

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". Copyright regulations mean I cannot give the direct quotes used. However I have given the sources and briefly described the content.

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 are 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 is 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 grandma/granddad /mature relatives.

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 examples 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 "Christmas is for old people": 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 – suggests that in the first half of life we are busy with practical living. 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.

VISION4LIFE Transforming the church – transformed for evangelism (Published by URC in 2008) page 19 'Good news on the high street' - Describes how a lady in her 60's talked to those she met when she was out and about. Talking about church and faith was part of her life and when new people went to church it was thought often correctly that she had invited them.

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): imagines himself to be a candle which even when burnt down will burn as brightly.

The last few lines of THE LAST BATTLE by C.S. Lewis (Narnia series - describes how Lucy and co were killed in a railway accident and how the best was yet to come).

Hymn 566 Now thank we all God

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

SESSION 1 "HELP! THE YEARS ARE PASSING" DISCUSSION STARTERS

- 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 SPIRITUAL JOURNEY" DISCUSSION STARTERS

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?
- 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 as 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 potential in the over 60's?