

NETWORK RESOURCES

This is what we did in the two morning sessions at the December Network Fellowship Day in December 2009

It was suggested I make available the content of the sessions so that they could be used or adapted by circuits/churches for use locally. I am happy to do this but your own updates and examples will give the personal touch. Please note – this is my “info for the day” and some may be subject to copyright regulations.

Ageing in hope and expectation

Opening devotions including offering

Points to make before we go any further – You may wonder why I chose to look at ageing. I do not have any professional expertise on the subject. Many of you more qualified to talk about ageing than I am on basis of experience of it!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I have had to pick and choose very carefully from the material I have to prepare this.

First session is a look at attitudes to ageing. Second session is a look at the church and ageing. I intend to lead us into some discussions in groups where attitudes and experience can be shared. Or you may want to use the time for individual reflection using the books/pictures/cuttings available.

Explain tape measures (Have plenty of cheap/free 100cm tape measures or use a roll of lining paper to make timelines)–Make a personal time line - think on or write on significant life events using cm. as representing a year. Be careful – this can uncover memories and be painful. But it can be a source of pleasure as well. Think about the future – this is not the same as planning it!

Look at the years ahead in cm at ponder on them

HELP THE YEARS ARE PASSING

Ageing a personal experience. Attitudes depend on personality, life style, family needs, culture etc. The news from Congo some time ago showed a granny believed to be in her 90's responsible for a family of orphaned grandchildren. What would she make of the lifestyle of those of us who get saga holiday brochures sent or who have leisure time we can fill as we wish.

Email sent to me about hymns for the elderly included the following:

Nobody knows the trouble I have seeing

Go tell it on the mountain but speak up

Guide me o thou great Jehovah – I've forgot where I parked the car

Art thou weary art thou languid, hast thou forgot to take thy tablets

Count your many birthdays name them one by one

GROWING OLDER IS OFTEN THE SOURCE OF HUMOUR< SOME OF WHICH COMES FROM THE ELDERLY BUT IT CAN BE A SOURCE OF PAIN.

Then there are the birthday cards like OVER THE HILL AT 40, BIRTHDAYS ARE LIKE CHOCOLATES – OK IF YOU DON'T COUNT THEM, OLD AGE IS ALL IN YOUR HEAD ONLY SOMETIMES IT SPREADS TO THE REST OF YOUR BODY

Which leads into the bible passage

ECCLESIASTES 11v9- 12v8 (Good News Bible)

Gives a very negative view!!!

In very general terms there have been two ways of looking at ageing in this country.

NEGATIVE The over the hill at 40 idea. (60 now seen as the new 40!)

This suggests that the early part of life is a time of growth and development up to our late 20's. For the next 20 years or so we use what we have learnt to establish ourselves but often we don't much change the course we have chosen. Between 50-60 we move into a period of gradual decline physically things go wrong with us and the senior moments kick in. Towards the end of life we generally lose the ability to control our lives and depend more on other people as we did in our childhood years.

Those who view life like this react accordingly. They say they are too old to learn new things. They mourn the loss of previous years and opportunities and sort of go into their shell. Some doctors encourage the attitude with 'It's your age'. There is a belief that the best of life is past and all that is now on offer is a downward slope to death.

POSITIVE This is the LIFE BEGINS AT 40 BRIGADE

The attitude here is that to live is to change and move on from one stage of life to the next. Moving on acknowledges regrets and the loss of things we enjoyed and took for granted. But the new stage is always going to be better and have more opportunities than we imagined. Therefore we can move on with hope and expectation – optimistically – knowing that physical, mental and spiritual change is part of an ongoing process.

ANY U3A members here? University of the third age

What I said so far relates directly to 2 prevailing attitudes.

U3A linked to third stage of life. Not time to go into detail. But until recently stage 1 = growth. Stage 2=independence and creating own household/career – pinnacle of life. Stage 3 decline in retirement.

HOWEVER SOCIOLOGISTS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS HAVE REVIEWED THIS. Life expectancy is increased. Medical care has improved. THE NEW THIRD AGE is no longer associated with diminishment. That now belongs to 4th age which lasts on average only 4 years. THE THIRD AGE COMES AFTER RETIREMENT AND WHEN YOUNG MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY HAVE MOVED TO INDEPENDENCE.

So there is a need to find purpose and fulfilment in those years. This is where the SAGA LOUITS, GOLDEN GIRLS, U3A, come in. But do we turn into Grumpy Victor Meldrew types or haven't a care Golden Girls. How do we use our time and the life experience and skills we have. Leisure companies are certainly recognising the potential in this age group as are groups looking for volunteers. And most of the unpaid childcare is done by the silver set. We'll come to the churches attitudes in our second session. But now is the time for you to share thoughts and experiences or to spend time quietly on your own.

Starter questions

What can't you do which you could do when you were younger?

What can you do now that you could not do when you were younger?

Are you an 'over the hill at 40' or 'life begins at 40'?

How have your attitudes to age developed as the years have gone by?

Are you ageing gracefully or as a grumpy Victor Meldrew type of character?

Is it possible to 'Act your age'?

Consider examples of people whose achievements are or have been impressive in old age. Include Biblical characters.

'One piece of advice I would give to young people'. What would it be?

Session 2 The Church and ageing

To look at bible eggs and ageing in the church

When I was a child between ages of 7-12 two people had a bigger effect on me than I realised at the time. Mrs Williams sat behind us in church on Sunday mornings and used to pop a packet of spangles or fruit gums over the back of the pew in the hymn before the sermon for me and my sister. Mr Pratt sat at the back and always shook hands and had a few words with you however young or old you were. I don't recall a single sermon.

In the bible there are several records of old people being very prominent. Abraham is one of the obvious ones starting out on a new venture at a grand old age.

John Bell in one of his pieces points out that the Christmas story is for and about old people

READ(What shall we do now file produced few years ago by Network)

Simeon and Anna show gifts of being there, waiting patiently, watching, praying. They had a sense of expectancy. They were looking forward IN HOPE AND EXPECTATION.

READ LUKE 2 VS 25-38

So what about older people and the church?

There is masses of literature and studies and reference works but one I would recommend for Network is LIKE SPRING WITHOUT FLOWERS by Janet Eldred because it literally is the thoughts and experiences of older women. Not long ago children were referred to as the church of tomorrow – now know they are also the church of today.

It is **assumed** that older people feel they are part of the church of today because we have an ageing church. The mantra is WE MUST ATTRACT FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE. Church mission statements and church talk reflects this. Network talks about attracting younger women but what is wrong with women of the third age!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! And the fourth. Get hung up on youth to such an extent that some older people are made to feel as if they are the church of yesterday and are of limited value.

A study by Philip Richter and Leslie Francis (Gone but not forgotten DLT 1998) found older people form a larger than expected proportion of church leavers. Reasons – illness, church accessibility, feel church no longer for them, feel excluded and undervalued. They are passive leavers – gradually stop coming and no one makes the effort to find out why and put things right.

Conclusion of these authors – OLD AGE PRESENTS THE CHURCH WITH NEW OPPORTUNITIES, AS WELL AS CHALLENGING PROBLEMS.

Carl Jung – ‘The first half of life is one sided – we are so busy with practical things that there is no time for cultivating the inner self. His experience with his patients in the latter part of their life led him to view this period as a ‘SPIRITUAL QUEST OR JOURNEY’.

Ann Morisy at the Network Swanwick conference in 2007 commented that the government is beginning to recognise the economic significance of the retired and the wastefulness of imposed retirement. She goes on to say ‘Sadly our churches have been slower to recognise that age related boundaries are indefensible and improvident. This is particularly so given the significant gains in relation to spirituality that come with age’. (Echoing Jung)

Older people have the time and the experience to share their faith if encouraged. They have personal stories to tell. May think they get hung up on the past but young people are hung up on the future. Older people best place to commend faith to others because they have experienced the ups and downs of life and still choose to follow Jesus. (Ann Morisy)

VISION4LIFE Transforming the church – transformed for evangelism

(Published by URC in 2008) page 19 ‘Good news on the high street’

‘Who knows how many people come to faith because somebody else talks about the church they go to and invites others along? Often the best evangelists are people who are prepared to talk to anyone, who notice new faces and are not afraid to strike up a conversation where God gets mentioned.

A village church kept getting new members on a regular basis because one faithful member, a woman in her 60’s, so often invited people to come to church. She enjoyed being out and about and liked nothing better than meeting people on the high street. When she was shopping she would often strike up conversations with people she knew as well as those she didn’t. Because church was such an important part of her life it was natural for her to talk about her friends in the congregation, and any things that were due to happen there in the coming week. Other worshippers got so used to her friendship evangelism that whenever they saw a new person in the church they tended to assume she must have asked the person along – often she had.’

Discussion starters Session 2

Talk about anything about ageing that you need to!!!!!!!!!!!!!!This is your time to share your thoughts and concerns! However the following might offer starting points.

Does what has been said in this session ‘ring true’ in your experience?

Anna was constantly in the temple praying. The lady I quoted last was out and about doing ‘Friendship evangelism’. Where are you!?

The fact that you are here today means you are not among the passive leavers but can you understand why they leave?

Does your church have a mission statement that is inclusive for all ages?

Do leaders of worship make it accessible for older people in style, content and presentation?

Most lay workers are employed for youth work and admin. A few are specific workers with older people? Is there a case for the church to be more proactive in meeting the spiritual as well of the physical and social needs of older people?

Have you found that age has brought more inclination to develop spiritual life?

Is Network so concerned with reaching younger women that it misses some of the potential in the over 60’s?

Closing the morning sessions

Quote 1 from Bob Noon (MHA volunteer newsletter)

Sometimes I picture myself as a candle.

I used to be a candle about eight feet tall – burning bright.

Now every day I lose a bit of me.

Someday the candle will be very small

But the flame will burn just as brightly.

The last few lines of THE LAST BATTLE by C.S. Lewis (Narnia series)

‘ Then Aslan turned to them and said:

“You do not look as happy as I meant you to be”.

Lucy said “We’re so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our old world so often”.

“No fear of that,” said Aslan. “Have you not guessed?”

Their hearts leapt and a wild hope rose within them.

“There was a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are – as you used to call it in the shadowlands - dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

And as he spoke to them he no longer looked like a lion : but the things that began to happen to them after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of THE GREAT STORY which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever : in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Hymn 566 Now thank we all our God

Session 1 *Help! The years are passing* Discussion starters

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Is it possible to ‘Act your age’?

Consider examples of people whose achievements are or have been impressive in old age. Include Biblical characters.

‘One piece of advice I would give to young people’. What would it be?

Session 2 *The spiritual journey* Discussion starters

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(Bob Noon (MHA volunteer

newsletter)

MHA facts from September 2008 magazine

Did you know there are more than 7000 people age 100+ in Britain. This has risen from 251 in 1951.

The oldest man to climb Everest is Japanese and was 71 years 2 months and 2 days when he reached the top in 2003.

1 in 5 people in the 80+ age group will have some form of dementia.

The oldest performing ballerina was 71 years 203 days. She began lessons at the age of 47.

The oldest female marathon runner finished the London Marathon in 2002 aged 90 years 145 days.

There are approximately 730,000 people in the UK living with dementia.

The oldest man to make a solo parachute jump is American and did it aged 96 years 63 days in February 2005.

By 2021, 20% of the population will be over 65.

MHA supports over 12,500 people.

Update May 25th 2008 – Min Bahader Sirchan, a 76 year old Nepali reached the top of Everest. Next day Yuichiro Miura of Japan got there for the third time – he did it in 1978 and 2003.

Comment – Some people achieve amazing things in old age. For many others a major achievement is getting out of bed and getting on with life as best they can! (Linda).