

plus

CHRISTIANS on AGEING
a Christian voice for older people

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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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Editorial

Welcome to the autumn issue of 'plus', As the summer warmth retreats and the equinox approaches, the start of a new learning year brings fresh delights.



But first, and with much sadness, we report at greater length on our recent past Chairman, Dr David Jolley, who died in May. Our current Chairman, Keith Albans has put together a fulsome tribute, based on reflections from various sources, painting a vivid picture of a man of energy, passion and care. We miss him.

'Ageing as Adventure' is a notion that I'm sure David would have liked. It was the theme of an international conference at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in March, and was the brainchild of Canadian academic, William Randall, alumnus of 'Emma' as the college is affectionately known. In his visiting term, William organised and hosted a three-day multi-disciplinary event, illustrating an approach to ageing that calls for *growing older*, rather than just *getting older*. I am grateful for his permission to abridge his keynote paper. If you'd like to see more about the papers, visit www.williamrandall.com/ageing-conference-uk-march-2024.html

I'm also grateful to Charles Kwaku-Odoi, of the Caribbean & African Health Network, and his colleagues, for providing an article on the work of CAHN that relates to older people. Charles had been invited by David Jolley to advise CoA's Board of Trustees on these and related matters. Do have a look at CAHN's website to appreciate the range and contexts of their work on health.

I was taken, in later summer, by reading about 'Ordinary Time' which is a liturgical term for the stretch of Sundays between the major Church seasons. Depending on the timing of Easter, it is mostly marked between Pentecost and the beginning of Advent – that's quite a lot of Sundays! I gained permission to reproduce the article 'Be steadfast and vigilant in Ordinary Time' from Duke University's newsletter *Faith and Leadership*. I had seen connections between this time of year and the time of later life that maybe seems less exciting, but one in which spiritual growth can still be sought and found.

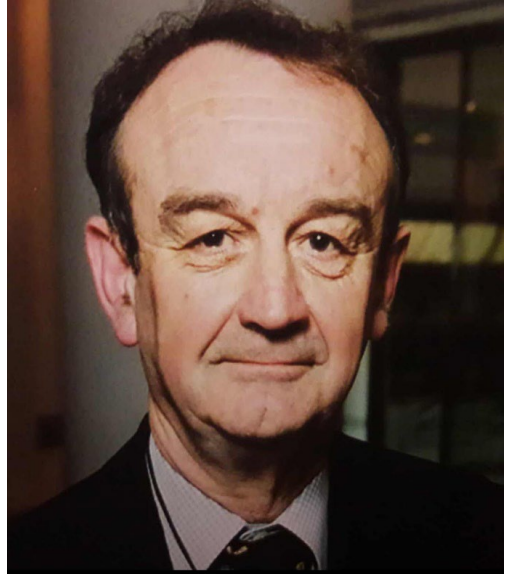
This year's Paris Olympics was also time to remember July 1924 as the 100-year anniversary of the Olympics in that same city – and immortalised for many as the scene of Eric Liddell's famous victory. Less known is the organisation and activities that have been set up in his name, to pursue his life values of care and compassion. The Eric Liddell Community has elder care, especially for those living with dementia, at its heart. I'm also taking this historic opportunity to share a family story – see what you make of it!

Joanna Walker, Editor

David Jolley (1944-2024)

Former Chair of Christians on Ageing

It was a privilege for me, along with several other CoA Trustees, to attend the service of thanksgiving for David's life which was held in June at Altrincham Methodist Church. A large congregation was treated to hear tributes to David from family, friends and professional colleagues, and to receive a copy of David's own reflections on a long life well lived. In putting together this tribute I am drawing on Claire Hilton's Guardian obituary, which was written in consultation with David's widow, Sue, as well as on David's own words, and some reflections written by Professor Peter Coleman. In it all it is clear why David (or Dave as many knew him) was held in such high regard and will be greatly missed.



David was born in Wolverhampton and went to the local Grammar School before qualifying in medicine at Guy's Hospital in London. His first job, in 1969, was as a house physician at St Mary's Hospital on the Isle of Wight, but by the following year he was training in psychiatry at the University Hospital of South Manchester, and in 1975 he was

appointed as a consultant psychiatrist there, with responsibility to provide services for older people. This was one of the first dedicated old age psychiatry services in the UK – and David was one of the first 'psycho-geriatricians', as Peter Coleman recalls.

"They formulated new and better ways of caring especially for the increasing numbers of older people suffering from dementia as well as providing more effective support for their family carers in times of difficulty. It was in this period that I first got to know David while I was conducting a research project for the DHSS on the impact of these new services on improved collaboration in the care of elderly people with mental infirmity, as his South Manchester service had been one of those selected for investigation. In subsequent years, he helped me in other ways, generously providing placements within his service for health and social services senior staff who were undertaking advanced training on the university courses I ran and who needed to learn more about this new approach to care. The encouragement and optimism he conveyed about improving the quality of care was infectious."

David's reflections on this period in Manchester reveals his enthusiasm and his willingness to learn and collaborate in what was a new field. *"The essence of our approach was to work with what we had and knew, and with families and other services. Magical improvements could be achieved with treatments for depression and some other 'functional' disorders, but for people with dementia, the long-established principles of good practice – caring, following up and supporting to the end – were our armoury. These principles remain the real strengths we have to offer, whatever problems we and our patients are faced with. All this mapped easily with my personal beliefs."*

What David began, at Withington Hospital, expanded as new services began in North and Central Manchester, Salford, Stockport and elsewhere. In addition, those he had worked with moved on to Sheffield, Nottingham and Birmingham and so the work spread and gained a national and international reputation – serving as a model for similar ventures. The relationship between the NHS and the University of Manchester developed bringing new academic and clinical roles into being. David also contributed to national policy and practice and decision-making on old age psychiatry through writing academic papers, advising various NHS trusts and by sitting on a number of committees. This included the Royal College of Physicians' working party on services for older people with mental disorders, of which he was secretary in 1989, and as chair of the section for old age psychiatry at the Royal College of Psychiatrists (1990-94).

In 1995 David described a call – both literal and metaphorical – to begin to work with the services in his hometown of Wolverhampton. They had been without a consultant psycho-geriatrician and called on David's expertise and experience but, following a number of visits to offer advice and encouragement, he arranged a secondment for two days per week and by the end of the year he had become their full-time consultant and, later, Medical Director of Wolverhampton NHS Community and Mental Health Trust and Honorary Professor at the University of Wolverhampton. In all of this he travelled daily from Altrincham except when on call!

During David's time in Wolverhampton the West Midlands Dementia Centre (Dementia Plus) was established with him

as its Director, providing training and encouragement to both professionals and lay folk, and contributing to research and forging links with other organisations including Dementia UK and Dementia Pathfinders. Writing in the *Journal of Dementia Care*, Dawn Brooker and Kate Read are unequivocal in their estimation of David's contribution.

"The field of dementia care would not be the same place without his influence. He was a passionate communicator both in his prolific writing, conference presentations and discussions. He had the rare ability to boil very complex ideas down to their essence so they could be understood and appreciated. There are countless professionals, students and trainees that have had the benefit of Dave's encouragement to take a stance to do the 'right thing' or to write articles, undertake their research or to speak at conferences."

In his reflections, David recognises the physical toll which the travel and workload took out on his body, and after encountering heart problems he retired from full-time NHS work in 2003, Nevertheless he continued part-time in various posts in Staffordshire and Greater Manchester, including as an honorary consultant at Willow Wood hospice in Ashton-under-Lyne (2010-15) and as a locum at Wythenshawe hospital (2015-17). From 2006 to 2022 he was an honorary reader in old age psychiatry at the University of Manchester.

Away from work David found time and energy to immerse himself in his local community in a number of ways, three of which were particularly dear to his heart. In 2014, he became honorary secretary of the Friends of John Leigh

Park in Altrincham, and organisation which he describes as “a resistance movement to the threatened aviary in the park.” He participated in many activities in the park, including daily maintenance of that aviary and leading weekly health walks for the public, and was recognised by everyone because of his iconic purple wheelbarrow! Earlier this year he was made a Freeman of Altrincham in recognition of his contribution.

Another community was his local church (Altrincham Methodist Church) where he and Sue were married in 1985. He fulfilled a number of roles and was part of several activities as well as helping out as Assistant Steward and Worship Leader at Bowdon Vale Chapel.

And David's third community was of course Christians on Ageing, to which he was introduced in 2018 by Albert Jewell. He was elected Chair in 2019 and served us faithfully and with typical dedication until illness forced him to step down in September 2023. David's time as Chair coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic, forcing him to find new ways of enabling CoA to continue with its work. One particularly successful innovation was the monthly Conference Calls which enabled members and others to engage with a particular topic, area of research or practical work. Many of these discussions have been profound and enlightening and have brought us into contact with people working both in the UK and abroad. David was also keen to reach out to other Christian charities working with older people, and brought new blood into CoA and its executive committee.

David's obituary refers to his dedication, energy, humility and humanity which inspired many people in his profession. Those same qualities were obvious to us within CoA, and Peter Coleman noted that David was someone who *"had a way of encouraging people to contribute more than they had thought feasible."* He was also someone who brought his academic and medical insights to the still-too-often overlooked area of the spiritual and religious needs of older people.

One of David's final gifts to us was the open and honest way in which he faced his illness and terminal diagnosis which came in May 2023. The use of Zoom meant that he was able to join in meetings without having to travel and it was a privilege to have him join in our AGM just 3 weeks before his death.

David is survived by his second wife, Sue, and their daughters, Emily and Sarah; three children, Ben, Kate and Esther, from his first marriage to Janis O'Connor, which ended in divorce in 1984; two grandchildren; and his brother, Malcolm.

The final words belong to David, written in February this year as part of what he called "A Life in his own words." He writes, *"Grateful for all of this, and content to know this life on Earth has a beginning and an end. The rest is mystery – but assured by experience and the wisdom of centuries."*

May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

Keith Albans, Chair of Christians on Ageing

Ageing as Adventure

Professor William Randall, St Thomas University, New Brunswick. Paper (abridged) presented to the *Ageing As Adventure* conference, Emmanuel College Cambridge, March 2024.

I've long been interested in metaphors and one in particular: life as a story. Over an academic career that followed some years in ordained ministry, I have developed a 'narrative perspective' on later life. A key characteristic of being human is to make meaning from our experience of events and circumstances, which we do by creating stories that explain ourselves to ourselves. My field of narrative gerontology brings together insights from the social sciences and the humanities to explore the *inside* of the ageing process, rather than its external features that are observed by other studies.

Narrative gerontology focuses on how these 'self-stories' change with time and our experience of greater age. We may find ourselves unknowingly subscribing to a particular storyline about ageing itself, often embedded in the culture we inhabit. However, the internal dynamics of later life can be seen more clearly when we focus on biographical (rather than biological) ageing – everyone's unique story. We can open a space for seeing ageing as a positive, even creative process, over which we can wield considerable authorship: not just *getting* old but actively and intentionally *growing* old.

However, grasping the possibilities involved in choosing how we 'story our lives' is not without challenge. The cultural narrative of decline by which ageing is perceived can be difficult to resist and may lead to a sense that our story is effectively coming to an end, and that new chapters are not likely to open up despite our lives continuing. Such a 'narrative foreclosure' can occur early on – we retire from a career that defined our identity, or family roles change significantly, and our story loses key sources of support. Whilst the decline dimensions of later life and its troubles cannot be denied, they need not be the whole story. We have the option to re-imagine, to reframe, to 're-genre-ate'; to shift from a rhetoric of decline to one of discovery or adventure.

What could such adventure consist of and how can it be pursued? Put simply, I'm thinking of adventure as venturing outside our comfort zone, whether emotionally, physically, psychologically or existentially, and towards some goal or destination. It could be any experience, planned or otherwise, that takes us into unfamiliar territory. So, I'm not talking here about sky-diving or hiking in the Himalayas, as feature in some versions of gero-tourism and ideas of 'successful ageing'. Such off-the-chart activities might well inspire some to rise up and try for the full bucket-list, but there are less expensive, less dangerous, deeper and more fulfilling adventures to be had in later life. I wish to propose four types or avenues to pursue: the adventure **outward**, adventure **backward**, adventure **inward** and adventure **forward**.

I see these movements not in any necessary order but often concurrent, since movement in one direction will usually

lead to or involve movement in another. I'm also envisioning some kind of forum or support network that will enable people to listen and discuss openly each other's adventures, offering encouragement and mentoring. The key to adventure is an element of unpredictability (risk and reward), anticipation and anxiety, and the possibility of failure. As with any story worth telling, there needs to be some 'trouble' to overcome. Conveniently, ageing brings all manner of potential trouble to complicate the plot, but it's because of this widened horizon that we learn and grow, and that ageing can be seen as adventure.

The adventure outward – widening our world

The adventure outward is perhaps the most obvious way in which retirement and later life are seen as facilitating a greater range of interests and activities to broaden our horizons. We may become acquainted with sides of ourselves we previously barely knew existed and find the plot of our lives thickening. (Jung refers to this sort of 'filling out' of our personality as individuation.) Our perspective on life as a whole can be gradually transformed in ways not anticipated in our busy middle-years – for example, by physical endeavour, social engagement or an intellectual or artistic project. With each such venture, we introduce new subplots, new themes and new characters into the stories we are and, thereby, into our self-understanding.

The adventure backward – probing our past

By the adventure backward, I mean examining our past which is composed of countless, multi-layered stories. In the library of our lives we have stories both large and small,

short and long, as well as shareable and 'shadow' ones. Furthermore, the past is not fixed but continually shifting inside of us, because we view it through the lens of the present and in the light of the futures we both hope for and fear. The process of reviewing our life is a developmental task in later life but also a narrative one. In the context of ageing as adventure, I would observe that it's useful to steer a middle path between overly positive visions and overly negative ones when looking both back and forward.

There are of course many strategies we can use for reviewing – keeping a journal, researching family history, seeing a counsellor, reminiscing with old friends, writing poetry or creating autobiographies. With or without the aid of a good listener, there are discoveries to be made and patterns to discern. There may also be dark corners to investigate, traumas and regrets to acknowledge, and new understandings to apply to old puzzles – all contributing to putting a life story together.

The adventure inward – discovering our depth

The adventures outward and backward will no doubt bring us face to face with the 'philosophic homework' of later life. It may push us at last to wrestle with the big questions of our existence (such as where have I come from, where am I going and who am I in the meantime?). Now with the possibilities of good listeners and fellow travellers of our own age, such ponderings are more feasible than at earlier stages, although 'knowing thyself' is never an easy task. For some, this can involve reconnecting with (or reviewing) whatever spiritual or philosophic tradition we were raised

with and experiencing its riches anew, with the benefit of layers of living now laid down inside us.

The point is, there is work to be done in later life, with inner, soul work as part of the story work. Jung talks of the 'duty and necessity' of such endeavours in the 'afternoon of life', to 'devote serious attention to oneself'. This inward turn, common to many spiritual/religious traditions, invites us to own up to inner contradictions, shadows and dreams. We can honour not only the lost selves and unlived lives within but, importantly, accept the many facets of the history that has flowed through us. This is the shift from 'role' to 'soul' that can enrich later life and ease its anxieties and regrets.

The adventure forward – facing our future

This adventure can have both political and personal elements. Many third and fourth agers are deeply concerned for future generations and the world they will inhabit, and are committed to doing what they can to secure societies worth living in and an earth worth inheriting. Some are on fire for peace and justice in a world that seems unable to sustain either. In the many ways that it is possible to pursue peace and justice, experiencing and expressing such generativity (as gerontology refers to such concerns) is vital to older people's continuing development.

The more personal, or hidden, aspect of the adventure forward involves more than ticking further items off the bucket list. It's about moving into the more contested territory of 'the transcendent horizon of the life story'. It's perfectly possible to embrace ageing as adventure

outward, backward and inward without giving much consideration to the end of the story. In narrative terms alone, let alone spiritual ones, every story needs the sense of an ending and a life story is no exception. But just as we are at liberty to story our lives in ways we wish, we are free to do the same with our death, despite the narratives of our cultures or immediate communities. What storyline do we wish to pursue?

This life, intricate as it is on every level, is but one chapter in a larger story of self or soul. In this chapter, we continue to learn, discover, evolve. Death is the end of our body, yes, but the story line may continue. It might be less of a termination than a transition – a doorway through which we walk into a larger room. So, the story we choose to pursue could be as much about infinitude as mortal finitude. Part of the forward adventure, then, is to re-imagine ageing as a 'near-ing death experience' and thereby grapple with how we want the story to end. Meanwhile, we can rise to the challenge of ageing more adventurously, embracing a more invigorating narrative of later life and embark more consciously on the outward, inward, backward and forward journeys.

*William L Randall, EdD, is Emeritus Professor of Gerontology at St Thomas University in New Brunswick, Canada, where he has regularly taught courses on Adult Development and Ageing, Counselling Older Adults, and Narrative Gerontology. He co-founded the journal **Narrative Works**, has organised international conferences called **Narrative Matters**, and authored or co-authored over 70 publications including ten books. This article has been abridged by 'plus' editor Joanna Walker, with the author's permission, See www.williamrandall.com*

Bridging Faith and Wellbeing: CAHN's Work with Older People and Faith Communities

The Caribbean & African Health Network (CAHN) is a Black-led organisation set up in 2017 in Greater Manchester to address long standing health disparities within our community. From humble grass roots beginnings with operations solely in Greater Manchester, we have grown to a national organisation leading the call to challenge and address the wider social determinants of health inequalities for people of Caribbean & African heritage. We work with, within and for the Black community and cross-sector organisations to build community resilience, equitable relationships, and a social movement to reduce health disparities and wider societal inequalities.

Our organisation's **vision** is to eradicate health inequalities and the wider disparities for Caribbean and African people in a generation.

Our **mission** is to ensure that the strategic and operational actions of service providers, across a range of health and cross-sector agencies and commissioners, lead to racial and social justice for Black people.

We seek to influence policy and practice to ensure equity and equality for the Black community.


During the course of our journey, we have rolled out programmes and services that meet the unique needs of Caribbean and African individuals, particularly those who are marginalised within broader healthcare systems. Some of these include:



Lead | Educate | Support | Advocate | Enhance

- Weekly health webinars on various health conditions and issues led by Black Healthcare professionals ^[1]_[SEP]
- Mental Health provision including a Black-led Counselling Provision ^[1]_[SEP]
- A Green & Arts Wellbeing Service ^[1]_[SEP]
- A Community Helpline ^[1]_[SEP]

CAHN recognises that health inequalities often become more pronounced with age, particularly for older adults in the Caribbean and African community. Many of them face long-term illnesses, mental health issues and barriers to accessing appropriate healthcare, such as language challenges and social isolation. A distrust of mainstream healthcare systems further exacerbates these issues. ^[1]_[SEP]To address this, CAHN provides tailored services for older people, often working in collaboration with faith communities. Churches and other places of worship,

central to these cultures, offer vital social and emotional support such as health screening led by our team of nurses and other allied health professionals. Through partnerships with faith leaders, CAHN ensures older adults receive both necessary care and empowerment in decision-making. 



Community Engagement through Faith groups

CAHN's collaboration with faith communities is a cornerstone of its work. Faith centres are often the hub of community life for older people, especially within Caribbean and African communities. Recognising this, CAHN has developed partnerships with churches, mosques etc to deliver health education, conduct health screenings, and offer advice on managing chronic conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular diseases: conditions that disproportionately affect Black populations.

We also run programmes targeted at faith leaders to increase their health literacy and offer of support to congregants. Churches and faith leaders often serve as trusted sources of information. This collaboration is essential in addressing health inequalities because it allows CAHN to meet people where they are, both physically and culturally. For older individuals, the church may be one of the few remaining social spaces where they feel safe and valued, making it an ideal environment for CAHN's interventions.

Advocacy Services: Giving Older People a Voice

One of CAHN's flagship services is its Advocacy Service, which supports individuals in navigating the healthcare and social services systems. This service is particularly relevant for older adults who may feel overwhelmed by the bureaucracy of health and social care, and who might face challenges such as language barriers, digital exclusion, and a lack of cultural competence from service providers. CAHN's Advocacy Service steps in to provide culturally aware and linguistically appropriate support, ensuring that older members of Caribbean and African communities can access the care and services they need.

This advocacy offer goes beyond healthcare navigation. It extends to advocating for better quality care in areas such as housing, social services, and legal support. Many older people in Black communities suffer from the double impact of ageing and racial discrimination, and CAHN's Independent Family and Advocacy Service is designed to address these dual barriers.

Mental Health and Wellbeing: A Holistic Approach

Another core aspect of CAHN's work with older people is the focus on mental health. The stigma around mental health in many Black communities often prevents individuals from seeking help, particularly older people who may be more accustomed to managing health issues within the family or faith community. CAHN addresses this through several initiatives, including a culturally tailored Counselling Service. Staffed entirely by Black counsellors, this service provides not only conventional therapeutic

support but also understands the importance of integrating cultural and religious beliefs into mental health care.

Many older people find comfort in knowing that their counsellors are not only professionals but also individuals who can relate to their lived experiences as members of the Caribbean or African diaspora. For those in faith communities, CAHN's counselling takes a faith-sensitive approach, recognising the role that spirituality often plays in healing and overall wellbeing.

For older individuals who are heavily involved in church life, the combination of faith and mental health care can be a powerful tool for improving emotional and psychological health. Counsellors are trained to be sensitive to religious perspectives, making sessions feel more aligned with the personal values of older clients. The service offers both high and low-intensity mental health support, making it accessible to people at different stages of need.

Addressing Social Isolation

Social isolation is a major issue among older adults, especially those who live alone or are cut off from family. Conscious of this challenge we run community events and programmes that encourage social interaction and support. For example, through Green & Arts Wellbeing Service, older adults are encouraged to engage in creative indoor and outdoor activities that improve both mental and physical health. These activities not only promote social connections but also provide a sense of purpose and joy, countering the loneliness that many elderly individuals face.

In conclusion, CAHN's holistic, culturally informed approach makes it an invaluable resource for older members of Caribbean and African communities. By integrating advocacy, mental health care and community-based interventions, CAHN ensures that older people are not left behind. Our work within faith communities further strengthens our ability to reach and support those who might otherwise remain underserved.

Authors: Percy Akudo, Oiza Ibrahim, Charles Kwaku-Odoi, Hyelni Mibwala.

CAHN
Caribbean & African Health Network



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Be vigilant and steadfast in Ordinary Time

James Wesley Dennis III, Associate Program Director, Leadership Education at Duke Divinity School

In a long season that lacks the spectacle found elsewhere in the liturgical calendar, we can find space to focus and grow, writes the associate program director for Leadership Education at Duke Divinity.

What does it mean to faith communities during this in-between season we call Ordinary Time? When I consider the rhythms of the liturgical calendar, Ordinary Time takes a back seat to the spectacle and grandeur of other holy seasons, like Advent, Christmas and Easter. There appears to be nothing significant to anticipate in this long, unbroken stretch. It seems mundane, pointing us to the routines of daily life.

In the rhythm of life, Ordinary Time can manifest in efforts that seem to go unnoticed and progress that feels stalled. Programs that once thrived may struggle for attendance. Ministry initiatives that gave meaning may now feel like mere obligations. Our prayers can feel hollow, sermons lack fire and interactions with the community can seem superficial.

But beneath the surface, the season can offer more than that.

Precisely in these stretches of 'ordinariness', we are challenged to find deep meaning and purpose in the everyday moments of Christian life and ministry rather than in the grand and grandiose. We serve in a culture that equates significance with spectacle, and perhaps Ordinary Time challenges the notion that meaning can be derived only from pivotal events or remarkable achievements.

This liturgical season reminds us of a profound truth: that the most transformative growth often emerges not from the dizzying heights of life's mountaintops but from the quiet, unassuming valleys that lie between them.

The warrior-king David knew something of finding the divine in the mundane. He writes in Psalm 23, "Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me" (Psalm 23:4 CEB). David invites us to cultivate a deeper awareness of God's presence daily, even in difficulty. Accomplishing that amid the ordinary requires us to do two things.

First, we must remain *vigilant*. Isn't it interesting that Ordinary Time coincides with summer activities and distractions? The allure of vacations, outdoor adventures and relaxation provides an escape from the monotony of this season. There are times when we need distractions as a respite from the demands and stresses of everyday life. However, when distractions become a constant escape from challenges and opportunities, they can be a barrier to our spiritual and personal growth.

Our faith is not a spectator sport. The powers of this world do not take a break during Ordinary Time; they continue to exert their influence. Without vigilance, these forces can slowly erode our communities and lead our lives into chaotic spirals. We must resist the temptation to disengage and instead be attentive and grounded in the present.

Second, we must be *steadfast*. There is something counterintuitive about Ordinary Time. While the other liturgical seasons display God's activity in the world in sudden and extravagant ways, Ordinary Time shows us that God is at work slowly as well. In this season, we realize that God's work can often be subtle and gradual. Just as a seed doesn't sprout into a full-grown tree overnight, God's plans for our lives and the world may take time to unfold.

It is here that Ordinary Time teaches us its most valuable lesson: our faith is not defined by a single event or season but is a daily commitment to the God who is patiently and persistently working behind the scenes of life's stage.

Being steadfast through Ordinary Time demands that we find solace in a journey of faith that is not always marked by visible triumphs and immediate results but often by the quiet, unseen work of the Spirit in the depths of our being. Here, we dig deeper to draw upon the reserves that have sustained us thus far. We are invited to embrace hope and choose to believe that the best is yet to come.

The season beckons us to resist the allure of constant stimulation and instead cultivate a keen awareness of the present moment. It invites us to find solace in the

extraordinary nature of the day-to-day and challenges us to unearth significance in the mundane.

In Ordinary Time, the resilience to navigate life's turbulence is not merely nurtured but fortified. By embracing it, we embark on a journey of revelation, discovering that the most profound truths often lie hidden in plain sight. Green, a colour synonymous with growth and vitality, adorns this liturgical season. Perhaps it is a reminder that our spirits can flourish and thrive even in the most unassuming times.

This article was first published in the newsletter *Faith & Leadership* www.faithandleadership.com from Duke University and reproduced with permission. See <https://faithandleadership.com/be-vigilant-and-steadfast-ordinary-time> See also [Link to author James Wesley Dennis III](#)

The Editor notes: Ordinary Time shares some common features with later life: it can be 'unspectacular'. It can demonstrate patient commitment and the work of the Spirit behind the scenes, finding significance and meaning in the everyday and rejoicing in the present moment.

The author Paula Gooder writes about an *Everyday God, the Spirit of the Ordinary* (2012: Canterbury Press). 'Ordinary' has more of the meaning of 'measured' rather than commonplace. It encourages us to benefit from practices – 'holy habits' – that will sustain our discipleship throughout life. It invites us to *ensure that our ordinary lives contain enough space within them for us to flourish.* (Gooder 2012, p8)

Eric Liddell Centenary – a legacy of care

*The editor writes, based on the website of **The Eric Liddell Community** and a personal history connection:*

One hundred years on from his iconic win at the Paris Olympics in 1924, The Eric Liddell Community is celebrating not only Eric's sporting success but also the lesser-known story of his life in China. His legacy was one of care and compassion.

In 1925 Eric returned to China to follow in his parents' chosen work to serve as a missionary teacher from 1925 to 1943. In 1941 life in China had become so dangerous due to the threat from the Japanese that the British government advised British nationals to leave. But Eric accepted a position at a rural mission station in Xiaozhang, which served the poor, staying on at the mission, continuing to do all he could to help people. The Japanese took over the station and, in 1943, Eric was interned with members of the China Inland Mission and many others.

Eric became a leader and organiser at the camp and busied himself by helping the elderly, teaching Bible classes at the camp school, arranging games and teaching science. But, exhausted and ill, malnourishment may have hastened his death. Eric died on 21 February 1945, five months before liberation.

A community in his name

The Eric Liddell Community is a charitable service provider and community hub that brings people together to enhance well-being and decrease loneliness. In particular, they support people living with dementia and their carers, as these can be amongst the most vulnerable groups and susceptible to isolation. *The Eric Liddell 100* programme has been a valuable way for the Community to publicise the values, compassion and integrity that shaped Eric's life. See <https://ericliddell.org/the-eric-liddell-100/>

Dementia care

A flagship Day Care service offers people living with dementia, and their families, activities and care in a stimulating environment, as well as chances for vital respite. It thereby enables people to stay in their homes for longer by improving their quality of life through good quality care and support.

A Carers' Service offers meaningful support through educational and fun activities for unpaid / informal carers. These include a wide range of free health, wellbeing and other courses that enable chances to meet, talk and take a short break. Additionally, there are joint activities for carers and the person they care for to do together, that may help to revive or sustain their relationship. Slightly longer carers' breaks (*Eric's Escapes*), wellbeing lunches, and a befriending service are available to support carers in their vital roles.

Housed in a former parish church, The Community also functions as a local hub, open six days a week, where anyone can join in clubs, concerts, projects and volunteer programmes (to help with the caring services and in the café). Spaces are available for hire for over 60 hours of regular classes for children and adults of all ages. This contributes to the vision for a community where no one feels isolated, but can learn and play, and meet and greet.

The Eric Liddell connection

Securing and celebrating the legacy of Eric Liddell for future generations has been a particular aim in 2024, making a link between his life and values, and The Community's aspirations for today. The way that Eric lived and died means that he had few belongings to pass on, so it is stories and documents that are his witnesses. Famously, the best-known account, the film '*Chariots of Fire*' concerned his Olympic participation in Paris, 1924.

On the basis of his devout faith, Eric dropped out of the 100-metre race – his strongest event – because the qualifying heats were scheduled for a Sunday. At the Games, he gained a bronze in 200-metres, and produced an amazing performance to win the 400-metres. Starting in the outside lane, Liddell sprinted out of the blocks and set such a speed that two others fell trying to keep up.¹ He won in a record time of 47.6 seconds, an Olympic and World record.

¹ Good accounts of the race, and all that led up to it, can be found in biographies mentioned on p30 of this article.



Photo: GB team at Opening ceremony, Paris Olympics 1924

Eric is remembered in many ways – as a sportsman, a husband and father, a devout soul who lived his life according to his beliefs, a graduate of Edinburgh University and a missionary in China who refused to leave those he looked after during the Second World War. If he had lived longer than his forty-three years, who knows what more he could have done. The Eric Liddell Community reflects Eric's code of ethics, to help and support those who need it and the people who look after them, in a spirit of community, inclusivity, diversity and generosity.

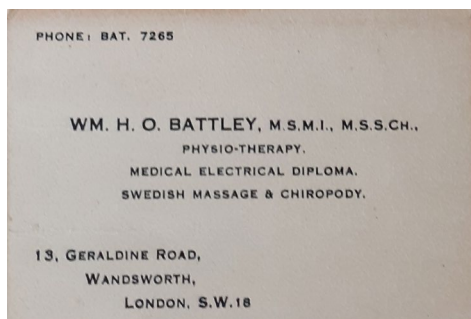
An unlikely connection

My grandfather, William Harold Battley (b.1883) was a second-generation member of the Plymouth Brethren. In the 1920's, as a young father, he worked as a postman in South London but had developed therapeutic skills in physiotherapy and

chiroprody, which he offered free to those who needed them as his Christian service. For instance, he followed the seasonal workers (hoppers) to Kent at harvest time to 'do their feet'. How on earth he made the connection, I do not know, but in 1924 he was taken as one of the masseurs with the GB national Olympic team to Paris!

We do know he was there, if not how, from the photos and memorabilia he brought back. We also believe he played a key part in the legend of the scripture that was passed to Liddell before the 400-metre race. In a couple of the biographies² I have read, the story goes like this:

As Eric was leaving his hotel on the morning of the race, one of the British team masseurs had pressed a folded note into his hand. Eric had thanked him and said he would read it later at the Stadium. Now, much later in the day, trying to keep calm whilst waiting in the heat of the dressing room, he read: *As the Old Book says, 'he that honours me I will honour'. Wishing you the best of success always.*



In the note, Eric recognised a version of 1 Samuel 2, v 30 and was encouraged to know that someone shared his conviction that the honour God gave was all that really mattered.

References: Hamilton, D (2016) *For the Glory: the life of Eric Liddell*; McCasland, D. (2012, 2nd edition) *Eric Liddell, Pure Gold*.



William H. Battley, with his family the following year, 1925, when they visited France all together. My father, Francis (b. 1916), is the elder boy at the bottom of the picture.

Sources:

www.ericliddell.org for text.
See website for many more pictures and references.

Photos: Personal archive



Opening ceremony Paris Olympics 1924

Culture Club: July 2024 Meeting Report

Marion Shoard, Trustee

Culture Club's meeting via Zoom on July 12th looked at the influence fictional characters from Shakespeare's *King Lear* to Victor Meldrew of the TV sitcom *One Foot in the Grave* may have had on the public's perception of older people. Just what might be the results of that portrayal on public perception of older people today?

Our otherwise light-hearted discussion took a serious turn when we remembered that it happened to be taking place at a moment in which public perception of the capabilities of older people had worldwide significance: pressure was building on Joe Biden to step down as a presidential candidate on the grounds that he was too old. On the face of it, this felt outrageously ageist. We wondered why Biden's supporters declined to say he might not be as quick as he once was but has the considerable advantage of experience and cool-headedness which a young whippersnapper could not match. At the same time, we noted concerns about Biden's current mental nimbleness at times when he seemed to be visibly impaired.

So, it seemed to us an important question: at what age does the public perceive that someone is too old to hold public office, and why? We were all well aware that the Bible tends to portray older people with respect and to empathise with their wisdom and their capabilities, even at a very advanced age. Today, gurus living on mountain-tops all seem to be old. But is the notion that advancing

years bring a valuable commodity – wisdom closely linked to experience – disappearing today? Is it less respected because we live in a fast-changing culture in which experience is devalued? Did the notion that older people were founts of wisdom depend on their rarity in the past: after all, the average age of death in Victorian Britain was 41 and a quarter of children died before they were five?

We contrasted the notion of the old as founts of wisdom with Shakespeare's "lean and slippered pantaloon", and later, in Jacques' seventh stage of man, "second childishness and mere oblivion, Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything". King Lear is foolish, not able even to compute the motivations of his three daughters.

TV sitcoms of the 20th century starting in the 1960s abound with negative (albeit often amusing) portrayals of older people – think of incontinent Godfrey, panicky Jones and paranoid Frazer in *Dad's Army*. We went on to wonder about the legacy of shows such as *One Foot in the Grave*, and *Til Death Us Do Part*, which may support malign stereotypes and suggest that increased levels of irritation inevitably accompany advancing years and that busybodies are bred from a lack of purpose.

What did *Last of the Summer Wine*, with its fond, cosy setting, its jokes about Compo's toothlessness and Nora Batty's stockings really say about the hopes, dreams and fears of elderly people? *Fawlty Towers* made fun of older people with a disability in ways which would be reprimanded today. A character who appears in one episode played by Joan Sanderson is ridiculed not just for her deafness but also for being a difficult old bird (in the

language of those days). However, the Major, a resident at Fawltly Towers, who is also deaf and has some cognitive impairment is treated more fondly – though remains a figure of fun.

Attender Heather Saint kindly screen-shared images of paintings by Rembrandt and Breughel and we contrasted the real interest Rembrandt showed in the character of the person behind the lined face, indeed their nobility with the caricatures of older people Breughel chose to deliver.

Charles Dickens could not be accused of ageism or of ridiculing older people, but at the same time he declined to flesh out his older characters as much as their younger protagonists – such as ‘the Aged P’ in *Great Expectations*. In Jane Austen, older people are little more than the controllers of the destinies of the young as repositories of family money (think Mr Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility*). We were reminded of 20th-century portrayals of groups of older people who bicker and annoy each other, as in Kingsley Amis’ *Ending Up* or Granny Trill and Granny Wallon in Laurie Lee’s *Cider with Rosie*, albeit based on Lee’s real-life childhood.

Against this background is the motif of the older person who startles the world by solving a crime, most famously Agatha Christie’s Miss Marple, but also Angela Lansbury in *Murder, She Wrote*, while in the Ealing comedy *The Ladykillers*, Mrs Wilberforce rumbles Alec Guinness’s band of nasty robbers before taking their cash to the police station. Assuming she is a stupid, naïve old lady, the police fail to believe her story, with the result that she keeps the money

and in turn seems set generously to share with those less fortunate than herself.

Richard Osman's hugely successful *Thursday Murder Club* mysteries of the 2020s carry on this genre after a fashion, though its amateur sleuths are treated with considerably more respect than Mrs Wilberforce. There's also the older gangster or spy who confounds everyone else by coming out of retirement to succeed in one last job – think George Smiley in John Le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*.

We also discussed the role of the dowager in real-life and fiction: the old, apparently dispossessed woman detached from the levers of power when displaced by her daughter-in-law as chatelaine. That's the theory, but attendees unanimously agreed that Maggie Smith's Dowager Countess remained firmly in control at *Downton Abbey*. What's more, she netted the best – and most withering – dialogue.

For the next meeting of Culture Club, on November 8th, we plan to turn our attention to how relationships between elderly parents and their children have been presented in works of art. Members' newsletters (the most recent circulated on August 24th) as well as the CoA website have put forward suggestions of films, TV programmes and fictional works you may wish to dip into beforehand.

To join any future meeting of Culture Club, please e-mail CoA's Honorary Secretary, Barbara Stephens, at secretary@christiansonageing.org.uk for the Zoom link.

Coming Events

Next CoA Conference Call

Wednesday 23rd October 2024, 10.30am:

Revd Dr Keith Albans will discuss *Ageing: The Unwanted Gift?* As the Christmas shopping season builds, consider with us the nature of an unwanted gift – and how things might be otherwise!

Drop a line to secretary@christiansonageing.org.uk to book onto the call, or register direct via this portal: <https://buytickets.at/christiancouncilonageing/1396170>

Dementia Congress: *Dementia Community* is delighted to announce that the 18th UK Dementia Congress (UKDC) will be held at:
Coventry Building Society Arena, Coventry CV6 6GE on 26-27 November 2024

We look forward to the largest annual multi-disciplinary dementia-focused event and exhibition in the UK. UKDC has a long history of bringing together everyone involved in dementia care to learn, share and inspire each other with fresh energy and enthusiasm for our work.

For further details on booking and a draft programme, visit [UK Dementia Congress – Dementia Community](https://www.ukdementiacongress.com) (journalofdementiacare.co.uk)



Christians on Ageing Publications

Dying and Death - Gerry Burke. New edition 2024.	£5.00
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