

SECOND HALF OF LIFE: FRESH HORIZONS

Third-Age Mission and Ministry

Empowering the Church: Affirming God's Kingdom

The Mission Challenge

- An ageing society
- An unreached group
- An under-used resource

The Mission Vision

- Empowering for service
- Engagement with church
- Equipping for evangelism
- Exploring the theology

The Mission Opportunity

- On your doorstep
- In your town or city



The Challenge

Like it or not, the nation, and the members in our churches, are getting older.

- There will soon be more over 65's than under 16's in the UK!
- There are over 9.5 million people in the UK over 65.
- In 2000, 7,100 reached 100 years of age, by 2030 that will rise to around 33,000.
- In 2003 over 33% of the world's population was over 50.
- Older people's lifestyles are influenced by their ability to travel and desire to participate in society.
- 30% of people 65 and over help with a voluntary organisation or charity.
- The estimate of Baptist third-agers (55-75+) who might be encouraged and equipped for mission is 30,000+.
- Almost everyone can expect to live much longer in the years to come.

The challenge is not simply related to statistics but mindset. Dawn Brown, in a comprehensive study of *The Impact and Potential of a Greying Population on Baptist Churches in England in 2000*, writes, 'The church of the 21st Century must surely seek to foster a culture of value for all humans whatever their age, rather than unconditionally exalting the icon of youth that has been created by society'.

She continues, 'Sadly, much of the ageism encountered in society, has been taken on board absolutely by **clergy, church leaders and congregations alike**'.

The challenge is not simply related to statistics but mindset.

Old or young – what do you see?

An ancient Chinese proverb states, 'When an older person dies it is like a library going up in smoke'. A policy of ageism actually creates a funeral pyre ahead of death, effectively cutting off or stifling the flow of acquired wisdom, knowledge, skills and invaluable 'life' experience.

Job knew what that experience of being marginalised, ignored, and even despised, felt like; 'But now they mock me, men younger than I, whose



fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs. And now their sons mock me in song: I have become a byword among them; they detest me and keep their distance.' (Job 30: 1, 9)

For many older people this is their testimony and experience – passed over, ignored, sidelined, irrelevant and even abused. Where this is evident the challenge is to a change of mindset, theology and pastoral practice.

Liz Stacey – Pastoral Coordinator for Mission to Seniors (Winchester Baptist Church)

Over the past eleven years I have become increasingly aware of the large numbers of older people using church premises but not necessarily having the opportunity to hear the Good News of God's love. I knew they needed the freedom to choose but in my heart I longed to make the links that would facilitate opportunities for ministry. I shared my concern about reaching the community with the church leadership, who agreed to release me for two days a week to research the possibilities. The aim was to create a framework that would support spiritual growth and maturity in older people by demonstrating God's love for them, thereby encouraging faith and bringing hope.

I began by recruiting a team, many of whom had been active in the past, but needed fresh vision and encouragement. The first lunchtime service drew members of the Age Concern and Friendship Clubs, both of which met on church premises. Feedback was encouraged enabling us to assess the relevance of our time together. The outcome was a monthly 'Silver-Service' (their name) attended by around forty people, with two-thirds from the community not the church. Building on the initial success, other activities such as craft, drama, music

and exercise classes were added, and as word spread around the city so more lunch clubs asked to join. A Marilyn Baker Gospel Concert attracted 160, mostly non-church, people. Citywide 'Songs of Praise' galvanised people for an orchestra and choir as well as general help. A 'Silver-Seekers' Alpha-type group led to six conversions including an 82 year old disabled lady and a 67 year old helper who were later baptised.

Seeing God at work has encouraged us all. Following eleven years as church administrator I was appointed as Pastoral Coordinator for Mission to Seniors in June 2006. I have the love and support of the church as well as the Steering Group which includes five people in their sixties and seventies. We are overwhelmed at what God is doing and



excited at being involved together. We have found some of the 'buried treasure' that lies within all our churches; the wisdom, collective common sense and insight held by these saints is an available resource to us all if only we will recognise and utilise it. Seniors still have ideas, want to be listened to and have accumulated a wealth of knowledge through their life experience and

faith journey. We need to create a definite role for our seniors, offering them training and support that allows them to develop further and to be all that God still intends them to be.

Nancy Lively – An amazing 'senior' presently working with husband Bill in Prague writes, 'Older people are still clever and full of ideas ... but they need real work. By creating a definite role for our seniors, we give them the love and respect they deserve as well as some **'senior significance'**. They are no longer God's **hidden** asset but the churches' **available** resource, locally, regionally and internationally.'

Theology – the biblical perspective on ageing

'Zaqen' (to be old) occurs 174 times in the Old Testament, either as adjective or noun. 'Elder', the more specialist term, occurs over 100 times and often in relation to the gathering of representatives of the nation. The authority of elders was derived from their seniority relative to those they represented, whether household, clan, tribe or nation. This pattern of leadership was maintained throughout the history of the Jewish nation.

Another commonly used word is '**seybah**', - to become grey or become old. There is a sense of admiration in the word – a respect for old age, even positive reverence. The Greek word '**presbuteros**' (older/elder) in the New Testament continues that of the Old Testament model and, whilst Jesus invariably battles with the elders because of a clinging to past tradition and history and an inability to embrace new thinking and practice, it is clear they are honoured, respected and representative of their nation.

The New Testament Church picks up the flow of history as 'elders' are appointed to spiritual oversight of congregations, though it should be noted that whilst this may imply 'age' it might not always be the case. Several references are made to the wisdom and self-awareness of older people (John 8: 9) and a call for respect of the older by the younger (1 Peter 5: 5). '**Probaino**' (to **advance in years**) is picked up by Luke as descriptive of 'key' individuals – Elizabeth, Zechariah and Anna.

Whilst the triumphs of old age run consistently through the Bible, whether Abraham or Sarah, Moses and Caleb, Simeon or Anna, the realities are also addressed. Isaac and Jacob had failing eyesight; Naomi faced loneliness; Job rejection and alienation; David illness and failure; Paul endured physical limitations; many were persecuted and martyred.

Dawn Brown¹ summarises, 'The realities of old age are captured throughout Scripture, whether the good or the bad, the physical or the spiritual, the sadness or the celebration. The heroes of God's Word were truly human and their old age was considered as much a part of their lives as any other phase'.

It is also clear that the Bible writers always expect spiritual growth to continue right up to death. 'Since my youth, O God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvellous deeds. Even when I am old and grey, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come' (Psalm 71: 17-18).

Respect

It is important to honour and respect our 'seniors' because:

- They are often the bridge-builders and conduits of anointing and ministry to the young – consider Naomi **with** Ruth, Elijah **with** Elisha, Paul **with** Timothy, Barnabas and Mark, Timothy **with** his mother and grandmother, etc. (2 Tim 1:5)
- They foster partnerships between, and support of, young and old.
- They impart wisdom, knowledge, skills and continuity in mission and ministry
- They are effective grandparents.

Above all it is important to ensure their skills and passions are not lost.

'If we are going to attract this older generation to working or ministering in our churches, we need to capture their imagination and arouse their passions for something new and creative, not just the mundane and practical.'

Single third-agers have a great deal to offer; they form excellent partnerships with younger generations, and can fill an important role especially where there is no extended family.

In the UK there are over 13 million grandparents, a quarter of the adult population, with some 82% of children receiving care from their grandparents at some point in time.

¹ We are indebted to Dawn Brown for her research in *The Impact and Potential of a Greying Population on Baptist Churches in England: a report for the Baptist Union of Great Britain* (London Bible College May 2000).

If grandparents go to church, 60% of children will attend church with them when they visit.



'If a child's parents separate, their grandparents often have the role of holding the child's broken world together.'²

A number of churches have courses on 'Being an Effective Grandparent'.

One night a father overheard his son pray, "Dear God, make me the kind of man my Daddy is." Later that night the father prayed, "Dear God, make me the kind of man my son wants me to be."³

Training and Evangelism

Excellent training is available but is often little known or hard to access. Agencies such as Outlook Trust and Viz-a-Viz have been pioneering new initiatives across the nation for many years. The Baptist Union initiated two national 'Age to Age' conferences in 2001. The Southern Counties Baptist Association has been running a series of very successful regional days under the banner of 'Caleb Challenge'; reams of information have been disseminated via denominations and church agencies such as the Church Army and Salvation Army. Individuals and churches have run workshops and seminars on 'Seniors' Ministry', whether as givers or receivers. A third-age member of Guildford Baptist Church has produced TV programmes on third-agers of great faith under the title 'The Spirit of Caleb'. Much information and inspiration is available.

The purpose of this Mission File is to inspire and encourage third-age seniors into mission and ministry. Too often, third-agers are seen as recipients of Christian ministry. The focus needs to be on what they can do rather than what is done for them – ie moving them from information and inspiration to active involvement in mission and ministry.

2 Dr P Brierley *Pulling Out of the Nose Dive* Christian Research, Eltham, London, SE9 2TZ 2006 p123.

3 Op cit, p119

Some of the key areas of training might include:

Retirement

- Rest, recuperation and rediscovery of Christ's will.

Spirituality (Spirit-reality)

- The balance of 'being' and 'doing' – who I am is more important than what I say.
- Developing your relationship with Christ.
- Hearing God's call.

Understanding today's society

- Re-thinking mission.
- Understanding multiculturalism and multi-faith.
- Engagement with a changing culture.

Mission

Serving the Church and building God's Kingdom by:

- Telling your story.
- Meeting special needs.
- Developing confidence in our message.
- Awareness of appropriate training courses and materials.

Theory into Practice

Whilst there is much in this file which points the way with respect to the issues and challenges, it is in the local church, cluster or association that theory is most likely to be transformed into practice. Here are some pointers which may help:

- Set aside a day to discuss the issues with seniors
- Identify the local challenges and opportunities
- Build a teaching theme on seniors' mission and ministry into the church year
- Form an 'action team' to move theory to implementation
- Empower seniors with 'significance' by identifying and using their varied gifts
- Publicise the opportunities available to seniors through other agencies
- Consider partnerships with other churches at home and abroad in which seniors take a lead
- Value the experience, wisdom and passion that many seniors possess
- Challenge 'ageism' at every level

Opportunities

Stanley and Nancy Hornsby, now members of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Swanage, spent their working lives with children and students in schools and colleges, in the UK, Kenya, Zambia, the Pacific, Hungary, in an environment increasingly demanding and litigious.

Then God said, "Leave this!" How good they heard this message when they were 60 and still had energy! They needed it for the 'Good Heavens' Roadshows pioneered by Outlook round Guildford, then Blackpool for the Lifelink mission, then Southall.

They ran their own Roadshow at home with a team of actors whose average age was



80! What fun it was! How good to proclaim the message: "With God you are never past your 'Sell By' date!" Then, a club and an Alpha course were started.

Then Holidays at Home – virtual trips to Kenya and in 2006 to France and fresh croissants every day! One lady of 90 confided that she'd not enjoyed herself so much for years.

How talented older people are! How generous and supportive! What a privilege to be a friend of those who are nearing the gates of heaven and perhaps needing assurance of eternal salvation.

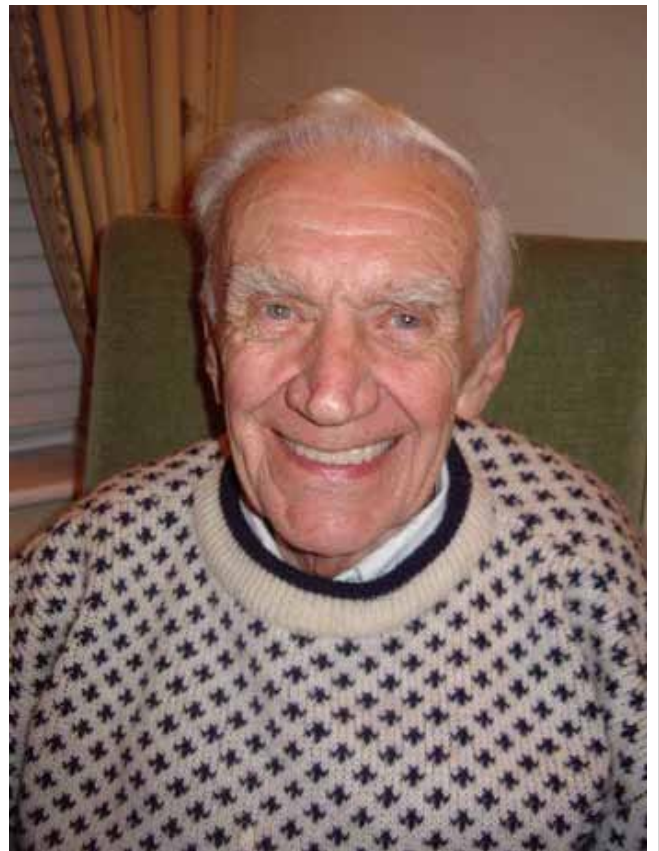
Story from David Heydon

Ivor's Story

Ivor Payne's missionary call came when he was 70! He was participating in a mercy mission to the former Yugoslavia. After delivering his own consignment of soft toys, and helping with the distribution of everyday items and clothing to hundreds of needy families, someone suggested making contact with a struggling Baptist Church in the nearby town of Kula. Ten elderly people, and their pastor who was engaged in door-to-door outreach, were meeting in a succession of rented rooms. Could Ivor find funding in the UK for a permanent building where they could welcome newcomers? Daunted but not defeated, Ivor set up 'Friends of Kula'.

The Kula Baptist family, now in its own meeting-place, has grown to over 150. The current plan is to purchase and develop abandoned half-built sites, providing work and homes for locals.

Ivor has inspired others to join him. Less robust health may mean that travelling days are over but he is confident that the work will continue.



Resources

Publications

- *Pioneering the Third Age* - Rob Merchant, Publisher Paternoster Press ISBN: 1 84227 177 6
- *The Church's Hidden Asset* - Michael Apichella, Publisher Kevin Mayhew Ltd ISBN: 1 84003 701 6
- *Evangelism Among Retired People* - Arthur Creber, Publisher CPAS 1994, ISBN: 1 8976 6014 6
- *The Bible Speaks to 3rd and 4th Agers* - Richard Morgan, Publisher BRF ISBN 1 84101 220 3
- *Finding God in Later Life* - William Purcell Publisher Lion Hudson ISBN 0 7459 3718 7
- *Working with Older People: A Resource Directory for Churches* - Leveson Centre/MHA Care Group (order or download from <http://www.leveson.org.uk/levesoncentre/publications.htm>)
- *Learning to Grow Old* - Paul Tournier, Publisher SCM ISBN: 0 33400 882 4
- *The Impact and Potential of a Greying Population on Baptist Churches in England: A report for the Baptist Union of Great Britain* - the Revd Dawn Brown, May 2000
- *Safe to Belong: Guidelines on work with vulnerable adults in the local church* - Baptist Union of Great Britain, PO Box 44, 129 Broadway, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 8RT. Tel: 01235 517700 www.baptist.org.uk
- *Church Army Focus on Older People Information Bulletin* - Michael Collyer CA, Church Army Research Unit, The Sheffield Centre, Wilson Carlile Campus, 50 Cavendish Street, Sheffield, S3 7RZ Tel:0114 272 7451, email: m.collyer@churcharmy.org.uk
- *What Could I say?* - Peter Hicks, Publisher Inter-Varsity Press ISBN: 0 85111 538 1
- *Re-emerging Church: Strategies for reaching a returning generation* - Roger Standing, Publisher BRF ISBN: 1 84101 492 0
- *Reaching the Saga Generation* - Chris Harrington, Publisher Grove Books ISBN: 1 85174 695 8
- *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* - Wade Clark Roof, Publisher Princetown University Press ISBN: 978 06910 1659 7
- *The Spirituality Revolution: The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* - David Tacey, Publisher Brunner-Routledge ISBN: 978 15839 1874 6
- *Stirrings of the Soul: Evangelicals and the New Spirituality* - Michael Reiter, Publisher Matthias Media ISBN: 978 18763 2662 3
- *Eternal Youths: How the Baby Boomers are Having Their Time Again* - J Harkin & J Huber, Publisher Demos London ISBN: 978 18418 0129 2
- *Journeying Out* - Ann Morisy, Publisher Continuum International Publishing Group ISBN: 0 82648 096 9
- *Beyond the Good Samaritan* - Ann Morisy, Publisher Geoffrey Chapman ISBN: 0 82647 141 2

Agencies

The Leveson Centre for the study of Ageing, Spirituality and Social Policy

Wide ranging resources including publications, videos and regular workshops.
The Leveson Centre, Temple Balsall, Knowle, Solihull, West Midlands B93 0AN
www.levesoncentre.org.uk Tel: 01564 778022

Outlook Trust

Publications, seminars, workshops, and conferences primarily concerned with evangelism among people aged 55+.

David Heydon, Outlook Trust, The Wycliffe Centre, Horsleys Green, High Wycombe, HP14 3XL

www.outlook-trust.org.uk Tel: 01494 485222, email: admin@outlook-trust.org.uk

The Halley Stewart Project

Series of booklets written to help individuals, local churches and other interested groups share a deeper understanding of the spiritual needs of older people.

Hazel Twynham, MHA Care Group, Epworth House, Stuart Street, Derby, DE1 2EQ

www.mha.org.uk Tel: 01332 221831

Faith in Elderly People

Contact Gaynor Hammond - Tel: 019438 79320, email: gaynor.hammond@northern.org.uk

Open Ears

A Christian fellowship for people who have impaired hearing and those sympathetic to their special needs and problems, providing fellowship, Bible teaching, prayer support and pastoral care.

The Administrator, Open Ears, 11 York Avenue, New Milton, BH25 6BT.

www.openears.org.uk email: admin@openears.org.uk

Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID)

Working to change the world for the UK's 9 million deaf and hard of hearing people.

Royal National Institute for the Deaf, 19-23 Featherstone Street, London, EC1Y 8SL

www.rnid.org.uk Tel: 0808 808 0123, email: informationline@rnid.org.uk

Through the Roof

Working for inclusivity around issues of disability including 'wheels for the world' wheelchair distribution across the globe.

Through the Roof, PO Box 353, EPSOM, Surrey KT18 5WS

www.throughtheroof.org Tel: 01372 749955, email: info@throughtheroof.org

Torch Trust for the Blind

Produces Christian literature in formats that blind and partially sighted people can read, promotes Christian fellowship with and among blind and partially sighted people and responds to the unmet personal support needs of those they serve with literature and fellowship.

Torch Trust for the Blind, Torch House, Torch Way, Northampton Rd, Market Harborough, LE16 9HL

www.torchtrust.org Tel: 01858 438260, email: info@torchtrust.org

Royal Blind Society

Resources for partially sighted and blind people.

Royal Blind Society, RBS House, 59-61 Sea Lane, Rustington, West Sussex, BN16 2RQ

www.royalblindsociety.org Tel: 01903 857023, email: info@royalblindsociety.org

The Christian Council on Ageing (CCOA)

Established in 1982 to complement the work of existing agencies concerned with later life. Its central focus is on the spiritual needs and development of older people, along with the encouragement of continued personal growth in the later years.

Dr Mike Lewis, 47 Allard Close, Northampton NN3 5LZ <http://freespace.virgin.net/mike.lewis/CCOA/>

Tel: 01604 403578, email: christian.council@virgin.net

Courses


More to Life Evangelism Training Course: Viz-a-Viz

Discovering Your Gifts in Evangelism: a ten-month course of training in evangelism that can be run by an association, cluster of churches, or a single church.

Contact Beth Powney 01268 530531 beth@vizaviz.org

This leaflet is one of a series which has been produced by the Mission Department.

For more information about third-age mission and ministry, please contact your local association or college (see contact details below) or contact the department on 01235 517713 / email mission@baptist.org.uk



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