



Uniting Church in Australia  
ASSEMBLY



# *Older Persons Sunday*

*dignity and hope for all ages*

## Worship Resources





### Background information

This booklet has been prepared by UnitingCare Australia as a resource to be used by Uniting Church congregations wishing to recognise Older Persons Sunday. In May 2022 the 16<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia agreed to “endorse the celebration of Older Persons Sunday (for example on the first Sunday of October) each year”. The decision as to whether and on what Sunday to specifically recognise older people is a matter for local churches.

UnitingCare Australia sees value in the first Sunday of October because it immediately follows the United Nations International Day of Older Persons which is 1 October each year. In addition Ageism Awareness Day is recognised in Australia this year as 7 October.

There are a number of resources about the work of UnitingCare Australia’s work in ageing and aged care on our website, include on the page for Uniting Friends of Ageing <https://unitingcare.org.au/uniting-friends-of-ageing/>

*We appreciate the contributions of a number of members of Uniting Friends of Ageing for providing or suggesting some of the resources in this booklet.*

For further information about Older Persons Sunday or the Uniting Friends of Ageing feel free to contact Warren Talbot at [warrent@nat.unitingcare.org.au](mailto:warrent@nat.unitingcare.org.au) or 0466 310 243.

Resources may be used with appropriate acknowledgement.

Words printed in **bold** are intended for congregational responses.

September 2022

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## The wisdom of older people

Rev. Sharon Hollis

President, Uniting Church in Australia Assembly

One of the stories I love in the Bible is of Anna and Simeon faithfully watching for God's salvation. I love it because they remind me of the power of faith tested over time and of the wisdom of older people to know how to watch and wait for God's new thing and to embrace that new thing with love and commitment.

The Uniting Church's life is enriched by its many older members who remember faithfully and watch hopefully for where God is leading, speak out on issues of injustice and nurture and encourage others across the generations. We give thanks for their worship, witness and service.

More broadly, as a society we are gifted by the many contributions, diverse experiences and loving care we receive from the older Australians in our lives. In the Uniting Church, we believe all people should be treated with respect and dignity.

I welcome the initiatives of UnitingCare Australia in setting up Uniting Friends of Ageing, and Older Persons Sunday. I encourage you to think about how you might become involved in being an advocate and ally of older people.

Alongside UnitingCare Australia, the Assembly calls for the changes needed to transform our aged care system to ensure older people can live their fullest life.

## Introduction to Older Persons Sunday

### Dignity and hope for all ages

Claerwen Little

National Director, UnitingCare Australia

Just over thirty years ago the General Assembly of the United Nations declared that 1 October each year would be recognised as the International Day of Older Persons (IDOP). The day is intended as an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the enormous contributions that older people have and are making as individuals, and members of families and communities. IDOP also serves to highlight the need for changes to policies and practices which neglect or discriminate against older people, ie ageism.

Members of the UnitingCare network are, collectively, one of the largest providers of residential and home-based aged care in Australia. This ministry dates back to the early days of colonial settlement right through to our active engagement with the recent Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Along with *Uniting Friends of Ageing* Older Persons Sunday offers an opportunity for local churches to join the recognition and celebration of older people, as we work together to transform ageing and aged care.

The general theme for Older Persons Sunday is “dignity and hope for all”. It would be all too easy, as a church or as a society, to think that this theme is merely stating the obvious. One of the major themes from the Royal Commission was ‘neglect’, both overlooking the concerns of older people but also direct discrimination. As good as most aged care services in Australia are, the Commission identified 148 detailed recommendations for change. These will take years to be fully implemented, and UnitingCare Australia is working hard to ensure that this happens.

The resources in this booklet are intended for Older Persons Sunday, but can be used at various times during the church’s year. Local churches have busy calendars. If it is not possible to allocate a Sunday, then some prayers can be included on the first Sunday of October or at another time.

In his life and teaching, Jesus emphasised the good news of God’s love for all people. He particularly focused on the need to love our neighbours who were vulnerable, poor, or marginalised in society. This is a message of hope, based on the God-given dignity of all people. On Older Persons Sunday we are reminded of Jesus’s ministry of welcoming and hospitality – and we commit ourselves again to sharing in that ministry with people of all ages in Australia.

## A Service of the Word

### The gathering of the people of God

#### CALL TO WORSHIP

At this time,  
as we gather either in person or online,  
and with those around us,  
let us worship God.  
Throughout our lives, we celebrate life.  
**Let us praise God for the gift of life.**

#### HYMN

[Various Hymn suggestions later in this booklet.]

#### GREETING and WELCOME

Good morning everyone, and welcome to worship today.

A special welcome to visitors....

Today is Older Persons Sunday. We are reflecting on what it means to be a faith community of people who are continually ageing. We are all together in this ageing transition process; we are all slightly older than we were at breakfast time this morning.

Some of us are experiencing faster ageing transitions than others, which can be uncomfortable, disorienting and hard to accept. This has implications in our church community for education, planning and pastoral care. As the people of Jesus Christ, we need to consider and prepare as a church community for the life-long transition called ageing.

Also today in Uniting churches we think of and pray for the many ageing and aged care services provided by the members of UnitingCare Australia.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

For thousands of years, the Indigenous people have walked on this ancient land. These many lands were taken from the First Peoples without their consent, treaty or compensation.

The Spirit of God has long dwelled with the First People of this ancient land.

We honour the [name of the land or lands on which the service is being held]...

and pay our respects to their elders, past,  
present and emerging.

#### SAFE CHURCH STATEMENT

The Uniting Church in Australia believes  
that all people are made in the image of  
God,

and as such we accept every individual  
regardless of race, age, creed, sexuality  
and gender.

As a Christian Community we believe that God  
reaches out to us in love and acceptance and that  
our relationships with each other should express  
love and respect and not be abused.

#### PRAYER OF ADORATION

God our Creator,  
Our thoughts cannot contain you; our words fall short of your vastness.  
Yet you are our God.

God of all ages, your breath gives us life.  
Your hands shape our being.  
Your artistry in creation leaves us gasping in wonder,  
longing to experience that which is of you.  
In each person, there you are, if we could but discern you.  
Accept us again, O ancient yet ever new God,  
as we gather to worship and adore you.  
**Amen.**

#### A RESPONSIVE PRAYER

We walk in the footsteps of those who have gone before  
**and know that we are not alone on this journey.**

We walk in the footsteps of those who are older  
**and know that they go before us.**

We walk in the footsteps of God  
**For the feet of God have walked this way.**

The footsteps of God will become for us  
the Way, the Truth, and the Life.  
**Thanks be to God!**

#### PRAYERS OF CONFESSION

Gracious God, we know that there is a time to be born,  
a time to grow old and a time to die.  
We know that ageing is a part of life.  
**Yet sometimes we forget.**

Sometimes we fail to embrace the life of our older people.  
We confess that we sometimes do not hear the voices of our older people,  
their needs and concerns.  
In our busy daily life, sometimes we just don't stop and listen.  
**Forgive us when we close our ears to our older people.**

We confess that we sometimes become reluctant to share  
precious resources of life with our older people.  
In this competitive world, too often our priorities go to where we readily see  
new life, youth and the promise of worldly success.  
**Forgive us for our failure to share.**

We confess that many Indigenous Australians never know old age,  
or become old before their time, through the struggles in their lives.  
**Forgive us when we fail to notice and act.**

Loving God, the Giver of Life,  
bring to us the awareness that our life depends on each other.  
We are called to uphold each other, especially those who are weak, frail and vulnerable.  
Fill us with your compassion, love and grace,  
the grace that walks with us, embracing even our death.  
In the name of Christ,

**Amen.**



## ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God is love.

Through Christ, God reaches out to us,  
embracing the young and the old,  
the strong and the weak,  
the living and the dying.

In Christ we are one.

**Thanks be to God**

## SHARING THE PEACE

May the grace and peace of God be with you all

**And also with you!**

*[The peace is shared following local practices]*

## A PRAYER WHICH FOLLOWS THE PRAYER THAT JESUS TAUGHT

**God, you are life for us,**

**holy be your name.**

**Your new day come, your will be done,**

**On earth as in your vision.**

**Give us this day our bread for the morrow;                      And**

**forgive us our sins,**

**as we forgive those who sin against us.                      Strengthen**

**us in the time of test,**

**and deliver us from evil.**

**For the power and the splendour**

**and the fulfilment are yours,**

**now and forever.**

**Amen.**

## INTERGENERATIONAL ACTIVITY

Additional resource: Practical intergenerational activity 'Creating our history of the last 100 years' (see Appendix 1).

## The Service of the Word

### SCRIPTURE READINGS

[A list of Scripture readings appropriate for Older Persons Sunday are later in this document.]

Loving God, may your word live in us  
**And bear much fruit to your glory.**

### PREACHING / CONTEMPORARY WITNESS TO THE WORD

(Some points for a sermon or reflection are found at Appendix Two.)

### AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Together let us affirm our faith:

**We believe in God who is creating all that is,  
who knows our hearts and loves us as we are,  
who speaks to us in our deepest beings,  
who calls people of all ages  
to abundant life and wholeness.**

**Christ Jesus shows us the Way,  
guiding us and healing our bodies and minds,  
sharing our joys and sufferings,  
crossing all human barriers and distinctions,  
transforming the power of death into new life.**

**The Holy Spirit is the gift of God's life with us now,  
giving us the courage to take new paths,  
and the strength to continue the journey  
in different stages and ages of our lives.**

**In solitude, vulnerability, compassion and love,  
the Spirit reveals her presence with.**

**Amen.**

#### NOTICES AND CONCERNS

It would be appropriate during notices to briefly mention the reasons for observing Older Persons Sunday, the work of UnitingCare Australia members in ageing and aged care, any local aged care services known to members, and opportunities for members to be a part of Uniting Friends of Ageing.

#### PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING

**Younger Person:** We give thanks, O God,  
for a society where people can look forward to long  
lives, for the wisdom of older people, for their faith and  
experience, for the sense that older people give us  
of family, tradition and identity, for the  
leadership they offer, for the things they  
teach, and all the ways in which they  
contribute to our families, our community and  
our church.

**Older Person:** We give thanks, O God, for the blessings of life,  
and our experience of its different seasons, for  
friends, family, children and grandchildren, for  
the experiences and opportunities of our lives,  
for our survival through struggles and griefs, for  
your presence throughout our lives and for the  
hope of the life to come.

**All: Amen.**

(Uniting AgeWell)

#### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

O loving Lord,

You are the source of life,  
sustaining us in every stage of life's journey;  
You are the mother earth,

ageing trees with time and nourishment,  
and embracing each fallen leaf back to its roots.

O loving Lord,

Today we pray for our senior citizens,  
keep those living in isolation in your sight, enfold others in your safety.  
In this pandemic, we remember the frontline staff,  
protect these ordinary heroes  
as they leave home and care for the elderly.

O loving Lord,

We also lament for the Royal Commission into Aged Care findings.  
We hear stories of abuse and neglect;  
we hear of greed for profit at the expense of quality care;  
we hear of ill-fated policies shifting the duty from the government to consumers;  
we hear of a culture that keeps the aged away from their families.

Forgive us, Lord,

Through the prophets,  
you have taught Israel - do not rebuke the elderly harshly,  
but exhort them as if they were our own parents.  
In Jesus, we have learned the Son of Man  
did not come to be served but to serve;  
and God made the old to have hopes and dream dreams.

Lead us, Lord,

Direct our energy about past regrets  
into blessings to the people near us;  
Turn our attention from fault finding,  
to seeing each person made in your divine image;  
Stop us from only using money to fix the problem,  
Build the capacity of our families and communities for care.

Guide us, Lord,

since the ancient times, your grace rises in the presence of the aged,  
and your blessing is honoured among the elderly.  
Through ancient cultures, we have learned:  
Respect for the elderly is the foundation of all social goodness.  
Raise us in your grace, Lord, as we rebuild a culture of respect;  
Send your blessings, as we honour life together with you.

Amen.

## OFFERING

We dedicate this money (and these gifts), O God,  
for the work of your church,  
asking that you use all that we have, and all that we are,  
in your service.

**Amen.**

## The Sending Out of the People of God

### HYMN

[suggested hymns are made later in this document]

### WORD OF MISSION

May the Giver of Life of all generations,  
whose love spans our years,  
keep us ever mindful of the wonderful gift of life  
- childhood to fulfilment of age -  
that we so rejoice in each other,  
that we live our days with respect, compassion and mutual responsibility;  
to the glory of Christ.

### BLESSING

And may the blessing of the one God  
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,  
be with you and remain with you always.  
**Amen.**

### DISMISSAL

Go in peace to love and serve in all you do  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

\*

### **Suggested hymns**

TiS 154	Great is your faithfulness
TiS 209	And can it be that I should gain
TiS 315	Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord
TiS 781	Father, bless us as we go
TiS 182	Bring many names, beautiful and good
TiS 210	O for a thousand tongues

## Suggested Scripture readings

These are suggested readings only. Depending on which Sunday is being recognised for Older Persons Sunday, the person curating the liturgy may need to choose readings other than those set in the Revised Common Lectionary, according to local practice.

- Genesis 6:3: Then the Lord said, “My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.”
- Genesis 12:4: So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.
- Exodus 7:7: Moses was eighty years old and Aaron was eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.
- Joshua 14:10b-11: And Caleb who said: So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then (NIV).
- Psalm 71:18: So even to old age and grey hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come.
- Psalm 92:12, 14: The righteous flourish like the palm tree, and grow like a cedar in Lebanon. In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap.
- Psalm 22:1-15 – My God, why have you forsaken me.
- Psalm 23 – The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
- Psalm 103: 1-18 – Bless the Lord, O my soul
- Proverbs 16:31: Grey hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life.
- Proverbs 20:29: The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their gray hair.
- Luke 2:36-37: There was also a prophet, Anna....She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.
- John 21:18: Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.
- II Corinthians 4:16: For this reason we never become discouraged. Even though our physical being is gradually decaying, yet our spiritual being is renewed day by day (GNT).
- Ephesians 6:2-3: “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: “so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”
- I Timothy 5:1, 2: Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father...to older women as mothers...
- Hebrews 4:12-16 – Indeed, the word of God is living and active.

## Prayers suitable for use on Older Persons Sunday

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### ***Prayer for aged care***

Loving God,  
we give you thanks for including service as part of nation building.  
In your self-giving love for the world,  
Christ came to serve the world to include all in your mercy.

We pray for families and communities,  
give us time and commitment to reach out to those in need,  
to include the elderly in our lives, to honour life with care and support.

We pray for Australia as a nation, give us the Spirit of life,  
to turn away from ageism, to develop a culture of care,  
to transform our service into compassion for life.

Loving God, we pray for the Uniting Church and our many community services networks.  
Make us an instrument of justice,  
so we may witness your kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

(Rev. Dr Ji Zhang)

\*

### **A prayer for the international Day of Older Persons**

The International Day of Older Persons (1 October)  
Hari Lansia International  
(in Indonesian and English)

Hidup lanjut usia  
Ketika menjadi tua  
bukan berarti ketidak mampuan  
Saat menjadi tua  
bukan berarti tidak bermanfaat  
Waktu menjadi tua  
bukan berarti menunggu ajal  
Menjadi tua  
adalah proses alamiah  
yang patut disyukuri  
yang harus dinikmati  
karena  
menjadi tua  
berarti menjadi berkat  
buat keluarga, masyarakat dan lingkungan



menjadi tua  
tetap sehat, berkarya dan mengabdikan  
buat kesejahteraan semesta  
Menjadi tua  
ada canda ria di antara teman  
ada keceriaan di antara aktifitas  
ada kesejahteraan Bersama  
Menjadi tua  
meski tidak selincah masa muda  
meski tidak sekuat masa dulu  
bukan berarti menjadi beban  
Menjadi tua  
menatap kehidupan dengan bijak  
menempuh kehidupan dengan kenyataan  
mengarungi kehidupan dengan iman  
merasakan kedamaian bukan ketakutan

Older Persons  
When growing old  
does not mean incompetence  
When we are older  
do not mean useless

Older persons  
do not mean waiting to die  
Growing older  
is a natural journey  
to be grateful  
to be enjoyment  
because  
growing older  
means to be a blessing  
for family, community and environment

growing older  
stay healthy, active and contribute  
for the benefit of the universal  
Growing older  
there is fun between friends  
there is joy between activities  
there is delightful time

Growing older  
although not as young as youth  
although not as strong as before  
does not mean it's a burden

Growing older  
live life wisely  
live life with reality  
live life by faith  
live peacefully without fear

(Revd Dr Apwee Ting)

\*

### **A prayer for older people and advocates**

God of all creatures, compassionate and creative,  
Thank you that we bear your image,  
from infancy to old age and all points in between.  
Thank you that we are valued wherever we go,  
whatever we do with whomever we choose.  
Thank you that we are your children,  
regardless of income, skill or ability,  
race or creed, gender or class.

Bless our deliberations in these moments.  
Draw our attention to listen to each one,  
Guide our reflection on our shared concerns,  
That your kingdom might find fresh expression  
In caring for older people more effectively  
And valuing their experiences of a life well-lived.

Grant a special measure of your courage and capacity  
to those who speak on our behalf in the corridors of Parliament  
and in the public square,  
That they might be powerful advocates  
for our treasured elders  
and passionate disciples of your gospel of grace and love.

Amen

(Pastor Chris Leech)

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### **Prayer for a relative in Aged Care**

Dear God

I pray for [name of person or persons]  
May kindness be the daily fare,  
For all our loved ones in aged care.  
May laughs continue while we are apart.  
May life be full of music and art.  
May words of wisdom flow free  
And plans about for when we see

One another...

Again...

For some tea and cake.  
I smile at the thought of the reunion of love.  
Whether here on earth or in heaven above,  
Who knows what will happen? I'm sure I don't!  
But I trust in You, Lord,

So please watch over .....

And thankyou for ..... in my life.

Amen

(Rev. Dr Amelia Koh-Butler)

\*

### **A prayer for leadership in aged care**

We pray for those living in and those working in our aged care system;  
those who provide care and express compassion.  
We pray for those who work long hours;  
particularly those who are overtired and overwhelmed by the scale of need before them.

We ask for you to hold them in your tenderness,  
as they offer hope and enduring love to your people.

We pray for leadership, and for health resources to be shared effectively.  
We pray for the findings of the Royal Commission into aged care, to be acted upon.  
We pray for a better system, a new vision, no longer based on a based on a mindset of rationing  
resources, but based on the rights of older people, including their entitlement to care and support  
based on their needs and preferences.

We pray for leadership: for resources to be shared effectively,  
and for wisdom and integrity on the part of our politicians.

May these prayers make a home within our hearts  
and inspire us to create a world in which all people  
might find a secure home, and live with dignity.

Hear our prayers for those whose lives have touched us, |  
those whom we know personally or those whose stories we hear.

May we touch their lives not only through our prayers  
but through our lives and actions as well.

**Amen.**

*(Helen Boerma)*

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### **A prayer for workers in health and aged care**

I anxiously watch them.  
My anxiety is not just for the one I love.  
I am deeply anxious for them.  
They try to comfort me with their professionalism and smiles,  
But I can see their own anxiety, so I pray...

Healing God,  
You called these amazing people  
to serve in your great work.  
Thank you.  
Bless them in their service.  
Give them deep restorative sleep  
when they get a break.  
Help them to keep laughing when they can.  
Give them wisdom  
in the difficult decisions  
and the complexity of treatment.  
May I always see their humanity  
and show my love and respect  
for their dedication.

In these anxious times,  
I pray for their families,

even as I know  
they pray in their hearts  
for my loved one.

Healing God,  
Bring us all healing.  
Amen

(Rev. Jon Humphries)

\*

### **A prayer for the elderly**

Gracious God,  
We remember and pray for the elderly  
in our society.

We pray for all those  
struggling with symptoms  
of dementia in its many forms;  
mood changes, memory lapses,  
confusion and helplessness.

May they know in their hearts  
your comforting embrace  
amid their daily frustrations,  
and continue to realise,  
as names and memories fade,  
that they are still loved by family,  
friends, and especially by you.

We pray for those who care for the elderly in our society;  
for family members, nurses, nursing home staff, doctors and hospice staff.

Help us all never to lose sight of the elderly in our community  
and enable us to always treat them with the dignity and respect they deserve.

We make our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

(Rev. Hans Christiansen, Melbourne Grammar)

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### **A prayer for older people in the age of COVID**

Loving and gracious God  
beyond and before all ages:  
we pray for older Australians,

their friends, family members and carers  
in this challenging time of remaining safe as COVID continues to spread.

We pray for people living in aged care,  
for the nurses, cleaners, kitchen staff, and doctors  
who care for them every day.

We pray for older people living in the community,  
family members nearby and far away,  
home carers, friends, and neighbours.

May all know of your love and care at this time.

Help us, O God, to never lose sight of older people,  
to cherish them with the dignity, respect and life you give to all.

In the name of Christ Jesus.  
Amen.

(Warren Talbot)

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### **A Litany on Ageing, inspired by the Scriptures**

Leader: Then the Lord said, "My spirit shall not abide in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be 120 years" (Genesis 6:3).

People: Dear God, we do need time to grow.

Leader: Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).

People: We pray that the long years will be good years.

Leader: The glory of youths is their strength, but the beauty of the aged is their gray hair (Proverbs 20:29).

People: Give us strength and experience.

Leader: Remember the days of old, consider the years long past; ask your father, and he will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you (Deuteronomy 32:7).

People: Remind us to ask, and teach us to listen.

Leader: Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life (Proverbs 16:31).

People: Day by day, we strive to be more holy.

Leader: Listen to your father who begot you, and do not despise your mother when she is old (Proverbs 23:22).

People: We are grateful for parents who teach and nurture in love.

Leader: So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to all the generations to come (Psalm 71:18).

People: We love to tell the story of Jesus and his love.

Leader: In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of sap (Psalm 92:14).

People: Yes, we too will soon know and understand God's gift of growing older; give us wisdom so that we may serve others as we have been served. Amen.

(United Methodist Church USA, UMC Discipleship Board)

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### **A prayer for Health Workers**

I anxiously watch them.

My anxiety is not just for the one I love.

I am deeply anxious for them.

They try to comfort me with their professionalism and smiles,

But I can see their own anxiety, so I pray...

Healing God,

You called these amazing people

to serve in your great work.

Thank you.

Bless them in their service.

Give them deep restorative sleep

when they get a break.

Help them to keep laughing when they can.

Give them wisdom

in the difficult decisions

and the complexity of treatment.

May I always see their humanity

and show my love and respect

for their dedication.

In these anxious times,

I pray for their families,

even as I know

they pray in their hearts

for my loved one.

Healing God,

Bring us all healing.

Amen

(Revd Jon Humphries)

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**Prayer of Confession** (in unison)

Loving God,  
Mother and father of us all,  
you provide everything we need,  
yet sometimes, we doubt there will be enough time,  
enough money,  
enough health,  
enough memory,  
enough compassion  
as we live out our days.  
We doubt when we need to have faith.  
We see the glass half empty when in fact it is half full.

We know you are present, God with us,  
but in spite of ourselves we sometimes feel separated and lost.  
Forgive us when we rely too much on ourselves  
and not enough on you,  
for you are steadfast and strong,  
ready to meet our every need and receive every petition.

Bless each of us, O God, as we grow older,  
that we may mature in faith as well as in years.  
In your mercy hear our prayers.  
Amen.

*Assurance of Pardon*

Hear the good news!  
In every time and place,  
in every age and in every space  
we are forgiven in Christ Jesus our Saviour.  
**Amen.**

(Presbyterian Church USA)

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**In the Hands of God**

More than ever I find myself in the hands of God.  
  
This is what I have wanted all my life from my youth.  
But now there is a difference;  
the initiative is entirely with God.



It is indeed a profound spiritual experience to know and feel myself so totally in God's hands.

(Pedro Arrupe SJ)

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### **Prayer for the Grace to Age Well**







When the signs of age begin to mark my body (and still more when they touch my mind);  
when the ill that is to diminish me or carry me off strikes from without or is born within me;  
when the painful moment comes in which I suddenly awaken to the fact that I am ill or growing old;  
and above all at that last moment when I feel I am losing hold of myself and am absolutely passive within the hands of the great unknown forces that have formed me;

In all those dark moments, O God, grant that I may understand that it is you who are painfully parting the fibres of my being, in order to penetrate to the very marrow of my substance and bear me away within Yourself.

(Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J.)

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## Suggestions for pastoral ministry with older people

-  Within the context of faith, it is important to stress that whilst growing old can have its benefits (such as seeing great-grandchildren) it can signal much grief (death of friends, loss of particular body functions, moving into assisted care, inability to attend worship).
-  Pastoral care should include all members of the church; look at ways to provide for the spiritual needs of the shut-ins, those unable to attend church.
-  When visiting someone in residential aged care, ask if they would like to partake in Communion (portable Communion kits are easily available if your church does not have one). If someone is unable to attend but is still able to read, ask if they would like a copy of the sermon to read (print it in bold, using a large font size).
-  If your congregation records the service, or has a down-load facility, see if this can be utilised. More seniors are staying in their own homes for longer, drawing on community services; this can be an opportunity for local congregations to offer pastoral care.
-  Different States and Territories have different calendars recognising older persons or seniors' week or month. This is a good time to remember and celebrate the many blessings we have received from God. Older people are one of those blessings. Seniors' Week is also a time for us to give thanks for the many agencies that care for, and/or intervene on behalf of older people.
-  We give thanks for our own Uniting Church agencies as a part of UnitingCare Australia. Seniors' weeks may spur us to donate money, or time (as a volunteer) to an aged care facility, to a senior neighbour, or to start up a program at our church.

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## Appendix 1

### **Intergenerational Activity**

#### ***Creating our history of the last 100 years***

- You will need to supply one work sheet (at the end of this booklet) for each group plus pens/pencils/textas.
- Invite people to form into groups of no more than three, ideally with people of significantly different ages. Explain that they will be invited to join in a task that will require the experiences and working together of different generations to complete it successfully. Hand out the worksheet.
- Explain that across the top of the sheet different decades have been grouped together into an era. Down the left hand side of the sheet is something to be identified for each of the eras. When the leader says “Go”, the challenge is for each group to talk about, and then write into the relevant box, an appropriate answer. From “Go”, allow 3-4 minutes for the groups to fill in as many boxes as they can. After 3-4 minutes the leader says “Stop” and asks for an indication as to how people have been going with the task. Do they still have some blank boxes to fill in? Presumably the answer will be “Yes”.
- Now invite each group of three to join with another group of three to help each other fill in any of the gaps they have on their respective sheets. Again after 3-4 minutes invite people to “Stop” (Note: if groups finish before this time, encourage them to talk a little bit more about some of their responses).
- By way of wrap-up, the facilitator could get an indication as to how many groups managed to complete the task. There might be encouragement to complete the sheets over Morning Tea. If time allows, there is also the possibility of inviting sharing of some of the responses. The leader might also seek responses around the question “What do you know now that you didn’t know 10 minutes ago?”

The activity could be concluded with the facilitator commenting on how fantastic it was to see people of different ages engaging so well together, perhaps even learning more about each other. Finish by thanking the whole congregation for their participation and encourage them to thank the other members of the group they have been with before returning to their seats.

*(Chris Barnett, Children and Families Ministry Co-ordinator, Synod of Victoria and Tasmania)*

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## Notes for a possible sermon or reflection

- Scientific advances and the consequent progress of medicine, have made a huge contribution in recent decades to prolonging the average duration of human life. The term “third age” now embraces a large segment of the world’s population: people who have retired from active employment, yet who still have great inner resources and are still able to contribute to the community around them. To this huge “third age” of “young old”, that is, those aged between 65 and 75, is now added a so-called “fourth age”, now called the “older old” – those over 75 years old. *And* those numbers are growing at a great rate. The number of people aged 85 years and over is projected to almost triple to 1.2 million by 2040.
- So this lengthening of average life expectancy, and by the way, a decreasing birth rate, have given rise to an amazing demographic transition: the age pyramid that existed less than half a century ago has literally been turned upside down. That’s right - the grey nomads are taking over!! And that’s not all bad.
- The most productive years of a person’s life *can* be the retirement years! You see, growing old doesn’t have to mean growing obsolescence. In fact, it can mean greater opportunity for many people. However, this “silent revolution of an ageing population” goes far beyond just statistical data: it poses social, economic, cultural, psychological and spiritual challenges.
- Now whilst the United Nations, and thousands of other government and community organisations grapple with trying to solve the problems of living in a contemporary, multigenerational society, Jesus makes an interesting reference in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 19. As Jesus was setting out on his journey, verses 17-19 tell of a man running to Jesus, before it was too late, possibly with the expectation that he would be asked to follow Jesus on his way. He is a “young” man only in Matthew 19:20; he is a “ruler”, that is, an important man in the community, in Luke 18:18; and simply “a man” in the Marcan story.
- Whatever the identity of this man, he asks Jesus “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” In answer to his question, Jesus quotes the Ten Commandments - but not all of them. The Commandments expressed by Jesus are those of the second table, which emphasise social obligations and human responsibilities.
- On Older Persons Sunday, the final commandment “Honour your father and mother” prompts us to explore further what God tells us in the Bible about how older people should be treated.
- In his first letter to Timothy (1Timothy 5:1-2), the writer instructs Timothy as to how people in his congregation should be treated. He says, “Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity”.

- Specifically, in traditional translations, the writer presents God as saying to *exhort* them (vs 1). Now that word is rich in meaning, and is translated in various ways in our New Testament. Sometimes it is translated “encourage”, at other times, “support”, “help”, or “comfort”. The word literally means, “come alongside and help”.
- So God wants us, as members of the church, to *come alongside* of each other, to *comfort* when one is hurting, to *support* each other, and to *help* in practical ways. This is especially true of older people.
- Ageing and aged care services in the Uniting Care network welcomes people who have had to live on the margins of society at some time in their lives because of poverty, prejudice, disability or illness. At the heart of this work, which is a ministry, is a desire to honour the unique spirit of *love, life and aliveness* in every person.
- The author Abraham Herschel said that “the affection and care for the old, the incurable, and the helpless, are the true goldmines of a culture”. God calls us as a church, to treat older people like gold....to come alongside and help seniors, to visit them, to spend time with them, *not* to dismiss them or ignore them. To honour them. To value them. To give them the proper recognition they deserve.

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## Appendix 3

### What Christians can do about ageism

There's much in the media today about racism and sexism but very little about the most widespread, insidious, illegal, and yet the most socially accepted of any prejudice—ageism.

Ageism is the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people on the basis of their age. It is seen in detrimental attitudes towards people's age and the aging process, discriminatory practices against people based on age, and institutional practices and policies that perpetuate stereotypes about people based on their age. Most commonly, ageism is directed at older people.

There are many examples in society of ageism against the elderly such as antiaging products, jokes about getting old, 55+ gated communities, societal hiring practices, and attitudes concerning older people and technology. If attitudes like this were applied to a different context, such as towards a person of colour or someone from another country, it would be seen as racism. But when it comes to age, it is socially acceptable. I caught myself wrestling with this issue as I stood impatiently in a grocery line behind an older woman counting her change with painstaking slowness.

Ageism exists in churches as well. It shows up when a church is looking for a new associate pastor or worship pastor. How many times have placement committees said, "We want someone who is younger"? And how many churches are intentional about investing in the spiritual growth of people over 50?

Churches often boast of how many young people they have in attendance, as if this is a badge of God's blessing. And a disparaging comment I've often heard is that someone doesn't want to attend a particular church because it is "full of old people."

The biblical picture of the church is that of a united body, a testimony to the world of the truth of the Gospel. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female and (by implication) old or young (Galatians 3:28).

The Scriptures condemn discrimination of any kind, particularly among believers. Jesus reveals that the greatest commands are to love the Lord with our whole hearts and to love our neighbours as we love ourselves (Mark 12:30–31). As believers, we are all equal in God's eyes, with everyone deserving the same respect (see Galatians 3:27–28; James 2:2–4). The Lord Himself "shows no favouritism" (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11). The church is to be a place where older women are helping and teaching younger women (Titus 2:2–6), and a place where we are all one in Christ Jesus.

In contrast to the rampant ageism in our society, the Bible honours age because God places high value on wisdom. Wisdom is associated with the elderly and not with the arrogant impulses of youth. "Wisdom belongs to the aged, and understanding to the old" (Job 12:12). "Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by living a godly life" (Proverbs 16:31). "Stand up in the presence of the elderly, and show respect for the aged. Fear your

God. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:32). It seems that respecting one’s elders goes hand-in-hand with respect for the Lord Himself.

Paul’s instruction to Timothy was, “Never speak harshly to an older man, but appeal to him respectfully as you would to your own father...Treat older women as you would your mother...” (1 Timothy 5:1–2).

This does not mean that God despises youth or that God honours all elderly people. But a person who has lived a long life of dedicated service to God, walking in the paths of wisdom, is surely worthy of higher honour than the youth who has only just begun his or her journey.

To combat ageism, we first need to become aware of it in ourselves and those around us. We become informed by reading about ageing and talking with older people about ageism. We become empathetic as we learn what people face as they grow older: friends and family are dying, occupation and its prestige are left behind, and agility and mobility may be lost. We become engaged when we think through how churches can help people deal with the depression, despair, and anger that sometimes occur as one ages.

Once you are equipped, you can help your church hold correct assumptions about aging and older adults. Here are some suggested questions to address. Are there tangible ways your church can show respect for the older people in the congregation and society and cultivate intergenerational relationships? Is part of your budget allocated to ministry to seniors? Has your church created division where there shouldn’t be any?

Finally, a word to those who are considered older. Challenge ageism when you experience it. Work against the stereotypes. Keep current with your skills and technology. Don’t be guilty of trying to act younger. It looks ridiculous and people won’t respect you. Learn what it means to age well

(United Church of Canada, Insight for Living)

## WORKSHEET for intergenerational activity

	1920s, 30s, 40s	1950s, 60s	1970s, 80s, 90s	2000s
A favourite TV/radio show				
A popular song				
Something unique to the era in a primary school				
A sporting hero				
A significant technological advance				
A typical church social activity				
A song people liked singing in church				



A fashion item				
A famous band				
The most successful football team				

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Affirmation of Faith – Pitt Street Uniting Church

Prayer following Jesus – David B Royer, Jonathon C Nelson, in *Flames of the Spirit: Resources for Worship*, edited by Ruth C Duck

Prayer of the People – Rev. Dr Ji Zhang

For theological reflection please consult “A theology of ageing” by the rev. Dr Ji Zhang, at <https://unitingcare.org.au/uniting-friends-of-ageing/>

*Some of the above resources include adaptations of style, layout or wording, made by Warren Talbot for this collection.*

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