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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Editorial

Autumn is a season of transition - of endings *and* beginnings, new terms *and* the equinox that marks the turn to shorter days. There are fallen leaves and ripening fruits, reminding us both of losses and of gathering in.

This autumn issue features several pieces that talk of endings, but also reports on our annual conference which had the theme of hope, and where it could be found. A fuller write-up of the excellent contributions to this conference will be on our website. Our keynote speaker was Revd Dr Michael Jackson whose book *Still Love Left, Faith and Hope in Later Life* is highly recommended.

We feature two articles from COA trustees, but who are writing in personal capacities about aspects of death that they feel strongly about, and which are topical in public discussion.

Our sister organisation, Faith in Older People (FiOP), has also come to the end of its current existence as a Charitable body. With their permission, we wished to share their letter to supporters, who surely include many COA members. The farewell message serves as a memoir of their innovative and influential work over many years. The FiOP website will remain, including access to valuable resources: www.faithinolderpeople.org.uk.

Scattered like autumn leaves among these significant endings, I have included poems, reflections and readings on the season of autumn, which seems the most evocative in the way it speaks of both past and future, whilst preparing us for the passage of increasing darkness.

On a more upbeat and practical note, Faith in Later Life (FILL) invites

us to assess just how friendly our churches are to older people in congregations and communities. They have devised an informal checklist to help identify whether and how your church's ministry among older people is important and intentional. You can apply these suggestions to the services and activities you offer in your own settings. Thanks to FILL for sharing this item.

Ben Boland's energetic and encouraging book *'Priceless People'* is reviewed by a young curate now leading ministry with older people in a Hampshire parish, including a new monthly 'Anna Café Church' meeting.

The eagle-eyed amongst regular readers of plus may have noticed a small change in style as part of incremental updates in the magazine and in our publications generally. We hope to introduce further changes in the new year.

Let me finish by quoting our speaker, Michael Jackson: *There's much truth in the old adage that it's not how old we are, but how we are old which matters. In a crucial way, we're fulfilled in later life by nurturing our spiritual life*.

Joanna Walker, Editor

COA Annual Conference Report:
Faces of Hope in Later Life

24th September 2025, online

Keith Albans, COA Chair, welcomed participants and speakers and encouraged us to pop a sentence of self-introduction into the chat function of the online screen for all to see. He introduced the keynote speaker Revd Dr Michael Jackson.

Michael shared his reflections on ageing and hope, drawing on his wide professional experience and reflections on faith, scripture and poetry. He discussed how spirituality can support the ageing process, emphasising the importance of nurturing one's spiritual life in later years. Michael's main message was to explore the faces of hope through the lenses of past experiences, present engagement, and future anticipation. These all shape hope at different times and attendees were invited to reflect on their own lives in discussions to follow.

From reflecting on the past, Michael identified recognising what has shaped us with a view to maximising gratitude and minimising regrets around loss or failure. Where there are regrets, the ways we have coped and healed can be noticed. Ageing can therefore bring us greater self-awareness and comfort. Forgiveness and reconciliation may still be needed and can be addressed, even where those involved have died. It can also be helpful to give ourselves credit for accumulated wisdom, which is the fruit of our later life.

On achieving a hopeful outlook in the present, Michael suggested our ability to continue to grow was key. Spiritual maturity involved an openness to God and an awareness of his ongoing purposes for us, in later life. This however did not require being 'busy' but could be as much about being as doing.

For present hope, he also touched on the pursuit of contentment rather than happiness and the need to 'abide' as expressed in Jesus' image of the vine, and staying rooted and nurtured, as in the psalmist's picture of the tree planted by water. Staying engaged in life and practising gratitude were also recommended for finding hope amidst life's challenges so that we can find blessing by being a blessing to others.

Hope for the future, though rooted strongly in the great Christian hope of resurrection and a future life, is not without the 'difficult stuff'. Through his experience of ministry with very elderly and sometimes disabled or frail older people, Michael could relate ways in which coping with and accepting such diminishment could still contain elements of hope. He concluded with a focus on 'looking death in the eye' but without hopelessness because of "Christ's dwelling in us and our ultimate hope of our true home in the love of God".

Hope and Reflection Breakout Sessions

In response, the meeting discussed three profound questions suggested by Michael. These were about hope in the contexts of past experiences; *present* hope such as encountered in daily life; and hope within anticipation of the *future*, including death. We went into breakout groups, each facilitated by a COA executive committee member, to reflect on the questions. After the breakout sessions, Maureen, Marion, Joanna and Keith reported back on the groups' reflections (see fuller report on COA website for individual group's feedback).

Finding hope in past, present and anticipating future experiences

The groups had discussed ways to draw hope from past experiences, including looking back at difficult times and realising that God has always been present, even if not in expected ways. They explored how current activities, such as hospitality and spiritual practices, contribute to present hope, and considered strategies for maintaining hope in the face of future challenges like dementia and bereavement. The

discussions highlighted the importance of finding meaning in daily life and learning from others, with participants sharing personal stories and observations. A lunch break followed.

The afternoon opened with a 45-minute creative interlude, as has become the practice at our online conferences in order to break up the day and provide a 'non-cognitive' activity. Liv McLennan led a guided meditation and singing session to engage participants and set the tone for the afternoon.

She started with a vocal warm-up session for the whole conference group, incorporating body awareness exercises, breathing techniques and simple songs to engage participants. She introduced accessible songs like *Give Peace a Chance and Great Day* encouraging participants to join in with body percussion and singing.

Liv emphasised the importance of using simple, repetitive songs in music therapy, particularly with older adults or those with health conditions.

Towards the end of the session she shared a poem she had created based on participants' hopes, as expressed through the chat function of the Zoom meeting:

> *I hope for health in age, I hope for political change;*
> *I hope for Christ's return, and the warmth of the sun,*
> *because while I breathe, I hope.*

We concluded with a final reprise of Great Day, which participants sang along to using recorded backing tracks.

Eric Liddell Legacy and Community Initiatives

John Macmillan, CEO of the Eric Liddell Community in Edinburgh, presented on the charity's work celebrating the legacy of Eric Liddell, a Scottish athlete who won a gold medal at the 1924 Paris Olympics but withdrew from the 100m race to honour his Christian faith. The presentation highlighted the charity's educational, sporting, and cultural

initiatives, including an educational resource for schools, sports events named in Liddell's honour, and a major exhibition about his life '*Eric Liddell 100'.* John discussed the charity's key community activities, namely dementia care services and community programs, emphasising their focus on reducing isolation and enhancing wellbeing for people with dementia and their carers.

Spirituality in Dementia Care Research

Olivia Luijnenburg, from Kings College, University of London, presented her research on spirituality in residential care for people living with dementia, sharing findings from two studies and introducing a new reflective spirituality tool for care home workers. She discussed the importance of broadening the definition of spirituality beyond religion to include meaningful activities and connections, while acknowledging the need to address religious needs. The presentation generated discussion about the challenges of implementing spiritual care in care homes, including staff training, time constraints, and the role of care home managers. Olivia's research aims to help integrate spirituality into everyday care practices and create educational materials for care homes.

A fuller account of these presentations and the group work responses will be available on CoA's website www.christiansonageing.org.uk

Hope-full, hope-filled God,
you sustain us through the darkness
and bring us to the light;
enable us through your Spirit
to be your co-workers
in bringing hope to the world
as you companion us
on your kingdom journey. Amen

Prayer by Very Revd Andrew Nunn,
Dean Emeritus, Southwark Cathedral

Some Deadly Holes in the 'Kill Bill'

Marion Shoard, CoA Trustee, writing in a personal capacity

Kim Leadbeater's *Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill* seeks to empower any resident of England or Wales over the age of 18 to obtain medical help to kill themself, so long as certain conditions are met. During its passage through the Commons, and more recently the Lords, MPs and peers have cited cases similar to that of Esther Rantzen – someone with agency who has a terminal condition and fears a distressing death.

But so widely cast is the Bill that fear of extreme suffering before death is by no means the only reason why someone could declare a wish for assisted suicide, so long as they fit the basic requirements the Bill lays down: they possess mental capacity, have a terminal illness, and a doctor has said they are likely to die within six months.

People knowing they may well die soon could choose to hasten the inevitable for many reasons. Perhaps their sense of self-worth has all but disappeared in the face of undermining from family members or a lifetime's societal marginalisation.

Those responsible for overseeing the process must be convinced that the person who has signed the declaration form has *"a clear, settled and informed wish to end their own life, and has made the declaration voluntarily without having been coerced or pressured by any other person into taking it".*

But many parliamentarians have voiced deep concern that some terminally-ill people might be persuaded, even coerced into signing. This has resulted in amendments to the Bill that seek to safeguard against coercing disabled people, people with autism, people with learning disabilities and those in a domestic abuse situation.

However, the vulnerability of another group much more likely to be at risk has not been seriously considered. This group is simply older people. And among them, one particular subset would be in especial danger: those living in the care homes of England and Wales who are paying their own fees.

There are 278,000 older and disabled people living in these. About half of them, 139,000 people, are self-funding. Of these, 42,000 are likely to pass the mental capacity test (mainly because they don't have a dementia diagnosis). Many of those 42,000, suffering from conditions such as Parkinson's disease, heart failure, cancer, emphysema and motor neurone disease, would pass the terminally-ill test too. Now, the fees these self-funding care-home residents pay are substantial, amounting to about £800 to £1,160 for residential care and £1,000 to £1,500 for a nursing home place every week.

Such costs, frequently running to more than £50,000 a year even after deduction of state payments, can rapidly wipe out inheritances, giving the heirs of self-funding care-home residents a considerable financial incentive to persuade their 'loved one' to sign the form.

Many older people in care homes live socially-isolated lives. Left with few of the possessions that give them a sense of their own identity and value, perhaps without easy access to a phone, let alone a computer and perhaps clinging to a sense of identity through family, they may feel guilty about continuing to live what looks like a pointless and unhappy life at the expense of heirs with financial needs. Hints might be deliberately dropped about first-time buyer deposits, cost-of-living pressures or tuition fees for grandchildren. The 'voluntary' option of a useful death could be made to seem the best thing for all concerned. Deals could be done, without anybody quite admitting that they exist. "Yes, I'll sign the form, dear. Can I come home for Christmas?"

While researching my books A Survival Guide to Later Life (2004) and How to Handle Later Life (2017), I came across many cases of callous treatment of older people by their nearest and supposedly dearest. I am sure that plenty of them, perhaps encouraged by their partners or

spouses, would be prepared to pressure, bully or coerce a reluctant relative into ending their life, if they thought they could get away with it.

It is hard to see how the professionals to be involved in scrutinising declarations of a wish for assisted suicide will detect such influence. The prime responsibility for doing so will fall to the two doctors involved, who will have the key conversations with patients. It is the sole responsibility of these doctors to prepare separately a report of their conversation with the patient, including amongst other matters a statement that they are satisfied that no coercion is in play.

These reports go to an Assisted Dying Review Panel, consisting of a judge or King's Counsel, psychiatrist and social worker, which can make inquiries of its own. The Panel then recommends to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Commissioner that the application be passed or refused (and if refused, it can be appealed).

Precisely how would any doctor detect coercion and how diligently would they try to do so? How could any Panel members in their turn be sure that no coercion is in play? After all, the crucial conversations between doctor and patient will presumably be conducted in private, and not recorded. Indeed, how can Panels be sure about other important matters? For example, might the care-home resident (who may have a hearing, sight impairment and/or speech impediment) not quite have grasped what the doctor told them, not least if the latter had an unfamiliar accent? For instance, it is important that they should have understood the doctor's explanation that they are free to change their mind and cancel their declared wish for assisted suicide at a later date, if they so wish.

Moreover, the first doctor the patient sees is free to raise the possibility of assisted suicide without the patient first having intimated that they would welcome the ending of their life – "I wish I were dead!" How are others to judge whether a doctor telling a patient they could obtain help to kill themselves is in fact interpreted by the latter as a recommendation from a trusted professional?

Operational Matters

Another area of concern is just how assisted suicides are to be handled in the environment of England and Wales' care homes (and also in hospices). At the Commons Report stage in May, MPs defeated by a small margin an amendment that would have protected care homes and hospices from having to provide assisted suicide on their premises, and another that would have allowed them to refuse to do so without incurring a financial penalty.

But if assisted suicide is not to take place in their care home, where will a resident go? The government is clearly unwilling to involve the NHS. Might they go to another care home that does permit it?

Or will the assisted dying services which will organise the actual termination (and this can be for-profit organisations) have to set up venues of their own? Any government Bill would have examined such matters before the Bill's publication, but this is often not the case with Private Members' Bills.

Findings from a research team at the University of Fribourg published this year[1] has shed light on some of the operational challenges faced by care homes in Switzerland. The 12 homes in the study had to find additional staff on the day of the death to support that resident, to protect other residents from upset, and to help manage the process including interaction with the police.

The Leadbeater Bill, however, specifically provides that reference to the coroner, and so perhaps also the police, will not be required (unlike normal suicide, which is considered an unnatural death requiring coroner involvement, as homicide can disguise itself as suicide). About half of the 36 Swiss professionals interviewed reported that cases of assisted suicide had greatly affected them, prompting feelings of confusion, sadness, revulsion and questioning of their professional duties.

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1 D. Dransart, E. Scozzari, 'Assisted suicide within long-term care facilities for older adults: organizational issues and processes experienced by health and social care providers in Switzerland', *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, Vol.16, March 2025.

In England and Wales, care-home owners may have strong reasons why they would wish to refuse to play host to assisted suicide. They may have ethical objections to the idea of helping someone to kill themselves, not least Jewish and Christian organisations. Other proprietors may fear that playing host to assisted deaths would tarnish their home's reputation unjustifiably.

There may be operational challenges: a survey of its members by Care England published in September revealed that the sector would struggle to accommodate assisted suicide. Twenty-four per cent of providers cited potential staffing problems, with only 13 per cent saying they thought they could manage the process of assisted dying within their homes.

Yet any care home which refuses to permit assisted suicide on its premises is likely to face a financial penalty. The owners of hospices heavily dependent on donations by people committed to palliative care would find the choice particularly hard. Kim Leadbeater's Bill must be amended to accommodate these issues.

Source: Izyan on Unsplash

Is your church 'faith in later life' friendly?

Faith in Later Life

Our population is ageing fast. That means that more older people in our churches and communities – what a wonderful opportunity for the gospel, and to demonstrate God's unfailing love! Helping people to have faith in later life is important and urgent, the Bible says that the harvest is plentiful. But if we're to gather this harvest in, churches need to be intentional about their ministry among older people. Here are a few questions to help you and your team think this through, for the first time, or as part of a review.

1. Engagement and Involvement:

How frequently does your church offer activities, programmes, or services specifically aimed at older people (e.g. Bible studies, social gatherings, seniors' events, care home services)?

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Occasionally
- Never

2. Pastoral Care:

Does your church proactively provide love and pastoral care tailored to the unique needs of older people in your community, including supporting people who are: bereaved, caring for others, living with dementia, staying home, in hospital, living in care homes, approaching the end of life?

- Yes, regularly
- Yes, occasionally
- No, but we plan to
- No, we don't

3. Helping Older People Find and Explore Faith:

Does your church actively help older people in your community find and explore faith through evangelism, Alpha courses, or other introductory faith programmes?

- Yes, multiple programmes
- Yes, a few programmes
- No, but we plan to
- No, we don't

4. Helping Older People Find you:

- How are you reaching older people in the community with your invitations to explore faith?
- Our website and social media posts include older people, so they know they are welcome
- We advertise our seniors programme in the local paper and on noticeboards
- We produce attractive, easy to read invitations for members to share with friends
- We partner with appropriate community groups e.g. telephone befriending services
- Other

5. Accessibility:

- Yes, fully accessible
- Partially accessible
- Not accessible but planning improvements

6. Inclusivity:

Does your church actively and specifically consult older people in church vision and strategy?

- Yes, regularly
- Yes, occasionally
- No, but we plan to
- No, we don't

7. Spiritual Growth and Support:

Does your church offer resources and opportunities for spiritual growth specifically for older people, such as age-appropriate Bible study materials, prayer groups, or mentorship programmes?

- Yes, multiple options
- Yes, some options
- No, but we plan to

8. Community and Fellowship:

How does your church foster a sense of community and belonging among older people?

- Intergenerational worship services and events
- Small groups or fellowship meetings for older people
- Outreach programmes addressing loneliness and isolation
- Opportunities for older people to serve and volunteer
- We currently do not have specific initiatives for older people

9. Calling:

Does your church actively encourage and help all older people to use their spiritual gifts? Examples might include helping people to explore what their gifts are, how to adapt and use them in later life, and as circumstances change, and creating opportunities for unique types of service.

- Yes
- No, but we plan to
- No

10. Resourcing for Seniors Ministry

How well do you feel you and your church are resourced for strategic thinking and ministry around seniors' work?

- Very well resourced
- Somewhat resourced, and making improvements
- Not resourced at all

Follow-Up Actions:

- Prayerfully identify areas where your church can improve or expand its ministry to help older people have faith in later life
- Consider setting specific goals and timelines to enhance your ministry in these areas
- For further guidance and resources, and to appoint a Faith in Later Life Church Champion visit Faith in Later Life

Church leaders aiming to be more intentional about the missional opportunities of later life are welcome to arrange a one-to-one conversation with our CEO, Alexandra Drew, to explore further. Please contact her directly via alexandra@faithinlaterlife.org

Autumn Prayers and Readings

In every acorn there is the potential for a forest; In every apple pip there is the potential for an orchard; In every soul there is the potential for your Kingdom to be established; full of joy and peace and love. Lord, may your kingdom come in us and in all your creation.

Isaiah 55: 10-11 is an 'invitation to the thirsty' (The Bible, NIV): As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth. It will not return to me empty.

Sources: churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/creationtide/creationtide-resources

We acknowledge our dependence on the fruits of the earth, the clear running water, the shelter of trees and the goodness of soil. We acknowledge our dependence on you Lord, as author and creator.

Lord our God, you renew the face of the earth and bring newness to our world. Restore the waters, refresh the air, revive the land , breathe new life into all your creation and begin with us. Amen.

Sources: The Bible NRSV and *The Rhythm of Life* 1996 David Adam, SPCK (adapted).

Psalm 1 v3: Blessed is anyone who trusts in the Lord. Such a person is like a tree by the waterside that thrusts its roots into the stream. When the heat comes, it has nothing to fear, its foliage stays green; Untroubled in a year of drought, it never stops bearing fruit.

Lord, deepen our trust, that in you we may grow strong and bear much fruit.

Brian Draper on Autumn as ‘Fall and Rise’

Autumn is such an evocative time, a profound threshold which teaches us every year in so many different sensory and sensuous ways about the journey of life and the path of both descent and ascent we walk with the Creator. I do love how every year, as the Earth tilts and turns, we are re-turned to this most stirring season! It’s not the easiest to welcome, but I see it as a lovely opportunity to pause between the more traditional times of Lent and Advent, and to revel in what Parker Palmer calls ‘the hidden wholeness’ of autumn. To savour the ripeness as well as the relinquishment; the fruitfulness as well as the farewells. In time, the colourful turning leaves will come to carpet autumn’s holy, composting ground. Let’s ground ourselves, then, in Creation’s rhythms and the Creator’s love, this ‘fall’ - and find that in the falling lies an invitation to rise.

Source: www.briandraper.org ‘Autumn season’.

Source: Doncoombez on Unsplash

Storing September

by Elizabeth Rooney

You ask me what I did today.
I could pretend and say “I don’t remember.”
But, no, I’ll tell you what I did today -- I stored September.
Sat in the sun and let the sun sink in,
Let all the warmth of it caress my skin.
When winter comes, my skin will still remember
The day I stored September.

And then my eyes –
I filled them with the deepest, bluest skies
And all the traceries of wasps and butterflies.
When winter comes, my eyes will still remember
The day they stored September.

And there was cricket song to fill my ears!
And the taste of grapes. And the deep purple of them!
And asters, like small clumps of sky...
You know how much I love them.

That’s what I did today
And I know why. Just simply for the love of it,
I stored September.

from *Storing September* Vol 3 in series: “All Miracle”

The Death of Us – A response to Anne Richards' article in plus Vol 41 no 2.

Revd Dr Keith Albans, Chair COA, writing in a personal capacity

Back in May 2025 I attended an online webinar organised by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland and entitled 'Direct Cremation and New Funerary Movements'. The speaker was Anne Richards, and the webinar is mentioned at the end of her article in the previous issue of *plus.* I felt quite uncomfortable during her presentation at the webinar and her article left me feeling similarly disturbed.

Let me begin by making three initial points. First, I agree wholeheartedly that some of the TV adverts for Direct Cremation promote a very utilitarian approach to the subject, and a lot of the marketing materials avoid any mention of the emotional issues which death evokes, or the possible involvement of the Church. However, the idea of advance planning, and having conversations with family members about our funeral wishes is, to my mind something to be encouraged, and whether or not folk opt for Direct Cremation such adverts can open up what is all too often a taboo subject in many households.

Second, the topic of funeral poverty is a serious matter for many and, sadly, something which is rarely discussed.

The option of Direct Cremation is clearly designed, in part, to address this at a time when the latest SunLife Cost of Dying report suggests that the total cost of dying in 2024 had reached almost £10,000.[2] That same report suggests that while the average cost of a simple attended funeral is £4,285, the equivalent figure for a Direct Cremation is just under £1,600.

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2 https://www.sunlife.co.uk/siteassets/documents/cost-of-dying/sunlife-cost-of-dying-report-2025.pdf p14.

In her article, Anne Richards poses the question, “Can we offer more affordable funerals to people who are worried about the costs?” Given that the current Church of England fees are £234 plus local costs for organist, heating and other optional extras,[3] their options to bridge that gap are limited, unless they join with others in encouraging the emergence of a simpler form of ceremony.

And third, I bring my own personal experience. When, in 2019, my wife discovered she was terminally ill she was clear in expressing her funeral wishes... “A direct cremation followed by a Quaker funeral and her ashes to be dispersed in the rock pools at Maryport.” As it happened we had already discussed the issue long before we knew Helen was dying, following coverage on the Sunday Programme on BBC Radio 4 in May 2018.[4]

Nevertheless, such an arrangement was still very much the ‘new kid on the block’ back then, with only around 3% of funerals in the UK being a Direct Cremation.[5]

While I accept that my professional experience meant that I knew the decision as to when Helen’s body left our care was mine alone, nonetheless I have nothing but praise for the professional services we received from the Funeral Directors. I was then able to collect her ashes from the crematorium some fifty miles away so that we could complete Helen’s wishes in due course in our own way.[6] The thing that disturbed me most about Anne Richards’ webinar – and it is reflected in her article – is the pejorative language used to describe what she sees as the implied lack of value and worth of the deceased’s body which a direction cremation evokes. In the webinar, she spoke of ‘trash,’ and, in the article, she suggests that the question to which direct creation is the answer is *why spend money on something worthless?* Human beings of all faiths and

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3 https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/parochial-fees-a4_25_0.pdf
4 https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b0b1p4xz
5 Op.cit. p17.
6 https://youtu.be/9P6A4HAn-EM

none hold a variety of views about the bodies of the deceased but few, if any, would want them to be treated with anything other than respect. Nevertheless, that sense of respect must naturally include the act of disposal – whether through burial, cremation or one of the newer methods now available – but the fact that it is disposed of does not imply that it is 'worthless', rather that it is now surplus to requirements.

After being with someone who has died, many relatives remark on how 'it is no longer the person lying there,' and people vary as to whether going to see the body at the undertakers is helpful or not. The journey from the point of death to the point of committal can be undertaken via a variety of routes, and for some people at least, the Direct Cremation route will be perfectly acceptable.

Anne Richards ends her article with a series of interesting questions, but I would like to add two more to the list. The first comes from data within the SunLife *Cost of Dying* report, cited earlier, noting how few people have any knowledge of their loved one's funeral plans. It says that "Over half (51%) don't know if their loved one wanted a burial or cremation, 1 in 5 (18%) don't know any of their loved one's funeral wishes, and less than 1% know all their loved one's funeral wishes.[7] So I ask, what role can the churches play in addressing this?

My second question is related but much deeper and wider. Is our hesitance in discussing dying and death related to the rarely acknowledged difficulty many of us have in articulating what we believe makes up "the Christian hope of resurrection to eternal life with Christ?" And might that difficulty explain why I, for one, have no issue with Direct Cremation, albeit as previously stated that the marketing of it leaves much to be desired!

7 Op. cit. p34

Fall and Rise, an Autumn Blessing

Be blessed, Lord, as you bless to me
this Autumn in your company,
The blushing leaves, the veiling mist,
the apples that the sun has kissed,
The darker nights and brave goodbyes,
the swallows emptying the skies.

O bless to me this holy ground
where falling, breaking things are found.
And up through which new life will grow,
and from whose darkness light will flow.
Please help me in my own descent
to know this path is heaven sent.

Sing through me your Autumn song,
then plant me deep where I belong.
The seed must crack – to live, it dies.
With you, my Lord, we fall and rise.

Source: Brian Draper
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tt5Wxxqqpt4

Source: Pixabay at Pexels.

Faith in Older People (FiOP) – letter to supporters, September 2025

It is with some sadness that I am writing to confirm that **Faith in Older People** will formally close at the end of September 2025 after 17 years of fulfilling, creative, collaborative and enjoyable work. The support of our Friends has been so important to the Board and the small staff team over the years.

During this time, we have had the opportunity to meet with many congregations and faith communities and to produce resources or organise events to support their work. This has included One-Step-at-a-Time in support of individuals experiencing dementia and those who care for them. The resource is available on the FiOP website which will remain: https://faithinolderpeople.org.uk/

We have highlighted the contribution made by older people within our faith communities with the major research project the 'Gift of Age'. We have influenced the inclusion of spiritual care in the curriculum for health and social care staff and have finalised a

Source: Design ecologist at Pexels

resource, commissioned by the Scottish Government, to better embed spiritual care in the learning.

FiOP has played a unique role in developing a stronger understanding of spiritual care within care homes and in relation to policy and practice in the wider sphere. I hope that we leave a legacy on which others can build.

There are so many people who have made our work possible. We have had so many collaborative events with voluntary sector organisations, Scottish Government, spiritual care teams, congregations and academics, highlighting different aspects of spirituality which have enhanced our approach.

Our thanks to the members of the Board over the years and our Chairpersons, Chris Davies, Bruce Cameron, Bob Rendall and Su Millar.

It has been a privilege to have been the Director over this time and to be part of our small active team whose members made enormous contributions. My thanks go to our team, founder members Mary Moffett and Jean Myers, Helen Welsh, Joanna Kemp and Mary Wilkinson.

All this was made possible by the vision of Malcolm Goldsmith, and the following have enhanced the work of FiOP: Simon Jaquet, Mike Nicholson, Sally Jaquet, Ruth Aird, Jenny Henderson, Ian Noble, Harriet Mowat, Mary Marshall, Lesley Greenaway, Diana Kerr, Colin Gray.

With our thanks and good wishes,

Maureen O'Neill, Director

Faith in Older People

Book Review

Priceless People: Loving Older People and People Living with Dementia, Ben Boland, 2025, Christian Focus Publications Ltd. pp 127.

As someone who has just recently been commissioned as an Anna Chaplain I have found this book, *Priceless People* by Ben R Boland, very helpful and insightful. One of the main things that I enjoyed is that it did not assume that readers have prior in-depth knowledge of dementia. Instead of trying to define dementia medically, it acknowledged that as research on dementia increases, defining it medically in a book means this would become quickly out of date. Rather, it seeks to bring awareness of what it means to live with dementia and what are the best practices in working with people who are living with dementia, as well as caring for those who are ageing.

As the church seeks to 'grow younger' this book is really helpful in bringing the spotlight onto caring for older people and not losing sight of the importance of our ministry to members of our communities who are getting older. It applies to all areas of ministry, across all denominations, providing lots of practical help for services both in church and within care homes. It offers extra resources that can be used to increase knowledge about working with, ministering to and caring for older people.

This book also provides a deep and moving insight into how we should as Christians see our ministry to older people. It grounds the caring of older people biblically and shows how the ministry and the love of God is for ALL ages.

It powerfully highlights that no matter how old we are, there is always an opportunity to share and receive the love of God: that even though people may forget who God is, or are not able to articulate their faith in the way that they might have once, it does not mean that God has forgotten them.

The book covers a lot of pastoral care and good practices, particularly through the three 'P's: prayer, presence and pastoral care. It helps to simplify what we can do in ministry with older people, making this accessible for the reader to feel that they would be able to give it a go.

I am looking forward to being able to share this book with other people, not just those who are in the specific ministry of caring for older people but to anyone who is part of a church congregation. In this way, we may all continue to value and empower the older people within our communities and remember that anyone, whatever age, is able to have a relationship with Him. I certainly will be keeping this book to refer back to in the future!

Revd Lizzie Davidson is curate in the parish of Warblington with Emsworth, in Hampshire, Diocese of Portsmouth.

Source: Anastasia at Pexels

Prisons Week 12th-18th October 2025 (16th-23rd November in Scotland)

Revd Dr Keith Albans, Chair COA

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of Prisons Week, an ecumenical initiative to encourage Christians to focus their thoughts and prayers upon prisoners and their families, victims of offenders, prison staff and all those working for prisoners and their families. This year's theme is ***God's word is not chained***, and information and resources are available from the website www.prisonsweek.org

Christians on Ageing has a long-standing interest in and concern for older prisoners, going back to when our former Chair, Canon Michael Butler, served as Chaplain to Norwich Prison.

One of our publications, ***Seeking a Peaceful Heart: Prayers and Reflections to help you in Prison***, has been distributed to all UK prisons via the network of Prison Chaplains, and our Older Prisoners' Interest Group continues to explore how we can ensure that the needs and concerns of older prisoners are not overlooked. As our recent Annual Report says, *"The number of people in prison over the age of 50 (figure determined by the Ministry of Justice) has increased significantly in recent years, not least because of prosecutions for historical offences only now coming to light. Christians on Ageing has been exploring how it can help the Churches answer the question posed by Jesus: 'when I was in prison, did you come to visit me?'"*

The title of COA's recent Conference, **Faces of Hope in Later Life**, was in part inspired by a fascinating research project based at the University of Manchester which explored the role of hope in prisons. An early publication based on the research, authored by Marion Vannier, is entitled *On the Importance of 'Hope-in-Practice' behind Bars* and examines how prison staff interpret and understand

hope, particularly from the perspective of those working closely with older prisoners serving life sentences – individuals with the slimmest chances of release within their lifetime.[8]

This cohort has recently become significant in determining prison policy, following rulings by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) around whole life orders. Judges held that whole life orders and then life sentences more broadly should preserve a 'right to hope' for release during imprisonment.

Such things were probably a long way from the consideration of those who established Prisons Week back in 1975, but as prison policy becomes increasingly politicised, and the proportion of prisoners who are older continues to increase, the focus of our thoughts and prayers as we mark Prisons Week 2025 must include them, and COA will continue to try to resource the Church to meet the thrust of Jesus's question: '*when I was in prison, did you come to visit me?*'

Editor notes: if you or your church is involved in prison visiting, free copies of COA's publication 'Seeking a Peaceful Heart' are available. Please contact secretary@christiansonageing.org.uk *to discuss supply.*

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"Autumn is really the best of the seasons; and I'm not sure that old age isn't the best part of life. But of course, like autumn, it doesn't last." (27 October 1963)

C.S. Lewis (1966), Letters of C. S. Lewis. Publisher Geoffrey Bless, London.

8 https://doi.org/10.60633/tfj.i04.101

Christians on Ageing News

Culture Club, 7th November 2025

Anyone, CoA member or not, can join in Culture Club – a meeting on Zoom every three months at which we discuss the ways in which the arts depict the lives of older people.

Our last meeting, which prompted a lively discussion, focused on two films and their associated books: *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* and *Conclave*.

At our next, at 1.30 pm on Friday, November 7th, we will talk first about The Thursday Murder Club – Richard Osman's popular novel about four older amateur sleuths living in a retirement village and the film of the same name now showing in cinemas and also available on Netflix starring Pierce Brosnan and Helen Mirren. The Guardian's long-time film editor, Catherine Shoard, will join our discussion. In the second half of our meeting, we shall tease apart advertisements, both current and past, whether on billboards, television, or accessed digitally, and consider what they can tell us about the public perception of older people.

Do join us by emailing secretary@christiansonageing.org.uk

Source: Denise Jans on Unsplash

Source: Alisa Anton on Unsplash

COA's publications

As part of a wish to update and modernise our publications list, without losing valuable past publications, we have decided to make some older titles available as pdf downloads from our website but no longer in printed form.

More recent titles will continue to be for sale either through the website, in print or e-versions, or by post for printed copies.

See the inside back cover page of plus for information, as in previous issues.

Let me also remind readers that we are always interested in comments and responses to items in plus, or offers to write an article, reflection or review.

Editor

Please contact editor@christiansonageing.org.uk

O LORD

REVEAL to my eyes, your glory
EXPOSE to my heart, your love
DISPERSE from my mind, the darkness
PROTECT from thoughts without action
GUARD from words without feelings
DEFEND from ideas without results
SURROUND me with your Presence.

OPEN my eyes, my heart, my mind, my will, my soul
TO the blowing of your Spirit.

David Adam in *Through the Year with St Columba*, Brown & Whitaker Publishing, 1997.

Source: Suzy Hazelwood at Pexels

Christians On Ageing Publications

Dying and Death – Gerry Burke. New edition 2024.
£5 print, £2 digital

Faith in the Third Age – Dr Michael Lowis. New edition 2024.
£2.50 print, £1.50 digital

Growing Dementia Friendly Churches – Revd Gaynor Hammond.
£3 print only

I'd Like You to Know - Sue Kennedy & Rodney Searle.
£2 print, £1 digital

Light of Faith: Reflections on Growing Old – Bishop George Appleton. New edit. 2025. £5 print, £2 digital

Making a Start: Developing Pastoral Care – Sue Kennedy (Ed).
£2.50 print, £1.50 digital

Seeking a Peaceful Heart – Gerry Burke & Sister Maureen Murphy.
££2.50 print, £1.30 digital

The Spirituality of Ageing – Metropolitan Anthony of Sourozh.
New edition 2025. £5 print, £2 digital

With Grateful Hearts – Sister Maureen Murphy.
£2.50 print, £1.30 digital

Worship in Residential Care – Michael Butler (Ed).
£2.50 print, £1.30 digital

Price of printed publications includes postage and packing.
Cheques payable to Christians on Ageing

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