

The Blessings of Ageing

Practical ways of working with the over 65s
A guide for parishes and partnership churches



INTRODUCTION

The C of E's unsung success story was the title of a recent Church Times report by Mark Hart. He detects a significant, but hidden area of growth among the over 65s. (Church Times 31st March 2017)

Mission and Ministry with and to people over 65 is a much-undervalued area of evangelism. The emphasis traditionally has been with children and youth, often supported by the philosophy that our younger people are tomorrow's Church! That may be the case, but let us not overlook the Seniors in our congregations and beyond who are part of today's church. Their needs, body, soul and spirit, are just as important and should be valued. The Office of National Statistics project that over the next two decades the number of 65s will increase by 48 per cent, compared with just three per cent in increase among the 20-64s.

The harvest is ripe for work with and to older people, but many will ask how do we start? We hope this practical guide will sow some seeds, grow and bear fruit. The DRGS do not claim to have all the answers but at least we can explore possibilities together and hope that if you are already working successfully with seniors we would love to hear from you and pass your experience to others.

The emphasis is on working with older people because this is not about organising events for older people but encouraging seniors to be part of the mission to their own peer group and even to the younger generation, encouraging intergenerational relationships. For example, involvement of Seniors' with work in schools. In this way we value and acknowledge Seniors' skills, knowledge, wisdom and faith; given the right opportunities to be effective ministers in sharing their faith, in serving both by words and action; overcoming isolation and loneliness in creating community that appeals and meets need.

These guidelines aim to give those who have a desire to work with older people some ideas and encouragement.

This document will cover the following topics

1. Where do we start? Consultation Day
2. A Mission Shaped Church for Older People
3. Celebrating Age
4. Holiday at Home
5. Nostalgia Now
6. Film Tea Afternoons
7. Men's ministry
8. Visiting Residential Care Homes

and links to useful resource material.

1. **Where do we start? Consultation Day**

So where do we start? The danger is for the church to organise and plan events without consulting and discovering the needs of those with whom you are intending to build relationships. Often events are organised with the assumption that the church knows what is needed! One way of overcoming this is to consult with older members of the congregation and involve them in the decision-making process;

recognising that they are human beings created in the image of God and not just an object to plan things for.

One model that works is to invite Seniors to a consultation day, exploring the needs of older people together. This could be arranged for a single parish or a group of partnership parishes. A good time to meet is 11.00 to 15.00 and include lunch and a celebratory eucharist. The lunch could be simple by ordering a take-away meal to be delivered, like fish and chips, filled jacket potatoes etc. The programme would look something like this, but can be adapted to suit the local situation.

Sample Programme

11.00	Coffee and Welcome
11.15	A brief introduction followed by group work (4 or 5 people in each group)
12.30	Holy Communion for short act of worship
13.00	Lunch
13.45	Plenary feed-back session (record on flip chart)
14.15	Making sense of the Feedback -prioritise three key elements
14.30	Recruit a volunteer 'think team' (6 people) to turn these ideas into action
14.45	Depart (Think Team or Senior Action Team arrange date for their first meeting)

Questions for each group to answer:

- » How best can Christians of pensionable age respond to Jesus's command to 'make disciples of all nations...?' (Matt. 28 v 9) What are the barriers?
- » What would you say are your unmet spiritual needs and those of your peer group?
- » What sort of mid-week events would you be happy to attend and be attractive to people who no longer attend or who have never attended church?
- » What day(s) and time(s) in mid-week do you think would be popular?

Notes:

Give each person attending the questionnaire sheet with space between each question for people to write down their responses. These forms do not require the person's name. These can be returned to the facilitator at the end of the day for further analysis and information that can be used as a basis for the team to work on later.

2. Mission shaped Church for Older People? Practical sessions for local churches

This is the title of a document jointly published by the Leveson Centre and Church Army and is available from the Leveson Centre website which has a wealth of other resource material for working with older people. Follow this link. <http://www.leveson.org.uk/resources/study-missionshapedchurch.htm>

In his Foreword Dr John Sentamu says '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.'

It is for those wishing to work with older people but lack the confidence or training, this is the ideal place to start. It is set out in three modules, each lasting for about 6 weeks, but which can be adapted and tailored to suit your situation.

3. Celebrating Age

Another way of kick-starting work with older people is to have a one-day celebration of age event. This could be done in partnership with local older people agencies such as Age UK. It could coincide with the UN International Day of Older People which takes place on the 1st of October each year and could incorporate an act of worship or songs of praise and a meal or sandwich lunch. Presentations of music, drama or puppetry could be included in the programme or displays of art, craft or other achievements of older people. Have an evaluation form available and ask people to leave their contact details if they would like to receive further information about activities. A one-day event could take a one day Holiday at Home shape and later be extended to a few days, with a day trip to a place of interest.



4. Holiday at Home

Many older people especially those in the 4th age feel increasingly lonely or isolated during the summer months, especially during August. A Holiday at Home can be a welcome break. It really is an extension of the Celebration of Age event but extended over a period of three or four days, perhaps including an outing to a garden centre or a National Trust property. The event usually takes place in the Church Hall or other suitable venue. The venue is set up with bunting, scenes of sandy beach and palm trees, with a few bucket and spades and perhaps a deck chair. It requires some imagination. See the following link for further information. <http://www.churcharmy.org/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=138315> A typical daily programme would begin with a warm welcome, offering tea and biscuits, where people can relax for a chat with some newspapers. Some men prefer to sit alone to read the newspaper and perhaps do the crossword. During the rest of the morning there would be a lot of small group activities, with a variety of board games available, playing cards, and dominoes (very popular) together with a range of creative activities, for example painting, needle work, and other crafts. The morning's events will conclude with a short Christian message, perhaps with some slides, before lunch is served. The afternoon is devoted with an activity that everybody does together, in the form of some entertainment, which could be billed as 'an end of pier event' followed by tea and cake or even a cream tea, before departure. Entertainment could include a magician, popular songs, musician, puppets etc.

5. Nostalgia Now

Older people love to talk about their memories and the things that are important to them. People are invited to bring something along that has meant something to them in the past. It could be an object, a photo, or even a precious memory that they would like to share. This will take place in small groups, could be self-selected groups. Some may prefer not to share but to listen and enjoy the experience, so there is no pressure. Ideally the event will include a hot meal or order from a take-away. After lunch, the event leader will ask a series of questions to answer related to their journey through

life. Each question should be discussed by the groups before the next one is given so that each question comes as a surprise! Afterward, each group will have the opportunity to share with the wider group their experience if they want to.

Programme

10.45	Coffee
11.00	Welcome introductions.
11.10	Short thought for the day or prayer
11.20	Sharing, object, photo or event.
12.00	Plenary feed-back session.
12.30	Short act of worship
13.00	Lunch
13.45	Sharing Memories
14.45	General feed-back
15.00	Tea and cake

What do you remember about significant events in your childhood?

1. What was your earliest memory?
2. What did you enjoy about your childhood?
3. Were there any incidents where you got into trouble?
4. What was your happiest memory as a child?
5. What was your saddest memory as a child?
6. Who were the important people in your life while you were growing up?
7. What was your first recollection of someone talking to you about God or Jesus?
8. Has your faith changed since you were a child?
9. What question would you ask God today?

At the end of the session ask whether people would like to meet again and invite suggestions for what they might like to do next.

6. Film Tea Afternoons

Films are a great way of entertaining older people living alone or feeling isolated. They are an effective way of attracting both men and women. It is a good way to create community, and can be a springboard for inviting people to other events. They make new friends and arrive early for a good natter. Going to the cinema alone for an older person is not very appealing. Showing a film once a month seems to work.

Sheffield Cathedral film/tea afternoons are very popular. A series of films are shown with an overall theme, like old musicals. After the film people stay for tea and homemade cake. People take it turns to provide cake, and are pleased to get involved. Most films raise theological issues which can be discussed informally afterwards. This event has been very successful in attracting non-churched people.

7. Men's Ministry

Ministry among retired men is a much-overlooked area of mission. Many retired men upon retirement find themselves without any of their old social groups among their workmates. Men, more so than women, find it difficult to build new social networks. Many church activities are attractive to women and are more focused on women.



Events might include:

- » Bowling nights
- » Pool tournaments
- » Pub/Pool nights
- » Games Night
- » Fish & Chips
- » Golf tournaments
- » Quiz nights

It's all about building relationships with people and building bridges with the church. Here is a link to spark some ideas. <http://st-thomas-brampton.org/men/>

8. Visiting Residential Care Homes

Visiting residential care and nursing homes can be a daunting task especially if your parish has more than its fair share. But it is a worthwhile ministry among the most vulnerable in our society. It is worth investigating whether other parishes in the area will join you, because together so much more can be achieved. Here is a link to a document that tells the story of how parishes in Eastbourne set up visiting teams thus taking the pressure off of one parish. <http://www.churcharmy.org/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=138321>

9. Other Resources

- a. Seasons of My Soul: Conversations in the second half of life, jointly published by The Church of England and The Methodist Church, is a useful training tool for those interested in working with older people. Quote: "The resource focuses on eight themes for conversations: identity; memories; transition, times; wisdom; roles and relationships; forgiveness and reconciliation; death and dying; and the celebration of life. These are opened up for discussion and exploration using interactive conversation tools, Bible texts, creative activities, social action topics, prayer and worship". <http://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk/books/9781858523989/seasons-of-my-soul>
- b. Face the Future, three books by William A. M. Cutting. The books come in three volumes:
 - Seniors Can Inspire, Apply Wisdom and Model Values
 - Challenges, Joy and Faith for Seniors

Seniors, Make the Most of the Health You Have

William is a retired Doctor of Medicine and specialised in paediatrics. His father was a medical missionary in South India. William has a deep personal faith and writes not only from a medical perspective but with a lot of humour. Books c. £9 each from Amazon. They are a good read; I have read them all.

- c. Valuing Age-Pastoral Ministry with Older People by James Woodward published by SPCK pub. 2008
- d. On Grief and Grieving (2014) by Kuber-Ross.
- e. 'The Last Lap' is a very personal reflection on caring for a loved one with a terminal illness and the immediate sense of loss following death. It gives an insight into all the practical arrangements before and after death combined with all the emotional and spiritual turmoil. It is unique in its style and will be a great help to anybody going through a very difficult time in wrestling with all the issues in facing bereavement in a frank and honest way. It has been written by Iris Sparks a member of the Diocesan Resource Group for Seniors and will be available soon.
- f. Bible Reflections for Older People. Published by Bible Reading Fellowship. 'Written by older people for older people, these reifications are designed to bring hope, assurance and sustenance, reminding the reader of the presence and love of God. Each issue contains 40 Bible reflections and prayer suggestions to use and revisit as often as is needed. brf.org.uk
- g. Natter Groups. A proven, easy to run model of outreach to the over 60s breaking down isolation and reconnecting faith. Natter is established in several churches around our Diocese and more are joining. If you are looking to reach out to the over 60s then you might want to set up and run your own natter group. <http://nattersheffield.org.uk/> To find out more contact Revd John Marsh at nattersheffield@gmail.com.



