

# Christians on Ageing Conference Call

## Grandparenting

Notes from the Conference Call led by Dr Sarah Holmes 16 November 2021

We were: Sarah Holmes, Norbert Baumker, Bill Hawes, Susan Stilwell, Ann Burke and David Jolley

**Sarah Holmes** has worked at Liverpool Hope University since 2015. She is a Lecturer teaching Early Childhood Studies and researching children's faith, spirituality and issues surrounding faith nurture. Her recent research has explored the roles and experiences of families during the Covid-19 Pandemic. This work has brought her to recognise the importance of older generations within families, and the stresses that are felt by grandparents.

She asked: *How can the churches do better in supporting the spiritual life of grandparents?*

- Grandparents provide a **long-term experience of involvement** for children from the youngest age and through to adulthood. This is a two-way learning and growing.
- Grandparents may be seen to be **the spiritual lead for the family** as a whole. They carry the spiritual legacy which is to be passed to the family.
- Churches may miss out on the **stories and role models** which can be provided by the older generation if they do not recognise what older people have to contribute.
- Grandparents may be left to wonder: **'What is it OK for me to say?'** There may be differing views between generations, even when all generations share a Christian belief.

Can we do better to support relationships across generations within churches? Are there useful books on this? There is some help on the internet

[Care for the Family | Because family life matters](#)

[Catholic Grandparents Association England – Catholic Grandparents Association](#)

[Christian media - Wikipedia](#)

In her research Sarah has encountered **people who have come to faith in later life** and are especially keen to share this faith with their family, and to pray together. The **spiritual life of families** is enriched when they identify with the Christian Faith. Families can then turn to prayer, or ask for prayer at any time. **Regular attendance at church** provides a model which children can follow. Sometimes they are following what grandparents do, even though their parents are not church-goers. There are questions on how to equip and empower older people for the demands and opportunities which come to them; sometimes older people feel they are not allowed or encouraged to have roles in church. There are concerns that the **Safeguarding process** will constrain what an older person can do.

*Opportunities are there but may not be recognised or remain unspoken.*

### In discussion we heard reflections, including:

- A grandson having a strong bond with his grandfather
- The gran who took me to church
- The destructive effects of the Covid-19 crisis and the rules which have kept families apart:
- Isolation and the divorce between generations, including a chasm between children and grandparents
- There are benefits to old and young when visits are possible: [The benefits of children visiting care homes | Green Tree Court](#)

We heard mention of a booklet from MHA which addresses visits to care homes by children, but no link to this has been found.

- Older people can help with **Messy Church**. We heard of one Messy Church project which visits six churches
- Our present economy requires that many grandparents care for their grandchildren in the hours before and after school when their parents are at work. These are times of **'Intentional Opportunity'** during which the child takes in the style, behaviour and manners of the senior party. **A time for Christian values to 'rub off'**.
- In some situations people will employ **Godly Play** as a technique to teach children about God and Jesus [Godly Play UK – A Christian movement centred on childhood spirituality](#)

There are books which can be helpful in talking to children about God – e.g. *'100 ways to know God loves me. 100 songs to say it back'*.

It was easier to talk to children about God and to share the stories of the bible when we were young. **We have become a secular society** in contrast to the Christian country of those times.

- Bookshops sport many **shelves devoted to treatises on Spirituality** but offer few books on faith or religion.
- We heard of the upbringing experienced in an Irish Catholic home – 'stories and rituals were imbued in us. It was natural to find comfort in the Rosary when mum was dying'.
- The **language** was simple, comforting and nurturing. We may have doubts about some of the mumbo-jumbo of religion – but we live the faith in certainty.

People of all ages are so busy. Not enough encouragement or teaching to make **time for reflection**.

- **Within the family** it is not uncommon for some children to deny the faith and others to live within it.
- For those who have lost faith, **preaching is not the way**.
- Is it enough/ok not to put it into words but to **demonstrate the faith** by the way we are?

There are many older people in churches who are involved with activities for youngsters: Girls Brigade, for example, or Sunday School. In these situations there is opportunity to

teach by example, to talk of matters of faith and understanding, to wonder what life is and what it is all about.

- 'Who shall I serve? Who shall I follow? (John 12: 26)

We can create an environment where people can ask and share and explore doubts and wonder.

- Christian belief provides a **structure when people are searching** for something more. You are not left going wherever the wind blows. There is a springboard for people to work with and to respond to.
- We will make mistakes and fail in somethings and at some times. God will always love me

### Conclusion

This was a very close and personal session with much to be learned and even more to be thought about. Sarah starts from a wish to understand **how to nurture young people in faith**; she has found that older people in the family, especially grandparents have much to give and much to receive in this dialogue. In the discussion, we expanded to touch on many aspects of the experience and spirituality of later life in a family and church context.

We thanked Sarah for leading us through these exchanges and thanked each other for the open and respectful way we were able to work. There is more to be done on this

**David Jolley**

### Some references which are relevant to our discussion

'*Spirituality: Roots and Routes*: a secular reflection on the practice of spiritual care', Gerry Burke, Age UK, 2007

A useful link: [Celebrate | Following Your Faith | Children's Liturgy \(rpbbooks.co.uk\)](https://www.rpbbooks.co.uk/Celebrate-Following-Your-Faith-Childrens-Liturgy)

*Reflections on Ministry amongst Children during the Covid-19 Pandemic*, [Sarah Holmes<sup>1</sup>](#), [Astrid Sandsmark<sup>2</sup>](#), [Ronelle Sonnenberg<sup>3</sup>](#), and [Shantelle Weber<sup>4</sup>](#) in: [Journal of Youth and Theology](#) Online Publication Date: 15 Mar 2021

#### Abstract

The role and function of children's ministry during the first six months of the Covid-19 pandemic is explored, including a comparison of observations from four different contexts: Norway, South Africa, The Netherlands, The United Kingdom. Theological reflection examines the emerging ecclesiologies, form and adaptation of sacramental practices and pastoral care of families during this time of crisis. This investigation acknowledges awareness that there were significant restrictions and consequent challenges facing churches during this time, causing implications on children's ministry that were unprecedented and frustrating for the Church on a global scale. Observations and recommendations are presented to aid churches globally in ensuring that children's ministry during such times of crisis is child-centred, values the child as part of the body of Christ, fosters intergenerational role modelling and solidarity, and helps rather than hinders children on their spiritual journey.