page 52) and including outings, games afternoons, interest groups and so on. Plan a ‘Holiday at Home’ week, bearing in mind the people whom you would like to attract and other agencies whom you would like to involve. List the things you would need to think about.

• Plan a ‘Celebration Service’ for older people. What should it include? When is the best time to hold it? What special arrangements or adaptations might you have to make?

• Older people in the church often feel marginalised and undervalued. List ideas of how your church can encourage older people to exercise their ministry and gifts, particularly toward younger people.

This last exercise could take a considerable amount of time, and people may like the opportunity to work in more than one group. This could then possibly extend into another session, allowing time for feedback and discussion.

In closing

Have a volunteer read the selected verses from Psalms 145 and 146 at the beginning of this module (page 27).
Having engaged with the issues in Part 1, we hope you will be motivated to engage in some kind of mission strategy or plan for action. Here are some resources to help local churches in their work with older people. They are intended as a framework on which to build and develop to suit your own situation. The topics covered are:

- Reflections on a welcome pack for newcomers
- Holding a special service for and about older people or celebrating age
- Taking services in care homes
- Running a Holiday at Home event
- Visiting and befriending
- Living with loss and change
- The ministry of the church to people living with dementia
- Mixed economy: inherited and fresh expressions of church for older people
- Developing a church policy on ageing

**Reflections on a welcome pack for newcomers**

(Material for this section was supplied by Peggy Boynes CA. It describes how one local church set about producing a welcome pack.)

Our aim was to produce a flexible pack which could be changed as local circumstances changed and could be used not only for older people who had moved into the area but for younger people too. It could also be used to encourage older people to be involved in ministry.

Everybody seems to be on the move. Young people frequently move away for their education and often travel extensively. Families move to where there are job opportunities and affordable housing. Older people plan smaller homes for their retirement, perhaps at the coast. Sometimes there are further moves to be nearer the family, or into sheltered housing. The traditional picture of the elderly couple still living in the old family home is seldom true. Not one member of the local Mothers’ Union was born in the town. Most arrived when they were in their 60s or 70s. There is still a steady stream of people of this age moving in.

We saw an evangelistic opportunity for the local church when people first arrive in the area. Some of these older new arrivals are regular churchgoers but they do not always find it easy to cross the threshold of a different church building. On the other hand, some are quite willing to start new things or begin again with the church. A visit at this time by church members could be just what is required to draw people into the church family. We thought the welcome pack would be a great addition to this initial visit. It makes the visit easier as you have a particular reason to call to deliver the pack and it covers information which can be referred to later.

Our local church brought together some of our older members to produce a welcome pack for our area. The project was seen to be an important part of the evangelistic work of the church. Each meeting began with prayer for the project and for those who would be visited. We made a list of contents, but in the end had to prune it. We decided on the following contents which we produced:

- a welcome letter from the church;
- an attractive card with times of worship and weekly events;
- a map of the district showing churches, chemists, surgery and the Citizens’ Advice Bureau.

We then discussed how many of the other leaflets to include which were produced by, for example, the council offices and the library. It was difficult to know what to leave out and what to put in. The council had produced a very attractive leaflet about places of worship but it included the Jehovah’s Witness Hall – could we use it? We invested in plastic wallets, which we did not want our pack to look like junk mail.

Did we get it right? I am not sure. The plastic wallet allows us to develop the pack. We are
thinking of putting it in the bus and railway timetable and we are hoping to start a parish magazine. We now have a new vicar so we want to have a letter from him. Perhaps one of the important things is to realise that everything is changing and a pack should reflect this. The surgery has produced a rather plush booklet for new patients, containing some of the information that we have, but their booklets are heavily subsidised by advertisers.

In my view, the pack is important but it is still just a tool. The visitors are the most important part of the contact with our new arrivals. We visit in twos and in view of the age profile of our area, we try to make one of the visitors an older person. We soon realised that we needed to be sure that we could deliver what we promised to a newcomer. For example we offered a lift to church but sometimes no one turned up. We must make sure that we only promise what we can deliver.

Your experiences in producing a welcome pack may well be different from ours but the following tips may help:

- Involve older people in the project and learn from them.
- Have a good look at information produced by local bodies.
- Decide early on if you are going to work ecumenically – if so, costs can be shared and it is a good opportunity for working together.
- Make sure that the material included is well produced and looks professional. Newcomers may easily be put off by poorly laid out and photocopied sheets.
- Appreciate that the pack is just a tool but because you have something to bring which newcomers need you will find that you are made very welcome.
- Recognise the value of the experience in making all of you better informed about advocacy, mobility aids, the local darts club and so on.

We have found that the production and distribution of the pack has resulted in a greater interest in older people and are praying that many of them will echo the words of the aged Simeon when he said, ‘My eyes have seen thy salvation.’

Many churches now organise so-called ‘all-age’ services which in reality are often modern worship intended for children and young people. The assumption is that all other worship is designed for older people so they have no need of special attention. Similarly many churches or dioceses have specialist youth workers and celebratory services for children and young people, but never think to appoint an older people’s worker or to celebrate age and the contribution of older people.

We need to appreciate that whilst many older people are fully involved in the whole range of church life, for others it is no longer possible to attend the usual services. It may be too early for them to be ready to go out. They may have problems either with concentration, with sitting still for long periods of time, with getting up and down and following a service book or may be prevented by lack of appropriate toilet facilities. They may find access to the church difficult, the pews uncomfortable or be unable to hear the words or read the service or hymn book.

We will therefore look first at the planning of services specially designed for older people and then give some examples of how celebratory services could be planned.

How might we devise services specially designed for older people?

All that may be required is a different time or a different day. All Saints, Thorpe Acre, Loughborough holds a weekly service for older people at 4.00 pm on Sunday afternoons followed by tea and cakes. Many older people find Sundays very long and lonely and this
service has become very popular, especially as transport is provided. On the other hand some older people may be visiting family on Sundays and would value a daytime service during the week. Carry out some research to find out what the older people in your community would like!

Some questions to consider:

• Where should the service be held? Would older people prefer to worship in the hall where perhaps the chairs are more comfortable and the room warmer?

• Could we produce large print versions of favourite hymns (see page 49) or a laminated large print version of the order of service? Older people don’t always find powerpoint or overhead projection easy especially if they have neck problems or bi-focal glasses.

• What version of the Bible should we use? Whilst many of today’s older people are familiar with more modern versions, many prefer the familiarity of the Authorised Version, especially when very well-known passages are being read.

• What music might be suitable? Many older people complain about the volume of songs or hymns by music groups or find hymns are in too high a register. They also tend to quail at over-long hymns.

• How can we give our older congregation a sense of the presence of God? Many say that normal church services are too informal, too noisy, busy and wordy. What can we do to make the hall, if that is where we are holding the service, a space where worship can take place?

• How can we include a talk or sermon that seems relevant? We must try to avoid emphasising doing rather than being, avoid appeals for financial giving and active participation but value and affirm the contribution older people can make to church life, for example through prayer. Teaching and preaching must resonate with where the older people now are. They are looking for relevant exposition of the Bible and honest discussion of topics of life and death, illness and loss.

• If Anglicans, could we consider using services from the Book of Common Prayer on occasions? So many churches only use the old familiar services at 8.00am which is generally too early for their older members to be out and about.

• If we are holding a Eucharist could we consider using the shorter form designed for home communions (and thus intended predominantly for older people)?

• Could we sometimes gather together a number of older people to have home communion in one house rather than on their own in their respective homes?

• Could we consider sometimes holding a café style service for older people, many of whom really appreciate the opportunity of eating with others rather than alone?

Whatever we think we might do, it is vital to consult older people, listen to their views and as far as humanly possible act upon them! Only then will those who are not in the first flush of youth feel needed and wanted by their church to which they may have given faithful service over sixty or more years.

How might we plan a special service in celebration of age?

John Bell of Iona in an Advent Talk on Radio 4 put his finger on the importance of older people in the biblical narrative and the need for us to celebrate age and the contribution of older people to church life. He said:

Advent and Christmas ... are about old people. Shall I say that again?

Advent and Christmas are about old people.

‘But what about the children?’ someone asks. And I have to reply that they don’t feature in the story.
The Advent stories begin with an elderly couple, Elizabeth and Zechariah, he a priest helping out in his retirement years, she a childless senior citizen.

The Christmas stories end with another elderly couple. One is Simeon, a God-fearing man who regularly visits the temple, the other is Anna, an 84-year-old widow and prophetess. They are the people who witness Jesus being dedicated to God by his parents in accordance with Jewish tradition, and who recognise his uniqueness.

And in between, we have three wise men, of indeterminate age, though if Eastern tradition is to be acknowledged, wisdom should be considered as the gift of years, not of youth.

I claim Advent and Christmas as a time for adults, not out of any dislike for children, but because I fear that by viewing these seasons as if they were devoted to and for toddlers, we avoid one of the quirks of God’s nature.

God expects old dogs to do new tricks.

God expects people whom the world would deem past it to initiate. The beginning of Jewish-Christian history involves an old man, Abraham, a nonagenarian, and his equally aged wife Sarah, from whom God maintains a nation will spring. He could have chosen a fertile upwardly mobile pair of newly-weds. We would have.

But God is not us. God expects old people to be the sowers of new seed; to be midwives of change; to be the ones who recognise and name the new directions which society has to take; to be the ones who applaud and encourage young potential.

Elizabeth and Zechariah become parents in their old age and Simeon and Anna recognise the uniqueness in Mary’s tiny baby, because God will not have people marginalised or written off on account of age. And when we see the wise men worshipping Jesus and then going home by another way, we see God’s belief and expectation that older folk can change and will change when they recognise the truth.

(John Bell © WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow, G2 3DH)

We often forget how many causes for celebration there are in older age, as well as causes for sorrow. Perhaps we could have a special service limited to children and their grandparents to celebrate the richness of intergenerational relationships. What about a celebration of retirement and the opportunities it brings? Or perhaps a celebration of the gifts and talents of older people or a service for those who have been married for fifty years or more to give thanks for a continuing relationship? Some brainstorming amongst the worship team will undoubtedly come up with other ideas. There follows an outline of a service celebrating age held in a village church on a Sunday afternoon and attended by a large congregation followed by sherry and nibbles.

**A Celebration of Age**

**Welcome and Introduction**

**Call to worship**

*Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

(Isaiah 40:29–31)

**Hymn**

**Act of Thanksgiving**

At Christian baptism a candle is presented with the words, ‘Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God the Father.’
The candle represents God’s grace, given that life may be lived to serve the world’s healing rather than the world’s hurt.

As we give thanks for the good that many older people contribute to family and society, representative individuals will light a candle (examples are given here to illustrate how this might be done). There will then be a bidding and response:

Leader Holy God
All We give you thanks and praise.

A parish councillor

We give thanks for the contribution to good governance made by mature and older people, especially those who work unpaid to ensure the good order of local amenities and services.

A representative of the Royal British Legion

We give thanks for all who in their youth served this country in the armed services, and who now, by promoting the annual poppy appeal, work for the well-being of their service comrades of this generation.

A school governor

We give thanks for our local schools and the people of all ages that work together to promote excellence and to maintain the Christian ethos.

In today’s changing world, we give special thanks for the wisdom, experience, and support that older people contribute for the benefit of schools and their pupils.

A churchwarden

We give thanks for our parish churches and the commitment of many older people to ensuring that they remain attractive and welcoming places where people of all ages may find God and refreshment amongst his people.

A representative of the Women’s Institute

We give thanks for the Women’s Institute and the contribution of older people in this and other similar organisations that encourage friendship, broad learning, and generous service.

A carer

We give thanks that older people are not simply recipients of care but are often very effective carers to those less physically able than themselves, both within families and within the wider community.

A grandparent

We give thanks for the supportive role many grandparents play in family life, and for the example they give to the next generation of children and young people.

Hymn
Reading
Hymn
Reading
Address
Hymn
Collect

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the church is governed and sanctified: hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people; that each in their vocation and ministry may serve you in holiness and truth: through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Intercessions

The Lord’s Prayer
Offertory Hymn

The Blessing

God the Holy Trinity
make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among you and remain with you always.
Amen

A selection of favourite hymns
chosen by, and familiar to,
older people

Abide with me
All things bright and beautiful
Be still for the presence of the Lord
Be thou my vision
Dear Lord and Father of mankind
Give me joy in my heart
Great is thy faithfulness
Guide me O thou great redeemer
How great thou art
Lord, for the years your love has kept and
guided
Lord of all hopefulness
Love Divine all loves excelling
Make me a channel of your peace
Now thank we all our God,
O love that wilt not let me go
Rock of ages
Shine Jesus shine
Tell me the old, old story
Tell me the stories of Jesus
The day thou gavest Lord is ended
The King of love my shepherd is,
The Lord’s my shepherd
What a friend we have in Jesus
When I survey the wondrous cross

Bible readings

See Session 4 of Module 1 of the modular training course (pages 19–20) for lists of bible readings concerning old age.

Taking services in care homes

Churches make many excuses for ignoring the so-called ‘forgotten congregations’ in care homes. They may be unaware that former members have moved into a home. They may mistakenly believe that the spiritual needs of residents are being met by the home. The minister may believe that he or she has too many other commitments or that there are not enough dedicated and reliable volunteers to undertake this ministry. They may even be frightened or intimidated by the home and the apparent lack of interest or welcome from the staff. Sometimes the real reason is an individual fear of ageing and of all that ageing implies.

But anyone who has seen the joy on older people’s faces as they take part in a service, joining in the repetition of familiar prayers or hymns, must consider this to be an invaluable part of local Christian ministry. Older people living in care homes face many losses and for those who previously regularly attended Sunday worship, the loss of the opportunity to worship God with others can be particularly painful. Members of local churches may come at Christmas to sing carols but this is often a one-off seasonal entertainment rather than worship and there is often no other contact throughout the year.

What preparations should we make in advance?

The most important first step is to establish a good relationship with the manager and staff of the home, making it clear that you would be coming in to serve their residents rather than coming with your own agenda! Consider identifying a sympathetic member of staff so that you can liaise with them on an ongoing basis about the arrangements. Once you have arranged a date and a time for worship, they will be able to make sure the residents know the service is taking place and find out who would like to take part. Residents will need to be asked each time whether they want to come – one week they may want to join in and another prefer not to do so. Make it clear that staff and family and friends are welcome to the service and indeed that it is
important that one or two members of staff are present in case residents need assistance.

In conjunction with the home, choose a quiet area and if possible arrange the chairs before residents arrive to help them feel they are participating in a special activity. As far as practicable clear away the clutter of daily living and use a table with an attractive cloth, candles, flowers, or something like a cross or Bible related to the religious service that will take place.

Work with the home to develop an understanding of the specific needs of their particular group of residents. For example some may have severe physical disabilities or be visually impaired or hard of hearing and others may suffer from dementia and all these factors need to be borne in mind. Check on each occasion whether there are any significant events like birthdays, anniversaries or deaths or other pastoral needs that you should bear in mind when preparing the service.

The worship leader need not be the minister unless you are planning a Eucharist. Whoever is taking the service you should consider bringing some additional members of your congregation and someone who can either play the piano or bring and play a keyboard.

Telephone shortly beforehand to confirm that you are coming and that the home is ready for you, as circumstances can change on the day.

Some useful tips for those leading worship

- Make sure that the time of the service is convenient for the home and the residents – not just chosen to suit you! It is generally not a good idea to come immediately after lunch when many are having a nap or at the time of a favourite television programme, for example Songs of Praise. Sundays are often a day for visits from or to relatives so are on the whole best avoided.

- Keep the service short! 15–25 minutes is usually long enough as some residents’ attention span will have become limited.

- Use appropriate symbols and familiar rituals. A cross on the table, appropriate vestments or liturgical colours will make the occasion seem special. In general using visual aids helps concentration.

- More important than appearance is the attitude and approach of the worship leader. Use your facial expressions and body language well to convey a warm welcoming approach and to engage people’s interest. A real desire to establish personal relationship is preferable to remoteness or a ‘holy grin’!

- Build in plenty of variety to the service, including a good mix of singing, listening, praying, silence and possibly discussion time.

- Consider asking residents, members of staff or relatives to take part in the service by reading a lesson or leading prayer.

- Ask about residents’ own favourite hymns or religious music and readings and try to include these. You may be surprised at some of their choices! If live music isn’t possible there are now a number of tapes and CDs of well-known hymns or you may wish to make your own hymnbook. You may want to limit the number of verses you sing as older people tire easily.

- Remember that many residents will have problems of visual impairment so if you use prayer books, hymn books or other written material, you will need them in at least 14–16 point type.

- Speak slowly and pronounce your words clearly but avoid raising your voice too much or using a condescending tone.

- Introduce yourself on each visit, giving your name and explaining which church you come from and reassuring the residents that all are welcome of all faiths and none.

- Be aware that many of the residents are likely to be living with a degree of dementia and their behaviour and responses may be
unpredictable. If you are at first nervous in an unfamiliar environment don’t be afraid to ask staff for support.

- Don’t worry if there are verbal interruptions, which may or may not be relevant to the theme, or if residents leave the room for the toilet or for other appointments. Sometimes these are unavoidable and showing understanding is important in developing good relationships.

- Do try to allow time to remain and talk to people afterwards, so you can get to know them as individuals. One-to-one time, attention, human contact and conversation may be as important a ministry as offering worship. Residents may just need someone to hold their hand for a while.

- Offer to visit by invitation, in their own rooms, those who were unable to come to the service.

- At the end of your visit, take a few moments to find out from the staff and residents how they felt about it and whether there are any lessons to be learned for next time. Many staff would find it hard to raise problems with you directly and so it is helpful if you provide an opening for them to do so.

A possible order of service

(This should be adapted to suit your particular needs.)

Call to worship

Leader My name is … and I come from … church. I would like to welcome you all to this service whatever your faith or beliefs. We have come together today at … to worship God.

Leader The Lord be with you

All And also with you

Leader Lift up your hearts

All We lift them to the Lord

Opening hymn

Prayer

Adoration, confession and thanksgiving followed by the Lord’s Prayer

Bible reading

Hymn

Short talk

Prayers

Intercessions with the response:
Leader Lord in Your mercy,
All Hear our prayer

Hymn

The Grace

All The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore, Amen.

(See page 49 for suggestions for hymns and pages 19–20 for bible readings.)

Special needs of people with dementia in care homes

See page 68 for help in meeting the special worship needs of people with dementia in care homes.

Where can I find further help?

Pastoral Action in Residential Care Homes for the Elderly (Parche) is a pioneer group founded in 1997 whose aim is to be available to meet the spiritual needs of every older person in care homes or sheltered accommodation. Teams from local churches hold regular services in a majority (63 out of 71) of the care homes in Eastbourne and offer pastoral care and training for staff and visitors. Parche offers training, support and encouragement to others wishing to start work in their local area. A video of their work is available on request. Website www.parche.org.uk
What is meant by Holiday at Home and why run such an event?

The idea of Holiday at Home is to provide fun and activity for local older people at a time when most other clubs and activities for older people have closed down for the summer break. It is a fresh way for churches to reach out to older people, make them feel valued by the church and seek to meet their spiritual and emotional needs and address their sense of isolation. Many older people can’t even afford an evening out, while an Age Concern survey of people over 65 shows that four in ten do not go on holiday either because they can’t afford it, or because they have caring responsibilities, are attached to pets, or just do not like going away by themselves.

Rhena Taylor\(^4\) writes:

Two difficult months in the lives of older people can be December, because of Christmas, and August, because it is the holiday month when families pack their cars to travel to the Continent, the government stops governing, the church activities close down and the television goes into what is called the silly season …

The implication is that anyone who is anyone is doing something in August. So maybe this is the time to hold a Holiday at Home and bring the holiday atmosphere a little nearer home for some older people around who aren’t booked for Tenerife or Bournemouth.

Running a Holiday at Home for older people can be the launch-pad for other events, engaging older people in an exploration of faith whilst having fun as well. It is an affordable event for older people where they can share and enjoy their hobbies, play indoor bowls, board games or join together for demonstrations, meals and entertainment as well as hearing the gospel message in a friendly environment where new friends can be made. The event can last just one day or continue for several days, including perhaps an outing.

Planning a Holiday at Home event

It is often a good idea before planning a Holiday at Home event to do some ‘mapping’ of the area to discover, for instance, the size of the older population and what is already available for older people. This data should confirm whether there is a need for a summer event. Population figures for specific areas are easily obtainable on the internet. (The government website http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk gives detailed breakdowns of census returns down to electoral ward areas.)

If possible meet people who have had previous experience of running a Holiday at Home event and learn from their experience. They are likely to say that when you begin ‘keep it simple and think small’. Small and achievable targets boost confidence. Over-ambitious schemes that ultimately miss the target can be very discouraging for all concerned. Begin small and let the project grow in proportion to the experience gained by leaders, helpers and volunteers.

It is essential to assemble a small team of enthusiasts, including representatives of the targeted age group, to plan the event and to make the necessary decisions about the project.

Practical matters to consider

1 Theme, purpose and title

Is the event to be based on a theme? Is the main purpose missional? If so, is it the first stage in a mission strategy? Is it to share the gospel in a friendly and meaningful way, to attract the de-churched and non-churched older person or to encourage Christians and others in the community to work together in meeting spiritual needs?

Alternatively is the aim to bridge the gap between the young and old, by providing fun, enjoyment and variety in building community for mission, engaging in bible study prayer and fellowship or valuing individual potential?

2 Time of year

August is generally a popular time for such events for the reasons outlined above.

3 Number of days

This could be any number of days up to a five-day event with an outing in the middle. It could be every other day, mornings or afternoons and various other combinations.

4 Programme content

It is important to get the balance right between all together events and small group sessions. Generally speaking the small group activities are popular for people who want to participate in or share their hobbies and want an opportunity for interaction, for sharing joys and sadness and having a chance to reflect on the past. On the other hand there is benefit in sessions when everyone is together and can share a sense of community. Offsite events are very popular as people living alone often do not get the opportunity to have a day out to enjoy with others. These might include a visit to a famous garden or the seaside or a trip to a concert or theatre.

There could be a short service at the start of each day with a thought for the day related to the overall theme. Many Holidays at Home finish with a celebration service either on the final day or on the following Sunday in a local church. These times should be fun with the style of presentation fitting the targeted age group. For example, a video projection via a computer can provide a useful backdrop of a text or image for reflection or a short video clip to illustrate a point. It could include participants sharing what their faith has meant to them, a short presentation or sketch prepared earlier by the participants, together with favourite pieces of music, songs or poems.

Plenary sessions might include:
- A Christian artist / dancer / singer / dramatist.
- Memory lane – people bring an object and talk about it.
- Music – singing or playing, musical instruments.
- Exercises to music.
- Bingo.
- Exhibition of art, photos, flowers, crafts.
- Large jigsaw, giant scrabble.
- Indoor bowls.

Small group sessions or workshops might include sharing hobbies, play reading, cooking, flower arranging, keep fit, line dancing, crafts (weaving, calligraphy, painting, needlework, knitting), board games, newspapers or jigsaws.

In planning the content it is important to allow for a gap between events, as older people need time and space to move around and interact with each other as well as to visit the toilets or enjoy a cup of tea or coffee.

It is also a good idea to provide an Information Centre where during gaps in the programme people can obtain information, help and advice. This could include entitlement to benefits from social and health care services, details of local interest groups or transport services. Many organisations are happy to provide leaflets.

5 Venue

This might be a village hall, school, church hall or even a church building. The planning group will need to take into account the number of people expected to attend, heating and ventilation, accessibility including parking, room for wheelchairs, provision of toilets, kitchen and appropriate seating.

6 Transport

Will this need to be provided or will people be asked to make their own arrangements? Who will provide it? What costs will be involved? Will volunteer drivers’ expenses be covered?
7 Administration

This will include for example application or registration forms, ordering goods and services, arranging speakers and entertainers and producing name badges for volunteers and participants.

8 Publicity

Make your aim and purpose clear. This may include local leafleting and contact with local radio and newspapers. Parish or church magazines or weekly news sheets should be included.

9 Volunteers and CRB checks

Volunteers are essential for the success of the scheme. They will need to be recruited and Criminal Record Bureau checks \(^\text{15}\) arranged. It is good practice to have in place a volunteer policy as it helps define the role of volunteers with the organisation and how they can expect to be treated. For assistance with this see *The Good Practice Guide*, 2nd edition by Kate Bowgett, Kathryn Dickie and Mark Restall, Volunteering England, 2002, ISBN 1897708238, £12.50, or look at [www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk).

It is important to offer training to your volunteers. This will enable a joint approach towards the older people participating and help develop a team spirit and reassure those who have not been involved in this kind of thing before.

10 Health and safety

This will include the handling of food and first aid arrangements. It is essential during the application process that you have details of next of kin in case of emergency.

11 Finance and fundraising

Money may be required for publicity, hire of equipment, catering services, fees for speakers and venue booking. It is much cheaper if you can use volunteers from the community. Remember to use wherever possible the resources of the ‘younger older’ people you have contact with. Funding might come through a local trust or charity, for example the local Rotary Club. Help may also be available from local Health and Social Services, Help the Aged or Age Concern.

12 Review

It is good practice to review the project as soon as possible after the event to look at outcomes and decide whether it is worth repeating. The review should include strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. Make sure that you either ask the participants at the last session for their views or include some of them in the review group.

**A summary of benefits of Holiday at Home**

- Reducing social isolation.
- A starting point for exploring faith issues and discovering need.
- Effective means of renewing faith and bringing older people to faith.
- Partnership of church community and local community.
- Providing a link to mostly de-churched and to a lesser extent non-churched older people living locally – newly retired people are often keen to get involved in community projects as volunteers.
- Potentially a fresh expression of church for older people.

**Conclusion**

In planning and reviewing a Holiday at Home, you might consider to what extent it fits in with the overall strategy of the churches in the area. Is the idea ‘mission-shaped’? In the first instance it may simply be a one-off event as an

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\(^{15}\) See [www.crb.gov.uk](http://www.crb.gov.uk) and [www.disclosure.gov.uk](http://www.disclosure.gov.uk)
An example of a Holiday at Home event

The organising group of eight seniors met monthly for about six months before the event. September Rendezvous was publicised by delivering the programmes to flats, bungalows and houses where older people lived. A poster on the church notice board encouraged members to bring friends. People were asked to book in by returning the tear off slip, indicating which activities they wished to attend. The charge was £2.00 per head for each day or £5.00 for the three days, which included a hot midday meal. About 57 people came and nearly half of these were not church members. The committee members acted as stewards and a first aid person was in attendance.

The activities included carpet bowls, crafts, quizzes, art, making the most use of your digital camera, magic tricks to show to your grandchildren, finding out your family history, fun with flowers, line dancing, local history, drama and a sing-a-long. Thought for the day was held 20 minutes before lunch and took the form of a visual Christian gospel presentation.

The following Sunday a special thanksgiving service was held in the afternoon which was attended by nearly all of the people who had come to September Rendezvous. A drama sketch, which had been prepared during the week, was performed and a visual presentation of the gospel was an integral part of the service. The afternoon concluded with a cup of tea and slice of celebration cake.

What lessons were learnt?

• A lot of careful planning, praying and hard work preceded the holiday experience.

• Volunteers who gave time and expertise were vital in making it possible.

• Those who attended had a great time trying out the activities, making new friends and enjoying the happy atmosphere.

• To continue contact with the people living in the community, a reunion event with a simple meal plus some activities and a showing of photos from the summer event followed and the completion of a questionnaire led to a New Year’s party and monthly events leading up to the next Summer Rendezvous. These events included a Thursday Rendezvous meeting monthly including the provision of soup, roll and sweet with a Christian thought for the day slot. A course has also been set up for people who wish to explore their faith further.

• People preferred not to sign up in advance for the group activities of the holiday and waited to see what was on offer before committing themselves.

Nanette Sanderson, a retired Church Army Sister working in Chesterfield.

instrument through which to listen to where the Spirit may lead. The inclusion of some kind of Christian reflection may have been a powerful way of helping people to renew their faith and engender a desire to do something more.

The concept of a Holiday at Home for older people seems to display are all the elements of a mission-shaped process consisting of the seven essential elements noted by Croft et al:16

• Prayer and support (by existing church family).
• Connections (between new and old traditional forms of church).
• Listening and following God’s call (double listening).
• Loving service.
• Forming community.
• Evangelism and making disciples.
• Evolving worship.

The hope is that the church will resist the temptation to expect all new converts to expand traditional congregations. Some de-churched older people may have no difficulty with the transition back to church, but what plans will the church have for those who do not want to return to traditional forms of worship? What will be the appropriate next stage or strategy to follow up such people?

There is no doubt that Holiday at Home events seek seriously to engage with older people at their various levels of need, socially, emotionally and spiritually. They offer positive value to older people and improve their quality of life. This is a means by which the gospel can be inculturated and assists older people to discover faith on their own terms, rather than being imposed in a way that tells people what they should believe.

**Introduction**

Many churches have aspirations to carry out a ministry of visiting and befriending both through the paid clergy and through lay visitors in either a formal or informal structure.

Research has identified a whole range of needs expressed by older people including someone who listens with helping skills, friendships, information, support, ways of having ‘vital links’ with the community. The outcomes are seen in terms of strengthening self-esteem, well-being, belonging and security. People speak of feeling supported, with something more to live for, a greater sense of connectedness with the outside world and their social networks. This is seen in phrases like ‘it was uplifting’, ‘it brings stimulus’, ‘I’m less depressed and more involved’, ‘I feel a new lease of life’, not so ‘cut off and alone’.

Those who are now housebound and were formerly connected to a church also report looking for communication and news, emotional support, companionship, some prayer, opportunities for Holy Communion, visits after stressful times such as bereavement, hospital visits or times in hospital.

**Visiting and befriending**

**Visiting older housebound people**

Consider these headings which are taken from a chapter on Pastoral Visiting in a book called *Being your Age* (M Butler and A Orbach, SPCK, 1993) and reflect on which might be most appropriate for individual visitors to take on.

**The visitor as a person of prayer**

Ideally, a visit, or round of visits, should be started and completed in the context of daily prayer, whether at home or by going into church or through regular meetings of the pastoral team. We share in the self-giving of Jesus by being ourselves immersed in the ups and downs of life. Our own struggles are part of the treasure we have been given to draw on when we visit in the name of Christ and of the church.

**The visitor as friend**

The friend cares by being present, not necessarily by doing active things. Visits can lead to a special kind of rapport – a real ‘meeting’. Whilst the visitor has many other links, the visit may be treasured and remembered for years by the person who is visited. ‘The emotional needs of older people are the same as anyone else: to be listened to, approved of, accepted and esteemed.’ This is what friends do best.

**The visitor as comforter**

Comfort comes when those visited know that we are there for them. It is about encouraging and sustaining others, as a sign of compassion, very different from being bossy or in control.

**The visitor as healer**

Listening is the key. It is important to allow time for people to voice unresolved anxieties and hints of bitterness, which can open the way for acceptance and forgiveness to be felt or offered. Healing is also about the link to the wider community. The visitor represents the community and the church, providing a safety net for those in danger of isolation or neglect. The visitor is to help break down the barrier between the housebound and the outside.
world, and restores to those visited a sense of dignity, belonging and self-respect.

The visitor as reconciler

As the relationship builds up, and trust grows, there may be opportunities for those visited to take steps towards resolving difficulties in a number of areas of their life. This is a time for the visitor to be attentive to when it is appropriate to suggest links with the clergy or readers and with a visit especially for worship, prayer or Holy Communion.

What gifts are needed in those who take on this responsibility?

Consider the responsibility given to those who keep in touch, and consider what gifts you might bring to this. What areas might you need to strengthen to equip yourself for this – prayer, alone or together, might be one area?

• I enjoy listening to people and hearing their stories.

• I like to be a ‘network person’ – being a link in a chain that connects people to other social and health networks, by passing on news and collaborating with others.

• I am a practical person, and I hope I can do some things that will help with the things that the housebound cannot manage on their own.

• I am someone who seeks to bring God into each situation – so I hope there will be chances to pray, or discuss the Bible or a recent sermon on tape.

• I am someone with a sense of justice. I want to make sure that the elderly can draw fully on their rights – and know for example about financial benefits and proper medical care and support.

What policy might your church need to develop to underpin such visiting?

This is best discussed with other groups specific to your congregation. You will need to have access to any existing statements of policy, but it may be that the outcome from this discussion is a meeting with the minister to firm up a policy.

We have already seen the need for good communication between those who visit and the clergy and readers who have responsibility for worship and the sacraments. The purpose of visiting can vary from parish to parish. These questions should help to clarify a policy.

• How will the names of those to be visited be decided and allocated?

• What is an appropriate number of people for each visitor to hold on their list at any time?

• The purpose of visiting – is it for support or what?

• Will visiting also include duties like collecting pensions or subscriptions, doing shopping, changing library books and reading to older people, writing and posting letters, filling in forms, paying bills or banking, tidying up or jobs around the house?

• How far is the visitor responsible for arranging transport, for example to church, to clubs, to medical appointments? Is there a transport team to liaise with, or is the liaison with non-church organisations?

• How will information and up-to-date feedback on those visited be handed on?

Guidelines for visiting someone in their own home

Some questions for consideration:

• When you enter someone’s home, how do you begin? How do you step into their agenda? Who starts the conversation? What do you say at the beginning?
Visiting and befriending

- Do you accept a drink? Tea? Alcohol? What are you doing in the few minutes while tea is being made? A room says a lot about someone (but beware of seeming to be nosy or jumping to conclusions).

- What does the cup of tea stand for? A ritual – hospitality, foot washing, giving the visitor something?

- Is the purpose of the visit to give information? Or to invite commitment?

- There are different kinds of visits – do we need a blueprint? A framework? Or is it completely open-ended?

- Are we willing to give the bonds of relationship a chance? The person you are visiting may ramble about all sorts of things out of anxiety or nervousness, but can you hear what they are really telling you? The discussion may be very practical, but can we hear the feelings? Can we listen to our own intuition and learn to read the body language?

- Where should we intervene and with what questions? Can we resist the wish to move in and make things better for people? How do we interrupt? (This should never be done out of curiosity, or to bring in our own agenda.) We need practice in paraphrasing and reflecting back what people say to us.

- When and how do we introduce our own agenda? (Remember not to promise things we cannot deliver.)

Ways of keeping in touch

The aim of keeping in touch is to be part of an effective social network on behalf of the church. It includes showing that people are remembered, valued and still have a part to play. It is not about taking on all the needs. It is vital to see what parts other people and other organisations can play as part of a ‘total network’ so that unrealistic expectations are avoided with regard to what you and the church can offer.

Consider the following and add any further ways that come to mind. Reflect on what might be appropriate in different situations.

- Keeping in touch will include visits, but it is wider than visits.

- Visits can be both regular, so that there is a pattern – for example monthly – but can also be in response to a special event such as bereavement, hospital visit or stay, birthday, wedding anniversary.

- Face to face contact is important. But this can be backed up by other kinds of contact: phone calls to check on progress and to hear if any special needs have come up; indeed, increasingly older people use fax or e-mail.

- Seeing that what the church provides reaches the housebound – parish magazines, newsletters, copies or tapes of services or sermons. Being remembered and valued is very important. Cards on special occasions – on behalf of the church – and letters can be significant. Gifts of flowers – especially at harvest time – can be helpful.

- Opportunities for prayer, reflection and worship, whether in the home or through transport to a church, can be highly significant. If worship is provided in the home, is it possible for the visitor to join the clergy or reader as part of how the church is being represented?

- Inclusion in prayer list for church, and opportunities to offer names for prayer list, for example of those who have died at a time of an All Souls Service or a service for those recently bereaved.

- Keep a note book with a list of the points of contact made with each person, key points, information to hand on or further contacts to be made on their behalf.

Helping people find meaning

Consider the framework below for how an older housebound person might be helped to find
meaning and purpose in their situation. What ways might the conversation be guided to help give opportunities for this to happen?

- **Meaning found through looking into the past.** Discussion about the past can often help to recover value, self-esteem, skills, contributions and achievements. This is where guided reminiscence can help.

- **Meaning found by focusing on the present.** This is where sensitivity to losses and opportunities comes in. What gives value and strength to the person now? What are the important relationships and contacts and can they be strengthened?

- **Meaning found by looking ahead and looking forward.** What events or celebrations are in store? What is the person or couple looking forward to? What new opportunities can be opened up? Can any contacts be renewed that will help? Are there fears that can be addressed?

**Consideration of boundaries**

In the past boundaries within society were more clearly defined, symbolised and understood. Language, dress and the use of titles all contributed to the security, confidence and certainty of particular relationships and the boundaries held. Nowadays, values and norms have changed; social contact is far more informal and relaxed. There are, of course, many positive aspects to these changes. However, there is also the possibility of ambiguity and risk of misinterpretation. There will be greater reliance on the carer’s own emotional and psychological stability in defining boundaries.

Consider some of the boundaries that have seen a definite change over the years:

- **The use of titles.** For many years it was considered impolite to address people immediately by their Christian names. Employers would certainly have been addressed as Miss, Mr, Mrs, Father, Doctor, and Reverend.

- **Code of dress.** Whereas in the past visitors would be formally dressed, most styles of dress are now considered acceptable. It is only for very formal occasions that people feel the need to ‘dress up’ and even then ‘smart casual’ is often advocated.

- **Language.** In recent years there has been a change in the use of language. People are, in general, more relaxed in formal situations. The use of ‘slang’ and colloquial language has been popularised through sit coms and soaps. Words have taken on different meanings. For the young, ‘wicked’ no longer means evil, but something to be admired. ‘Sad’ doesn’t mean unhappy, but pathetic!

**The advantages of previous boundaries and the disadvantages of changes that have taken place.**

Advantages of previous boundaries:

- People knew where they stood.
- There was a certain respect and less risk of over-familiarity.
- The boundaries were more clear-cut.
- The boundaries provided protection for both parties.
- Misunderstandings and misinterpretations were less likely

Disadvantages of boundary changes:

- People are sometimes unsure of where they stand.
- People may feel uncomfortable not knowing how to address others.
- There may be more risk of misunderstanding in relationships.
- Contemporary boundaries may offer less protection.
- Personal space may be invaded.
- More risk of over-familiarity: social settings and relationships may be conducive to sexual misconduct.
- There is now more reliance on our own internal, emotional and psychological stability.
- Self-awareness will be essential to know when there is a risk of ethical boundaries being broken.
**Visiting and befriending**

**What guidance may we need?**

**Meeting place**

Boundaries of where to meet will need to be considered carefully in order to protect confidentiality, but also to safeguard against possible danger of abuse or exploitation. Pastoral care is offered in many different settings and it is the pastoral worker’s responsibility to set the ‘right’ climate for the visit. In your own home it will be your responsibility, as a pastoral worker, to be aware of furniture setting, lighting and creating a welcoming atmosphere, without allowing informality to be misinterpreted as inappropriate intimacy.

**Time**

‘I can’t put a time limit on a person … If they need my time they must have it.’

‘I don’t seem to be able to get away; every time I try to bring a session to a close, she raises some new aspect of her situation.’

‘I felt so guilty having to leave my client just as he began to tell me how he was feeling.’

Boundaries relating to time spent together need to be kept clear. Ending will be your responsibility. We all work to time limits. Sometimes these are explicit, sometimes they are not. There are many advantages to making it clear at the start of the session how much time is available: the person can tailor what they want to say to the time available. They will not embark on their full story if they think you only have two minutes. On the other hand they may find it difficult to stop talking if they think your time is unlimited. There is a limit to the time that one can concentrate. It is not fair to yourself to exceed this limit and it is unfair to the person to whom you are listening.

In working with people we ask them to be honest with us. We also need to be honest with them, by stating that there is a limit to the amount of time we can spend with them. By doing this at the very beginning of a session we empower the person to use the time they have been given. By setting time limits we are encouraging the sharing of difficult problems and feelings; we are also making the relationship professional.

‘What do I do if I leave the person in floods of tears?’

In this situation we need to recognise that although we want very much to make people feel better, to enable them to cope with their lives more appropriately, in reality we are not, in the short term, going to be able to do this. If – for example – we are encouraging bereaved people to express feelings and emotions which their family and friends are likely to have encouraged them to suppress, they will often feel worse. We all tend to work within the time limits we know we have. People often raise quite important and painful issues right at the end of a session because in a way it is safer to do so then. Because the session is coming to an end, they only need to feel bad for a short while. Perhaps it is because it is their last chance to raise the painful and important issue. Maybe it is an attempt to hold onto you longer. If there is no agreed time limit, however, there is no incentive to raise the issue – it can continually be put off.

What can we do when this happens? We can tell someone that we recognise that what they are saying is important: however, we do not have the time to talk about it now, because we simply do not have the time to give it the attention it deserves. We can then make an agreement to consider this issue at the beginning of the next session.

How then can I finish a session?

As the session is coming to an end, wrap it up by stating tentatively but clearly, that you have 15 minutes left. Use the last 15 minutes to reflect back the main points you have heard in the session. This will act to bring the session to an end and reassure the person that you have been listening.

Although clock-watching is not advised, when you feel it is appropriate, look at your watch.
and state the time. ‘It is now 3.45 pm, we have 15 minutes left.’ Then make a definite move towards your diary or your handbag. This will act to signal to the person that you are now making a move to close the session.

**Touch**

Touch can be a very powerful tool within pastoral care. It can provide stability in the midst of a mass of confusing and conflicting feelings and an anchor in the midst of a storm. Touch can say, ‘I am listening to what you are saying,’ when words would be too intrusive or inadequate. It is important to recognise, however, that not every pastoral carer will feel comfortable using touch, and not everyone on the receiving end of pastoral care will feel happy to be touched.

The appropriateness of physical contact will be affected by the relative age and sex of the people involved, their personalities, the nature of touch and where they are touched. Some older people, who have been bereaved, may appreciate touch as this may be the only physical contact they ever receive, but older people may also feel more vulnerable.

If it is appropriate to use touch, do so with confidence rather than apologetically, which is much more likely to make people feel embarrassed. You will sense if people are uncomfortable with touch for they may pull away or go rigid.

One problem you may experience in the holding of someone’s hand is the letting go. You may feel yourself grasping someone’s hand feeling unsure about how to finish this contact without appearing to be rejecting them. One useful tip is to end a contact with a gentle squeeze.

**Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is crucial to the development of trust within pastoral care and relationships. Where ministry is shared, however, boundaries of confidentiality are not easy to define. Questions will arise: to whom is the matter confidential and who is inside the boundary of confidentiality at any one time? Is the information confidential to the pastoral care worker and the parishioner alone or might it be appropriately shared with others?

Some professions take confidentiality seriously, but include the right to share with other people in their profession or group.

These will be issues that need to be clarified within a parish policy.

**Prayer**

Dear Lord
In many ways we do not feel free to be as we might wish to be.
Meet us in the places where we are not free so that we may be strengthened in your presence,
find a new freedom in your loving acceptance and grow in a capacity to respond to those with whom we have contact.
We offer this hope and prayer to our Father, in the name of Christ,
and with the touching power and comfort of the Holy Spirit.
Amen

**Living with loss and change**

**Introduction**

In this section we are looking to deepen our understanding and awareness of what grief and bereavement involve and increase our appreciation of how older people are undergoing multiple losses of different kinds, including actual bereavements, and the implications of this for their feelings and views about their own death. We shall also see how keeping in touch as a friend from the church can help.

As a background to our reflection, consider the implications of these quotes from *Ageing in Society: European Perspectives on Gerontology* 3rd Edition (John Bond, Sheila Peace, Freya Dittmann-Kohli and Gerben Westerhof [eds], Sage, 2007).
Both Erikson and Butler saw the key task which they identified in old age, developing integrity and life reviewing, as being triggered by awareness of the end of life … Growing awareness and acceptance of death are major developmental tasks of adulthood and a crucial part of the process of ageing.

In modern Western societies, it is predominantly elderly people who die. Many people live through to middle age experiencing only the death of their grandparents amongst those close to them. Later their own parents will die, but it is only in later life that death will be experienced as a constant pattern as siblings, friends and other contemporaries die … The instances of bereavement and coping with loss are concentrated on older people.

For older people each new loss can re-kindle feelings of previous losses, even those which happened a long time ago.

**Loss through bereavement**

We shall begin by considering a number of models setting out the stages of grief through which people may pass.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parkes’ Four Stages of Grief</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The pain of grief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing fear, guilt, anger and resentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apathy, aimlessness and sadness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The emergence of hope and moves in new directions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Consider the model of grief above. As we visit and support older people who are bereaved we need to be aware that they may experience denial, anger, guilt and depression as they work towards acceptance in real terms. In some cases a bereaved person may be totally in denial and claim the death is all a lie, a bad dream or a mistake! In others they may express anger with the doctors and other professionals engaged with their loved one or with God or feel guilty about themselves or their families for things they either did or said or didn’t do or say. And of course depression is frequently a concomitant of grief.

The diagram opposite charts components of grief and expands further on the stages through which a bereaved person may pass. You may wish to pay particular attention to the initial feelings of numbness and how the bereaved person may feel completely anaesthetised and how this protects them from immediate feelings of overwhelming pain. This may prove to be useful especially when working through feelings of guilt. Many people who have been bereaved are unaware of the numbness and, therefore, they may experience overwhelming feelings of guilt because they were unable to feel any initial pain – for example they could not cry at the funeral or felt they were not really engaged with the whole experience.

To see how these theories work in practice, consider William Worden’s Four Tasks of Mourning (*Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, J William Worden, Springer, 2002). The tasks are not numbered because people may pass through them in different orders. Also, people may move backwards and forwards in the tasks and may be working through more than one task at a time as situations improve or aspects of decline are more immediate. These tasks can apply equally to other losses and diminishments in older age.

**Accepting the reality of loss**

- ‘She is dead, she is not coming back.’
- ‘We are separated/divorced, she is not coming back.’
- ‘Death is for ever.’
- ‘He does not need his clothes, possessions, bedroom.’
- Denial may be strong – ‘maybe they made a mistake’.
- Searching – spiritualism may be explored.
- Saying goodbye is important – maybe seeing the dead body, going to the funeral.
- It may be important to tell the story over and over again.
### Components of Grief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1 Shock</strong></td>
<td>Numbness and disbelief&lt;br&gt;Defence against being overwhelmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2 Disorganisation</strong></td>
<td>Collapse:&lt;br&gt;a Immediately&lt;br&gt;b After funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3 Denial</strong></td>
<td>Denial of:&lt;br&gt;a Facts of loss&lt;br&gt;b Meaning of loss&lt;br&gt;c Irreversibility of death&lt;br&gt;Expressed as:&lt;br&gt;i Behaving as if loss had not occurred&lt;br&gt;ii Hallucinations&lt;br&gt;iii Searching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4 Depression</strong></td>
<td>Deep, active, pining or desolation&lt;br&gt;Passive, helpless, hopeless, despair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5 Guilt</strong></td>
<td>Real or imagined&lt;br&gt;Thoughts or actions&lt;br&gt;Omissions or commissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6 Anxiety</strong></td>
<td>Of being overwhelmed by feelings&lt;br&gt;Of own future survival&lt;br&gt;Of future in general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7 Anger</strong></td>
<td>Towards self&lt;br&gt;Towards doctors, nurses and so on&lt;br&gt;Towards deceased person&lt;br&gt;Towards God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8 Resolution</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9 Re-integration</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Accepting the reality of the loss may well be made harder if there is nobody to say goodbye to, for example if the body was too badly damaged, lost at sea or never found.

### Experiencing the pain and loss

- It is important that there is some way that these feelings can be shown.
- Feelings will often include sadness, anger, guilt, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, shock, yearning, relief, numbness, disbelief, confusion, preoccupation and sense of presence, hallucinations.

### Adjustment to the new environment

- When someone dies, the shape of his or her life changes. If a partner has died they may feel ‘uncoupled’. If a child has died, there will be a change in the family dynamics; this applies to the parents and remaining children.
• If someone suffers a loss of any sort, the shape of his or her life will have been changed. They will have to re-adjust to this new way.
• A child may be without a parent, or if both parents have died, they will be orphans.
• There will have to be a new routine in the bereaved life.
• The bereaved person will have to learn new things, which used to be carried out by the dead person and/or the person who has left.

Re-investment of emotional energy

• Gradually, the bereaved person will start to look forward and outward.
• They may need to know that it is all right to move on.
• It does not trivialise the memories or loss. It is all right to laugh.
• This does not mean they have got over the loss, but rather that they are learning to live more comfortably with it.
• It must be remembered that people grieve in different ways and at different times. This may cause difficulties in a family who are all grieving; one may be ready to re-invest emotional energies before another. This can be the cause of big stresses in a family.

Another model map of dying (see opposite) was developed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in On Death and Dying (Simon & Schuster, 1969, paperback edition 1997).

In considering the various models as a guide to being involved pastorally with those who are bereaved, we must always bear in mind that none of them are stages which automatically follow one another. We need to be sensitive to a different mood at each point of contact.

You will often find that facing the loss of a spouse or close friend or relation triggers off for the older person thoughts and feelings about their own dying. They may open a conversation with you, as if to test out whether you can cope with hearing them say something about their future dying. They would like to say something aloud to help them to work through this. Do not panic. Listen to what they say and play what they say back to them, asking questions like, ‘How does it feel?’ or ‘What are your fears?’ Often it may simply be appropriate to show that you have heard.

Here are two quotes from older people. Consider what feelings they might be experiencing in terms of the Kübler-Ross model:

I love my life; that’s why I’m so worried about dying. I don’t want to die … we cling on to life don’t we … I want to go on.
I feel it is all right … I used to think of death ‘out there’ happening to other people, and I know it will come to be real for me … life has a peace and beauty now. I know I will die, but now I am free to live in a more vivid way.

When caring for someone who has been bereaved, keeping in touch is very important. In giving others good attention, we need to be able to set aside our own frame of reference and try to pick up the frame of reference of those we are visiting. Whilst we may have our own concerns and ways we might be of help, we need first to pick up the starting point and frame of reference of the others, and only then can we see what we might be able to offer in practical ways.

Family and close friends have an important part to play, but so do those one step removed from such close relationships. It is often with these people that comments will be offered as older people prepare for their uncertain future. Social networks are also very important in times of anxiety, searching and loss. These include members of organisations to which the bereaved person belongs. Thus for church members it is important to feel that the church network is still an active support – and those who keep in touch on behalf of the church are an important sign of this.

Research shows that it is attentive listening that is most helpful to older people in these situations. For example, focused attention, showing that what is said and felt is heard and understood, being there and engaging in moments when feelings and hard truths are said. It is the chance to confide in a relationship of trust. The key to the support gained seems to be reciprocal warmth, trust and perhaps above all a sense of being valued. It is good to have someone who understands.

We should therefore provide opportunities for older people to talk and discuss issues relating to their perception of life, its value and meanings. It is an advantage if they have the chance to clarify their thoughts and feelings together with someone who shares their concerns.

Other losses in older age

In this section we have concentrated mainly on death – the major and life-shattering loss of older age, but we need to consider this against the background of a period of life when many people are experiencing multiple losses and bereavements and we will conclude by considering briefly a few of these.

Loss of status

In older age, for most people their professional (paid) role has vanished and eventually their voluntary roles as well. Sometimes people feel relief, but often the loss of status brings depression and uncertainty. They need help in finding a new role where perhaps being becomes more important than doing and achieving.

Physical diminishment

Whilst some fortunate older people remain physically well and active into their eighties and even their nineties, most experience a degree of physical decline. This may manifest itself simply as less energy and a need for more frequent rests. However for many eyesight and hearing become less acute with the associated problems of communication with those around. For others mobility is a problem and there is a need for acceptance of a stick or zimmer.

In addition many older people have to learn to live with limiting long-standing illness like the results of a stroke or heart attack, macular degeneration, Parkinsons Disease or cancer.

Mental diminishment

For many loss of memory is the greatest fear in approaching old age. Everyone worries when they are unable to remember names, lose things or forget what they intended to do. In a majority of cases this is simply normal ageing and no cause for concern but for a few, Alzheimer’s disease or other forms of dementia pose a massive challenge and loss. See page 66 onwards for a discussion of this.
Loss of independence

For younger people it is often difficult to understand the ‘bereavement’ that many older people experience in the loss of their car. However this is a very real loss because it marks the beginning of loss of independence. Once you need a lift to meetings, for shopping, to church or other activities, you no longer feel independent and these losses continue to multiply as simple tasks like opening a tin or changing a light bulb are no longer possible.

Downsizing or loss of home or possessions

Again some older people are able to live out their lives in the family home where they raised their children, but for most a time comes when a move is necessary to somewhere smaller, to a bungalow, to sheltered accommodation or to a care home. In every case this involves losses – of associations that a place has with someone who has died, of possessions that bring memories of the past and often of neighbours, friends or fellow church members.

Conclusion

All those involved in working with or supporting older people in the churches need therefore to be aware that they are people experiencing multiple losses and that they need our understanding, care and concern to work their way through to an acceptance of a new way of living with loss.

The ministry of the church to people living with dementia

What is dementia and what are its effects?

Dementia is a condition in which the cells of the brain die more quickly than in normal ageing. This leads to a general decline in a person’s abilities. It produces loss of memory, confusion, personality changes, odd behaviour and a diminishing ability to reason. It is a complex and perplexing condition whose causes are not fully understood and as yet there is no cure.

In the UK alone it is estimated that there are about 680,000 people living with dementia. Alzheimer’s disease is the most common form of dementia, but there are numerous other types, including vascular dementia, Pick’s disease and Lewy Body dementia. It is a condition that has profound effects not only on those with the disease, but on their family, friends, carers and all who come into contact with them.

How can we see the person behind the dementia?

Until fairly recently the future was bleak for people with dementia. There seemed little alternative to the medical containment model of care, where the person with dementia was looked after, but often in a de-personalising manner, and simply waited to die. It was sometimes known as ‘the death that leaves the body behind’. However in the early 1990s Tom Kitwood transformed our approach to people with dementia. He suggested that the crucial factor in well-being for people with dementia is person-centred care, that is seeing the PERSON with dementia not the person with DEMENTIA. How people are treated and approached by other people with whom they live is vitally important and this of course means paying proper attention to their spiritual needs alongside all their other needs.
What are the spiritual needs of people with dementia?

Spiritual well-being is a basic human need. A person’s spirituality is linked to their sense of identity and the need for this linkage is nowhere more urgent than in those with dementia, whose personhood is so often denied in current practice. People with dementia are already likely to be a disadvantaged group – often old, certainly vulnerable and frequently confused. To ignore their spiritual needs increases still further that social exclusion. Spirituality encompasses the way in which an individual responds to and makes sense of the raw experience of life – for instance moments of delight and sorrow, understanding and bewilderment, hope and despair. There is a need in all of us to feel valued and affirmed, to love and be loved, to hope in something in this life and beyond, to have faith and trust in someone or something and to know peace, security and tranquillity.

Meeting the spiritual needs of people with dementia is not an optional extra but is crucial if the aims of holistic and person-centred care are to be met.

How can the churches minister to those with dementia?

1 By visiting them in their own homes or in care homes

Many people say that there is no point in visiting people with dementia because they don’t understand what you are saying and they will have forgotten your visit five minutes after you leave. This is not true. For people with dementia conversation is like gold dust. They live in the present moment and thus moments of happiness, laughter or caring attention minister to their spiritual needs. A visit by a friend from the church can transform a day.

Some tips for visiting people with dementia:

• Wear or take with you something which may remind the person who you are, for example a name badge, a cross or, where relevant, a clerical collar.

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The ministry of the church to people living with dementia

- Read, where appropriate, familiar passages from the Bible – you may be surprised when the person joins in with all the words!

- Pray using the Lord’s Prayer or other familiar prayers, gently holding the person’s hands if they seem to like this.

- Accept that your visit may well be short as concentration will often be poor.

- If possible keep in touch with the family too as they may not be aware that you visit.

- Assume the person can understand, give them respect and treat them like any other person you may visit. They are people like us who happen to have a memory problem.

- And finally remember that although you and your visit may be quickly forgotten, the good feelings generated will remain. People with dementia continue to respond to feelings even when they no longer appear to understand.

2 Continue to welcome people with dementia to worship

Many people with dementia and their carers feel that they are no longer welcome at the main service of the week where the church family is gathered. They are concerned about possible interruptions or other strange behaviour so cease to attend. We need to ask ourselves why this is so. Why are we indulgent when children walk about the church, make loud comments or need to go to the toilet but we are embarrassed when older people with dementia do the same?

3 Support carers

Caring for a parent, spouse or other family member with dementia is very hard and demanding work, all day every day. Churches should be conscious of this and appreciate that carers need both practical and emotional support. In fact all too often they are forgotten through fear of dementia or lack of understanding. We might consider offering to sit with the cared-for person while the carer attends a service or other church activities or just has a relaxing walk in the country or a meal out. Some churches have set up support groups for carers where they can meet others in a similar position and let off steam as well as receiving practical support.

4 Visit and lead worship in specialist dementia care homes

It is estimated that about 70% of all residents in care homes are suffering from a degree of dementia. Taking Services in Care Homes (page 49) provides a lot of information in general about leading worship in care homes, but there are some particular factors to consider when speaking about a ministry to specialist homes where everyone is suffering from moderate or severe dementia. This issue is covered in depth in Leveson Paper 7, Older People, Faith and Dementia, written by a Church Army officer Chris Crosskey and published jointly by Church Army and the Leveson Centre, and in Lighting the Way: spiritual and religious care for those with dementia (Leveson Paper 16) based on experience in a day centre but with a wealth of suggestions for leading worship with people with dementia.

Some key points to consider:

- The ritual associated with organised religion can be particularly important where there is memory loss. The repetitive nature of ritual gives familiarity and reliability and acts as a cue to a person’s spirituality.

- Taking part in a service can give people with dementia a sense of companionship and belonging.

- You will need to learn to be flexible if the congregation deviates from your plan for the service. On the other hand there is great value in the outline of the service being the same every week to provide a sense of familiarity.

- If possible prior to the service go around and say hello to residents, introducing yourself and smiling or shaking hands.
• Keep the service really short (15–25 minutes).

• Use familiar and well-loved hymns and readings. One of the most wonderful aspects of this ministry is to observe the way in which people who seem to have lost all connection with others can join in hymns and prayers with evident enjoyment.

• Don’t underestimate the power of the Eucharist which can be a very strong memory cue for people with dementia.

• Use religious symbols like candles, crosses or a Bible to remind people of previous acts of worship.

• If you have a short address, use visual aids where possible. Chris Crosskey’s book is full of ideas.

• Make use of symbols and appropriate physical contact.

• Be prepared to modify the form of service in the light of your experience.

5 Set up a lunch club or Alzheimer’s café for people with dementia and their carers

People with dementia and their carers are often reluctant to eat out or even have a cup of tea or coffee in a café for the same reasons that they are reluctant to attend church. Some churches have responded to this. For example a URC church in Wirral runs a monthly lunch club which is staffed by volunteers and is very well attended. Not only do the participants enjoy it greatly but the volunteers eat with them and thus ‘normalise’ the occasion and they learn much about dementia along the way.

Many communities now have Alzheimer’s cafés at least once a month. The Ashbourne café meets in the Methodist church premises and, in addition to church volunteers, the Alzheimer’s branch members and representatives from social services and the mental health team are present to help and advise people with dementia and their carers.

6 Support other voluntary sector initiatives

Where it is not possible for individual churches to take part in any of the above initiatives, it is important that volunteers from the churches are seen to be involved in other voluntary sector initiatives which minister to people with dementia.

Conclusion

In a video entitled ‘Responding to Music’ a man with dementia says to the musician who has been playing to him, ‘You have touched the strings at the very centre of my heart.’ We have the capacity to do this for people with dementia if we can only stifle our anxieties, lose some of our self-consciousness, and let love accomplish its amazing transformations.

In the words of Malcolm Goldsmith we need to ‘shift the attention from us to God … it is not what we do, it is not what we believe which is important, it is what God does! What God does is that he remembers us and the fact that he remembers us means that we are of immense worth. Our spiritual life does not depend on our remembering, it does not even depend on our believing, it depends on God’s love and mercy alone.’
churched or at least have a good grasp of the basics of Christianity and be familiar with liturgies. Because of this, some older people will be comfortable with inherited or traditional church but others may find old style religious activities culturally foreign. For this reason it is suggested that a mixed economy church is appropriate for the 21st century offering fresh expressions of church alongside traditional expressions of church. *Mission-shaped Church*, a Church of England report published in 2004, says in the introduction:

> A mixed economy of parish churches and network churches will be necessary, in active partnership across a wider area, perhaps a deanery ... In addition, our diverse consumer culture will never be reached by one standard form of church.17

Furthermore as localities fragment, parish churches may have to think even more locally, that is smaller than a single local parish community as in the past. Parishes might well be made up of different communities based on housing estates, ethnic groups, lifestyle and people of varying ages. People from other parishes may identify more strongly with a particular group or network within the parish.

Valuing the parish could create excellent opportunities for connecting fresh expressions to inherited modes of Christian community, giving life to the ‘mixed economy’ church.18

Parochial Church Councils should not be asking how we can get people linked to different groups into our congregation but how we can do church where they are. Are there ways to make connections by giving spiritual value? One obvious example would be making connections with supported housing schemes for older people or building relationships with an agency-run luncheon club or day centre. Other suggestions might include contact with a leisure centre offering sessions specifically for older people.

**Fresh expressions of church and older people**

The spiritual needs of churched older people can be met by acknowledging that they too want to be involved in mission rather than seen as a group of people with a specific need. They are an untapped resource for reaching their peers who can be encouraged through fresh expressions to reach out to the many de-churched who still have an experience of church in the past and who may be open to hearing the gospel in a fresh and accessible way.

A fresh expression of church is an important way forward for the sending church to re-connect with de-churched and non-churched people where they live, or within already established networks, in order to present the church and the gospel in a fresh and novel way that is relevant to their spiritual needs. It is a process by which both the churched and those to be reached discover innate faith waiting to be stimulated.

What defines a fresh expression of church? At one level it defies a single definition as they are, by their very nature, churches that are diverse and fresh! ‘Fresh’ is used deliberately instead of ‘new’ echoing the Preface to the Declaration of Assent which Church of England ministers make at their licensing: ‘ ... the faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation.’ It also acknowledges the developing story of God’s work in the church and humbly conveys that necessary sense of connection with history; it is not a case of ‘out with the old and in with the new’.

*Mission-shaped Church* states that the phrase ‘fresh expression of church’ was intended to describe two different things: firstly, churches which are intentionally sending out people to start something from scratch in a new mission context and secondly, ‘existing churches that are seeking to renew or redirect what they already have’.19 We need both of these kinds of

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17 This report from a working group of the Church of England’s Mission and Public Affairs Council concerns the contemporary Anglican understanding and practice of church planting.

fresh expressions of church which share the motivation of being ‘established primarily for the benefit of people in our changing culture who are not yet members of any church’.20

Chapter 4 in Mission-shaped Church21 explains why we need fresh expressions of church. It gives a national overview of recent developments in church planting and describes the varied and exciting ways in which ‘church’ is being planted afresh. It lists some of the common features found across all the different types of fresh expression of church.

Reflecting on good practice since the report’s publication, these common features have been revised by Claire Dalpra, assistant researcher at the Sheffield Centre, Church Army’s research unit. Broadly speaking, fresh expressions of church …

• question the assumption that Sunday morning, church building, and congregation-sized is best for mission;

• recognise the importance of small groups for relational mission;

• are aware of the considerable need for churches amongst networks, for example in the workplace, among pubs, clubs and even school-based, not just neighbourhoods;

• are supported or released by a denomination, but many, in ethos, operate as if they were post-denominational;

• often find they have more in common with similar types of fresh expression of church outside their area than with other churches in the deanery.

There is a diversity of fresh expressions. Some of these are illustrated as follows:

• Alternative worshipping communities
• Café church
• Cell church
• Community
• Multiple and midweek congregations
• Net-work focused
• School-based or school-linked
• Seeker church
• Traditional church plant

So why the need for a fresh expression of church for older people? They do not appear on this list. Won’t they be content with existing forms of church, seeing as so many traditional church congregations are attended by older people?

Remember, in this context, we are predominantly thinking of mission and evangelism to older people who are not yet members of any church rather than our care of those older people who are already in church.

We have already seen that, because of the huge age range, older people fit into three main cohort groups. Within these there are distinct cultural differences, from which these groups have emerged, for instance:

If you were born in the 1920s
• You were a child or young adult in 1940s war years
• You grew up in a society shaped by modernity
• You were accustomed to religion and moral values as normal and respected
• You grew up in the industrial age.

If you were born in the 1940s
• You were a child or young adult in the 1960s period of rock culture, peace protests, flower people and so on
• You grew up in a society shaped by post-modernity
• You were accustomed to alternative spiritualities as a viable alternative to religion
• You experienced the challenge or rejection of accepted standards and moral values
• You grew up in an age of technology.

20 This is the definition offered by the Fresh Expression Team set up by the Archbishop of Canterbury and led by Steve Croft.
These differences in background are one reason why, if we are considering a fresh expression of church for older people, ‘one size’ does not fit all. We must be aware of the differences. A spirituality that nurtures someone born in the 1920s might not be appropriate for a person born in the 1940s because of the cultural differences in their upbringing. These differences may give us clues as to what kind of church will connect best with both the younger-old and the older frail.

For the 4th-agers, as well as physical access to and around a church building, the worship style may be difficult to access. Youth culture with loud music and unfamiliar songs may leave them feeling overwhelmed and lonely. It is very easy for an older person to feel isolated in a crowd; a church setting is no exception.

For the 3rd-agers (the new old), especially for the non-churched, the church building and worship style can be completely alien.

A challenging question would be: ‘If Mick Jagger and his contemporaries were converted, what sort of church and music would be appropriate?’

Although we have no easy answers, it is important that we have logged the question. The issue will grow in importance as the population ages and the de-churched within our society who have had meaningful contact with church as children diminishes. Increasingly, we cannot rely on a returnees ‘come back to us’ policy in mission to older people; they were never ‘our people’ in the first place.

It might be tempting simply to re-label or re-package existing community activities with older people but growing a fresh expression of church for older people is more than just changing labels. There is a great temptation to take an existing group of older people, say in the context of a day centre, luncheon club, or some other kind of meeting and re-label it as a fresh expression. Beware of a mere change of language; simply naming something as a fresh expression does not make it so.

However, existing groups might have the potential to grow into a fresh expression of church in the future or be a necessary stage toward the set-up of a fresh expression. This could be the point at which to progress and look for the ‘green shoots’ of a potential fresh expression based on four key indicators.

**Worship**

One of the essential elements of church is that the people assemble for worship. Does it take account of the spiritual needs of older people? Worship need not be in traditional format but tailored to context and need. Café-style may be an appropriate format. The format should not be imposed on the older people but based on their desires and needs so that it has meaning for them and is ‘owned’ by them. Furthermore, is it sacramental? Do they celebrate Communion? If one of their members asked to be baptised, how would this be facilitated?

**Mission and discipleship**

That is the desire to reach out to others. For the community to be attractive to de-churched and non-churched people, it must provide the kind of spiritual help and support people are seeking. It should not be a means to boost the numbers in the traditional congregation. Some newcomers may prefer to attend inherited church but for those who would find this difficult then the new community should be seen as their church. The mission context will shape when and where it happens.

**Community**

Is there a sense of community? An older people’s meeting may be just a collection of individuals without sense of commitment to each other – a meeting which is no more than a mid-week social occasion. Community is something that continues outside of the formal meeting. Most activities for older people close down sometime during the summer period, leaving older people without their regular support. The new community will function continuously without a formal break or closed period.

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*A Mission-shaped Church for Older People?*
Relationship to the sending church

How well is it supported by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) or other church leaders? Does the fresh expression have representation on the PCC? How does the church leadership understand it? Does the sending church identify and train indigenous leaders to enable it to be self-financing, self-governing, and self-reproducing?

The relationship to the sending church and the wider community is important for building potential partnerships:

- with other churches
- with church authorities
- with other agencies in the community
- with people in older people networks.

Summary

The resources needed to shape a mixed economy church for older people in the 21st century in order to reach a culturally diverse age group are

- Fresh vision
- Change of mindset from only pastoral care to mission involvement
- Encouragement from the church leadership to experiment
- Location and equipment
- Finance.

A final thought: Stephen Cottrell, Bishop of Reading, in the foreword to a new publication from the Church of England’s Research and Statistics Unit, *Churchgoing Today* (Church House Publishing, 2006, page 6) says:

“Churchgoing is changing. It is changing whether we like it or not. The question remains: are we stubbornly going to fight a corner for a certain way of being church, or go with the flow of the Spirit and develop ways of worshipping that chime with our culture, and times and locations for services that fit better with demands of contemporary living?”

Core values

For those who have explored and examined issues related to ministry to and with older people it might be worth considering what the church’s core values are. Such a statement could be based on the following:

- **Faith**: as a Christian community we affirm the centrality of our faith in Jesus Christ in all that we do.

- **Openness to God**: recognising the growing number of older people in our society, this church in its vision for the future has focused upon older people as one of its areas of evangelism, so that older people can be offered friendship and spiritual care with a view to sharing the gospel with them.

- **Equality**: we are committed to treating older people with respect and as having ultimate value in God’s eyes. It means actively working towards changing attitudes in the church and wider community which discriminate against older people.

- **Professional integrity**: through its sustained commitment to training, this church has invested resources in its leadership. This has enabled a number of lay people to work in pioneering situations in a mission-shaped way.

- **Partnership**: this church works alongside and in partnership with other organisations, in working with and for older people and in tackling issues related to their needs.

Principles to consider

- **Respect**: older people deserve respect. They have weathered the storms of life and survived. This means valuing the older person

22 The Diocese of Hereford has developed an excellent policy. Contact Council for Social Responsibility (Tel: 01432 373311) or e-mail j.boys@hereford.anglican.org for a copy.
by (a) giving quality time and being attentive; (b) not being patronising; (c) respecting values, culture and religious beliefs, even if different from one’s own; (d) not abusing a person’s isolation and vulnerability; (e) ensuring in residential situations that older people are present by choice.

• **Dignity**: older people have earned the right to be honoured because of their life experiences. They hold the key to our history and have a lot to teach us. This means showing respect, treating the older person as being of ultimate value in God’s eyes. It means being humble and learning from the older person. It means recognising spiritual gifts and needs and being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

• **Privacy**: care needs to be taken not to abuse the privacy of older people; they need to feel safe to share. This means taking care to pre-arrange a visit and to be punctual. It means too ensuring privacy and space when engaging in one-to-one conversations in residential settings. It means keeping confidences and your word. Permission needs to be given to pass on information (unless the person would otherwise be at risk). It means not giving advice or taking sides in an argument, but being prepared to be the older person’s voice if necessary (giving her or his ideas, not yours).

• **Recognition**: many older Christians have gifts matured by insight and wisdom. This means affirming these in older people and encouraging Churches and the wider community to value and use the gifts of older people. It may also mean helping older people and churches to recognise that they have needs for ongoing spiritual growth.
It was said in the introduction that work with older people needs a higher profile in church life. This resource offers an opportunity for such aspirations to be realised. It provides a comprehensive starting point suitable for most situations for those leaders and pioneers with a passion and a desire for the church to be mission-shaped for an ageing population. It offers us ways of working with the older members of our existing congregations but it also helps us in the considerable mission challenge of reaching beyond our existing members to connect with people beyond our church fringes.

Those using these resources should remember that process should match content and therefore seek to involve older people as much as possible in the presenting of material to raise awareness and in the practice of reaching out to non-Christians.

A feature of church life over the last twenty years has been the increased number of paid youth and children’s workers, while work with older people has been a much overlooked area of mission. Work with older people needs to be properly resourced by pastoral as well as pioneer ministers and valued by providing appropriate training opportunities for both the elderly frail and the young-old.

These young-old are more active, independent, vibrant adventurers and non-passive receptors of change. They were the movers and shakers of the 60s and are not prepared to roll over and accept traditional attitudes towards ageing. They are in search of a meaningful spirituality replacing old style religion.

Religious life – like so many other features of post-modern society – is not so much disappearing as mutating, for the sacred undoubtedly persists and will continue to do so, but in forms that may be very different from those which have gone before.²³

A very different missionary journey is required more akin to cross-cultural mission abroad, involving a ‘go to them’ direction rather than a ‘come to us’. As the Mixed Economy section explores, we may need to think of the ecclesiological implications of our mission to older people, especially the younger-old; the planting of new kinds of churches may be needed. It is a riskier venture as there are more unanswered questions and more unknowns. We can choose not to focus our efforts here and continue with the older cohort groups who have more affiliation with inherited forms of church but beware, in time we will be doing our mission work in an increasingly shrinking pond as the proportion of non-churched in our society continues to grow.

We have a biblical mandate. In 1 Timothy 5, followers of Christ are told to take responsibility for the emotional, spiritual and physical well-being of older people. They need to be engaged rather than marginalised. One of the characteristics of a genuine Christian community according to Scott Peck²⁴ is that a group of diverse individuals or subgroups learns to transcend what makes each of them different. These differences might include class, gender, race, religion and, of course, age. A healthy church acknowledges difference rather than trying to ignore it and empties itself of prejudices and assumptions about those differences. Peck uses the analogy of looking at people through ‘soft eyes’ rather than ‘hard eyes’. By this he means, in a healthy church, people have learned to respect each other. The masks of composure drop and we see the courage and deeper dignity within.

When this place of safety is reached through genuine community, there is a natural tendency for us to heal ourselves and find ways of growing towards wholeness. This is a special and necessary gift for older people who, in such a safe place, are better placed to transcend their own

physical limitations and find a reason to survive and overcome their everyday constraints. Living outside themselves rather than dwelling on their inner self has been shown to be a significant help in thriving at this stage of life.

Here is an opportunity to encourage and engage older people to explore their faith in ways that they have never done before. Such engagement will allow them, with the help of peers and ministers, to grow in faith and maturity in a Christ-centred way as relationships are developed. Older people have a role to play in the church’s survival.

... we rightly expect Christians to grow old wisely, for the church is a community constituted by wisdom. And wisdom is acquired not through means-end principles but through corporate experience, by living the church’s stories. We do not presume that all Christians as they grow old should be wise, but we do expect the church to live as a community that requires the wise, particularly the elderly among us, to exist ... So the church must find ways to have children and those we currently call ‘the youth’ sit at the feet of their elders where they learn the wisdom of the past.

Older people need to know that they belong and indeed find spiritual nourishment in being known, being valued, feeling accepted and being involved.

General resources

Butler, Michael and Orbach, Ann (1993) Being your Age: pastoral care for older people, SPCK.
Collyer, Michael (2004) St Stephen’s Seniors: Christ to elderly and lonely in East Twickenham (Discovering Faith in Later Life No 2), Church Army.
Howse, Ken (1999) Spirituality, Religion and Older People, CPA.
Jewell, Albert (2000) Grow Old along with Me, NCEG.
Knox, Ian S (2002) Older People and the Church, T & T Clark.
Leveson Centre in collaboration with MHA Care Group (2006) Working with Older People: A Resource Directory for Churches, second edition. Details of over 100 church-related organisations working with older people, £7.50 (in plastic wallet) or downloadable from the website www.levesoncentre.org.uk

Spiritual needs of older people

SCOP (2006) Spiritual Care for Older People: the extra dimension. Continuing series of sheets, SCOP.
Wray, Martin (2005) Second Wind: spirituality and the second half of life (study course), MHA Care Group.

Raising awareness

Green, M (1990) Evangelism through the Local Church, Hodder & Stoughton.

Taking services for and with older people

Carols that Live (large print). Available from PO Box 341, Enterprise House, Northampton, NN3 2WZ.
people with dementia – suggestions for action, Faith in Elderly People, Leeds. Available from 29 Silverdale Avenue, Guiseley, Yorkshire, LS20 8BD.


Hymns that Live (large print). Available from PO Box 341, Enterprise House, Northampton, NN3 2WZ.


Kirkbride, Susan (2005) O Tidings of Comfort and Joy – favourite Christmas hymns (CD), Stirling Dementia Services Development Centre. Available by phoning 01786 467740 or e-mailing dementia@stir.ac.uk

Kirkbride, Susan (2005) Restoring the soul: A selection of favourite hymns (CD), Stirling Dementia Services Development Centre. Available by phoning 01786 467740 or e-mailing dementia@stir.ac.uk

Knocker, Sally and Johnson, Alison (2005) Creating Links between Care Settings and Local Faith Communities: a practice guide, NAPA. Available by phoning 020 7078 9375 or e-mailing sue@napa-activities.co.uk

SCOP (2007) Worship with Older People in a Care Setting, SCOP

Woodward, James and Houlden, Leslie (2006) Services for Weekdays, SPCK.

Woodward, James and Houlden, Leslie (2007) Praying the Lectionary, SPCK.

Running a Holiday at Home event


Women’s Network of the Methodist Church (2002) What shall we do now? Christian Resources for Older People. Available by phoning 020 7467 5175 or e-mailing network@methodistchurch.org.uk

Visiting and befriending

Butler, Michael (ed) (1997) Visiting Older People, CCOA.


Killick, John and Allan, Kate (2001) *Communication and the Care of People with Dementia*, Open University Press.


MHA and CCOA (2001) *Worship for people with dementia*.

Murphy, Charles J (1997) *Dementia Care and the Churches: involving people and premises*, Dementia Services Development Centre, Stirling.


**Mixed economy: inherited and fresh expressions of church for older people**


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**Some useful websites**

- Age Concern  

- Alzheimer’s Society  
  [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

- Carers UK  
  [www.carers.demon.co.uk](http://www.carers.demon.co.uk)

- Christian Council on Ageing  

- Church Army  
  [http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/ChurchArmy/web/site/ChurchArmy/Resources/MissionAndEvangelism.asp](http://www.churcharmy.org.uk/ChurchArmy/web/site/ChurchArmy/Resources/MissionAndEvangelism.asp)

- Counsel and Care  

- Keychange  

- Leveson Centre for the Study of Ageing, Spirituality and Social Policy  
  [http://rps.gn.apc.org/leveson/study.htm](http://rps.gn.apc.org/leveson/study.htm)

- MHA Care Group  

- Mission Care  

- National Council for Palliative Care  

- Outlook Trust  

- Parche, Eastbourne  
  [www.parche.org.uk](http://www.parche.org.uk)

- RISE – Reaching the Isolated Elderly  
  [http://www.regenerate-rise.co.uk](http://www.regenerate-rise.co.uk)

- Sheffield Centre  
  [http://www.encountersontheedge.org.uk](http://www.encountersontheedge.org.uk)
Alternative worship

It refers to Christian groups expressing worship that combines antiquity, mystery, technology and art. They seek to engage with the values of contemporary society by drawing on ancient resources.

Church planting

A term used to describe the process (rather than an end result) leading to a fresh expression of church.

De-churched

People who have had meaningful contact with church and have left. Either they have deliberately chosen to leave church, generally on account of abuse or disagreement, never to return (closed de-churched) or they have drifted away without really meaning to and would be happy to be invited back (open de-churched).

‘Come’ mentality and ‘go’ mentality

‘Come’ includes the practice of relying on existing non-eucharistic services or provision of visitor services where newcomers have to take the initiative in coming to something new and unfamiliar. This works on the existing church style: ‘Come join us on our terms.’ ‘Go’ asks church members to leave the safety of their church buildings to meet people in the community where they would naturally meet, for example in the school playground, in the pub, buggy club. ‘Go’ does not drag non-Christians back to church services as soon as a connection is made. Rather it asks how relationships can be grown, faith explored and ‘embryonic’ church encouraged in these neutral places.

Double listening

The methodology by which the ‘dying to live’ process is pursued is double listening, attending to both the mission context and to the essence of the Christian faith handed down to us.

‘Dying to live’

Poetic shorthand for Jesus’ incarnation, death and resurrection as a model for the process of church planting. ‘As the Father sent me, so I send you.’ In all good church planting, preconceived ideas about church and ministry have needed to be sacrificed for what is most contextually appropriate and theologically faithful.

Fresh expressions of church

The consequence of directing the church planting process towards people who don’t go to church and would find existing forms of church culturally alien and inaccessible. They differ in key aspects from traditional forms of church; this difference could be the group of people the church exists for, size of church assumed, day of the week it meets and balance across parameters like worship, community, mission and connection with the wider church.

Fringe

People who have been to a church building at least six times a year.

Mixed economy

Encouraging traditional expressions of church where they are effective in mission to fringe and de-churched people while developing fresh expressions of church in mission to those that traditional forms cannot reach.

Network

This refers to a community of people in society who do not live in the same geographical area but have a strong cultural identity based on where and how they either work or socialise.

Non-churched

People who have never had any meaningful contact with church except perhaps for a relation’s funeral.
Editors and contributors

Editors

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