

VALUING OUR ELDERERS

EDITORIAL

by Dr James Woodward, Canon of St George's Windsor, England; author of *Valuing Age* published by SPCK (2008).

Most of us are in some kind of denial about our own age. Ask yourself what age you feel inside and many would say at least ten or 15 years younger than we are. Enquire of a northern European congregation what most threatens their sense of stability and they might reflect back that it is the reality of their ageing supporters. This is in sharp contrast to the value given to older people in some other societies.

We deny that which we fear. Fearful people build fearful places where some of the people and experiences of life are marginalised. This can lead to prejudice and some injustice. All of this should disturb us, for we are all growing older and should share a conviction that our faith has potential for transformation.

Look again at the picture of Sister Constance. She offers a very different model of ageing! Change, diminishment and death are part of an older person's lot; but there is also the opportunity for growth, wisdom, integrity and the appreciation of the sheer gift of living.

Why not attempt to picture yourself in 20 years' time? An older person. What do you see and what feelings are associated with that picture? Energy, blessing, empowerment, creativity? Or perhaps it is diminishment, frailty, vulnerability, a sense of loss and impending death? These questions grounded in our own journey are an important part of our discipleship. We neglect them at our peril.

I continue to experience some disappointment at the resistance in people and communities to face up to the realities of age and ageing. This excellent IAFN newsletter is a wonderful encouragement.

In these pages you will discover how some of these questions are tackled in greater practical length. From across cultures we are offered challenges to our stereotypes of age. Are older people in our Churches viewed as 'honourable treasures for wisdom' (see *Africa*); an integral and important part of the community (*Papua New Guinea*)? Are we imaginative enough to face the demographic realities and organise ourselves around the needs of older people for creative engagement? (*Hong Kong*) How do we practise respect (*India*)? How often do we assume that we know what older people either want or need (*New Zealand*)? Might some of the examples of good practice encourage us to respond to a small group of older people in our communities? How might we participate in the political processes to ensure that older people and the resourcing of their support and care become a higher priority for health and social care (*Canada, Scotland*)?

We have always believed that in our proclamation of the Kingdom all people whatever their age belong to God in love. As part of our commitment to working out justice which is part of that love, age and valuing age need to become more of a priority.

I commend those many people in these pages who have shared their stories. I hope and pray that we might listen and respond. Now look back into that mirror and face the reality and possibility of your own age with courage and excitement.

For further reflections on these matters see www.jameswoodward.wordpress.com

July 2009

"The latter years of our lives are given us by God to give Him thanks, to use our maturity, to use our manifold gifts because there's no one more varied than the elderly person. These years are not ours just to salt away; they are ours to help leaven society." Sister Constance



Sister Constance (then aged 75).

Photo: The Anglican Journal.

Sr. Constance, a 105-year-old sister of the Sisterhood of St John the Divine, is legendary in Canada for her ministry to seniors. She earned an M.A. in Gerontology at 73, travelled daily by bicycle in her 70s to her job as the first chaplain in a Toronto seniors' home, and helped found the Canadian Institute of Religion and Gerontology. As chaplain, she instituted twice-yearly Celebration of Life services in the Cathedral which brought seniors from senior centres, seniors' housing projects and nursing homes on foot, in wheelchairs and on stretchers by ambulance. At 90, she published her autobiography and continued her visiting of the elderly well into her 100s, travelling by subway and later with a personal driver.

AFRICA



Elderly woman with an orphan. Photo: The Salvation Army.

The African elderly are honourable people who are considered the shade in every home and village. They are the treasure for wisdom. No matter how old a person is, in the family and the community they are respected and are a point of reference.

In **Malawi** the elderly are still respected and looked up to. However, with the increasing pressure from HIV/AIDS many elderly no longer enjoy rest in their later years. They instead find themselves the supporters of their own grandchildren. Others are living in poverty because their children are either too sick, or have died and are unable to support them.

For these reasons, The Salvation Army has two approaches to the needs of the elderly. One programme, funded from the USA, supports 732 elderly people, 658 of them female, with monthly food supplies. The second is through **AAA Clubs** – “*Amai, Abambo, Akulu*” (Women, Men, Mature). The local headman formed the clubs and gave land to the old to cultivate, helped by their grandchildren. The crops are maize, beans and sunflowers to assist them in their care of orphans. The communities are now taking ownership of the need to support the elderly.

However, with the increasing pressure on older people, two other projects: *Hope HIV*, and the UK *Orphan Vulnerable Children Support Projects* (OVC) seek to support the elderly who care for orphaned children – some not even their own. These projects work through 11 centres of The Salvation Army throughout **Malawi** to provide teaching on HIV/AIDS, and on the rights of

orphaned children. They also seek to sensitise them about the needs of orphans within their communities.

Through this initiative, 270 elderly people are helped and encouraged as they care for around 6000 orphans. The orphans themselves are encouraged to be part of children's clubs where they are provided with play materials as well as counselling. They also receive school materials and uniforms. For the OVC project, it is recognised that the elderly need the means to sustain themselves and 75 grandparents (68 female) have been given goats so that they can breed them and sell the offspring to assist them financially. 23 grandparents have been given micro-credit loans by The Salvation Army to enable them to run small businesses to help them support their orphaned grandchildren. Eunice Mpina, whose two daughters died leaving her with five orphans between the ages of seven and fifteen, testifies that the loan has enabled her to set up a doughnut-baking and selling business. She is now able to pay fees and support the family. The Salvation Army OVC Project has also tried to meet the needs of older carers by supporting them with food, shelter and bedding.



Help for elderly people.

Photo: The Salvation Army.

In **Uganda**, The Salvation Army Uganda Community Care Programme for orphans organises weekly savings-club components. These support the elderly through savings and micro-enterprise. Women form groups of 25, save money and share loans in groups.

Loyce, 86, lives with her mentally disturbed grandson. She sold her land in order to treat her grandson.

In 2005, she started saving and the account grew to Uganda shs 85,000. She was able to build her own house.

Angelina, aged 66 years, lives with her two grandchildren whose parents divorced. She joined the Savings Club and after six months, asked for a loan with which she bought a tree. Her son helped her to cut it down and split it into timber which they used to construct a house. By continuing to work on people's land, she was able to buy two goats which have now multiplied to five.

Sarah, the secretary of the Women's Group, reports that Tom, whose wife died six years ago, was left with a two-month-old baby. The Women's Group provided basic needs for the baby. This has been a relief to the grandmother who looks after him and who is already burdened by caring for another relative who is bedridden with AIDS.

Challenges

Elders face a lot of challenges. Among these are inadequate financial support to meet their basic needs, malnutrition and

ill health. Age itself is against them in going the extra mile to support orphans and other vulnerable children. HIV/AIDS is another challenge that the ageing people face. This scourge has killed the most active age group in the society.

Article contributed by
Commissioner Rosemary Makina,
The Salvation Army.

HONG KONG

'Honour your father and your mother'
(Exodus 20:12)

From the teachings of the Bible as well as the Chinese culture of filial piety (Bu, xiao), there is a long cherished tradition of 'Valuing our Elders'. In facing the rising numbers of an ageing population as well as

the trend of solitary living of seniors, the greatest challenge in Hong Kong is the provision of seamless care to our seniors to allow them to "age in place" with dignity and respect.

The Challenges of Population Ageing in Hong Kong

Hong Kong is experiencing a rapid growth in the numbers of older people. The population aged 65 and above is projected to rise from 12.7% (0.89 million) in 2008 to 27% in 2033 (2.26 million). This is a major cause of concern for policy makers and service providers. In response, the Government set up the 'Elderly commission' for formulation of aged-care policy and has designated 'Care for Elders' as a major strategic objective since 1997. In Hong Kong, over 80% of social service is subsidised by the Government. But a very important role is also played by the Church through the HKSCH Welfare Council. The Anglican Church in Hong Kong should not merely play the role of service-provider for the Government. Carrying the mission of being the most proactive social welfare organisation in Hong Kong, working to build a society of justice, peace, love and care, the Welfare Council endeavours to pilot new products towards meeting the emerging needs of the community. As a trailblazer for aged-care, we have set up numerous pioneer projects. For example:

The World's first Golden Guides

These senior guides were established in 1990 to enable citizens over the age of 60 to retrieve more opportunities to participate in community activities and enhance their sense of belonging to our society. They have regular unit meetings and participate in training activities in accordance with the Eight Point Programme of the Girl Guides.



Cyber world for Seniors

This project has been set up at an H.K.S.K.H Elderly Community Centre since November 2000. The Cyber World, with specially designed computer facilities and various training courses, enables seniors to browse the Internet for health and other information and also to learn IT knowledge. It aims to assist our seniors to march into a new era of e-living and to adjust well to the ever-changing world.



Innovation of Integral Care: Senior Citizen Residential Scheme

In 1996, a survey showed that there was strong demand for purpose-built housing for middle-income seniors. Cheerful Court, an innovative Senior Citizen Residences Scheme, was initiated by the Hong Kong Housing Society and the Social Welfare Council of the Church through strategic partnership. The Housing Society acts as property-developer while the Church Welfare Council is responsible for facility management and provision of self-financing medical and social care. The scheme adopts the concepts of "Supported Housing" and "Lease for Life" to provide "a Home more than a Home" for seniors who can afford it.

The facilities support residents to enjoy active ageing and healthy lifestyle with a sense of security and freedom of choice. Cheerful Court provides 333 residential units with a full range of security and safety devices installed. The club provides facilities including a restaurant, swimming pool cum hydro-pool, gymnasium, library-cum-computer room, shuttle bus. Service provision includes a health-care centre with Chinese herbal and Western medicines, dental clinic and rehabilitation programme. An intensive care unit with 57 beds, which offers transitional and long-term care to residents and the community, is incorporated. A stroke-rehabilitation programme now provides more options of care for stroke patients and also a pilot project to try out a user-pay model for the sector and the future market.

The Centre initiates a brand-new lifestyle – living with care – and has achieved great success. All units were soon leased out, with over 200 applicants on the waiting list. The insight and experience gained at the project spearhead the development of aged-care and housing options in Hong Kong.

Article contributed by Esther Hui, Assistant Director, Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui Welfare Council, HONG KONG

Anglican Indigenous Network: Voice of the Elders:

At the recent gathering of the Anglican Indigenous Network (AIN), held on the island of Hawaii, Bishop John Gray of the Pihoptanga of Aotearoa (Maori Bishopric of New Zealand) asked a question that is being increasingly pondered: "What is an elder today?" and noted that in New Zealand the age for Maori senior citizens is plummeting down to the low forties. One reply was heard many years ago at a Native American gathering of elders, when a young person got up after listening to the discussion and remarked, "There are some people who grow old and there are some who are wise."

During the deliberations of this Indigenous Network gathering, the issue of internal governance and administration provoked several of the delegates representing elders to speak. Uncertain of the proposals to have AIN operate like other organisations, they stated, "Some of us elders feel compelled to say that we too feel the gravity and need to find someone for our next Secretary-General. We want to do it in the way our peoples seek a leader among us – by consultation, by prayer, by looking in and of ourselves, guided by the Holy Spirit. We are not to be rushed for expediency as some do at tribal meetings to bully us to silence. We ask that we can reflect upon the good people already mentioned, talk privately with them, go back home and look among our own people deserving of being our Secretary-General for someone who can and will be able to work with all of us and stand with us on our land. We believe in the present executives and trust their wisdom and experience and would forward the name or names for them to consider. We know this to be the ways of our peoples and are determined to keep AIN grounded in our indigenous way." They were saying that what makes an elder is this: Age should reflect years of experience and accumulated wisdom and knowledge, and the willingness to speak out and to share with others so that they may learn and be skilled.

Article contributed by Malcolm Naea Chun, Secretary General Anglican Indigenous Network, HAWAII

INDIA

In Indian culture, respect for elders is important. One always gives respect to older people and we ask for their blessings. We know that Isaac blessed his sons, Jacob and Esau. Also, when Jacob went to Egypt to stay with his son Joseph, he blessed Pharaoh. When he was very old, he blessed his sons before dying.

According to our marriage customs, when the bride or groom is leaving the home to go to church for the marriage, there is a prayer by the priest and the blessings of the elders is sought. The bride or groom stands on a mat in front of the grandparent, and after giving them dakshina (presents), they touch the feet of the grandparent who then prays and blesses them. This also takes place when leaving home for a long journey.

The fifth of the Ten Commandments God gave to Moses deals with honouring your parents. It is the only commandment with a promise of long life if we obey it. St Paul says, "obey your parents in the Lord, in everything". According to Indian custom, the elder children get married first and leave the home and the youngest son looks after the parents. It is necessary to look after your parents in their old age rather than leave them in an old-age home, where they are lonely and someone else takes care of them. They looked after their children when young and educated them, got them married, helped to look after the grandchildren. So



Woman's Fellowship (Mother's Union) Silver Jubilee Conference 2008, East Kerala Diocese. Bishop Daniel putting shawl on members aged over 80 to honour them.

when they need companionship and looking after, their children should do their duty and not abandon them to an old-age home.

There is much we can learn from the elders as they have a wonderful store of practical knowledge. They have seen so much in life, so their word should not be taken lightly. Today the younger generation has so much knowledge from the Internet that they have a superiority complex. But elders will talk from their store of practical knowledge. I worked in very remote rural places, where farmers who were not so highly educated would

say, "Today, we are poisoning the earth with chemical pesticides." That is now proving true and the world is reverting to organic farming.

We have to follow the Bible-given ways to get back to God and wisdom. Many of our churches have started senior citizens fellowship. One group brings senior citizens to the centre for fellowship, meeting and a meal once a week.

**Article contributed by
Dr Elizabeth Daniel, Kerala State,
INDIA**

NEW ZEALAND



The garden always provides spiritual uplift.

Photo: The Selwyn Foundation.

Connecting conversations

As we grow older in larger numbers and approach our later years, most of us would like to know that we will be consulted about what we want. This hardly seems a novel suggestion.

It is indeed fascinating that many of those who fund and plan for care to older people cannot clearly show that their mandate comes from older people themselves. Many suggest that they know what seniors want, or point to nationally-prescribed standards. Rarely, are central and local government funders and our health services challenged as to how they have established what older peoples' views are on what they need and what factors are important in leading a quality life.

There is an opportunity to engage in conversation with older people. This is the approach adapted by Waiapu Anglican Social Services Trust Board in its work with older people in the Diocese of Waiapu. The Diocese covers areas of the North Island of New Zealand and a team of 500 staff and 500 volunteers support

21,500 people every year. The Anglican family is large and has both a rural and urban catchment with the majority of its services to seniors based in parish sites, in co-location and partnership with the local parish. This is the community-facing church in action – present and active in its neighbourhood.

We have five day-centres for seniors which provide a range of meaningful activities, companionship, learning opportunities and home-visiting programmes. In addition, a team of nearly 200 caregivers visit and support older people in their homes. These caregivers support older people to attend to their daily activities and at the same time develop relationships with them.

In 2006, we began a conversation with older people and talked with them about what was important. They wrote to us, talked on the phone, attended meetings and outlined what they needed to lead a comfortable life. The responses raised a range of key themes:

- social companionship was important. As older people were bereaved their family and friendships decreased and many lived dislocated from surviving family.

- Older people wanted to be treated with respect and have autonomy. They wanted to be given choices and options wherever it was possible.
- People wanted to feel and retain a sense of control and to be in charge of what was happening and have an active participation in decision-making.
- Older people also saw their mobility as key to independence and there was a real desire to have access to good accessible and affordable foot care and podiatry services.

Whilst these were only some of the more prominent themes, older people's voices were heard and valued. Once the research was completed, we visited and engaged them to launch their own research report at three different locations and invited health and other funders to attend and listen.

We then moved to adopt these key themes in our work as we planned new services or refined existing ones. Examples of what this has meant in action include the development of volunteer-visiting services where older people are

supported to build and re-establish new social networks and the inclusion of foot-care services for them. These services are extremely well-utilised.

Our mandate from older people has made a real difference to us – what we are offering and thinking is informed by senior views and is different to that we may have otherwise considered. Our Anglican ethos calls us to embrace diversity, respectfulness and to practise inclusion. As a community-facing church, we have a significant role to play in supporting our elders. Working alongside older people builds on our skills and strengths in hosting people, our pastoral-care talents and our local community relationships with our neighbours.

We have an essential role to play. With more of us ageing, the need for us will only grow.

Article contributed by Liz Andrews, Chief Executive Officer of Waiapu Social Services Trust Board and National Chairperson of the Anglican Care Network, NEW ZEALAND

For full details of the research report see www.waiapuanglicansocialservices.org.nz

PAPUA NEW GUINEA



Ageing in PNG – part of the community.



Photo: Chris Luxton.

One of the legacies of the Anglican Church was the establishment of a health service that continues to service the majority of the Anglican communities. So Papua New Guinea, like everywhere else, has to deal with a rising ageing population due to better health care.

Most of the elderly in Papua New Guinea are free of the types of diseases and ailments that affect the elderly in the west. Their difficulties usually entail fading/loss of eyesight and failing physical ability.

Even before this increase in life expectancy, all older people were treated

with respect. Perhaps because in the past all knowledge was acquired by word of mouth or by example from the elders, they are very much valued and are an integral part of the family unit. The family unit in PNG societies extends beyond the nuclear family to include those three, four or even more times removed. Elderly parents/relatives' houses are built in close proximity to their children and other relatives, and these family members collectively take care of their own. Day-to-day caring is usually done by grandchildren, ie fetching water and wood, cooking and providing companionship. This is an important

relationship, because in Papua New Guinea societies, elders and children are valued equally.

Nowadays, as more and more adult children move to towns for employment purposes, in the majority of cases extended family members take on the responsibility of caring for the parents, and nearly all those in town still maintain strong emotional ties with their parents/relatives as well as giving financial support. Many married children often move their parent/s to live with them in towns if there is limited support in the village.

In the Anglican community, the Mothers' Union movement has also added another dimension to the caring of the elderly. This gives emotional and spiritual support wherever necessary visiting the elderly at their homes. Because the elderly are well looked after, the Mothers' Union members usually visit to pray and sing hymns.

So as people live longer and therefore age increasingly, Papua New Guineans can feel proud that theirs is one of the few societies that values and takes care of the elderly based on their traditional customs with the added support of the Mothers' Union of the Anglican Church.

Article contributed by Eva Vickerman (Uwedo), Papua New Guinea Church Partnership

ENGLAND

Mothers' Union Project – Open Door Lunch Club for the Elderly

Our parish church is no different from many in having a large proportion of the congregation in the retirement-plus age bracket. In addition, our parish contains the largest proportion of retirement and residential care homes in the City of Gloucester.

In 2000, it was decided to start a weekly Lunch Club for the many elderly and lonely folk living in our parish. Research showed that, although mothers and toddlers were well catered for with many pre-school activities, there were very few activities locally for those of senior years. Thus the Open Door Lunch Club was created and launched one Thursday in May. It began as a Mothers' Union project and to this day is still 'owned' by MU, but is considered very much a part of the Outreach Ministry of the parish church. The clergy promote the Lunch Club when they do their follow-up visits after funerals and it has been a life-line to many, particularly widowers. Many of the original diners are sadly no longer with us, either because they have died or have

gone into residential care. However, our numbers remain steady, with almost 50 on our books and on average 36 attending every week. For many, it is the highlight of their week, having a nourishing hot meal and dessert, plus a hot drink and plenty of company – all for a reasonable charge. For those less able to walk along to our Church Centre, we provide transport.

All the cooking, preparation of room and tables and washing-up is done by teams of volunteers, a few of whom are not Mothers' Union members. Of the diners themselves, fewer than half are members of our congregation. Word spreads about the wonderful meal provided at the local church on a Thursday and the Co-ordinator will be telephoned to book a place for a new client. It is very much a community resource. In addition, our branch of Mothers' Union has gained several new members over the last few years as a result of people helping at the Lunch Club.

At Christmas time, a special meal is put on and the Lunch Club becomes a real community venture with a choir from our

local primary school singing carols. In 2006, the Christmas party was made even more special. The Mayor of Gloucester, herself a Mothers' Union member and a member of our church, accepted the official invitation and joined in. The diners were thrilled to be able to inspect her gold chains at close quarters and to chat with her over lunch.

Although the Lunch Club involves an enormous commitment from the volunteers, it is a valuable service to the elderly and much appreciated. The diners always enjoy their meals and have been known to alter hospital appointments if these fall on a Thursday because they do not want to miss the social interaction, as well as the food. We wish we were able to offer the service on more than one day per week. I am sure we would fill the tables every day.

Article contributed by Margaret Edwards, Mothers' Union Diocesan President, Gloucester Diocese, ENGLAND

WEST INDIES



St Philip's Mothers Union receiving cheque to help their ministry to seniors.

One of the advantages that the Caribbean nations have enjoyed over the more developed countries of the world is the culture of the extended family. In the West Indies, many families consist not only of parents and children but also include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and even friends. In such a family, the grandparent or other aged relative is revered and plays a very important role in

helping to nurture the children and pass on acceptable values to the younger generation. As these seniors grow older, every effort is made to make them comfortable within the home and they are lovingly cared for until death. To a large degree, Caribbean people believe that it is a blessing and a privilege to personally take care of one's parents until they pass away, whereas to do otherwise is a "curse". Thus the grandparent or old relative holds a place of honour in the home as everyone tries to live up to the fifth commandment – "Honour thy father and thy mother..." Deut 5:6.

Unfortunately, however, the pressure of modern living has begun to weaken the extended family. The rising cost of living makes it necessary for everyone to seek employment and unless the family can afford a care-giver, the aging parent is left alone at home all day. Further, migration is also taking its toll as young families are

moving away to "greener pastures", sometimes leaving aging parents; and though it is still not a widespread custom for families to abandon their elderly relatives, yet more and more older persons are being placed into homes for the elderly or left to fend for themselves.

Further, because having homeless older persons among us has not been the norm in the West Indies, governments and non-governmental organisations are ill-prepared for this, so that even though there are homes for the elderly, they are either too few or may not be of an acceptable standard.

The Mothers' Union in the province, ever mindful of its motto of caring for families, has observed the changes that are taking place with regard to the care of the elderly and many groups have undertaken projects that would help those who in their golden years are affected by this trend.

Such projects include visits to the elderly to tend to their personal needs, reading to them, taking them to their doctors, doing their shopping, and rendering other services that would make their lives more comfortable. On St Luke's Day every year, special healing services are held throughout the province to which the elderly are bussed and at certain times of the year such as Mothering Sunday and Christmas, special programmes are organised for the elderly and "shut-ins".

In Georgetown, Guyana, the members of St Aloysius Mothers' Union were challenged by their parish priest and his wife to start a project at the Archers Home for the Elderly. During their visit to the home to administer the Holy Sacrament, Father Leslie and his wife saw the need to enhance the appearance of that home and challenged the branch to assist by adopting one room. The challenge was willingly taken up, and donations were sought from families and friends. Soon gifts of paints, carpets, curtains, mattresses were obtained. The youths of the church volunteered to do the painting, and in a short space of time the Mothers' Union of St Aloysius had transformed not one room but two. Other MU branches are now being encouraged to adopt other rooms.

The members of St Philip's Mothers' Union, Georgetown, are also involved in a project for the elderly. That project is a weekly "Meals on Wheels" programme which benefits 14 "shut-in" persons who live either by themselves or in a home for the elderly, but all of whom are in dire need of nutritious meals. The project was

conceived four years ago when the Mothers' Union of St Philip Church realised that many of its once active members were no longer attending church and had become "shut-ins". Visits were paid to those members and their living conditions were assessed. It was discovered that many lived on their own, either because they had no children or their children had migrated. Some lived in families but those families were very poor and could not take very good care of them; and some lived in poorly-run homes for the elderly. It was at that point the Mothers' Union, encouraged by their parish priest, decided to set up a weekly feeding programme.

As a start, members donated cash, raised funds and sought donations from family, other church members and sympathisers. Thus in May 2005, the first batch of meals was delivered to 12 persons, all "shut-in" members of the church. However, as the programme progressed, the MU realised that there were other persons who were non-church members but who also needed meals. At the moment, 50% of the beneficiaries are not members of

St Philip's Church. Recently, a generous cash donation was received from the World Day of Prayer Committee, Such donations will help to make our dream of expansion a reality.

In Antigua, an island in the North Eastern Caribbean, the feeding of the elderly and "shut-ins" is an ongoing project. Six branches are actively involved in the ministry one day every week, contributing, preparing and transporting the meals. The programme at All Saints has been going for over 12 years. The number of persons benefiting from these programmes range from 12 in the smaller branches to as many as fifty people weekly in the larger ones.

By engaging in this ministry, the Mothers' Union in the Province of the West Indies is living up to its motto "Christian Care for Families".

Article contributed by Leila Austin, Mothers' Union Provincial President, Guyana, WEST INDIES

CANADA



Photo: Natalie Makietzoff.

St Paul's Thunder Bay Anglican Church Women, who are mainly seniors themselves, host monthly "Come and Go" teas during the cold, bleak winter months to get seniors out of their homes and enjoy some companionship. Rides are provided, there is no charge, parishioners are encouraged to invite friends and dress up for themes such as in the St. Patrick's Day tea shown above.

Seniors in Canada, as in many western countries, are living longer, and - thanks to a universally available government-funded health care system - live healthier and more active lives, often with some replaced body parts such as artificial hips or knees and heart or artery surgery. Gerontologists no longer speak of seniors as a unitary group but classify our elders as the young-old (ages 65-74), the middle old (ages 75-84) and the oldest old (ages 85-95). Folks in the 85-95 age group are the fastest growing demographic in Canada. Because of the social philosophy of Canadian society,

there is a large secular network of supports for seniors that range from health care and housing to educational, recreational and social opportunities.

Most church congregations in Canada are similarly ageing, and indeed without "the seniors" many parishes would not be able to sustain themselves. This results in a need both for ministry to seniors and ministry by seniors. Parishioners in Canadian churches serve on Advisory Boards, Finance Committees, Anglican Church Women outreach projects, and assist with worship as Choir members,

Lay Readers and Eucharistic Assistants in their 70s, 80s, and indeed into their 90s. The wisdom of retired clergy is welcomed as they join the parish ministry team to serve as non-stipendiary Honorary Assistants who lead services, do pastoral visiting, take funerals and teach daytime Bible studies.

Clergy, lay readers and parish visitors routinely visit elderly parishioners in hospital, nursing homes, seniors' residences, or in their own homes to bring communion, and to keep them connected to the larger parish family by bringing the Sunday service bulletin, the Parish Newsletter and share what is happening in the lives of other members of the parish. In large cities and smaller communities, most clergy conduct a monthly Eucharistic Celebration in a particular nursing home which is attended by all Anglicans in the facility and often by seniors of other denominations. I fondly remember the monthly visits of my Girls' Auxiliary Group to a city-run "Home for the Aged" to which we brought cookies and our teenage enthusiasm to bring cheer to the Anglican residents as well as their roommates.

A relatively new ministry that has been growing in Canada since the 1980s, and which greatly benefits seniors, is that of the Parish Nurse. Parish Nursing encompasses the whole person in health promotion and in healing from illness in a faith context. As a member of the

ministry team, the Parish Nurse will visit seniors at home and in hospital and keep the priest informed of their needs as well as serve as an advocate to help senior parishioners navigate their way through the health-care system. Their intervention often secures a needed place in a care facility. In addition, the Parish Nursing Team presents workshops that promote holistic approaches of body, mind and spirit, and holds blood-pressure clinics after services. In many congregations, the Parish Nurse is a member of the prayer team who prays with people for healing at a side chapel while communion is being distributed at the main Sunday service.

Some parishes and dioceses accept the gospel mandate to social justice by working to meet specific needs of

seniors who fall through the cracks of the social service system. St John's Parish in Peterborough has converted their large rectory into housing for seniors. A number of churches, including St. Paul's L'Amoreaux in Toronto, have donated land and provided leadership to build housing for seniors adjacent to the church building. St Paul's Seniors' Centre now includes a meals-on-wheels programme, friendly visiting, a counselling and referral service, home support service, and an exercise facility.

Individuals often make major contributions to the well-being of seniors. In Ottawa, one woman who loves to cook gathered a group of men to help and began "Muriel's Kitchen" out of her parish church. Once a week they offer a soup and sandwich lunch geared

to seniors, mainly widowers and widows who enjoy the socialisation as much as the meal.

Sr. Constance (see cover page) provides a wonderful example of the value of elders. She has developed her own theology of ageing. "The latter years of our lives are given us by God to give Him thanks, to use our maturity, to use our manifold gifts because there's no one more varied than the elderly person. These years are not ours just to salt away; they are ours to help leaven society." May we follow in her footsteps.

Article contributed by Dr Carol Knox, St Paul's Anglican Church, Thunder Bay, CANADA

HONG KONG

St James' Settlement

There is a significant difference in education background and living standards between different cohorts of elderly people in Hong Kong. In 2007, over 0.18 million aged 60 or above are receiving social security allowance (17% of the elderly population). Statistics also show that 80% of those over 65 years are plagued by one or more chronic diseases. In comparison, those soon-to-be-old (aged 45-59 years) are more educated and financially more viable. Over 50% of them have secondary school education or above, whereas 78.7% of those aged over 60 have primary school education or below. More of the younger group have some kind of retirement protection, compared to around 16% of those aged over 60.

The government funding, though stable, cannot catch up with the increasing elderly population and the needs arising from it. There are a lot of destitute and frail elders living in the community, whose needs of basic and tangible support are not met by the existing welfare services. Meanwhile, there are many younger and healthier elders who are in search of an active and productive aging.

Elderly service projects of the St James' Settlement

St James' Settlement, founded by Bishop R.O. Hall of the Anglican Church in 1949, has developed elderly services since 1967. Although most of these are now subsidised by the Government, St James' Settlement has pioneered various charity services to fill the service gaps for the destitute and sick elders. These services include:

Electrical Appliances for the Elders Programme, Home Maintenance Services, Funeral Navigation Service, Home Use Medical Equipment Support Programme, and Kin Chi Dementia Support Centre.

Donations from the public are solicited for these and, in order to serve the maximum number of cases, a vast number of volunteers are recruited to deliver the services.

Take an example of the *Home Maintenance Services*. Granny Yeung was a frail and single-living elder residing in a remote Sheung Shui village house. Electric wirings in the house were all worn out with sockets fallen off – a fire hazard. She relied solely on social security and could not afford the cost of changing the wires. In order to remove the potential danger, the volunteers, who are trained in home-maintenance and renovation, changed all the wirings and sockets of the house and installed a new fuse box. A waterproof lamp was also installed on the external wall to facilitate Granny Yeung's activities in the dark night.

In addition, St James' Settlement continues to actualise the principle of active-ageing in-services for the healthier and younger elders. Since 1979, the Settlement has pioneered services for the



Granny Yeung and the volunteers in front of the village house.



Joining the Adventure-Based Counselling programme and building confidence.

the Association was transformed into the *Retired Person Volunteer Association* with its own premises. Members are encouraged and enabled to manage their association and building and, at the same time, contribute their time and expertise in providing volunteer services to deprived people in the community.

In 2008, the Settlement began to pilot a series of *Adventure-Based Counselling* programmes for elderly people. The aim is that through these the participants would strengthen their confidence and esteem, improve their communication skills and enhance their resilience. The programmes are tailor-made for both frail and healthy elders, but the younger and healthier among them are expected to become volunteers and serve the community in return.

Article contributed by David Fung, Senior Manager Continuing Care Services, St James' Settlement, HONG KONG

MALAYSIA



Dining room, administrative building, ARK.

Anglican Retirement Kampong (ARK)

The Anglican Retirement Kampong (village), commonly known as ARK, is the first Diocesan community/welfare project for the elderly. The idea of a retirement home was first conceived in the 1970s by the late Bishop Luke Chhoa in anticipation for the Diocesan clergy's retirement. The plan for a home for the elderly was later developed by Canon Fred David of Christ Church Likas in March 2001. The PCC of Christ Church adopted the plan and named the project "A Touch of Home". By November 2001, the Diocesan Standing Committee approved the RM500000 project and a grant was given to Christ Church to spearhead the development. The project was later revised to RM1.4 million with some modification by adding a two-storey building and another administrative

building. A loan from the Conference of Churches of East Asia was secured to meet the shortfall.

Upon approval from the local development authorities, the groundbreaking ceremony was held in December 2002 by the Bishop of Sabah and Primate of South East Asia, The Most Revd Yong Ping Chung. The whole project was renamed Anglican Retirement Kampong (ARK). After two and a half years, the newly-built complex comprising a 12-room/24-beds Residents' Building, an Administrative building and Warden's House was completed in 2004 and dedicated in June by the Archbishop.

The ARK began operation in January 2005 with five residents which grew steadily to 23 residents at the point of writing. Three applicants are on a waiting

list. Due to a growing demand for such service, the Management Committee proceeded with the Phase 2 (Expansion) of ARK, comprising a ten-room building. The Standing Committee approved the project in July 2008 and granted a loan. Due to the economic crisis, the tendered costs have escalated and the development and building plans now await the local authority's approval.

We praise God for the growth of this ministry. The ARK has received much praise from churches and community alike. It is praised as the best-cared Home for the elderly in the city, the best facility with the most committed team of caregivers. We thank God for the Warden and his team of dedicated staff. We also thank all the others on the Board of Management and the Building Committee for their commitment and service in overcoming all the challenges.

The ARK now functions as a retirement home and also offers limited nursing care. Its mission is to enhance the social, physical and spiritual well-being of senior citizens. It is also designed to provide a safe, comfortable, and scenic environment to the residents. The activities include morning and evening devotions, Bible study, birthday celebrations, outings, senior citizens fellowship and Sunday worship at Christ Church Likas. All glory to God.

Contact Person, The Warden,
ARK, Sabah, MALAYSIA

SCOTLAND



Photo: Jean Myers.

Age Celebration: Elizabeth on her 100th birthday.

Faith in Older People

On a global scale the small nation of Scotland has much to be thankful for. We live in peace, in relative prosperity and with free access to healthcare services. A baby born in Scotland today can expect to live until she is almost 80 if a girl, and almost 75 if a boy. In a population a little over five million in 2007, there were 710 people who were over 100 years old. However, within a positive big picture there are many problems. In deprived areas, life expectancy can be reduced by almost 20 years and, with an ageing population, over 65,000 people suffer from dementia and most of these people live alone or with an elderly partner. Like many countries in Western Europe, church attendance is falling quite rapidly and many churches are attended predominantly by older people. This is seen as a problem by many people who fear for the survival of the church as older members become more

infirm and die. Within a general context of growing fear and negativity about ageing, *Faith in Older People (FiOP)* was an initiative begun three years ago by a group of Anglicans in Edinburgh to celebrate the process of ageing, to recognise the contribution that older people have made to our society and many still continue to make and to rejoice in their lives of faith and service.

Recognising the large number of congregations who have many older people in their midst, we see this not so much as a 'problem' but rather as an opportunity. These congregations are incredibly rich in experience and faith and we welcome and support them and wish to honour them.

FiOP is now spreading out from Edinburgh to work in different parts of Scotland, supporting and encouraging churches as they value their older members and,

working with them, we seek to find new ways of understanding and nurturing the spiritual lives and experiences of older people. This becomes even more important when age or frailty prevents people from attending their church and when illness, pain, loss and the death of loved ones leaves people more isolated and perhaps more fearful for the future.

FiOP is working to find ways of encouraging the spiritual welfare of older people if, or when, they leave their own home and move into some form of residential care. We know that many carers in our increasingly secular society are at a loss to understand or address people's

spiritual needs and so we are active in trying to bring to the fore a greater understanding of what it is that gives meaning and purpose, hope and significance to people as they enter the final stages of their life. We recognise that although many people may not regard themselves as being 'religious', there is an almost universal appreciation of the need to love and be loved, to 'keep our spirits up' and to face the future with hope rather than with despair.

FiOP is about our faith in them and in what they have achieved and continue to contribute to others and it is also about recognising the faith which sustains so many people as they journey through life and have

to cope with so many setbacks. Our small organisation has been enormously encouraged by people's response to our work and we face the future with considerable confidence and hope as we seek ways of maintaining and nurturing that faith and spirit if the 'problems' of age threaten to suffocate the joys of lives of fulfilment, service and generous self-giving.

Article contributed by Malcolm Goldsmith, Faith in Older People (FiOP), SCOTLAND.

www.faithinolderpeople.org.uk

ARGENTINA



Senior Devotion.

Photo: Ronnie Watson, BABS.

BABS is the British and American Benevolent Society which was set up to take care of those who, in their old age, needed help in Argentina. BABS has been providing this caring service since 1880 and is a home for senior citizens in the capital, Buenos Aires. Most of the people there are descendents of English-speaking immigrants, whose first language is still English, even though many were second, third or fourth generation of those born in Argentina.

Christian services are held each Sunday in the home. The first Sunday of the month is led by an Anglican minister and the other Sundays by RC, Presbyterian and Community church leaders and it struck me that there might be a positive response to an offer of something devotional during the week.

Our little group began in April 2002 and about ten ladies attended. We were given a small room and, as many were in wheelchairs, it took a long time to settle everyone in. Since then, we have been given a larger area called the Winter Garden where there is a lot more space.

As I travel quite a lot, two other leaders have emerged, Rosemary and Winnie, and between us we lead the devotional hour each Wednesday morning.

We begin with a prayer or psalm and then a shortened Morning Prayer, followed by a reading from a book, finishing with prayers, then other relevant readings. There is a very good atmosphere and some of the ladies chip in from time to time, but most of the time they seem hungry to listen

and learn. The emphasis is always on God being our Creator and that He loves us and sent his son Jesus to save us and make it possible to be reconciled with Him, and that each one of us is called to have a personal relationship with Him. Each of the readings is explained in a simple manner and it has been very encouraging over the years to see how some of the ladies have understood the gospel for the first time.

Mary, one of the ladies who attended the first meeting, eventually gathered all her family round her bed the week she died and radiantly said goodbye to them all. Another, Elizabeth, who used to come for a cigarette (the Winter Garden is also the smoking area) and listen behind a pillar became so interested that she began to attend. She once rang me up the night before I was visiting the UK to thank me for the group and she said she now understood the gospel. When I returned six weeks later, she had died. Once when I was in the Recovery Unit, visiting someone who was ill, another lady was looking on with great interest. Afterwards I went to say "hello" and

asked her if she'd like a prayer. She looked terrified and said "no thanks", so I just kissed her forehead and blessed her in the name of Jesus. Next week she watched again. The third time, she accepted my offer of a prayer and once she had returned to her own room she looked forward to my weekly visits. She had been brought up as a Christian Scientist and for many years had suffered with a serious illness and was in denial and very confused. She seemed to be at peace with God when she eventually died.

I also encourage the regulars to use their gifts with each other in the home. Lily now goes and gives goodnight hugs to some who need it. Four of the present ladies meet three times during the week to read the Bible and pray together. Elvina gathers people together for our Wednesday devotional hour. (Some need constant reminders as many are suffering from short-term memory loss). Some with dementia thoroughly enjoy the hour but then of course have to be reminded again the following week. Nora has learned Psalm 23 by heart for the first time in her life. She has given a copy to her son and now encourages him to do the same. Hilda enjoys the hour so much that she sometimes refuses to go to her exercise class which overlaps. Katherine reads to people who can't see well enough.

Out of my original ten regulars, only two are still alive. Over the last seven years at least 50 ladies have attended our little devotional hour, many who are now in glory. I have been privileged to be able to pray with some in their dying moments and I look forward to being reunited with them one day.

Article contributed by Mrs Sylvia Venables, Buenos Aires, ARGENTINA

NEW ZEALAND



People always want to be helpful.

Centre for ageing and spirituality

Jim attends communion once a week at his wife's dementia unit. He says this is his way of connecting with her now that her dementia is so advanced. Although she cannot say so, she seems to find relevance in the Eucharistic ritual.

Mary has been a caregiver in aged residential care for many years. She grieves each time one of her beloved residents moves on to a higher level of care or dies. Although she says she is used to it, sometimes she feels overwhelmed by the constant losses.

The occupational therapist in the older people's mental health unit is frustrated by the lack of attention paid to the need for older people to live in a meaningful way. She feels the dominant "medical model" ignores people's spiritual needs.

Joan has been unable to get to church recently because of poor eyesight and incontinence. The minister rarely visits. She feels isolated and deserted after a lifetime of Christian service.

Older people and those who care for them are often faced with challenges of a spiritual kind.

In health and aged-care services, staff are often too busy or feel incompetent or that they are overstepping boundaries in attempting to address older people's spiritual needs. Yet the older people in their care need help to transcend suffering and make meaning of their lives as death approaches.

Churches can feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of older people in their congregations. Often members lack expertise in dealing with the problems that beset their elders; deafness, chronic pain, dementia, immobility. It can be difficult to include people who are disabled in congregational life. Yet these are the people most at risk of social isolation who most need the support of the body of Christ.

Like the rest of the developed world,

New Zealand is experiencing an increase in the numbers of older people both Maori and Pakeha (those of European ancestry). The vast majority, (87% aged over 65) affiliate with a Christian denomination. We can anticipate increased ethnic and religious diversity as a result of immigration, and the baby boomers now in their 50s and 60s will have different spiritual needs from their parents.

Photo: The Selwyn Foundation.

Government health and welfare policies promote "wellbeing" and "holistic care", both defined as having a spiritual element. For Maori, "taha wairua" the spiritual side of health, is vital – along with physical, emotional and social wellbeing. However, despite acknowledgement of the importance of spirituality, for many older people, there is little attention paid to meeting the need.



Relationships remain important.

Photo: The Selwyn Foundation.

The Selwyn Centre for Ageing and Spirituality was set up in 2008 to educate, research and advocate in this field. Education is not just for Christians or those with a religious background. Health-care workers are a diverse lot, often more secular than their elders. The participants in a recent workshop appreciated the opportunity to re-evaluate their own lives and recognise the spiritual part of their identity, so easily lost in a busy helping environment. People spoke of becoming aware of ways to remain tranquil yet sensitive to the people in their care. From recognising the changes in themselves with ageing and their own spiritual journeys, they felt

more able to be open with others in their situations. We hope to have courses running specifically for religious organisations by 2010.

For people wanting an academic challenge, Charles Sturt University (Australia) offers distance-learning in Ageing and Pastoral Studies and the Selwyn Centre is coordinating and supporting New Zealanders wishing to do the Certificate, Diploma or Masters courses.

In September 2009, we are hosting the International Conference on Ageing and Spirituality with key-note speakers from USA, Scotland and Australia. The Conference has discovered several New Zealand researchers dealing with aspects of spirituality and ageing. Even in our small country (population four million), we are often unaware of exactly what research is going on. Our own literature review showed a dearth of research on ageing Maori and spirituality, men's spirituality, and the needs of formal and family caregivers. We are funding two scholarships for students wishing to pursue research in ageing and spirituality and will commission research in the area.

Advocacy comes with education and research. If having spiritual needs met keeps people healthy (as overseas research suggests), then the Government may be interested, in the face of the ageing population. An electronic forum, recently launched will, hopefully, facilitate concerted action. Raising awareness and educating staff in the health and

aged-care services can ultimately improve the quality of care elders receive.

Older people living at Selwyn Village (where the Centre is situated) have been most helpful in sharing their ideas and giving advice, both formally as an advisory group and also as members of a group that meets to discuss issues pertaining to spirituality and to educate me, as Director of The Selwyn Centre.

Article contributed by The Rev Canon Dr Julia Perry, Anglican Care Chaplain, NSW, AUSTRALIA

www.selwyncare.org.nz

AUSTRALIA



Soul Food: objects to touch and smell rekindle memories.

Anglican Care, the Diocese of Newcastle.

Every Eucharist I give the valediction: "Go in Peace to love and serve the Lord". For many years in parish ministry I said this with what was meant to be an encouraging volume for witness beyond the church walls. Ministry in a resident community which is entirely frail-aged, challenges my urging to evangelism. Anglican Care has 650 staff and facilities on several sites which care for 1,000 residents. About 50% of the residents have some Christian faith experience; the vast majority are in very frail physical health, and many have some dementia. "Go in peace..." is now more of an entreaty to liberation, though still an encouragement, especially for those who can't hear or understand the words. A 100th birthday is not especially unusual and many residents' families live hours away. Spiritual care does of course include the sacraments and scriptures. However for the high-care residents we

are exploring ways of 'lifting their spirits' as well as ways in which we might lift the spirits of the families around them:

Soul Food: We all need spiritual nourishment, and many of us have choices about time for meditation and style of spiritual belief and expression. This is no longer true for our high-care residents. So we are beginning a programme which is to provide some choices about spiritual nurture and also to stimulate the residents' senses (except taste – that is too risky) and appreciation of their own worth. In parish worship, the presider leads the congregation from song to words to symbols at the presider's pace and choosing. While we can make some adjustments for various frailties at *Anglican Care*, the service is not equally accessible to all present – and choice, so lacking in their lives, is again not available. *Soul Food* will be of short duration and include audiovisual and tangible chances to explore God's world according to themes.

Small decorated boxes which for a sea theme might include sand, shells, starfish, seaweed (fresh would provide a wonderful aroma!) would be given to each resident while scenes of waves crashing/rippling are accompanied by recordings of the sea, sea gulls, ships horns. Themes could be Australian bush and birds, kitchen/cooking, men's shed, children, church. In each instance, there and will also be an opportunity to include brief and familiar scriptures and poetry.

Each 'session' will begin and end with the same pieces of music which will be familiar hymns – e.g. Amazing Grace, 23rd Psalm.

I would hope that where families might visit, they could sit with their loved one, hum the tunes, explore the boxes with them; and in time feel easier themselves to sit and share tangible, aromatic, audible and visual memories inspired by their own knowledge of cherished family history and reminiscences.

Wherever *Soul Food* opens avenues for residents to wonder at God's creation, wonder at their place in it, and encourages their families to share those spiritual times of nourishment, God is worshipped.

Contact Person: The Reverend Canon Dr Julia Perry, Anglican Care Chaplain, C/o Anglican Care, Toronto Rd, Booragul NSW 2284, AUSTRALIA

www.anglicancare.com.au

A PRAYER FOR CARERS OF OLDER PEOPLE

FATHER OF ALL

We pray for families, neighbours and churches

who gently encourage their members of senior years to be as independent as possible; who help the elderly to take part as much as they can in family, church and community life;

who give personal, ongoing and sacrificial care to their frail, sick or dependent elderly members;

Grant them, and to all who serve the elderly voluntarily or professionally, at home or centre, warmth and patience, confidence and strength;

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, grandson of Anne and Joachim.

Amen

Revd John Bradford

IAFN International Anglican Family Network

IAFN ADDRESS

C/o Anglican Communion Office,
St Andrew's House,
16 Tavistock Crescent,
Westbourne Park,
London W11 1AP, ENGLAND
email: mail@iafn.net
Tel: +44 (0)7948 332697

THE NEXT FAMILY NETWORK NEWSLETTER is on the subject of Death and the Family

Visit the Family Network website: www.iafn.net

The views of individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the International Anglican Family Network.