Offering spiritual care in later life

Ageing well and how the church responds to an ageing population

Wednesday 17 September 2025

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Aims

- To reflect on the season of older age: its significance, particularities and experiences
- To consider our societal and ecclesial contexts
- To share an overview of Anna Chaplaincy as one ministry model/creative response offered to, and by, the church as part of its pastoral response

Stereotypes of ‘the old’

Photo credit: Centre for Ageing Better

A better image?

Photo credit: Centre for Ageing Better

Anna’s story - Luke 2: 25-38

What are our inherited stories of ageing?

Who in their later years has most influenced *you*?

Old age – an ambiguous gift?

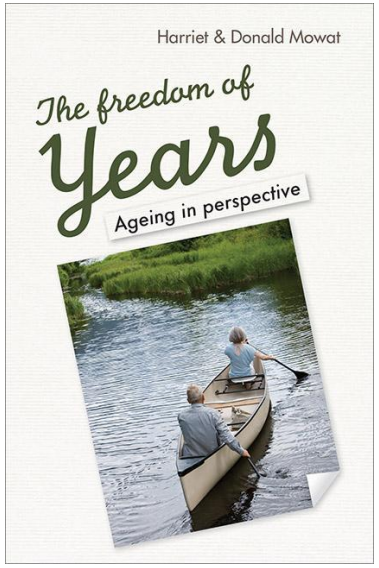
Growing old is like being increasingly penalised

for a crime you haven't committed'

Anthony Powell
(*A Dance to the Music of Time, 1951-1975)*

‘The journey into old age gives us the opportunity to deepen our faith and relationship with God through our awakening senses and simplifying our lives. This is what we would say ageing is *for*. It is a blessing, a privilege and a responsibility.’

Harriet and Donald Mowat
The Freedom of Years
BRF, 2018



The challenges of ageing

- Identity crisis – who are we as we get older?

- Multiple overwhelmings, loss of all kinds

- Monumental transitions: typically, a move from:
  - Doing to being
  - Activity to inactivity
  - Independence to dependence
  - Health to dis-abilities and challenges: physical, cognitive, emotional

The opportunities of ageing

- Time: lifelong learning is consolidated and can be shared

- Spiritual growth: '…. is not just possible in old age, but likely' (E McKinlay) A fertile time…

- Time: an opportunity to 'finish well', be in 'good health' (J Swinton) and offer 'an engine room of prayer' (W Nash)

- The principle of gift exchange

The growing need for distinctive older people's ministry

- A biblical mandate
- Changing demography
- The need for spiritual and religious care
- More reflective period of life: opportunities and challenges

God’s heart for all people: the church’s response

- The Bible resounds with inter-generational life, and justice
- The growing focus on lay leadership and chaplaincy
- The spotlight on health and social care as holistic care – CQC and care home provision

Increasing ageing population

- **In the UK there are now more people aged 60 and above than there are under 18 – for the first time ever – and is the fastest growing age group, particularly in coastal areas in England and Wales (ONS, Jan 2021)**

- 3.8 million older people (over 65s) in the UK live alone – 2m over the age of 75 (Age UK)

- In 2018, there were 1.6 million people aged 85 years and over; by 2043, this is projected to nearly double to 3.0 million (ONS, Oct 2019)

Increasing ageing population

- The number of centenarians in the UK increased by 85% in the 15 years to 2018. By 2031 there will be 65,500 centenarians in the UK and 154,900 by 2041. (ONS)

- There are around 944,000 people living with dementia – that's set to rise to 1.6m by 2051 (Alzheimers Research UK)

The need for spiritual care – shared human qualities

- *The need to give and to receive love* – mutually supportive relationships, belonging
- *The need to sustain hope and purpose* – self-worth, recognition
- *The need for something and someone to believe in* - meaning
- *The need for creativity* - opportunities to contribute
- *NB: the difference between religious care and spiritual care*

What's the difference between religious and spiritual care?

- 'Religious care is given in the context of the shared religious beliefs, values, liturgies and lifestyle of a faith community
- Spiritual care is usually given in a one-to-one relationship, is completely person-centred and makes no assumptions about personal conviction or life orientation
- Spiritual care is not necessarily religious.
- Religious care, at its best, should always be spiritual.'

The Scottish Executive, Health Department Directorate of Nursing

Anna Chaplaincy is…

- A gracious gift from the church to the local community

Key principles of an Anna Chaplain role

- Appointed, authorised by and accountable to, their local church or group of ‘Churches Together’: complementing existing pastoral ministry
- Ecumenical wherever possible
- Community based
- An advocate and champion of older people in the wider community
- Reaching out to people of strong, little or no faith: includes relatives, carers and care professionals, non-proselytising
- Person-centred, non-judgemental

Anna Chaplaincy to date…

- 461 Anna Chaplains (and those in equivalent roles) in this ministry among older people

How long has Anna Chaplaincy been going?

- 2010: Started in Alton, Hants with Debbie Thrower
- 2014: BRF takes on the Anna Chaplaincy concept to develop it nationally
- 2025: To date, 450 + Anna Chaplains and those in equivalent roles, across the UK, plus c. 2,500 Anna Friends volunteering alongside chaplains

Anna Chaplains for Older People

- May be lay or ordained, male or female, paid or voluntary, often older people themselves

- It's a vocation - gifts for this ministry are recognised and an individual candidate supported by local church; a chaplain is 'sent'…

- Linked to and supported by BRF Ministries through the national Anna Chaplaincy Network **NB**: *A Head Licence Agreement must be in place with BRF Ministries to use our name and logo*.

Ministry includes…

- Accompanying – walking alongside
- Listening to people's 'stories'
- Sensitive spiritual care
- Diverse contexts – to those who are living alone, care homes, retirement facilities, community groups, dementia-friendly cafés … and many more

Advantages of Anna Chaplaincy for older people

- Extensive network of those working in older people's ministry raising professional standards
- Sharing of a wealth of experience, including 'Messy Vintage'
- Training - supported by ongoing relevant, topical workshops and BRF publications
- Annual gathering for teaching and sharing

2021 Impact Report –Where we are a decade on

- ‘Love is the basis of Anna Chaplaincy, and shines through all their interactions. An integral part of this approach is to give time because time honours and values the recipient, and restores their worth.’

A contextual diocesan and deanery response – Annie Jefferies and Emma Sneddon

Anna Chaplaincy = local, contextual ministry

Photo credit: FreeImages

An invitation to a practical activity

Consider your own context:

- What ministry or activities already happen amongst older people – in church, in the wider community?
- What *could* happen? What is *needed*?
- What is my role in this? What is the wider church's role?

Prayer

Faithful God,

You have promised in Christ to be with us to the end of time.

Come close to those who have lived long and experienced much.

Help them to continue to be faithful

and, within the all-age Kingdom of God,

to find ways to go on giving and receiving your grace, day by day.

For your glory and your kingdom

Amen

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