

The Church and 't

It's a fact that the Church (and not just the CofE) would be in a pretty poor state without its older people. As our contributors here prove, older people offer their churches experience, talent, stability and, that precious commodity, time! Sometimes as the book review shows, older people may need special consideration. Yet often the discussion is 'what should we do for the elderly', when really it should be 'what can we together'?



Older people within the Church

MY RETIREMENT week-end, 8 years ago, was spent at Hillfield Priory. There I learned about the Third Order of St Francis, and the shape of my life since then has been formed through membership of that Order. Our Rule of Life requires us to: *'make a lifelong commitment to God and to others; to care for all that God has created, and as instruments of peace to have a special concern for the poor; to give a central place in our lives*

to the Eucharist, and, in a spirit of penitence and simplicity, to persevere joyfully in prayer, study and work for God's Kingdom.'

My **study** began at King's College, to which I am hugely thankful for the quality of New Testament teaching. This was followed by an MA at Heythrop. Meanwhile, I was fortunate enough to train as a Reader for 3 years, a broader course of study, and very worthwhile. I try to keep up with Bible study and read widely.

The **work** has been steady and absorbing! As a Reader, I assist with services, preach, and take funerals. During the recent interregnum, the work increased, especially the number of funerals; it was an opportunity to get to know

members of the parish better, and to assist the bereaved. I have also worked with others to improve our church hall for use by community groups, and have helped to raise funds towards the £300,000 needed for the conservation of the church.

Until recently, I had various diocesan commitments, such as membership of the Bridge Editorial Board, and the Board for Church in Society. I have, also, been teaching Pastoral Care and Ethics on the Reader's Course for the past 3 years. I was heavily involved for 18 months with the group which produced the Diocesan Report on 'Cohabitation'.

Aside from these activities, I work with asylum seekers - my 'poor'. Currently I visit detainees at Harmondsworth Detention Centre weekly, and am linked with a church-based group, the Wandsworth Refugee Network, which seeks to make known the injustices of the current system.

As I reach 70, I plan to work less and spend more time in **prayer and meditation**. The resolution has led this year to monthly Quiet Days, a Franciscan pilgrimage, and a Meditation group during Lent. I hope to continue on this journey.

Denise Mumford



As we grow older

TOGETHER WE have felt part of the Church for many years having met almost 60 years ago when Hardinge was a churchwarden and Joan a cub leader in Hampstead. We now qualify as being elderly!

We have been fortunate. We have kept fit and able to move around (thanks partly to the freedom passes) and we have had the benefit of each other's continued support. Although we have each faced difficulties on occasions we have not faced the challenge of loneliness or being housebound which is the lot of many elderly people.

It is good to be able to walk to church Sunday by Sunday and to take part in celebrating the Eucharist relieved of such

responsibilities as setting up the church for the service, reading or leading intercessions now there are others involved.

As we grow older we become more broadminded and enjoy new forms of worship if well planned and ordered and we have the service in large print. We much prefer the "new" Lord's Prayer.

We can take part by joining in discussion groups and we are grateful for the welcome of young people prepared to share with the aged. The groups may be ecumenical and we are disappointed at the slow progress in coming together of Christians, as ecumenical activity started in our youth.

It is still possible to join in delivery of church notices if we choose level areas! Although we can't stand long enough for the Good Friday walk of witness and Waterloo Station services, we can support efforts to end world poverty and

discrimination, and support events because we are more available than those at work.

We form part of a stable group in the church when many younger people move more often. It gives friendship as horizons narrow and the joy of shared anniversaries. It is a comfort to feel clergy and members of the congregation notice our absence and if unexpected check the reason.

The housebound need regular visits and home communion and regular delivery of leaflets of events so that they can still feel part of the Church family.

While we are not so active in proclaiming the gospel we try to practice it in our lives. Prayer is always there and we can try to keep up to date in our reading. We are an available source of experience and memory of people who have helped us, as well as schemes that have been unsuccessful and so can, on occasion, give a warning and suggest further thought about a new idea while being ready to encourage wise experiment.

As we grow older we are much less rigid than in middle age and we still enjoy life.

As we draw near to the end of the road we are more inclined to obey the apostolic command to set our affection on things above. That ought not to be at the expense of the problems of the world.

The conclusion of the Nicene Creed dictates we look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. That is not so much a proclamation of belief as a dedication of hope.

That is a hope that the Church brings in particular to old people.

Joan & Hardinge Pritchard

Age is no bar to involvement

MY CHURCH, All Saints, Tooting Graveney, can be summed up by the words Bishop Ronald Bowlby, written after his visit in 1963. *'The church itself encourages worship and prayer, while the centre next door will do much to build up the life of the congregation and serve the neighbourhood'*.

I had a similar impression when I entered All Saints for the first time over twenty years ago to worship with my family. The warmth that greeted us, the format of the liturgy and the friendliness over coffee prompted us to stay until today. I was encouraged to participate e.g. in charge of Servers, doing readings and intercessions;

servicing on committees, including Deanery Synod and Brace Trust and as churchwarden for six years.

Four years ago I was directed by the Holy Spirit to continue with God's work in a more spiritual manner. Neither age nor colour deterred me from responding to that call.

I embarked on a three-year Readers' course that I satisfactorily completed last year when I was admitted and licensed to All Saints.

As a Reader, I assist in leading worship, baptisms and funerals, preach, share in the spiritual teaching and pastoral work; and in the leadership of our Parish.

As an ethnic minority member within the Diocese I serve on the Executive Committee of the Black and Ethnic Minority Forum. I visit and preach at a different church on Racial Justice Sunday encouraging others while

spreading the Gospel of Christ.

In this Church the older one gets the more committed one tends to become. Mrs Olive Brown, for example, the oldest member of our congregation at 94, comes to church almost every Sunday and can narrate almost everything that has happened in the church since she started attending services over 50 years ago.

We are quite aware that some of our older members rely on others for help during periods of illness, disability or simply ageing. So we encourage them to focus on group activities such as the Choir, Mothers Union' and our once a month 'All Age Worship' which can be done collectively.

Those who cannot travel to Church usually have volunteers who can collect and return them to their homes. We also make home and Hospital visits to the housebound where Holy Communion is administered if

requested. There is a weekly service at a nursing home called the Heritage Care Centre which is on a new housing estate in the parish. Various members of the congregation help the Vicar with this. We try to make the worship specific to the pastoral needs of the residents. Our choir also visits the centre each Christmas for the Carol Service.

As with most churches we are making ongoing efforts to adapt our building and worship to meet the needs of those with disabilities.

We have a loop system, large print copies of services and have recently installed a ramp.

We also have a website: www.allsaintstooting.org.uk. We value everyone in our community irrespective of age.

Above all we are united in our faith in God and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and our love for one another.

Sydney Wager



the elderly'

The Springfield Senior Citizen's Group

THE GROUP first met in 1997 at Springfield Community Flat. It all began with Mrs Benn's 100th birthday party.

She was one of the matriarchs of the estate. She had moved in during the '30s with her husband, they had two children. Her son had moved to Australia and her husband and subsequently her daughter had died. She was alone and relied entirely on her home help and the mobile library.

At 100 years old, living on the first floor, Mrs Benn was a prisoner in her own home (Springfield Estate doesn't have lifts) so we had to persuade the local fire brigade to come to carry her downstairs for the party. She had a wonderful and was exceedingly voluble. Reading her telegram from the Queen, she remembered the time she had seen Queen Victoria and she was a mine of good stories about the estate and its more colourful inhabitants. She was especially thrilled that she had managed to get so many of her friends to come to the party too. They mostly lived on the upper floors of other blocks and she had not seen them for year. The firemen had been very busy that day carrying elderly women up and down stairs!

Of course the party was a huge success and all the women wanted to do it again. They told us how lonely and isolated they felt. They felt that no one even knew of their existence or cared whether they lived or died.

Their problems were exacerbated by their failing health and their physical disabilities. Fortunately there was a wonderful younger woman on the Estate who loved seniors and she ran a pilot project with them, visiting those who could not get about, and persuading the more able-bodied to come to a weekly drop-in session.

Numbers attending grew, they loved this highly personalized service. In the summer they sat out on the grass outside the flats under the shade of the trees and enjoyed their afternoon tea.

More people joined and as autumn came, the group, with several people in wheelchairs was too big to fit back into the flat.

They had to move out and found a much bigger room next to the vicarage.

Funds for a worker...

We managed to secure a grant to pay the volunteer to become a full time worker and another grant to make the vicarage room suitable for disabled people, and then there was no stopping them. The group has 20-40 members, 50% black, 50% white, most are over 80, several have Alzheimer's Disease, others strokes, asthma, diabetes or chronic bronchitis and so on. We encourage everyone to retain as much independence as possible, involving them in decision

making and helping one another. We also plan activities and events to encourage intergenerational activity including the gardening project – bring a disused patch of earth back into use as a community garden.

Regular activities include weekly armchair aerobics on Mondays (thanks to YMCA), a drop in session with lunch & activities on Wednesday and drop-in sessions on Fridays.

Members have really benefited from the mutual support and have enjoyed a wide range of activities, reminiscence work, drama, quizzes, arts and crafts of all sorts, making or altering their own clothes (often led by a member of the group – or someone in their family) and basketball.

At first people did not want to try to make a basket they thought it was too difficult, but eventually realized how much the activity actually helped their arthritic fingers.

Then there were visits to other clubs and regular outings – fruit picking, seaside trips and music hall, Christmas and New Year parties are always a great success and the annual week's holiday at Bognor or Bracklesham Bay with electric wheelchairs for all was the highlight of the year.

The group used to make regular visits to the local care home and would act as advocates for some of the residents in a very effective

way. Our full time worker persuaded the home to employ an activities worker there – and what a transformation that produced.

The full time worker was also able to do a lot of outreach work with people who have been referred and to offer help and advice to each of the senior citizens ensuring that they get the benefits and the health care to which they are entitled.

...which ran out!

Then the funding ran out and we were not able to pay a worker. The senior citizens group has coped very well on its own for three months, buying the food, cooking and sharing the costs and enjoying board games.

We have now managed to find another volunteer a SPA who helps them in the Wednesday drop-in and is planning outings and barbecues, aromatherapy and painting and crafts. Perhaps we will be able to find more funding to allow some more staff time and so more outreach now that such good links have been built up with GPs, physiotherapists etc.

We plan to move in to the new West Stockwell Health and Community Centre when it opens at the end of 2006. We could have many more people coming in then with a dedicated craft room, and hopefully laundrette facilities which the senior citizens themselves have requested.

Rev Sue Peake



Canon Ian Ainsworth-Smith reviews:

"In a Strange Land... People with Dementia and the Local Church"

by Malcolm Goldsmith

(4M Publications, 34 Cumberland Street, Edinburgh EH3 6SA

ISBN 0 95 30494 6 9 £14.95 plus £2 p & p)



Pastors are frequently asked by people in personal crisis to suggest something "helpful" which they might read to help them make sense of their experience. I have learnt to be cautious of recommending books as a panacea. What speaks to one may not make sense to another and alienate someone else.

But I heartily recommend this book. Malcolm Goldsmith is an Anglican priest with a background in parish ministry, chaplaincy and research. His experience produces a book which is rich in practical advice, but set out in a thoughtful and documented theological and pastoral framework. If the measure of good pastoral care is its "praxis", the linking of what is done and an underlying theological coherence, this book succeeds.

Many parishes and Christian communities have learnt the value and importance of

welcoming people with disabilities the mutual enrichment that can take place. I have certainly not previously come across any writing which focuses on incorporating (sometimes reincorporating) people with dementia and their carers into church life. This book has an aptly named chapter "Don't talk of love – show me!" which suggests how churches might extend and develop their welcome and ministry to people with dementia. We are also rightly reminded that the term dementia is not a 'blanket diagnosis' and that the experience of dementia is not the same for everyone, nor does it follow a set pattern. Carers may also drift away from contact with the church and their departure is sometimes unnoticed!. The impact on long term carers is also discussed, and some possible practical and supportive ways of helping are

suggested. I have certainly heard from carers many of the mixed feelings about their experiences which are well highlighted in this book.

"Spirituality" is a term which now has some prominence in health care. Its relationship to other factors such as a person's culture and religious practice is frequently examined in "secular" settings. The author sets out some useful definitions of the spiritual issues which are present in working with people with dementia. He stresses that these are not just "add ons" but for many people in long term illness something that can provide meaning and purpose when everything else, experiences of past life and looking towards the future can feel chaotic and without meaning. The title refers to Psalm 137 and raises the theme of trying to sing a familiar song in a strange and unmapped land. It is a

poignant image and resonates fully as one reads the book.

This is an area where Christians are reminded yet again of the unique value of ritual and liturgy as a means of trying to put into action and reaching for the unsayable. This implies a challenge to a way of thinking and working that tries to express everything in words. Many people in crisis or long term illness may be able to respond to and use actions, and occasionally words, which may be familiar to them. (I was recently roundly rebuked by a patient, who was apparently unaware of his surroundings and past life, to whom I gave communion on Whitsunday for using the Gospel rather than the Pentecost reading from Acts, which is longer but may be much more familiar to many!)

We are offered some very imaginative suggestions for liturgies which could be used

to mark someone's admission to a nursing home or to support family and friends of people in residential care.

Malcolm Goldsmith stresses that people with dementia are not a "client group" but a potential resource. He never sentimentalises or underestimates the difficulties but a thread runs throughout of thoughtful prayerful respect for everyone whose lives may be touched by dementia. It would be an admirable basis for a parish or community based ministry project. The current estimate is that the number of people who may be diagnosed with dementia may constitute within a few years a quarter of the population over 75, not to mention those who may develop the condition earlier in life.

His book is very timely.

Canon Ian Ainsworth-Smith is Chaplain, St George's Healthcare NHS Trust