

Cherished, or Forgotten?

There is nothing worse, for any human, than being without love – love to give, and love received. ‘If I am without love, I am nothing’ wrote St Paul echoing the words of the Lord: there are only two things to worry about – loving God and loving neighbour.

Older people need little introduction to the concept of love – they have had a lifetime of experience and, for most, it will have been a mixed bag. This experience will include their personal lives, of course, but also that in community – and, for those who have spent a lifetime of Christian involvement, in the communities which make up the Christian Church. They have reached a point where they know, at first hand, how the inclusive love proclaimed by the gospel of Jesus Christ has affected them; many are living, in their end days, the alternative vision of human flourishing to be found in the gospel message.

There is a suggestion, in some quarters, that the love older people experience in their Church is somewhat different from the values proclaimed on paper and in practice.

It is in the context of this experience that ***Christians on Ageing*** is undertaking an **Enquiry** into the ways in which the Churches include older people in their life and fellowship.

If it is true, as some assert, that older people are the Church members who get forgotten, are often marginalised and carelessly patronised within their communities, we need the facts. If it is not true, then there must be many examples of how older people are treated with dignity and respect, included in community life and valued for their current as well as past contributions.

How can we discover the truth?

The [Ageing Issues Study Network](#) is an informal ‘virtual’ gathering of people from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, including practitioners in caring services, students and teachers in the academic world, pastors, carers and people generally wanting to contribute to an exploration of important issues in the lives of older Christians.

The first topic for exploration is the way in which the Churches deal with the possible isolation of older people who are no longer able to take part in the life and worship of local congregations by being physically present.

Most older people continue to be involved in their local congregation, either through sharing in regular Sunday worship or through involvement in groups and activities, many of which would collapse without their presence and input. Some, however, because of mobility difficulties, or increasing frailty of mind or body, or medical conditions which confine them to their home – these are not able to be present in the normal way.

What happens when people can no longer get to the church building? What contact is maintained? What support is offered? How is the spirit nourished? Simply, what happens?

The **Enquiry** will seek examples of good practice. The **Enquiry** will also try to identify what is not being done. It will be a challenge to the Churches: if there is a problem, admit it, confront it, and do something about it. If the problem is exaggerated, get busy showing all the good that is happening.