



BEING OLD, BEING BOLD

***Living by faith, seeking truth,
accepting challenge***

**A Report on our Conference
25 September 2019**

No text

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“Time together in Sheffield”

An introduction and reflection from the Vice-chair of Christians on Ageing

On 25 September 2019 *Christians on Ageing* held its first conference since 2015. We met at the Central URC in Sheffield which has been the location for AGMs and Executive Committee meetings for some time. It felt like home and we were able to welcome of the order of 40 delegates to a day which brought people together with time to talk, presentations on some key themes, a review of publications and reflections on what the organisation has done and might aim to be doing from here on.

There were delegates from pretty well the full geography of the UK, but with a dominance of the immediate North of England. There were more women than men and a fair spread of ages from 20s into 80s (and maybe beyond).

The introduction reviewed some of the work which has been done during the last thirty-five years and drew attention to the considerable success of producing a new and responsive website. This, together with a regular email newsletter, the quarterly magazine *plus* and the six-monthly Dementia Newsletter represent the main means by which Christians on Ageing makes contact and shares its messages. There were presentations on the position and perception of older people in the UK 2020, the potential and practice of dedicated ministry to older people, humane care for older prisoners, and current understandings of dementia, its impact on individuals and families, and the potential of churches to help. These were of uniformly high quality with combinations of information and inspiration. Written versions of each paper will be published in *plus* magazine. Questions were perceptive and sometimes searching.

There were two discussion sessions, the first in small groups around tables and the second, and last session, an open forum. These were vigorous, enjoyable opportunities to sound out ideas, raise doubts, identify prospects and establish links and friendships. From them we have a range of suggestions for the future; the heart of the organisation is beating a little faster and a little stronger.

Lunch was followed by 30 minutes of music – led by a Sheffield U3A Ukulele band. They gave us tunes we knew and words we might remember. It was a bonus of coordinated relaxation which pointed to the values of togetherness which must mark all we do. A brilliant fillip.

We are thankful for Central URC’s generosity in making its facilities available and to the staff for their guidance and support, to everyone who helped organise the day and make it happen, and we are glad for all who came and shared themselves and their views on prospects for the future.

We will surely do something similar annually, inspired and informed by this time together in Sheffield.

David Jolley

The conference was attended by over forty people. The day was divided between input from expert speakers, discussion of the main themes, and contributions reflecting local experience. This Report contains the text of the presentations (‘the Papers’), the shared information of participants (‘the Practice’) and the recommendations made in group and plenary discussion (‘the Proposals’).

THE PAPERS

Intergenerational fairness: the position of older people

David Jolley

Throughout the world, more people are surviving into the later decades of life. This is very evident in the UK where 18% of the 65.6 million population in 2016 was 65 years or older, 2.4% aged 85 plus. More women survive to experience these later years. More people from ethnic minority groups are now surviving to these later decades.

The media frequently identifies 'the elderly' as a group which is equated with 'burden' and 'suffering'. Lately we have learned that older people are financially better off than their equivalents in the 1950s, 60s, 70s etc: This generation of older people is fitter than its predecessors, people have been better educated, have been able to make provision for their futures by investing in a house, saving and contributing to pension schemes, and supporting their families. They have benefited from a life within a country generous in its care for people of all ages. There is now concern for the welfare of younger people who are growing up and growing older in a country which is more hostile: jobs are less secure, housing is less affordable, educational opportunities perhaps less relevant than they might be.

A case is made for conflict between the generations: the easy life of older people against the deprived struggle of younger people. When you ask – you find that there is no conflict: families love each other across generations. There is massive support and care from older relatives toward their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. This is appreciated at every level.

The late great Bernard Isaacs shocked us by declaring: "*Let's get rid of the elderly*". He meant: "*Let's get rid of 'The Elderly'*" – a group falsely labelled as alien – to be dismissed as out of touch, dependent and depressing, and a burden – now apparently leading the high life at the expense of everyone else. In truth there is no conflict between generations. We are all as one in being troubled by the state of the world and by the mess which our own country has fallen into – a mess of our own construction in many ways but perhaps not in all. The challenge is to analyse the present and plot a better future – together – not in conflict.

The House of Lords Select Committee published its report: '**Tackling Intergenerational Unfairness**' in April 2019. You will find the report and the references below to figures and tables, by using this link: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldintfair/329/32902.htm>
The very title of the committee and the report assumed that there is unfairness and potential for conflict between generations.

On the 25th of April The Guardian gave us: '*Free TV licences for over-75s should be scrapped, the age-threshold for free bus passes should be raised and the triple lock on pensions abolished time to rebalance policy in favour of the young, in order to remove the risk of social bonds between generations fraying further*'. If there was not conflict before, you might be forgiven for feeling that this was designed to stir some up. Conflict gets better television and easier newspaper headlines than peace and understanding. The issue of TV licences has raised great indignation and hostility. By June 2019, the BBC had announced that free licences for people aged 75 and over, would cease by June 2020. From then onwards only people in receipt of pension credit (or fulfilling other criteria) will qualify for free licences or a licence at a reduced rate: www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/reports/consultation/age-related-tv-licence-policy

The House of Lords Committee was chaired by Lord True. He was supported by seven baronesses, four lords and a viscount. Sadly, Baroness Joan Bakewell resigned part way through the work. The committee was appointed May 2018. 72 written submissions were received. 55 people gave oral evidence and an all-age contact group (14 members), addressed particular questions. Their report provides a comprehensive, balanced review of relevant aspects of life in the UK

Overview:

The population of the UK continues to increase: by 2016 it was 65.65 million, having been 40 million at the end of the First World War and 48.5 million at the end of the Second World War. It has become fashionable to label generations within the population according to the years of their birth and current ages: Thus, people born before the end of the Second World War are designated The Traditional or Silent Generation (aged now 70 years plus). Baby boomers were born after the war: 1945- 1965 (aged now 51-69). People born 1966 -1981 are Generation X (now aged 35 – 50). People born 1982 – 1996 are Generation Y (now aged 20-34) and then there is Generation Z aged under 20 years. {The numerical balance in millions is: Silent: 8.5, Baby Boomers: 14.8, Generation X: 13, Generation Y: 13.8 and Generation Z: 14.5}

Life expectation has increased, generation on generation, fuelling growth in the number of people living in their 80s, 90s and beyond. It is estimated that one in three babies born in the UK 2019 will live to be 100. Generations, as defined in this way can be looked on as cohorts, born within a given time bracket and sharing an experience of living through subsequent years, with the associated changes in social, economic, political and value attributes of the times. Where people have closely shared experiences, as in a class or a year at a school, there is no doubt that they recognise this kinship. How far the application of these labels to wider groupings, tied only by years of birth, is meaningful, can be questioned. The House of Lords Committee asserted that *'each cohort (generation) should retain a fair expectation of social improvement, have a fulfilling life, not harmed by the actions of a previous or subsequent cohort.'* The notion that people assume an identity with their allocated 'generation', is questionable but the principle of fairness to all individuals, with expectations of a life where they feel safe and can make progress, will be owned by many, though not all. Some would say that the decades since World War 2 have been characterised by progressive erosion of dedication to the common good and a return instead to the pursuit of self-interests.

Is there a problem? Not really

The Lords consulted their all-age contact group to investigate the possibility of unrest between the generations. They found no evidence of friction. Instead they heard of an Intergenerational Compact with help within families and friendship networks flowing in all directions: 27% of parents continue to provide financial support to adult children, grandparents give care to 42% of families with a 9-month old child. It is estimated that grandparents provide care equivalent to £7.3 million pounds of professional childcare. £ s d is the easiest way to apply a numerical value to any activity, but over and beyond this, these mutual services, given freely and flexibly, carry love, give opportunity, share stories and wisdom, sadness and joys, make plans and mend broken hopes.

What have governments been doing in response to the known and predicted changes in the demography of the population (more people living into the later decades of the lifespan)? The demographic trends are easily identified and can be used to model future needs of groups of people – whether characterised by location, gender, income group, age group/generation or anything else. The Lords found that this facility has not been used: *'when the findings clash with political aspirations'* – situations are ignored, data not published, activity misrepresented. Everything is conducted with an eye to the short-term, minimising liabilities and spending (keeping

taxes down), but ignoring predictable long-term needs. Five wise virgins might have provided a better model. In the event, costs may be greater or damage done which could have been avoided. In living in a dream world in denial of reality, the government's gross debt has risen from 33.7% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) 2001/2 to 85.4% 2017/18. Is this money being spent for the benefit of future generations? Or is it a debt those generations will pay whilst living with poorer resources?

Housing:

There is shared alarm at how difficult it has become for young people to afford accommodation. We are told that people born 1926-1945 were spending on average 8% of their income on housing at the age of 30 years. Those born 1981-2000 are spending 22% of their income. Home ownership rates at the age of 30 years have fallen from 55% to 35% in a span of 30 years. The availability of rented accommodation from councils has fallen from 30% of households to less than 20%, and is now exceeded by private rentals. There is variability in the quality of accommodation within the independent sector. Costs are such that it is difficult for young people to save sufficient for a deposit to start a mortgage. There is little security of tenure in private rentals in this country, in contrast with other European countries which protect tenants by legislation. Twenty five percent of private renters will move on within a calendar year, compared with 5% of families in council accommodation and 3% of home-owners.

The worry is that young people become trapped into a life of expensive renting and can never own their own home with the security which this gives – something which has been available to most families in the decades following the Second World War. The generations are not at odds about this – older people worry for younger members of family and act on it: 60% of first-time buyers receive financial help from their elders at the time of purchase. Help carries on thereafter – with finances and with practical support such as childminding. These patterns of help are not confined to well-off older people, it happens right across the spectrum of incomes.

The House of Lord's report makes reference to special intergenerational financial products: equity release, interest-only mortgages and intergenerational mortgages. People make what arrangements they can. The report also urges building more houses, making use of government land. This seems likely to be more complicated and have more downsides that is admitted.

Education:

The human life-span has probably not changed, but the number of people surviving into their ninth and tenth decades has increased and will continue, leading to calls to prepare for 'The 100 year life'. Though education and training are given high profile as priorities in every political party pamphlet, there are concerns that the education people receive does not fit them well for the challenges and opportunities which life brings to them. Successive generations have seen more young people stay in schools or colleges until 18 years and more progress to a university course and degree. Even so a third of school leavers are said to lack good ability in maths or literacy, and traditional school subjects which lead to academic qualifications are not helpful with many practical and personal needs: young people say the curriculum should include taxation, mortgages, first aid, personal development, social issues and benefits, health and economics. The Lords report would have 'Citizenship' as a compulsory subject which should be reviewed in Ofsted inspections.

Despite the hype, allocation of resources for education have been falling rather than rising: budgets for 6th form cut by 20% in ten years, funding for apprenticeships cut by 45% in the same time, spending on adult education halved. Apprenticeship training is said to be 'confused', Higher Education loans saddle young people with debt and the value of a degree is now loudly questioned.

So, the quality, relevance and value of education available from childhood into the early twenties in the UK, does not pass scrutiny and needs to do better. This may require more money and a rethink of what is being offered and to what purpose. But what of the 80 years which a third of us will enjoy beyond our 21st birthday? Few will be whole heartedly in agreement with Professor Andrew Scott who apparently attested "*I cannot think of anything I can learn at 20 that will probably still be relevant when I am 70*", but there is need to provide a structure for ongoing education and learning for everyone throughout their lives. This should include but not be restricted to practical matters: taxation, mortgages, first aid, personal development, social issues and benefits, health and economics, computers and communication – yes but also studies of subjects we did not find time for at school, new hobbies and old hobbies, arts and performance skills, insights into changing cultures and mixture of cultures, challenges to be encountered at later stages of life – perhaps the role of faith and faith communities.

There are opportunities for DIY educational ventures, books, libraries, the internet, television and radio all offer a rich mix, but doing it yourself and without the company or tutorship of others is not easy. The splendid U3A demonstrates what can be done, but its reach is to a particular set of self-motivated individuals. It continues to expand and might be developed to reach even more people, to include links to courses which will provide qualifications and to aspire to all-age learning rather than feel restricted to people who have left the (paid for) workforce.

Work and the 100 year life:

As more women and men live longer the pattern of a life which restricted employment to late teens to early 60s has become eroded, as has the expectation that one career will last throughout. Flexible patterns of work: part time, interrupted and with change of direction and location have become common. Studentship, followed by work, followed by retirement gives way to a mix of learning, providing service and taking time for leisure and pleasure. Some will make time throughout life for spiritual and religious devotions. The emphasis is on continuing growth and developed maturity, an exciting and sometimes stressful adventure. The Lords recommend people have organised life-reviews – mid-life or ongoing – a process which allows for stepping back, reviewing the situation and moving on after thought and discussion, rather than pressing on – heads down to a bitter end.

There are worries associated with these changes. One job for life gave a sense and reality of security – knowing who you were and where you might go. There is widespread concern that new patterns which give no security: zero hours contracts, the Gig economy, the push to make people 'self-employed', are bringing fear and misery to many young people and families. These fears are sadly realistic – and the UK has a poor record on this compared with other European countries. The fault is hardly a consequence of conflict between generations, but in the philosophy of politics which has taken over everyone's lives these recent decades. Within the employed workforce, older people are more represented than they were: currently 76% of men and 68% of women aged 50-64 are employed – an increase of 10% and 20% since 1992. Employment beyond 64 years has doubled – from 5% to 10% 2000 to 2018. Discrimination on the basis of age is found to be the most common form of discrimination – felt by more than half of people aged 50 plus and three quarters of those aged less than 34 years. There is evidence to suggest age-discrimination has been neutralised with unemployment rates now flat across the working age spectrum.

It is, perhaps, encouraging that involvement in paid-for work is extending into the late sixties and beyond, but we will be impoverished if people feel obliged to give all their years to the grindstone. Time to explore other avenues, to think and give time to others in charity formal or informal, brings reward of a different dimension for individuals and oils the wheels where formal services are found wanting.

All age communities:

There is general concern at the 'atomisation' of society: people living in smaller households, often, with families divided geographically and individuals pursuing friendship and interests via the internet rather than in the flesh. Loneliness has become described as an epidemic. It affects all age groups- The stereotype of a lonely old lady is denied by a BBC survey which identified 16-24 year olds as reporting loneliness more frequently (40%) than 75 year olds (27%). We return to the observation that there remain strong bonds between young and old within families. Wider personal networks develop and are maintained more via shared physical space than by technological space – So that schools, work places, clubs of all sorts and faith communities all have beneficial influence on subjective feelings of wellbeing. Some of this is achieved at minimal cost but The Lords found that Public Investment has been in decline for decades. This is undermining the potential of communities to support themselves and cope within the changing cultures of life at all ages: The Lords call for the identification of spaces which are community assets so that they can be protected and revised rather than lost in unthinking asset stripping: high streets, libraries, youth clubs and friendship clubs can be cited as examples (Keep It In The Community). The dangers of loss of these assets are palpable and affect people of all ages. The action required to save them does require modest investment.

Taxation:

Taxation is the topic addressed in the final chapter of the Lords report. It is here that the issues of division and unfairness are most focussed. Key figures in the Report (7 and 8) demonstrate that during the working years households give more in taxation than they receive in benefits or through the use of the NHS. From 65 years onwards the balance is reversed as people receive pensions and make more use of the NHS. People continue to pay taxes beyond retirement age but less on average than people of working age. There is little surprise in this; that is the way the system is devised. But *Table 1* (in the Report) provides some surprises and the basis for unease: A single parent household has by far the lowest weekly income: £271 for two or more mouths to feed; single male pensioners (one mouth) receive £408, single women pensioners £377; a couple with children receive £415; a pensioner couple receives £463.

Table 2 explores wealth. A single parent with dependent children, on average has £28,900. A single pensioner household has £232,000. A couple of working age with dependent children has £238,900. A pensioner couple has £618,400. So, in these measures younger people, with responsibilities and an expectation that they will work, are disadvantaged compared with people who have completed their working lives.

Some pensioners will, at times, turn to the state for help to cope with illness and disability. There is a widely held view that people have paid taxes during their working years to be used to pay for their pension, health and social welfare needs in old age. The equation does not work like that: from the beginning, pensions and other benefits for a generation of old people have been paid from taxes drawn at that time from contributors at that time – predominantly people of working age, but also from old people themselves (as in Figures 7 and 8 referenced above). The worry is that as more of us survive into our eighth, ninth and tenth decades, the demand for care will outstrip what can be reasonable sponsored by this taxation: the myth of the Apocalypse lives on despite its reasoned denial by Evans and others, now nearly twenty years old. Progress has meant that more will live longer, but at every age we are fitter and less expensive to keep than previous generations. Medicine continues to make progress and judicious use of new technology means that costs are contained. But honest budgeting and planning are required to provide appropriately for the predictable needs of people at all ages, including late life. A Green Paper on Social Care, promised since 2017, has not yet appeared. In the current political climate it is even possible that a White Paper will be published ahead of it.

In the name of austerity, massive reductions have been made in the money made available for welfare services since 2010. Benefits for young people and people of working age have been cut by an estimated £37 billion per annum. In the same period, old age pensions have been protected by The Triple Lock: linked to the highest of – average wage, inflation or 2.5% per annum. It is here that unfairness is seen to bite – The unfairness is to younger people who have been exposed to savage cuts, whilst older people – previously known to be the poor relation, have been sustained with income similar to that which was taken for granted in 2010. This is hardly a fault to be levelled at older people, nor a reason for conflict between generations. It is a phenomenon entirely contrived by government – and most people will not only recognise this, but want to see it corrected. The answer for most of us would be to level support upwards for younger people, rather than take away for their elders.

Yet the House of Lords took a different tack, from another perspective: calling into question continuation of winter fuel payment, free bus passes, free TV licences and freedom from National Insurance contributions for pensioners. Property Tax, Council Tax and Inheritance Tax are all recommended for scrutiny in an attempt to squeeze more money for the national purse from 'the elderly', who have come to be re-designated 'Public Enemy Number One'. The discussion is blind to the scandal of older people and their families being charged for care which in the past was accepted to be a responsibility of the NHS, criteria for NHS Continuing Care which are clearly at odds with court rulings on individual cases, and varying between pathologies www.alzscot.org/news/the-fair-dementia-care-campaign-so-far.

'The Questor', author of Ecclesiastes, might feel justified in his pessimism: *Smoke, nothing but smoke. (That's what the Questor says). There's nothing to anything – it's all smoke. What is there to show for a lifetime of work, a lifetime of working your fingers to the bone? One generation goes its way, the next one arrives but nothing changes – It's business as usual for old planet Earth.* (The Message). But perhaps even he would curl up at the commentary which quoted with approval a forthcoming television series which is based on the metaphor of 'Zombie Pensioners': *'Our heroes (Generation Z) need to take on the old flesh eating zombies who have stolen the resources and finally the flesh of the young'*.

Reflection:

So, this is where we are: large numbers of us living a full life into our seventies and beyond. Fitter and wealthier and better informed than ever before, surrounded by opportunities and playing a celebrated role with families and local communities, yet identified as an alien group within the world; a burden, hostage to suffering, and increasingly misrepresented as unfairly privileged to the detriment of younger people, the reason for all ills. It is important to see ourselves as the world sees us – or represents us. This is a useful step in making plans.

Where are we now? Where might we want to get to? How are we to get there? Older people are culture carriers. They may be involved in the work of faith communities. Faith communities surely have a role in protecting older people from misrepresentation and acts which disadvantage them. Multigenerational work in faith offers prospects of healing the hurts which currently dog the nations. We must raise a flag for this.

Books:

Lynda Grafton and Andrew Scott: *The 100 year life: living and working in an age of longevity* (2017)
Graham Hawley and Albert Jewel: *Crying in the wilderness* (2009)
Carl Honore: *Bolder: making the most of our longer lives* (2018)
Claire Hilton: *Improving psychiatric care for older people* (2017)
Paul McCartney: *Hey Grandude* (2019)

Being old: special need or special contribution?

Helen McCormack

My role:

I have the longest job title I've ever had! I am a ***Pastoral and Development Worker for the Northallerton and Thirsk Methodist Circuit and Northallerton URC for older people***. One of the church members once simply introduced me to a person as "This is Helen. She has the longest job title ever but basically she works for a group of churches with older people." Even though it is a mouthful to say, it's a great conversation starter with people!! It provides a great opportunity to talk about my role, the church and spirituality with people in the community.

I've been in post since January 2019 and the job involves me working across two church denominations and there is genuine interest in raising the churches profile and for them to be embedded into their local communities. Whether that is via sign posting people to organisations, looking at moving towards becoming a Dementia friendly church or running activities for older people. I think it is also important to highlight that I know in speaking with the URC as a single church that they see the practical benefits of linking up with a Methodist Circuit which includes a cluster of churches. Joining up with other Churches demonstrates a unified picture to the local community. I guess our motivation and our aim is to show God's love to our communities.

I was initially tasked with undertaking a mapping exercise to see what activities and services were operating both within the churches and the wider community for older people. This was to assist in seeing where there might be gaps in provision, provide us with opportunities to listen to what the community was saying and start to appreciate what some of the strengths/assets of the local community are. For many years in community work organisations have parachuted into communities and said we know best and set up projects to what is so called 'address the problem' or put on activities for people.

I have been thinking about people's "spiritual needs" both for those of faith and not. How do Christians play a role in this area?

I've been undertaking pastoral support / and been challenged to think about what pastoral work is - not just visiting people at home etc.... In fact, pastoral care can occur in places such as coffee mornings.

I've spent a lot of time visiting community organisations and groups looking really with the question how we can mutually support each other. This has included becoming active in the local Dementia Action Alliance, been asked to sit as a faith representative on the North Yorkshire Steering group for Loneliness. We have been able to share our mapping document with local organisations. There is great power in coming together as a church community and we can pool resources and expertise and work in partnerships with community groups.

"Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much" Helen Keller

As you will well appreciate, for years many churches have invested a lot of resources in supporting children and young people ministries and employed youth and family workers as they have seen that this is the way to grow their church congregations and support their local communities. I am whole-heartedly behind these priorities (I was a church youth worker and I could speak on the value of this type of work for a long time). However, I think that it is great that churches are now

starting to reflect on their congregations and local communities and see the importance of also having workers with a focus on ministries to older people. Maybe there is some worth in considering how we can have teams of workers to link the generations more within the church. I have a friend here from another Methodist Circuit and their Community Link Enabler – her focus is on mainly older people but she is also involved with Messy Church.

Edwina Hayes is an acoustic folk singer-song writer. She has an album called *'good things happen over coffee'*. My own little mantra has become "good things happen over coffee." It has been a real privilege to get alongside individuals within the churches and community groups that I visit and see what is happening for older people in the areas we cover. I also have the great privilege of listening and giving time to people. I've heard so many life stories.

This just gives a taster of some of the work I have become involved in but as I go through my presentation, I will share other examples of how I am working with older people and community organisations.

Introduction

This morning I have been asked to focus my presentation on the question ***Being Old "Special need or Special contribution?"***. I am going to break the presentation up into four main sections. As we go through the session, I am going to pose some reflective questions to help us ponder what they may mean in our individual contexts.

As you no doubt will appreciate there are several different definitions of 'old'. I think we could spend a whole session debating these alone:

Office for National Stats:

being old is linked to certain ages. Older people 65 + and 85+ "Old Oldest"

World Health Organisation:

old defined as someone whose age has passed the median life expectancy at birth (UK 81.2 for men)

Different organisations have their own definitions and criteria depending on their specific role and focus:

Age UK works with people '55 plus'

Within my role we haven't set a specific definition of old or oldest person as we take each person's circumstances case by case. However, generally, they are at least over 60.

First, I think it is helpful to place the main question *'old age special need or special contribution'* into the wider context of our faith. We should very briefly remind ourselves as Christians where does our identity and value come from and what has the Bible to say about older age.

Secondly, we are bombarded with messages from the media about this "ageing explosion" and the consequences of this occurring. At this point, I want us to look at some of the challenges that present people as they are on an ageing journey. As this will help us to explore further this question do old people have "special needs".

Third, I want to look at the positive contributions that older people make both in the church and wider community. Whilst also acknowledging some of implication for churches and how they can respond.

Finally, I would like to look at how churches can connect with their local ageing communities recognising the challenges and opportunities that this present.

In conclusion, I'll summarise what we have been looking at this morning and will return to the key question ***"Being Old Special need or special contribution"***

SECTION 1

Prior to tackling the main question of this session. I think that it is important to take a step back from this question and remind ourselves as Christians ultimately where do our value and identity come from. We are so often bombarded in society with messages via the media about what should shape our 'value and identity'. There are often strong links to looking beautiful, being successful, having money and being talented. Therefore, I think as a Christian community it is important to acknowledge that our identity and value is not dependent upon us being youthful, nor our economic status or being successful. Rather, we need to be continually going back to the heart of our faith - we have a wonderful creative and loving God. As we are reminded in Genesis Ch. 1 v 27 in the beginning of time God chose to make us humans in His image – Isn't that amazing! We reflect something of God! Even when humans messed up and the world was broken, God never gave up - He loved us so much that he designed a loving plan to ensure that relationship could continue.

We see throughout the Bible this amazing love story unfolding - Jesus' death and resurrection sits at the very core of our faith. God does not abandon his followers rather he leaves the gift of the Holy Spirit with the command and mission to share God's message of love and hope to the rest of the world. We see as the early Church grows and develops that followers of Jesus are each encouraged to use the gifts they've been given. I love the passages both in Romans Ch 12 and in 1 Corinthians Ch 12 where we see what it means to be the body of Christ and the importance of spiritual gifts and how everyone has something to contribute. I love the illustration of the body - we are one body with many parts. This so beautifully demonstrates the idea of inter-dependency. Every part of the body is valued, for it contributes and functions when all parts are operating in a coherent manner. There are no age distinctions between old or the young in these passages, neither is there any stipulation that you are only given one gift for a lifetime. I like to think that gifts develop and change over time depending on our life experiences and circumstances.

When we look throughout the Bible, we are often reminded that as we age we can be reassured that God will not abandon us. We see "ageing" as a process of gaining experience and on occasions we see older people are told to share their wisdom and pass it on to the next generation.

- Isaiah Ch 46 v 4 *Even to your old age and grey hair I am He, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you* (referring to the Nation of Israel)
- Psalm 71 v 9 *Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone.*
- Job Ch 12v12 *Wisdom is with the aged and does not long -life bring understanding.*
- Titus Ch 2 *Highlights the importance of older men and women teaching them the younger generation- he passes on their knowledge.*

God chose on several occasions to use older people to take his work further.

I am always struck by the comments made in 2 Timothy Ch. 1 v 5. When Paul writes to Timothy he says "*I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.*" This passing on of faith from one generation to another is so vital. I, too, can identify with the importance of intergenerational relationships as both sets of my grandparents have left a legacy of faith in my own life and my children's. As we return to think about this session's question ***Being Old, special need or special contribution*** it important to remember that we are loved by God no matter what our age or the circumstances we find ourselves in. We are reassured God is unchangeable and will not forget or abandon us. We need to hold onto these truths as embark on the ageing journey.

Secondly, we are bombarded with messages from the media about an "ageing explosion" and its consequences. At this point, I want us to look at some of the challenges that confront people on their ageing journey. This will help us to explore the question do old people have "special needs".

SECTION 2

Special Need – The Headlines

'Facing the challenge of an ageing population' – everywhere "Old People are an increasing burden, but must our young be the ones' to shoulder it?" writer Philip Inman in The Guardian, 27th April 2019 'Dementia Care: How to improve conditions for sufferers and carers of the health epidemic', Jessica Knibbs in the Daily Express 21 Aug 2019.

We have heard this morning about the statistics surrounding the growing and changing population in the UK, and we understand that life expectancy has improved. Of those babies born in 2018 it is projected that 23.4% of males and 29.2% of females will survive to 100 (ONS, 2018 cited in Age UK Report 2019 - Later Life in the UK May 2019). Surely, this is a cause for celebration? However, when we look around at research and listen to the media, we are often told that these extended years are often characterised by poor physical and mental health, social isolation, loneliness and grief. So, is this something to be celebrated? The media often portray older people as being burdens, an economic drain on services such as health care, and that older people have negative views of young people. It often portrays ageing as a 'negative' experience and very much focuses attention on the 'needs' of older people.

It is not only in society that we see these negative attitudes and aspects portrayed. How many of you have heard conversations in churches that say *"I am sorry we don't have any young families in our churches; we are an ageing congregation"* or heard comments like *"young people are the church of tomorrow and this is where we need to invest our resources"*? Both of these are factual but they actually send out very negative messages about how we view and value older people. This has the potential that churches do not pay attention to the people they have in their congregations at that particular point in time.

I guess research that highlights these negative aspects of growing old can appear to put a dampener on the prospect of growing old and can lead us to conclude that old age does indeed only bring about **"special needs"**. So, for the sake of this presentation I would like us to follow this path of thinking for a few minutes: I want to spend some time now just highlighting a few areas where we could say older people may have a special need.

Special Need – Retirement

If we think about people reaching retirement (I appreciate that occurs at different ages so I'm referring to it as a stage), it is a stage in life when people experience a significant period of transition. Generally, how people process such transitions is influenced by what their values are in life, whether they have a faith or not. So how people have dealt with other transitions in their life will guide them through this stage. Retirement may bring with it a set of challenges. For instance, some people's identity is caught up in what they have done for a living. It can be a time when people lose the structure to their days and they may miss having daily contact with work colleagues, so this can be a period of reorientation and change.

Opportunities for us: Help people prepare for their retirement. Encourage people to think about their role within the church.

Special Need - Physical Environment

As people's physical health changes many experience some form of sensory loss, as well as a loss of mobility. The Office of National Statistics, 2018 (cited by Age UK) supports the proposition that disability and complex health needs increase with age. This in turn may mean people struggle to remain in their own home. They may not be able to access buildings because of poor accessibility, reducing their engagement with wider society.

'Living in a rural community' (DEFRA, 2018, cited in Age UK 2019 Report) says populations in rural areas have a higher portion of older people than urban areas. There can be poor infrastructure in place and limited access to activities and services (UNECE 2017, cited in Age UK 2019 Report). Also, if people can no longer drive, public transport is poor and access to services further afield may be limited too. This could also lead to social isolation and loneliness. Moving around the community becomes increasingly difficult due to physical factors therefore old age does present a special need as a fit and healthy person has control over and freedom to choose where they go and not rely on anyone else to assist.

Opportunities for us: Look at our buildings: are they accessible to everyone? Do we provide transport to services?

Special Need - Grief

There are various forms of grief that may affect an older person: loss of physical mobility, loss of a life partner, loss of identity and value. People may be questioning what their role in life is: "the kids are grown up / I am retired / my health is failing".

Opportunities for us: To prepare and journey with people through these experiences.

Special Need - Loneliness

This is not exclusively an older person's issue as it also affects young people and those with mental health issues. 49% of older people (equivalent to over 5 million individuals) say that the television or pets are their main form of company (Age UK, 2015 and cited in Age UK Later Life in the United Kingdom, May 2019). People often now live away from the family's geographical original base; older people face being moved nearer to family members thus leaving their familiar environment and friends behind. Older people have to cope with losing their lifetime partner/ Losing their friends. Limited family connections, e.g. single females with no immediate family

Opportunities for us: Spend time with people; I have come to appreciate that giving of your time to listen is so important.

Special Need - Death and Bereavement

Thinking about death and dying can lead people to consider the big questions of life. Why I am here? What is the point? What is the purpose of life? Have I lived a good life? Have I any regrets? How do I adjust to life on my own having been married for several years and lost a partner?

Opportunities for us: Surely as Christians with a message of hope and love to share with the world we are both to live in the present and look to the future with great anticipation. So, for those wanting to explore the Christian faith, this is an amazing opportunity to share the good news with them.

Special Need – Social Environment

Many lack the ability, for a variety of reasons, to continue to attend and engage in social activities which results in loss of contact with people.

Opportunities for us: Providing people with opportunities to socialise, creating environments where relationships can be "fostered".

Special Need – Dementia

1 in 14 people over the age of 65 (7%) and 1 in 6 people over the age of 80 have dementia (17%) (Alzheimer's Research UK 2019; Alzheimer's Society, 2019b cited in Age UK 2019 Report).

Dementia impacts on people's memories and can cause confusion and problems with speech and understanding, all of which impacts on how people living with dementia are received in their communities.

Opportunities for us: Become part of a dementia friendly community

Having looked at some of these areas to which research would say old age brings 'special needs', we can now think about the implications that these special needs may have on our church congregations.

Special Need in church

People may not be able to access the buildings (think of listed buildings with temporary ramps excluding them from meeting with people). Those living with dementia may struggle with the layout of a building or the lack of signage. Loss of sight should lead to thinking through the provision of large print material and having audio descriptions when power point visuals are used. People maybe questioning or struggling with their faith as they go through a grieving process. People may not be able to attend church for a variety of reasons, so they feel social isolated and lonely. Divisions between old and younger congregations may not be recognised.

Opportunities for us: Visit people and provide safe spaces where people can explore their faith: house groups/ Bible study/ café style churches / Vintage Messy Church.

This section has given a snapshot of some of the areas where we can say older people have 'special needs'. We can't deny that some people's reality of old age is as outlined above. Therefore, I don't think that we can ignore the statistics and information that is being presented to us. However, with each of those needs the Christian community is also presented with opportunities.

Now let's turn our attention to the next part of the question: 'Special Contribution'

SECTION 3

Positive Contributions

Too often older people are portrayed as a burden on society, a passive group with high dependency. What is often forgotten is that older people contribute to the UK economy through employment, informal care, childcare and volunteering. However, despite these contributions older people undertaking these roles are not always recognised or valued. Neither do they receive the support they need themselves.

Volunteers:

Facts and figures: 'Volunteering' (Institute of Fundraising 2016 Report) included a break down on Religious Volunteering: regular worshippers are more than twice as likely to have volunteered in each 3-month period (43%) than the typical individual non worshipper (21%) - figures based on 2014-2016. 65-74-year olds are the most frequent volunteers: 29 % of 65-74 Volunteer once a month and 42% once a year (Third Sector Project 2019). When I think about some of the activities I am involved in, such as church community coffee mornings, I note that most of the volunteers are over 65 and they are often the people who volunteer in a variety of different places. I want to share a Case Study where someone in their 60's volunteered.

Case study: Appleton Wiske Methodist Church

20 years ago, one of the members of the Methodist Church was talking to the local GP who ran a surgery once a week in the village. The GP mentioned that half the people he saw each week did not need to see him for any medication, rather they needed someone to chat to. It was on this basis that the little Chapel set up a coffee morning. The drop-in has grown and over time they have built up their connections in the local community. Out of this coffee morning, relationships have been built. When you visit, there is a real sense of people looking out for each other. What is also interesting about this group is that it is one that very clearly demonstrates where the church has responded to a community need initially. Also, as it has expanded the attendees have then set up an art group. All of this has been driven by volunteers who are in their 60s or older.

Question: How do your churches show volunteers that they are valued?

Carers and their economic contribution

It is estimated that the informal childcare that grandparents provide for their grandchildren is worth around £7.7 Billion to the economy: (Iparraguirre, 2017, cited in Age UK 2019 report). In regard to informal care: 1 in 5 adults are carers aged between 50-64 yrs. old: (Carers UK, 2015). A quarter of those who provide family care are 65+ (equivalent to over 2.5 million people) (Carers UK, 2015 cited in Age UK Report 2019). Caring in the home is more common among older adults. More than half of carers aged 65+ care for someone they live with (Social Market Foundation, 2018

These figures clearly demonstrate that older people over 65 years are positively contributing to their community. They are providing a significant amount of informal care for both children and adults. What does this mean for carers in our congregations? How do we care for our carers? The URC structure appoints an elder to each person/ older person elder. How do we show that they are valued? What about praying for carers? Sitting with the person that needs care? Providing informal situations where carers can meet and linking them to carers support networks?

Question: How do we support those who are carers in our churches and wider communities?

Story Telling

Everyone has a life story and for those with faith there is that dimension to it too. Everyone has a story that brings with it a set of life experiences, gifts and contributions. For Christians this really relates back to us being the body of Christ and we all have a role to play.

I have been really struck since starting in my job just how important listening to people's stories has been. Simply listening to the individuals' story brings that individual a sense of self-worth. It helps them to process what they are experiencing in the here and now which in turn gives them confidence to manage their situation. I have personally benefited from my own grandparents and parents sharing their life stories with me. It was through their story telling that I came to faith.

How many times have you been to a thanksgiving service or a funeral where you learnt so much about the person who has died that you never knew when they were living? It is sad sometimes to think we perhaps had not taken the time to get to know each other better. People have so much to give to others. Older people have a wealth of life and faith experiences which need to be shared in our congregations. Surely this is one way that we can promote more intergenerational work. When I was preparing for this, Jo and I were even talking about All Age Worship style services. How often are these types of services designed more for children. How often do we hear an older person sharing something of their story?

Question: How might you promote the positive contribution that story telling can make in your church congregation and community?

Case Study – URC

A Social Concerns group looks at getting church members to write down some of their life history building on the idea of a Memory box. House groups are encouraged to share their life and faith stories. There is also a huge opportunity here for older people to share their stories of faith with their peers. A church in my area hosts a luncheon club and at the end of lunch someone gives a little talk where they share what God is doing in their life.

Prayer ministry

I've visited several church members who struggle to get out to church but they love to hear the church family news. They want to know what is going on so that they can pray about current situations. This is a real way in which people can still feel connected to their church families and it is a great encouragement to others to know they are being prayed for.

The wider community and spirituality

Finally, as Churches, how do we connect with older people in our wider communities? In this presentation I have shared some of the things I am involved in and reflected on potential opportunities. These are examples of where we have tried to find some common ground to connect with older people in our wider communities.

Harriet Mowat says that *"Ageing is a journey, which for every human person includes a spiritual dimension - whether they have faith or not"* (Harriet Mowat and Maureen O'Neill; *Spirituality and ageing: implications for the care and support of older people, Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services, January 2013, 2.*)

John Swinton, Professor of Practical Theology and Pastoral Care at Aberdeen University helpfully points out that *"The meaning of spirituality has changed and widened over time. It is no longer exclusively referring to religion although it does include that. Rather it is defined as a human quest for "meaning, purpose, self-transcending knowledge, significant relationships, love and commitment, as well as sense of God"* - taken from the Spiritual Carers Series.

If we think about peoples 'needs' and 'contributions' in the light of spirituality, it starts to give life a meaning and a purpose. There is research that shows that spirituality relates to improved health outcomes. Spirituality helps people cope with illness, suffering and death; this is something with which to engage if it is known to enhance individual's lives. Christians are in a good position to support people on their spiritual journeys, assisting people to find hope and meaning as they age.

Conclusion

We began the session reflecting on the core of our faith and where our identity/value comes from. These beliefs will shape our life as a whole not only when we reach old age. We have thought about how each Christian, no matter what age they are, has gifts and we need to put these gifts to use in our communities. We are one body but many parts - we are to reflect the love relationship between Christ and the Church. If you think about the Church, it is probably one of the only organisations that lends itself to being truly 'intergenerational'. I think this presents us with a great opportunity to challenge some of the negative messages so often presented in the media. We then thought about how we are often bombarded with the negative elements of ageing and the focus is often on older people's needs rather than looking at their strengths. We have spent some time looking at the positive contributions that old people make. We need to ask these questions, often:

- How do we care for older people and carers in our congregations?
- Is there a pastoral visitor structure in place?
- How do we show that we care for people when they can no longer get to church?
- How do we recognise the positive contribution and strengths of older people?

Older Prisoners: new ways of working

Salvation Army chaplaincy in a long-stay prison

Rita and Paul Conley

Rita and Paul are Majors in the Salvation Army who have served as prison chaplains for over twenty years. They describe their work as 'lingering with intent' and were moved to start when they saw an old prisoner sitting alone in his cell 'waiting to die.' From this came the idea of the CAMEO centre (**C**ome **A**nd **M**ee**T** **E**ach **O**ther) providing meaning for people whose lives have little or no meaning, many of whom are older men, serving long sentences for historic offences – 'taking up the fragments that none may be lost.' (John 6:12)

The first problem was to find a space. They found an old room and persuaded the Governor to let them use it, and then got a group of a dozen prisoners to help clean it up, and in so doing to see it as theirs. It was gradually fitted out with materials for activities. There are now ninety men using the centre every day. All are over 60 – the fastest growing age group among prisoners. Sessions are run twice a day, and as well as tea and refreshments may include education from DVDs, magazines, and books on topics such as history and travel. The men play games and, along the way, have learned other skills like spelling from Scrabble or maths from Monopoly.

There are other more serious topics, too. When some of these prisoners are released, they will go into a world where they no longer have any families or other supports, and where they will need to develop new skills in learning how to look after themselves. So, one piece of equipment in CAMEO is a microwave oven so that people can learn to cook for themselves.

CAMEO has built up a community where prisoners are able to care for one another, and Paul described how touching it was to see this, and how they will watch out for one another, and tell Paul and Rita if they are concerned about someone. All this, he said, is part of an incarnational ministry, in which people find God not from formal preaching or worship or Biblical instruction, but from finding God real in their lives with one another; where they can open up to the chaplains about their worries for their families, and discuss their own spiritual lives. One man had told how dry his spiritual life had become, and Paul was able to get some helpful prayer books to him very quickly.

Old prisoners have additional needs – in health, for example, or from drug-induced mental illnesses. In many ways, prisons are containing people with a range of health and social problems in the way that the big old mental hospitals did in the 1960s, and with equally limited resources or understanding. 85% of prisoners have some mental health problems. But prisons are also places where God's love is shown through the work of the chaplains, and through the care which prisoners can show each other. It is less showing concern about previous guilt than learning to live together, and to prepare people for their ultimate release.

We were told a number of stories about individuals, for example a man to whom they sent a birthday card and who told them it was the first such card he had received in many years; or the one who they visited after he had had a brain haemorrhage, and who said 'I knew you'd come.' Promises must be kept – or not given, if you're not going to be able to do so. That sick man died a few days later; there were only three people at the funeral, but after it there were bacon rolls served at CAMEO, their tradition of remembering their fellows.

Paul and Rita are retiring, they said, in a few months - at least from this posting. But the Salvation Army has agreed to continue the post, and their successor has already begun working with them, and the Salvation Army are looking to open other similar centres.

At the end of their moving talk Rita and Paul were asked what organisations like *Christians on Ageing* could do to help? To pray for them, they replied, and to make the needs of older prisoners better known in their Churches.

A summary of Rita and Paul's contributions by John Lansley, editor of plus magazine.

People with Dementia: A Christian Response

Albert Jewell

We are all aware of the growing numbers of people living with one form or another of dementia in UK (and indeed the wider world) today. Latest figures given by the Alzheimer's Society are that there are some 850,000 people in the UK living with dementia and this is likely to rise to 2 million by 2051. How much this growth is to be accounted for by better diagnosis, by our living longer or by dietary and environmental factors etc is not as yet at all clear. We know what the consequences of having dementia are i.e. what happens in the brain but as yet not necessarily the causes. I have this year had published an academic article taking account of over 500 studies world-wide to which I gave the title 'Dementia: Are we all on the spectrum?' To which my answer is 'Yes, certainly potentially!' Not the most comfortable conclusion!

A concern for people living with dementia, whether in churches or the wider community, has rightly been a priority for *Christians on Ageing* over the past 25 years or so, dating back to when we received special funding for the employment in Newcastle of nurse Laraine Moffitt who did valuable work over a period of years. Her support group later became our Dementia Group, now renamed Dementia Network, of which I have been secretary and the editor of our six-monthly Dementia Newsletter for the past 10 years.

Let me say that my personal interest in dementia and gradual growth in understanding goes back much further even than my seven years as Pastoral Director of Methodist Homes (MHA) ending in my retirement in 2001. It has led to the emphasis I want to place on recognising the challenge of dementia, both for those with the condition and for their family carers, especially in terms of the isolation and consequential loneliness they so often experience.

I had little or no knowledge or experience of dementia until in 1984 I became minister of a church where it took me 15 months to discover a member who had evidently been the life and soul of that church and had fairly recently gone into one of those massive Victorian psychiatric hospitals that we used to have. No one mentioned her to me; she had - whether out of shame or embarrassment - in effect been erased from the landscape, or so it seemed. I duly went to visit

her. What I found was totally dispiriting: a locked ward, restraint and bedlam within; in such an atmosphere I could not talk or pray meaningfully with a person with advanced dementia who of course had never met me until then, and I felt totally 'discombobulated'. I cannot begin to imagine what her total confusion and sense of lost-ness must have felt like. I confess I hadn't a clue what to do. Hopefully such conditions are rarer now, even if not totally eliminated.

A little later I took a small group of mostly young people from that church to a local authority care home, which included many residents with dementia, in order to conduct a short service. At the end I was suddenly aware that the residents were all reaching out to hold hands with our young people. This lasted for quite some time and I realised then just how hungry the residents were for close human tactile contact. I had also noticed one man sitting on his own apparently asleep, but when I spoke with him he showed how aware he had actually been all the time. My eyes were duly opened! What wrong conclusions we often come to regarding people living with dementia!

When I later moved to South Wales the importance of not pre-judging such people was underlined by two things that happened in the psychogeriatric hospital where I was a part-time chaplain and in which there were two wards primarily for patients with dementia. After some two years of diligently visiting those wards, one day I was asked by Staff Nurse Jones if she could have a word with me. Taking me aside she asked why I seemed to ignore a man who was always seated in the middle of the ward attended by staff. I explained that he was always flailing his arms and legs around and I was a bit afraid to get closer - however I did always give him a cheerful wave as I passed by. She replied by saying, 'Have you never thought that that is why he always gets agitated when he sees you come, because he knows that you are going to pass him by?' She then told me that Norman had Huntington's disease and that he had been a professor at Oxford University. I was duly chastened!

The other learning experience was when I was conducting one of the short Sunday afternoon services in the hospital and noticed one of the dementia patients wearing an incredibly long multi-coloured scarf even though it was mid-summer. During my mini-sermon she suddenly got up and proceeded slowly but deliberately in my direction. I decided that the best thing to do was go on speaking. When she finally reached me, she began to wind her scarf around me from my ankles right up to my face. Then it struck me what she meant: 'why don't you shut up!' When verbal communication is too difficult, people with dementia have other means of expressing their feelings, if only we are alert and willing to give them our time and attention and love. I hope I have gone on learning ever since. There is indeed so much to learn.

I want to go on to briefly mention research into dementia. Doing such research directly with those living with dementia is for obvious reasons very difficult - though thankfully quite a number of people in that situation (most recently Christine Bryden and Wendy Mitchell) have written powerful books about how they have coped with living with dementia. I have recently, however, through the support of *Christians on Ageing*, MHA & Faith in Elderly People (Leeds), led a revealing study of the Christian family carers of loved-ones living with dementia - because they are the ones who are so often forgotten and for whom the burden is greatest. We recruited a cohort of over 53 such carers, 42 of whom were spouses or partners, from across the denominations. They have been coping with this situation often over many years. In answering the key question 'what have you found most demanding in your caring?' they were very forthcoming in what they revealed, giving voice to strong emotions which all too often lie covered up.

We found that quite a few confessed that they tended to get angry because, for example, of the endless repetition that those they are caring for require especially the relentless 24/7 vigilance their caring demands and the sheer exhaustion it brings, and some felt guilty or ashamed of their anger. Almost all regretted the greatly reduced scope for the social engagement they had once enjoyed. Their personal lives appeared to have shrunk almost totally. Some were already grieving the loss of their loved one even before they had died. Many felt their Christian faith was deeply challenged. Almost all of them said that they felt isolated and lonely - maybe because they were reluctant to accept help, as some admitted, but sometimes because they felt let-down by their church. The most extreme case was reported by a daughter whose mother had been unable to attend church for some months. She lived next-door to a member of the church's ministerial team but had never received a visit; what she did receive, however, was a reminder that she needed to renew her planned giving! You can imagine how incandescent that made her daughter!

The better news, on the other hand, is that well over a third thought that the support they received from their church was very good, although many had suggestions of improvements that could be made in the area of pastoral care, both during the caring period and after the death of their loved-ones. Our only worry was that we had not been able to contact any who had given up on church as a consequence of their caring experience, only those with a church connection.

In *Christians on Ageing* we want to play a part in helping the Churches (and local communities) to become more dementia-aware and dementia-friendly. An invaluable tool is Gaynor Hammond's excellent book 'Growing Dementia-Friendly Churches', published by *Christians on Ageing* together with MHA and Faith in Elderly People (Leeds). In fewer than 50 pages, comprising 14 brief chapters, and with an amazing selection of illustrative stories it is very user-friendly. The book helps churches to journey with those with dementia through the various stages in the condition.

The word 'growing' in its title is significant. It is necessarily a gradual process because it aims to achieve a whole change of culture. It takes time for churches to become 'welcoming, inclusive and nurturing communities to all who enter their doors, including people who have dementia'. But it is infinitely worthwhile.

THE PRACTICE

What was striking about the discussions which took place in smaller groups was not so much the variety of people's experience of living and sharing the gospel message locally as the similarities. The challenges faced by rural communities – falling numbers, ageing congregations, use of buildings, the growth in numbers of those living with dementia – were not that different from the experience in urban settings. And, amazingly, neither were many of the ways local churches looked for solutions, despite the difficulties.

Common to all the reports of the Churches' local activity was the underlying theme of **inclusivity**:

- Continuing to seek ways of respecting and retaining their older members, and traditional ways of doing things, whilst encouraging new arrivals and younger people to experiment with other ways of bringing people together not just for worship but community support.
- Growing in understanding of the needs of people living with dementia, their families and friends, especially in how worship can be designed to meet those needs.
- Looking for ways to include older people as mentors and guides, especially through the involvement of grandparents if they live locally
- Allowing time for people to come together and to share their faith journey, including feelings and doubts, and to be together in conversation and conviviality
- Being very active in offering welcome and support to people from every ethnic or cultural background, especially Christians forced from their homes by persecution

Another theme was the need for the Churches to grasp and make good use of **opportunity**:

- Recognising the value of social activities alongside pastoral care, even though, for example, those like lunch clubs and knitting-circles might seem out-of-date and be increasingly difficult to organise because of lack of resources, lack of volunteers and increasing rules and regulations
- Identifying new ways of engaging with those cut-off from mainstream community life: those in hospital, in prison, in care homes, as obvious examples, but opening-up to more hidden need (and people living on the country's waterways was a vivid example)
- Taking inspiration from the life and work of communities of Religious, women in particular, whose members do not retire from pastoral work in older age, even when less mobile, doing the kinds of things older members of any local church could easily be asked to do
- Going beyond accepted ways of responding to community need by small-scale volunteering and being prepared to take on comprehensive support services as a natural extension of living the gospel message
- Building on the enthusiasm and energy of younger people, especially in those congregations where they are in a majority which could, for example, be in a university town or city.

Specific examples of practice in local churches forming the basis of this summary are outlined in *Appendix 2, Table Talk*.

THE PROPOSALS

1. There was widespread support for the idea of an annual conference, picking-up on some of the major themes identified in our day together which are a constant challenge to the Churches.
2. A specific plea was made to include consideration of the needs of older Christians from black and minority ethnic communities in any future conference and in the continuing work of *Christians on Ageing*. It was recognised that this would require much more meaningful contact with a variety of people and organisations. This would include the Black Churches and representatives of minorities within the other Churches.
3. It was suggested that *Christians on Ageing* would benefit from having a Facebook account. This would make for more fluid and immediate interactions, and reflect the communication preferences of a younger generation.
4. The focus of activity by the organisation in more recent times has been in the north of England. Quite a number had made the journey to Sheffield from the Midlands and the South and, indeed, Scotland. It was recognised that involvement by members of *Christians on Ageing* and people interested in our work, from all parts of the country, needs to be nourished – possibly by members and supporters being put in touch with others living locally. Meetings, events and conferences had been held in a variety of locations over the years and this should be tried again.
5. Everyone liked the way in which *Christians on Ageing* has developed and maintained its means of communication like **plus**, the members' magazine, and the Dementia Network Newsletter. The branded publications, both in-house booklets and those produced jointly with close partners, were praised and encouragement given to seeking new titles.
6. The development of a website was acknowledged to be an essential feature of *Christians on Ageing's* work and its ability to share in the new forums of discussion, debate and dissemination of ideas. We need to be seen to be doing something about current issues, for example the climate crisis and the Churches' efforts to stress that this is a gospel issue.
7. Many people present at the conference had heard about it through the e-newsletter which is sent to those in the Churches with known responsibility for work with older people. The Directory of these contacts, currently around 300, is being expanded and there was strong support for it to be expanded even more.
8. There are many days and weeks of special significance to older people during the year, both national and international, for example International Older Persons Day on 1 October, Prisons Week also in October. Notification of these and similar dates is given on the website calendar but the question was asked: how aware are the Churches of these, and how can they be made more aware? Is this a task for *Christians on Ageing*?
9. It was suggested that a good project would be to establish a link mechanism for pastors (ministers, priests, lay leaders) with special local responsibility for the support of older people (the Anna Chaplaincy was mentioned). The difficulties of pursuing this idea were not minimised.
10. The growing interest of the organisation in identifying and supporting the needs of older prisoners could include suggesting and resourcing a more active engagement in prayer with and for older prisoners, including those who work with them, endorsed by all the Churches.

APPENDIX 1

TALKING TOGETHER

These are notes taken during the short discussions after each presentation. The amount of time available after some talks inevitably curtailed the number of comments or questions.

Discussion after David Jolley's paper on intergenerational tension

One delegate said she thought DJ's approach understandable in the context of families and communities able and willing to give support to younger people. But were the situation viewed more globally, younger people would surely have real cause for resentment. Many older people had benefitted greatly from the post-war rise in house prices. As individuals they were not directly responsible, but the general rise in house prices and the resulting difficulties younger people face in finding affordable housing had happened on our watch. David Jolley had mentioned a schoolchild protesting about climate change in his local park and the questioner pointed out that this phenomenon and inadequate action to address it will also have a very serious impact on the lives of younger people and, again, occurred on our watch. She suggested that older people should recognise these tensions and advocate radical policies in fields such as climate change and housing; these could include a large increase in inheritance tax, for example.

Another delegate considered that the period over which younger people have to work is far too long, and that their earnings are often much lower than those of older workers. He urged that the system be made more equitable, not least by spreading wages far more evenly across different age groups.

A delegate said she was one of the WASPI (Women Against State Pension Inequality) women. She had started work at the age of 14 and-a-half and every time she thought she had reached the goal of retirement, that goal was moved a little further away; the bus pass too remained out of reach for her. She urged greater awareness of the plight of such people in churches.

Another delegate raised concern about older people having to pay for their care, even though they may have worked all their lives and paid their taxes. David Jolley referred to Scotland's Fair Dementia Campaign, which contrasts the charges levied on people with dementia compared with those with cancer, and the situation in Trafford in Manchester, where care home fees are so expensive that people are moved out of their home area, thus losing contact with friends and communities.

Discussion after Helen McCormack's paper on local church co-operation

A delegate said that successive governments had ditched their responsibilities towards older people, such as the provision of social care, and churches had been left to fill the gaps. He asked whether Helen McCormack had been able to access resources from the wider community to support her work. She replied that she had carried out an audit of services provided by all organisations including non-faith ones in her area, and that she signposts inquirers to these. She also said churches in her area are able to access funding from North Yorkshire County Council from a fund called Stronger Communities.

Discussion after paper by Paul and Rita Conley on work with older prisoners

One delegate asked why the number of older prisoners had risen and Paul Conley pointed to greater use of DNA testing which leads to more convictions; the fact that people are coming forward more often than they used to; the investigation of crimes from the past; and the fact that some very old people are offending.

A delegate said she had been asked to provide dementia care training at a prison in Nottinghamshire and was surprised to find on arrival that her training would be directed not, as she had assumed, at staff, but at the prisoners themselves. She was touched by the care being provided by fellow prisoners, as was a chaplain at a prison in Lancashire, who had observed prisoners wheeling fellow prisoners in wheelchairs.

Paul and Rita Conley were asked about the context of their centre within the Salvation Army and they said it had recently opened a similar centre in Usk, south Wales and has plans to open more centres.

One delegate explained that Christians on Ageing had long been concerned about the plight of older prisoners and wondered what steps Paul and Rita Conley considered the organisation could most usefully take to help them; she pointed out that a prominent member of Christians on Ageing had, until his recent death, served as an energetic chaplain working with older prisoners in Norwich prison. They replied that Christians on Ageing should pray for older prisoners.

Discussion after Albert Jewell's paper on support for those living with dementia

In response to questions, Albert Jewell said he considered that the number of people with dementia was probably far higher than the figure given of 850,000 people in the UK, as many people are diagnosed when their dementia is quite far advanced. David Jolley added that the incidence of dementia had begun to drop in prosperous parts of the UK, but this was not the case in less affluent areas, where people have earned less money and received less education. He pointed out that a healthy lifestyle is likely to reduce the chances of someone developing dementia, but that there is no guarantee of this. He also said that air pollution seemed to be linked to the development of dementia, probably through causing inflammation of the brain.

Albert Jewell agreed with one questioner that self-help groups in churches could help sustain people with dementia. These often create themselves informally, with members offering mutual support.

One delegate drew attention to literature she had brought about Anna Chaplaincy. This is an ecumenical project, which started in the south of England and is spreading, involving spiritual support for older people of faith or no faith who have disabilities and illnesses which may include dementia; they often live in care homes. Specially trained Anna Chaplains seek to help these people find spiritual fulfilment; for those of faith, this will include helping them to develop their Christian life. Anna Chaplains try to seek out people who have moved out of area, so that older church attenders with illnesses and disabilities do not 'drop off the vine'. The movement encourages the idea that Anna Chaplains are commissioned by their local church, that church members are aware of what they do, and that chaplains are accountable to their churches.

Appendix 2

TABLE TALK

These are notes taken at the discussion groups, when participants were invited to share good ideas and practice from their own locality. They have been partially edited to fit the format of this Report but otherwise are as the record-keeper has presented them.

Discussion A

Knutsford Methodist

Dementia Café: tea and activities – singing, trips, craft, exercise. 20 -26 attend. Offers space for carers (10 + per week). Volunteers (age range 55-85) form strong links with carers. Little other provision in the area, and transport poor. Though there may be health and safety issues many of these have been met by the church already.

Ripon and Lower Dales

Based on Masham Methodist Church. Simple lunch, craft, games, knitting. Growing – now about 50. Aimed mainly at dementia support but also covering loneliness. Carers group alongside, in separate room but with window so can see each other.

Bedale

Silver Service: simple worship 20 mins, routine form. Transport is a big issue but trying to work with community bus service. This, and awareness of what other services exist seem a general problem. Pointed out resources for worship such as MHA.

Faith in Older People. Edinburgh:

education and linking information rather than running direct services. Singing Groups.

Prison Chaplaincy

Growing age group offering meaningful activities. Prisoners help each other and it gives opportunities to share

Discussion B

A member of the group, living in the south-west of the country, wanted to share the situation of small churches like her own: a village church that had been well-attended, including children's work some time back but no longer. There had recently been a new housing development nearby and this has prompted the mostly retired original parishioners to ask how their church could contribute towards meeting the needs of the newcomers. As a consequence, a Toddlers group has been set up, together with a 'little fish' group and now a 'Lego church'. She felt that care was needed in balancing 'modern' and more 'traditional' approaches so as not to lose or marginalise the older attendees. Another in the group in a similar church, in an area where there are many holiday bungalows, said they had found flexibility in e.g. timing of services and activities was needed; they have recently started a dementia-friendly monthly cafe. The group agreed that they had both responded to their situation in an exemplary manner.

Discussion B contd

Another group member presented a rather different profile of her church which was a thriving and well-attended C of E with a school attached (and set in a thriving local community). They felt they had benefited from the vicar, (who was a great pastor) having been in post for nearly 20 years and were a bit fearful that things might change too much when he departed. However, they have concentrated on creating a totally welcoming congregation providing for activities across the whole age spectrum. Their older members were very active in 'Open the Book' in local schools, and grandparents provided 50% of those bringing children to their 'little' and 'baby rascals' activities.

A third group member who worked with the Congregational Federation (of those Congregational churches that didn't join the URC) felt that they were some way behind in helping churches to become more aware of inter-generational priorities and becoming more dementia-friendly. This is because, although she can advise, Congregational churches were each independent and made their own decisions. She found this rather frustrating but reported some successes, not least in South Wales. They have found Anna Chaplaincy to be particularly worth exploring.

Graham Hawley, a Vice-President of Christians on Ageing, reported on his work leading regular workshops for older people. He found how much they had valued being honest about their questions and doubts (which they felt they couldn't do in their local churches without feeling they were 'rocking the boat') and that they felt valued because others were interested in their life- and faith-journeys. Certainly, a lesson for the Churches! Their local church hosts Saturday afternoon teas for the local community raising money for local, national and international charities (including Bethlehem Bible College). This seems a way of widening the vision of those attending.

Discussion C

A local Methodist and C of E partnership in Sheffield allows the employment of a very part-time worker to support the needs of those in transition from medical care to home care

A local church employs two people for youth work but the needs of older people are presumed to be covered in the work of the pastoral team

Practically every church represented at the table seemed to have a lunch club but getting people there is becoming increasingly difficult; having a minibus is only the start

Local authority support for initiatives is slowly disappearing whilst the reporting and compliance demands are increasing beyond the abilities and willingness of volunteers

There is to be a 'Live at Home' conference for Sheffield churches arranged by the MHA scheme in October

Collaboration on social initiatives locally must surely be the way forward and organisations like PSALM provide workshops and resources to assist.

Discussion D

A member of the group explained that until recently she had been a National Waterways Chaplain. She explained that large numbers of elderly people live on boats on waterways, but churches have no idea of their existence or their needs. They are not on the radar of organisations like social services; they are not classed as travellers or homeless. She urged churches which have waterways in their area to reach out to these communities. She mentioned the case of a woman with no family who lived on a boat with her dog and was recovering from breast cancer. As she was so unwell, she could not get out to buy food or collect her benefits, which were cut off. Rats ate through the electric wiring and the walls of her boat. One of the waterways chaplains was able to assemble help, this included taking food to her and bringing a dog-tolerant cat from the local cattery which devoured the rats. She stressed that what people remember is not words: it is actions. Living on the waterways can pose problems. You have to be physically fit and be able to pay mooring fees; these are often high, as there is a national shortage of moorings. Some people are in a position in which they have to move their mooring every two weeks but run into difficulties if they are ill or the boat breaks down. It's estimated that there are 50,000 people in England and part of Wales who live on waterways. These are the people who are registered with river licences, but she thinks the total number is twice that. Substance misuse and mental health problems are common amongst these people. She explained that there are three Christian organisations involved in the waterways: The Boaters Christian Fellowship (consisting of boaters themselves); Christian Ministries, which is evangelical, and her organisation, the National Waterways Chaplaincy. A question was asked: how can we make sure our work is not simply social work? Someone referred to Street Angels in this context.

A Methodist minister spoke of her experience of 'dementia conversations' sessions with David Jolley. Each session involves people with dementia and their carers coming along and sharing stories, eating cakes and drinking tea from china cups (to make the occasion special), playing games such as Desert Island Discs and singing. There is no faith component, but she is present wearing her dog collar and the events take place in a church. In response to discussion about dementia-friendly harvest services and carol services, she said a dementia-friendly harvest service would be: short with traditional readings and hymns, use a traditional version of the Lord's Prayer, and take place in an atmosphere in which people feel free to walk around and shout out. A dementia-friendly carol service would be carol-heavy, contain familiar carols from childhood, and offer only a short message. She said it might be candle-lit; but this was questioned because of concern that candle-lighting would be too dim.

A group member was from the Methodist Church of Huddersfield. She referred to the use of Godly Play; previously she had been doing the equivalent with children. She took Godly Play into a nursing home but said it is important to be careful that residents don't put the objects used into their pockets. She reported that people who have stopped speaking had started again during Godly play.

Another group member, and also a member of *Christians on Ageing* committee, is head of a religious order in Manchester. Some of the Sisters are quite elderly but continue to work. One Sister aged 84 runs a centre for the homeless in Manchester – she is responsible for it. Although Sisters never retire, it has to be considered what those who are less physically able can do to fulfil their sense of mission. They might be asked: to pray, giving them people to pray for, such as someone another Sister has met at the bus stop; some elderly Sisters write letters; some write to prisoners on death row in the United States, where those Sisters used to work; some write to government urging a particular course of action; some might mend church linen, such as vestments.

We talked about other ways in which older people with disabilities can continue to serve, for example telephone befriending both of people within a church community and outside it, referring to a woman who was in a wheelchair and rarely left her very sheltered flat who had acted as a telephone befriender.

Discussion E

During our discussion, one church representative volunteered that they also have a ministry for older people similar to that described by Helen McCormack in her talk and find it to be very worthwhile. We also heard of a system to encourage and support Dementia Friendly churches in Bradford: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/Cathy%20Henwood.pdf>

There was a plea from a member of the group to address the needs and identify initiatives for older Christians from ethnic minority groups: The belief that 'They look after their own' – and therefore need nothing – is questionable. There is work on this issue but often linked to other faiths and particular cultures. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15373818

The Importance of seeing all people as spiritual beings, irrespective of age, culture, faith or no faith was stressed throughout discussion. All Christian activities should be inclusive: care services and such be open to anyone for whom they are suitable, irrespective of whether they are churchgoers or not.

Activities for people with dementia are at their best if inclusive – i.e. people living with dementia being welcomed into activities which are also accessed by people who do not have dementia

A woman from a church in Sheffield spoke of their efforts to attract older people to their church. The church is situated near the university and has much for the students, but wishes to grow a balanced congregation for the benefit of young and old. [The STC Story | STC Sheffield](#). This is a phenomenon which might be found in other university-cities and towns and it is worth finding out more.

We heard a massively impressive account of the work of Catholic Care and Caritas in Leeds. [Our people - Catholic Care](#) and <http://www.csan.org.uk/news/> This is a large, well established organisation which provides a range of services to people at home. They run a shared transport scheme as well as some day care. They have a strong relationship with the local authority and other agencies working with older people. They are knowledgeable about benefits and how these can be used to support people at home. Although 'Catholic' – the services are available to any older people in need

We also heard from a church which is rural and has a predominantly old congregation and struggles: 'I come to church on Sunday and put my £5 on the plate. Is that not enough?' They have approaches which have a reasonable response: a visiting group, special events: scarecrows, angels, hymns and Pimms!

There was also mention of hospital chaplaincy: It is an important work. Makes aware that some people who have been regular worshippers and servants within the church are lost ('Drop off the perch'), when they become less mobile and less able to get to church. Sometimes they resurface via the hospital. An inclusive pastoral activity is what is required to follow people and include them in their need.

No text



The story of older people is the story of their unique life journey. They have lived through war and peace, have known hope and failure, and have found, and sometimes lost, friendship and love. For many, their Christian faith has been the context within which they have lived and in which they will die. They have handed on the gospel message to the next generation but are also living it day by day. Their story is not just about the past; they are part, in the here and now, of the Churches' proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are a valued and precious resource. They want to give as well as receive. *Christians on Ageing* is one of their voices.

Christians on Ageing

- *works throughout the United Kingdom*
- *operates as an ecumenical Christian organisation*
- *publishes resources for individuals and local ministries*
- *arranges conferences and events*
- *promotes research and innovation*
- *comments on current issues affecting older people*

A resource to the Churches

- *improving understanding on issues that matter*
- *providing a link between the denominations*
- *contributing to innovation in work with dementia*
- *responding to enquiries on age and ageing*
- *unlocking the talent and experience of older people*
- *seeking dialogue between people of faith and wider society*

Join us

- *become a member*
- *receive our quarterly magazine*
- *support our work (even leaving a legacy) and so*
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