

plus

CHRISTIANS on AGEING

a Christian voice for older people

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Quarterly Magazine of
Christians on Ageing

Christians on Ageing – a Christian voice for older people

We work for a society in which older people are heard, supported and valued.

Our activities aim to:

- Collaborate with Christian and other agencies with similar visions
- Inform and facilitate debate on issues of concern for older people
- Celebrate the gifts and potential of later life
- Influence policy makers, service providers, paid carers and practitioners

We deliver these activities through conferences, publications, commentaries and informational resources, focusing on faith, spirituality and flourishing in later life.

Current prime areas of interest and action:

- **‘Cherished not forgotten’ – activities that relate to excluded older people for whom the church can play a role, such as in illness & disability; in hospital, nursing or residential care; those living with dementia and their carers; the digitally, socially or economically disadvantaged; isolated & lonely older people and older prisoners.**
- **Mission & ministry in later life – activities that inform & support lay and ordained, by sharing information and good practice, and promoting training and vocation related to ministry with older people.**
- **Later life discipleship – activities that contribute to understanding older people’s spiritual growth and faith development; promoting a positive image of older Christians’ spiritual roles as elders & mentors; encouraging intergenerational learning.**

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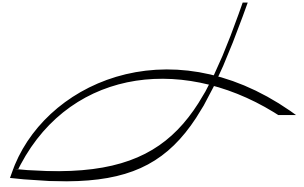
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Contents



Editorial	2-3
A toolkit for loneliness: the work of Caraway	4-9
More on loneliness	9-10
Care and Support Reimagined	11-14
New resources on caregiving	15-16
Challenges and choices: International Conference Report	17-22
Church in the post-Pandemic era	23
Later Life Faith and Spirituality: Editor's reflection	24-25
How do we prepare for a great old age?	26
Annual Conference	27-28
Book Reviews	29-33
Conference Calls	33-34
New membership initiatives: update	35-36



Editorial

Joanna Walker, Editor

Welcome to the autumn issue of 'plus'. We reflect on summer events and publications, and look forward to new ventures and happenings as a 'new term' beckons.

Our international flavour is provided this time by Keith Albans' informative and encouraging report from the *International Conference on Ageing and Spirituality*. Held for the first time in Canada, the International Conference is a once-every-few-years' event and therefore rather special. I've had one chance to attend, in Edinburgh in 2013. Keith says "*The current tentative plan is that the 11th International Conference will see us return to Australia in 2025 to mark the 25th anniversary of the original Canberra Conference. Time to start saving up!*"

On the domestic scene, but no less importantly, we feature two current debates. **Loneliness** (as opposed to social isolation) is back in the news and Revd Penny Thatcher, working with the Southampton charity 'Caraway', and

from her parish base, describes how loneliness has emerged as a particular focus for their work with older people. **Social Care** has received much impetus for discussion by the publication of the Archbishops' report *Care and Support Reimagined* (featured in Summer 'plus'). We have borrowed an article from *Modern Church*, to share the reflections of Dr Joe Forde of the Urban Theology Union, Sheffield.

You won't therefore be surprised to hear that CoA's annual conference in September tackles an overall theme of *Christians' response to exclusion*, and looks in particular at older people in need of care, and of befriending, and those who are involved in the criminal justice system. See page 28 for details. There will be a conference report to follow and we will, as previously, publish fuller versions of papers given in future issues of 'plus'.

As a new feature, I have in this issue included news of publications and resources that complement the articles. Many such items cross my in-tray and sometimes they're particularly relevant and hopefully of interest to readers. Where possible, I follow up and ask an author or organisation to write a piece for us, but that takes a bit longer to emerge!

So, after Keith's international report, we have news from Duke University, USA on post-Pandemic ministry. After the review article on *Care and Support Reimagined*, we have news of three new resources on caregiving. After the Toolkit for Loneliness, there's more on loneliness research. I hope you like these additions. Let me know.

Joanna Walker

A Toolkit for Loneliness

Rev'd Penny Thatcher, Curate to Caraway and Parish of Chandler's Ford

I don't know whether you've noticed, but the topic of loneliness does seem to have had a higher profile lately on many platforms of society? There have been programmes and articles on tv and radio. If you search for 'loneliness' on the internet you'll find many major organisations devoting pages of their website to the issue. For five years now we've had a Government Minister for Loneliness in the UK.

Loneliness is often highlighted in relation to specific demographic groups, but it is loneliness amongst the older population (generally 70+) which has become the subject of a project being carried out by Southampton-based charity Caraway. <https://www.caraway.uk.com/>

Caraway's mission is 'to promote the spiritual wellbeing of those in their later years'. Our vision is 'to give those in their older years a voice, to be alongside the lonely, isolated and bereaved and create community, where connections can be made and friendships can flourish'.

Two years ago, in preparing for my ordination as deacon in the Church of England, I was given formal agreement by the Diocese of Winchester to spend half of my curacy with Caraway, learning about the spirituality of ageing and ministering alongside its founder Revd Canon Dr Erica Roberts (City Chaplain for Older People in Southampton)

and her team. This included the hosting of Memory Cafes, Courses for Carers of those living with Dementia, Vintage Adventure, Holiday at Home, Care Home services (both in person and on zoom), and many other activities, too numerous to mention here! This has run concurrently with the other half of my curacy where I'm licensed to the parish of Chandler's Ford.

Loneliness

Over the last 12 months Caraway has significantly developed its Chaplaincy Services, and through this process the idea for a 'Toolkit for Loneliness' bubbled to the surface. In order to support and expand the Anna Chaplaincy work in Southampton, Caraway has been developing a more structured referral route to allow the work to grow safely and cohesively across the city. We already know that much of our Chaplaincy contact falls into the areas of end of life, spiritual wellbeing, re-connection with faith, bereavement/loss and times of transition and change. Our referral structure now highlights these areas and guides those who are referring an older person towards a tailored, time-bound Chaplaincy service.



From spending time with our Anna Chaplains to find out more about the profile of the older people they visit, these conversations have shown us unequivocally that loneliness is consistently the most common reason for chaplaincy contact to be initiated, often interwoven with other circumstances. Some older people are lonely

and mobile, some are lonely and housebound, and it's with the second set of people that Chaplains have found the contact most challenging. Caraway is not a befriending service but is in a city where organisations offering such services are already massively overstretched. The question arose of how do we resource and support our Chaplains to combat loneliness in a realistically manageable yet effective and pastorally sensitive way?

As a result, we've spent some time reflecting on the topic of loneliness and how it manifests itself amongst our older population. We've considered it from a Biblical and a sociological perspective and invited some of our partner organisations, friends and advisers to help us brainstorm the issue. We agreed that loneliness is very much about how you feel regardless of circumstances. The following quote seems to sum it up well:

"Loneliness is not the same as being alone. It can be defined as a feeling of lack in response to an insufficiency of emotional closeness and connection. Everyone has different levels of contact they feel comfortable with, which is why some are truly content in solitude, while others feel deep loneliness despite being in a relationship or having a seemingly vast circle of friends. Loneliness is not about numbers. It's about the depth of the connection, the feeling that you are being seen and loved." (Laing, 2021)

Maybe for some that feeling comes from a separation from the comfort of knowing God's presence, or even a separation from ourselves through the barriers we might have put up between us and God or others. It's not the same as being alone, which can be good and necessary

at times. And we can see in Genesis 2:18 how God saw it was not good for a human being to be alone, so God created a companion for Adam. From the very beginning we see that it's important to be in relationship with another. Primarily, we are created to be in relationship with God, and the need and capacity for relationship, interaction, connectedness is imprinted in the core of our souls, and we can see this in the outworking of God's plan through Jesus.

A regular part of our Chaplains' strategy is to signpost older people to community events and activities, enabling relationships and networks to be formed and regular commitments to be established. Of course, this is only possible if an older person is physically mobile and able to leave their home in the first place. It's also only possible if a person feels mentally and emotionally able to take those steps. For both of these scenarios we began to envisage our Chaplains visiting with a physical toolkit and asked the question 'If you could take a 'Toolkit for Loneliness' with you, what would it contain?'

As you may imagine, the initial list was very long! It incorporated ideas for physical exercise, for craft activity, for personal reflection and for wider community participation (from your armchair), memory gathering and finding purpose and meaning in day-to-day life. As the toolkit has begun to take shape, specific suggestions have included a gratitude journal with prompts for daily recording of 'blessings', a list of small challenges to complete and a guide to putting together a timeline of your life.

The focus of this toolkit is to give agency to those who are at a stage of life where much is being done to them and when it's easy to feel as though they no longer have control over any aspect of it. There is a focus too on fostering a positive attitude and encouraging participation in something beyond their immediate environment and thought patterns, with an emphasis on self-compassion and mindfulness.

Caraway's team has people with a wide range of backgrounds and skill sets including medicine, psychology, spiritual direction, human resources and social care. It has access to partners and like-minded organisations across the city with whom to share resources. The hope is to equip lonely older people to adopt new habits and fresh perspectives so that they are able to continue living in this way after the Chaplain has ended regular contact.



Ideas have also been shared about the possibility of including older people in home-based community projects, such as contributing knitted squares for larger

items, exchanging correspondence with other older people and/or with local school children and these will be developed over time. For those with a faith or spiritual interest there would be the option of prayer cards and ideas of things to pray for in the local neighbourhood. Crucially, the development of this toolkit would go hand-in-hand with training and support for the Chaplains and Caraway is currently exploring how we might best provide this.

The Toolkit for Loneliness is still a work in progress and will be adapted and honed over time, but we are excited about its potential and the Caraway team has really caught the vision of how this practical, creative yet relatively simple idea can take shape and support our ministry with loneliness amongst older people in Southampton.

Reference: Laing, O., 2021. Available at [Loneliness: coping with the gap where friends used to be | Loneliness | The Guardian](#) [Accessed 12 August 2023].

Photos: Tim Doerfler (older man) and Alpay Tomga (older woman) on Unsplash.

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More on loneliness – from the Editor's in-tray:

A new framework for understanding older adult's loneliness, from King's College, London.

Researchers at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) at Kings have created a framework that helps describe and define 'loneliness', which can

mean a range of things (as discussed by Penny Thatcher on p6). Having surveyed much previous research from many countries, and applied many theories, they conclude that the core of loneliness is the gap between people's expected and actual social relationships.

Thus titled *The Social Relationship Expectation Framework*, their work identifies facets of loneliness in older adults and hopes to inform future research and practical interventions.

Lonely people may lack:

- Proximity: the availability of social contacts
- Support: feeling cared for and relying on others
- Intimacy: feeling close, understood or listened to
- Fun: sharing interests and enjoyable experiences
- Generativity: having opportunities to contribute meaningfully
- Respect: feeling valued and actively included.

Loneliness is different from social isolation, which refers to an external situation that lacks nearby social contacts. The research clarifies loneliness as being a subjective experience arising from unfulfilled expectations about the quantity and quality of relationships – meaning that it can be felt even in the midst of social contacts.

Reference: Akhter-Khan, S. et al, 2023, 'Understanding and addressing older adults' loneliness: The social relationships expectations framework', Perspectives on Psychological Science Vol18 (4) pp 762-777.

Care and Support Reimagined

Dr Joseph Forde, Research Fellow, Urban Theology Union

*This commentary on the recent Archbishops' report is reproduced with permission from the autumn issue of **Signs of the Times**, a quarterly magazine of Modern Church. We are grateful to the author and editor.*

The problem with reimagining something is the danger that the vision can become disconnected from the reality 'on the ground', making it less credible. I suggest the jury is still out on whether that has happened with the recently published report by the Commission set up in April 2021 by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, to examine the future of social care in England: **Care and Support Reimagined: A National Care Covenant for England**.

Certainly, as the report makes clear, the nine Commission Members consulted widely before making their recommendations: speaking to people who get care and support, to those who provide it, and to academics, policy makers and politicians. Their terms of reference were framed in a way that gave them much scope for developing what it describes as: 'a radical and inspiring long-term vision for care and support in England, underpinned by a renewed set of values and principles, drawing on Christian theology and ethics.' Yet, it did not include a specific requirement for this vision to be costed,

a requirement for advice on how it might be resourced, or even a requirement for how its resourcing might be prioritised in relation to other competing demands on the public purse (although some suggestions are made along these lines in its findings). One is left to ponder, therefore, whether Christian values, principles, theology and ethics will be enough to convince many readers of the merit of the report's recommendations; or whether the report will be seen by some (including some politicians) as little other than a well-intentioned but idealistic endeavour, and hence one not to be taken too seriously.

It would be a pity if that is what happens, for there is much to be commended in the report, at least from a Christian perspective. For example, it rightly argues that disabled people and the elderly should be able to exercise their rights to live life to the full. It rightly argues that the levels of human suffering due to a lack of care and support are unethical. It rightly argues that creating good care and support jobs is a matter of fairness and equality, and that increasing the pay of care workers would address the gender/ethnicity pay gap. It rightly argues that properly funded care and carers' rights are essential to the social infrastructure of society, in a way that is similar to child care. It rightly points out that we are wasting money in the NHS when people who are medically fit to be discharged remain in hospital owing to a lack of social care provision.

Cross Party Support

I suspect that all of these points would command the support of a sizable number of politicians from across the political spectrum, at least on a theoretical level. For politicians, however, as well as for many of their

constituents, the difficulty with turning this vision into a reality may arise when these points are set against other competing funding priorities (one can hear echoes of how, 'if we didn't have a magic money tree before the Covid-19 pandemic, we certainly don't have one now'). This is a dimension that the report touches on, but hardly fleshes out.

'Lift Our Gaze'

My beef with the report stems — in significant part — from my scepticism of its stated view, that: '*The task of reimagining required us to lift our gaze from the challenging realities of today's situation*'. Perhaps it did, but I am not sure that it should have, at least to the extent that is apparent in its analysis and, arguably, in its recommendations. By taking that approach, the Commission has limited the report's relevance to what is, essentially, a values-based study (though, admittedly, in some respects, a good one). As such, it is a study that might be easier for some politicians and other welfare stakeholders to ignore, precisely because it may be seen by them as too disconnected from the political, economic and financial realities that the country currently faces.

A key recommendation of the report is for a National Care Covenant to be developed, that clearly sets out the mutual rights and responsibilities of stakeholders: citizens, families, communities, and the state, both in providing support and paying for it. It suggests that this should reflect a greater role for, and investment in communities; a new deal for unpaid carers; a stronger role for the state in guaranteeing access to care and support; and acceptance of what it terms '*our mutual responsibilities as*

citizens, including as taxpayers, neighbours and members of communities, and as people who draw on care and support and family members.' It envisages that such a covenant 'would require a major and sustained programme of public dialogue and engagement.'

I hope that, in this regard, *Care and Support Reimagined: A National Care Covenant For England*, will be able to demonstrate its true worth as a catalyst for change, by stimulating rigorous debate and analysis at a national and local level on the way forward for social care; a debate that is rightly underpinned by a shared sense of values that will help shape the direction that is taken, whilst also being grounded in a realistic sense of the economic, financial and political constraints that exist, and informed by possible ways of overcoming them.

Dr Joseph Forde is Honorary Research Fellow in Historical Theology at the Urban Theology Union, Sheffield. He researches and writes on welfare and Christianity and is author of: *Before and Beyond the 'Big Society': John Milbank and the Church of England's Approach To Welfare*, James Clarke & Co, 2022.



New resources on Caregiving

Embracing Age has launched a free four-session downloadable course entitled *Caring for Caregivers* designed to help churches to support carers and those living with dementia. Each session includes short videos, featuring current caregivers and input from the authors, Tina English and Robin Thompson.

There are also helpful questions for discussion (for group use) or reflection (for individuals) and additional downloadable support material.

See Embracing Age's website for more information: www.embracingage.org.uk and download the course at <https://www.embracingage.org.uk/supporting-carers-course.html>



The Open University has published new research on the value of the mutual relationships that can be established through 'relational care' and launched some associated training material for practitioners.

They note that recent times have seen the emphasis shift to person-centred adult social care, with acknowledged benefits. But focusing on the individual as a collection of needs to be met by carers can have its own problems: one-way care can be disempowering, re-enforcing assumptions about frailty and lack of autonomy for the older person on one hand, coupled with depersonalising carers as never-ending providers on the other.

'Relational Care' represents a way of looking at human lives more naturally, recognising that in the home, family, and society most people are interdependent, expecting and requiring to both give and receive care. This mutuality promotes self-worth, a sense of life meaning, and a feeling of being still part of the community (whether that be in a residential or day-care setting).

The OU research, entitled *The value and practice of relational care* not only offers an analysis and definition of the concept, but is also the basis for an accessible practitioners' toolkit: *Making every relationship matter*. This is aimed at providers and professionals.

See: an abridged version of the research, and the toolkit, on OU's digital publishing platform ORO. Search for <https://oro.open.ac.uk/88678> (for the report) and 88663 (for the toolkit).

Age UK has issued a major new report calling for a big shift towards joined-up home and community based health and social care services for older people. *The State of Health and Care of Older People in England 2023* documents how health and care systems are struggling to meet the needs of a growing older population. Significant numbers of hospital admissions could be avoided if help was available early on – a 'laser focus on prevention and early intervention is needed' to enable older people to stay fit and well in their own homes, and in care homes.

Search online for: [age-uk-briefing-state-of-health-and-care-july-2023-abridged-version.pdf](#)

Challenges and Choices: Spirituality and dignity in later life

International Conference Report by Revd Dr Keith Albans, Trustee

This was the title of the 10th International Conference on Ageing and Spirituality, held for the first time in Canada and hosted most graciously by Conrad Grebel University College, a Mennonite foundation and part of the University of Waterloo, Ontario. This series of Conferences began in Canberra in 2000, when amongst those attending had been Elizabeth Harbottle and Michael Butler, then members of CCOA's Executive Committee. They had issued an invitation to hold the second Conference in the UK and Albert Jewell chaired the organising committee with MHA as the main sponsor. As I was succeeding Albert at MHA, I became part of that committee, thus beginning a connection with these conferences which has lasted on and off for two decades.

The aim is to bring together academics, researchers, pastoral practitioners and older people themselves in order to explore the intersections between ageing and spirituality. The outcomes always look to practical ways of better understanding and supporting the later lives of older people and improving pastoral practice. This latest conference saw around 130 people attending, and while the vast majority were from the USA, Canada, UK and

Australia it was good to also have folk from Norway, Germany, Switzerland and Uganda.

Four keynote speakers had been invited to offer the main framework of the conference. The first was Ellen Idler from the Sociology Department of Emory University, Atlanta who took as her title, *Religion as a Social Determinant of Health in Old Age?* It's an area that Idler has researched for over 30 years, taking data sets from around the USA and beyond and looking at subsets within them for evidence of the differences that belonging to a faith community can make.

Her approach was outlined on one of her slides, quoting a UN source as saying, "*The dominant paradigm in public health today says that population health is largely determined by the circumstances in which people live...*" To this she added, "*Our contention is that religious communities are among those 'circumstances' for billions of people around the world, and religious institutions are among those 'wider set of forces'.*"

I had heard Professor Idler speak before but I still find her data astonishing, whether it be on the links between religious festivals and the postponement of dying,¹ or her more recent study of an American sample of 18,000 people aged 50+ which showed that, compared with respondents who said they never attended religious services, those who attended weekly or more often were **40% less likely to have died** over a 10-year period, even when health and demographic status were adjusted.² Idler concluded with

¹ American Journal of Sociology, vol 97 no 4 1992, 1052-79

² <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0189134>

a look at the effects of secularization and the Covid-19 pandemic, the latter of which she pointed out had excluded from gatherings those who were most vulnerable but, also, likely to gain most benefit from attending.

The second keynote speaker was Dr Kathryn Mannix from the UK. Following a career in palliative care she has embarked on a campaign to improve the public understanding of dying and death and her address *The Forgotten Wisdom: Why it matters that we can talk about dying* was a moving and powerful account of how this might be achieved. Some will be familiar with Mannix's approach from the experiences she shared in her book *With the End in Mind*,³ and some of these formed the basis of her lecture.

In my time at MHA I worked hard to change the culture around dying and death within the aged care sector, and I had suggested inviting Kathryn to be a speaker and she did not disappoint! She used the story of Sabine (p15ff in her book) which is a powerful account of how the rediscovery of the forgotten wisdom of shared knowledge around how dying happens can help everyone, and she offered the vision of creating a 'village' of open sharing as a means to the end of changing the culture. Her concluding slide was a challenge to reclaim the D-words and a reminder that no one else will do it for us.

The third keynote speaker was Susan McFadden, Professor Emerita of Psychology at the University of Wisconsin, whose

³ *With the End in Mind: Dying, Death and Wisdom in an Age of Denial*, William Collins, 2017

title was *Dementia and Faith Communities: Reasons for Hope*. McFadden has been working in the area of Dementia since the 1980s, and her use of the word 'hope' focused on the role faith communities can play, particularly in the earlier stages of the dementia journey. She also emphasised Malcolm Goldsmith's contention that those living with a diagnosis of dementia should make a spiritual plan alongside other aspects of forward planning. McFadden referred finally to the work of Beate Steller, another contributor to the Conference, whose book *Meditations for Older People* underlines the place of gratitude in later life.

The final keynote speaker was Dr Kathy Absolon, a member of the Anishinaabe peoples, one of the indigenous groups native to the area around Waterloo. Her approach was different – arranging the seating in a circle, walking around the space and carrying precious objects from her tradition – as she shared the stories of her life and community illustrating her title, *Carrying the Lantern: An Anishinaabe Experience*. Central to her story were the different experiences of three generations of her family, and how their understanding of birth and death shapes their intergenerational identity.

Absolon's mother and grandparents experienced the trauma of what she calls colonial violence as her mother was taken from her parents and sent to an Indian residential school. Here she received many negative stereotypes of her community such that, like many of her contemporaries, her mother married a white British man, thinking that such a marriage would make her more respectable. Absolon's tradition honours elders as the

carriers of knowledge and tradition and views ageing as belonging to the whole life course, and she herself is committed to the recovery of the nature traditions which had been torn away from her.

Alongside the plenary sessions, the Conference included concurrent sessions of paper presentations and workshops which covered a huge range of topics based on research and practical experience. What stands out though is the opportunities afforded to experience input from a variety of faith traditions, nationalities and backgrounds. It was good to hear, for example, a Muslim perspective on Assisted Dying as well as a Buddhist experience of Dementia Care, and the sessions also saw contributions from our visitors from Norway, Germany and Uganda.



College Chapel window – a space for all spiritualities.

The final strand of the Conference was the Field Trips, organised to offer interaction with local projects and people. Two of the trips were to familiar types of institutions

– a hospice and a centre for innovation in ageing – whereas the other two visits showcased uniquely local work. One was a visit to Crow Shield Lodge, www.crowshieldodge.com, a centre for reconciliation and healing based on indigenous teaching and the seven Grandfather Teachings of respect, truth, wisdom, honesty, humility, courage, and love. The visit I went on was to a Mennonite Church where we shared food and explored Old Order Mennonite Spirituality with a researcher and an older couple. We could have spent many hours in their company exploring a tradition very different from our own, and I was particularly struck by echoes of Lars Tornstam's work on gerotranscendence in what they shared of their own spiritual tradition.

As with most conferences, the best thing was being there, along with the informal interactions over coffee or meals. I was also cheered by the presence of a new generation of researchers and practitioners which is emerging to carry on the work from those whose contributions have graced these International Conferences so far. We shared lots of insights and initiatives which highlighted the importance of choice, dignity and spirituality in later life, but I have come away with one nagging feeling – that while the arguments for taking ageing seriously and placing the need for care and support of elders higher up everyone's agenda are largely won, the challenge of making sense - to and for the older person - of the meaning of extreme frailty remains. Perhaps it always will.

This must remind us of the necessary humility we all need as we seek to explore and advocate for what I often refer to as a new story of ageing.

Church in the post-pandemic era: guidelines for leaders

American research from Duke University was based on interviews and surveys with 100+ clergy and church volunteers in 20 states and multiple denominations. It has led to recommendations to pastoral leaders on how to help people live in the new era of ministry ushered in by the effects of COVID19.

- Recognise that things have changed – embed some of the new practices found during the pandemic.
- Recalibrate previous habits and rituals – invite and include more people with wider needs but also gifts, both digitally and in-person.
- Re-imagine the use of resources – explore greater recycling and repurposing of resources to reduce carbon.
- Try new forms of collaboration – rebalance lay and clergy workloads to avoid overwhelming either leadership group.
- Focus on mental well-being – family belonging and intergenerational care are precious roles for the church.
- Confront injustice – in ways it has come more to the fore recently, such as poverty, gender, race, age.
- Craft new stories for the future – dream with your congregation about a new 'big picture', rooted in faith and practice of the past.

Reference: Faith & Leadership newsletter, March 2023.

See <https://faithandleadership.com/>

Later life faith and spirituality – Editor's reflection

In May, a friend of mine was commissioned as an Anna Chaplain for the parish in which we both worship, along with two others commissioned for their parishes in our deanery. As our Rector is Area Dean, he had been asked to conduct the service and preach. Because he knew of my interest in later life spirituality, and in the Anna Chaplaincy movement, he asked me to be 'interviewed' as part of his sermon. We agreed he would ask me to suggest three key points which we could then discuss for a few moments.

I made some brief remarks about how older adults carry on learning and developing, and especially in their faith and spiritual lives. We all go on learning, mostly from life, and especially as Christians from our life with God and with others in faith communities.

What did I think were particular dynamics of spirituality in later life? I had decided my three points would be: reflection, maturity and legacy.

1. The most important learning we do is to know ourselves better – who we are in God, and in God's kingdom. Older people can find themselves reflecting on this, considering the 'narrative' or the story of their lives. So, it's helpful to have opportunities to talk and reflect with others. This builds and clarifies our understanding, and combats loneliness and rumination (overthinking). Faith communities,

families, carers and visitors such as Anna Chaplains can help with this.

2. Maturity and wisdom can be features of later spirituality. Psychologists refer to individuation, a term for the coming together and rounding out of our personalities (contrary to the popular stereotypes of later life). In my research, many reported getting more tolerant of others because they had learned to accept their own weaknesses and failings; they were also more interested in others, to compare their life experience. God can help us grow in these ways if we are open to it. It's also an antidote to regret (concerning our 'unlived life', or mistakes) if we can accept the one life we've lived and the choices we made.

3. It's said we have an older age-related urge to 'give back' – to leave a legacy (beyond material things) to the world, to younger generations. Known as generativity, this includes, for example, grand-parenting, mentoring, giving time and resources, supporting causes and missions. What is God putting on your heart – your gifts to the world now and in future? This can be part of a practice of gratitude. *But* beware of busy-ness and having an over concern with being useful. It is a challenge to accept that *being* is part of *doing* in later life. We are loved by God for who we are.

It was a good challenge to me to limit myself to three main things. Feedback over the ensuing tea was positive!
What would you say about later life faith and spirituality?

Joanna Walker

The Pilgrims' Friend Society has been asking the question: *How do we prepare for a great old age?*

For the answer, the Society commissioned YouGov to ask some key questions about how people in mid-life (aged 40-60, for the purposes of this work) are preparing for later life (say, 70+). The results can be viewed via their website: www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk/news-views/ **Louise Morse** has also written helpfully on their website about the findings, with Christians and faith communities in mind, and below is a brief snapshot of her article:

She starts by observing that some Christians have thought about dying but not so much about living in old age. She suggests two reasons for this: "One is that we have no experience of our own old age so can't 'see' ourselves as old, and the other is that we push away the notion because we have such negative views of it." She encourages us to imagine how God views older age – as times of harvest, wisdom, and of offering balance and care to others.

We are to expect continuing spiritual growth and intimacy with God, and understand that there is a plan and calling for the whole of life. She recommends a 'check on your soul', so that negative, hurtful or anxious thoughts and memories do not spoil our relationships. Also, to allow ourselves to be helped and supported when necessary. She advises investing in family and friends now, and to exercise trust by stepping fully into God's path for you. (For full article see website as above.)

Christians on Ageing

Annual Conference, 20th September,

10am – 4.15pm *Free online event*

Challenging Exclusion in a Harsh Environment

A programme involving speakers, groups and our famous lunch-time interactive session is still open for booking. Following one of COA's ongoing issues of interest, 'cherished, not forgotten', we focus this year on exclusion and some particular ways in which older people can be affected.

The morning sessions will be given over to an in-depth look at the Archbishops' Report '*Care and Support Reimagined*'. Will Fremont-Brown from Lambeth Palace will lead us through the key ideas and how the Report is being used. What do we think and what can we contribute as Christians and Church members? There will be opportunity to comment and discuss.

Our lunch-time interactive session has a musical theme. Inês Delgado will lead a short workshop on music meditation, exploring activities that mindfully inspire the creative mind. This element of the conference worked so well last year when we experienced storytelling. Grab your lunch and join in!

The afternoon sessions will look at two aspects of 'older people on the margins'. Nicola Cadet of Sheffield Hallam University will share her research on behalf of HM

Inspectorate for Probation that highlights the experience and life-outcomes for older people who find themselves involved with the justice system and on probation. COA has had a longstanding interest in older prisoners and are pleased to offer this less well-known area of concern.

The second afternoon session will address a recent development in a more established source of exclusion – social isolation in later life. Emily Kenwood will share the work of 'Time to Talk Befriending'. As in previous years, the conference will end with an overall reflection and a chance to discuss prospects and ideas for the future.

Do come and join us online. Contact secretary@christiansonageing.org.uk or ring her on 07774 935905. Visit www.christiansonageing.org
Book directly at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/challenging-exclusion-in-a-harsh-environment-tickets-676673788517>



Photo: Centre for Ageing Better

Book Review:



Journeying together: Accompanying people with dementia Joseph D Cortis & Pia Matthews, 2023. Redemptorist Publications, Paperback £11.95

COA's chairman writes "This is a personal story and review of a book whose time has come. An excellent resource for all those who are on the long road that is the illness Dementia."

My name is Lesley Pitchford [Rev] and my husband, David suffered from this awful degenerative condition for ten years, between 2012 and 2022. Our journey was a long struggle to get support and practical advice as we battled with the realities of personal loss and suffering. Thankfully, David was enabled to remain at home for the duration of the illness. Brief episodes of 'respite care' did not inspire us to seek long term residential or nursing care.

I'm very thankful indeed that I was able to do this, thanks to my nursing qualification and good family support. However, no one is invincible (only God!) and I eventually suffered from extreme exhaustion, which finally brought forth a long-awaited response from Social Services and - at last - funding for residential care at home. We then were able to assemble a care team, and receive practical ongoing support from a long-awaited Admiral Nurse, Occupational therapy and, occasionally, District nurses.

We were also truly blessed to receive further support from a Marie Curie Dementia nurse specialist. And a local Hospice (Skanda Vale) provided much needed socialisation for both of us, and respite care together, which was an amazing gift.

I mostly covered the nights. David had a hospital bed and I was blessed that he was a very good sleeper. It was precious time in many ways "Love truly does bear all things". But, it is God who upheld us 'In all the changing scenes of life', as the hymn states. I truly believe that God, who is our refuge and strength, enabled us to keep going.

Indeed, the book we are reviewing is also written from a Christian perspective and, as people of faith, we can truly testify to the all-encompassing power of the everlasting arms of our Saviour, Jesus and give thanks for His great love, through the dark and difficult times. This book, with a foreword by the Rt Rev. Marcus Stock, Bishop of Leeds, is an excellent handbook, providing support, advice and information for those dealing with dementia.

It is a very good resource, providing much detailed information, supported by dialogue from real life situations. The book was 'birthed' by Caritas Leeds, whose motto is '*Faith through loving service*'. The group identified very helpfully with the presence of dementia in our society and the challenges it brings to all concerned.

Journeying Together focuses on listening and then providing ways in which needs can be communicated and responded to appropriately - with practical and spiritual

support. Reflecting on our own situation, the very worst aspect of the illness for us was the massive change that occurred socially, physically and mentally. Having no one to turn to and ask was truly devastating. At that time, no support whatsoever was provided after diagnosis.

The book approaches the subject in helpful sections:

- Our story - real life reporting
- Sharing - good communication; what matters to you?
- Living well with dementia - practical advice
- Dealing with vital issues of paperwork - Power of Attorney etc
- Legislation
- Practical spirituality - Church 'at home '
- The Sacraments - home visits from clergy
- Becoming a Dementia Friendly Diocese
- Concluding reflections.

I was much blessed to read this book and see how a community can really make a difference. As we say in our family: "That's just what Jesus would do!"

**Lesley
Pitchford**



Photo: Unsplash

Book Review:



Dementia and Ethics Reconsidered,

Julian Hughes, 2023. Open University Press, Maidenhead. 285 pages Paperback £23.99

This is a scholarly, caring and informative book. It comes from Julian Hughes who is a loved and appreciated authority with a unique experience as an ethicist with training in philosophy, politics and economics, medicine and psychiatry. With a formidable academic record, he has practiced as a clinical Old Age Psychiatrist and is a world leader in the field.

This book aims to be accessible and understandable to the full range of people with interest in living with dementia: 'from people living with dementia to practitioners'.

There are 32 short chapters – starting with explanations of ethics and ethical theories – essential to most of us who have barely a clue. Equipped with this knowledge we are taken through an exhaustive exploration of considerations relating to the care and support of people with dementia. This is done with care and respect. It demonstrates just how much the presence of dementia intrudes into the lives of individuals, their families and those who seek to help and advise them. There is reference to relevant legislation in this country and elsewhere. It is a humbling journey.

Chapters are richly referenced. The early chapters I would suggest are compulsory reading. Readers would probably

find best benefit from studying later chapters on individual topics as they become relevant.

'Dementia-Friendly Churches' are now encouraged. This book asks for a thorough, well-grounded approach to dementia and those living and working with it, in all aspects of our lives. Travelling this journey with a Christian faith, or faith of another persuasion or none, will be strengthened and made safer.

This book is one of a series: 'Reconsidering Dementia' edited by Keith Oliver and Dawn Brooker, which are to be recommended.

David Jolley, *Chair of Christians on Ageing. Formerly Consultant Psycho-Geriatrician and Honorary Professor of Psychiatry*

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Conference calls with Christians on Ageing: October and November 2023

Completing the series of Conference calls for the year, we have two extremely interesting topics:

October 17th: Reverend Ben Boland: *Jesus' love in the midst of age and dementia: A practical Christian ministry* with older people and people living with dementia.

Ben is a pastor and chaplain working in aged care in Australia. This will be our first Conference Call linking with Australia. Much to be learned – and hope the technology works.

November 15th: Professor Julian Hughes: *Ethics and dementia: A Christian Perspective*

Julian Hughes is a Professor and Consultant Old Age Psychiatrist at The University of Bristol. He is an appreciated authority with a unique experience as an ethicist with training in Philosophy, Politics and Economics, medicine and psychiatry, practice as a clinical Old Age Psychiatrist and with a formidable academic record. He is the world leader in the field. His recent book is already acknowledged as a classic: *Dementia and Ethics Reconsidered* by Julian Hughes. Open University Press,

Conference calls have been offered by Christians on Ageing since the Covid years taught us the power and value of Zoom. They are free, though we hope people will consider joining Christians on Ageing. Each session runs for 90 minutes from 10.30am to 12 midday. There is a presentation of 30-45 minutes by an expert/enthusiast on a topic and this is followed by participants sharing comments on views and experiences. Summaries of previous presentations and discussions are available on the Christians on Ageing website.

Conference Calls are open to all and are free via a Zoom link which is provided nearer the date of the Call.

Register your interest by e-mail: discussion@ccoa.org.uk

New Membership Initiatives: Update

An update about the three new benefits for Christians on Ageing members announced in 'plus', Summer 2023:

The second gathering of the online discussion forum for members *Culture Club* will take place between 1.30 and 3 pm on Friday, November 3rd. We'll talk about the film to be released in early October starring Michael Caine and Glenda Jackson *The Great Escaper*, based on the true-life story of a British World War II veteran who broke out of his nursing home to attend the 70th anniversary D-Day commemorations in France in 2014. *The Guardian's* film editor, who will have interviewed Michael Caine about his role in the film before its release, will be joining us.

At that gathering, we'll also be asking for attenders' suggestions of other films, TV or radio programmes, works of literature or art which depict older people and their lives in an interesting way which we might discuss at future meetings. If you would like to take part, contact Barbara Stephens, CoA's Honorary Secretary, at secretary@christiansonageing.org.uk or at Christians on Ageing, 23 Nelson Street, Ryde PO33 2EZ. Members without access to a smartphone or computer can join in over the phone.

As members have been finding it difficult to cut their contributions for *Meet The Members* and *The Older Person Who has Inspired Me*, we have decided to extend the word-limit to 500 words. For *Meet the Members*, we are looking for background information about you, but

especially the activities involving churches and older people with which you have been involved over the years, and your thoughts about the place of older people in the life of the church.

In *The Older Person Who Has Inspired Me*, we're looking to celebrate older people whose actions and attitudes have had a special influence on members. Do think about who that might be and just what it is about them that has so impressed you. For more information and/or to submit an article, please contact Marion Shoard at marion@marionshoard.co.uk or at P O Box 195, Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 9EF.



Source: Centre for Ageing Better, Icon collection

Christians on Ageing Publications

Dying and death - Gerry Burke	£3.00
Faith in the Third Age – Dr. Michael J Lewis	£2.50
Growing dementia-friendly churches – Rev Gaynor Hammond	£3.00
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