



DRAFT DIOCESAN POLICY FOR OLDER PEOPLE

(We have prepared this draft policy to assist dioceses or individual churches who wish to draw up their own policies to guide and inform their work with older people. Please acknowledge the contribution of The Leveson Centre if you use this policy as a basis.)

The Bible challenges many of the prevailing stereotypical assumptions about older people. It presents us with an image of older people as respected members of the community, as culturally important and as having a continuing role to play. We need to recognise that they are not a uniform group of people and like the rest of us differ in gender, class, income levels, race, age and health. After all, older people are simply those who have travelled further in the journey of life.

It is against this background that this policy is presented. Beneath each aspiration are some practical questions for individuals and churches to consider.

- 1 Those involved in church life at all levels should reflect upon how God views older people as revealed in biblical stories and how this might affect their attitudes and actions towards these elder members of the community.
 - Consider the Christmas story. How many of the characters are older people?
 - What might we conclude from the responses to Jesus of Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and Gamaliel (all of whom we may infer to have been of mature years)?
- 2 Churches need to recognise how in practice they discriminate against older people in much of what they say and do.
 - Have you apologised for your congregation with the words 'I'm afraid we're all elderly here?'
 - Are your 'traditional' services always held in the early morning or after dark? Why do youth and family services always take place in the prime mid-morning slot?
- 3 Churches should listen to older people's experience and be ready to learn from them.
 - Can older people offer a much-needed longer perspective in a time of rapid change?
 - Can older people afford to be more radical because they have less to prove and less to lose?
- 4 Churches should ensure that older people are offered new experiences rather than assuming that they will always prefer the status quo.
 - Reflect on the top ten favourite hymns (attached) voted for by Songs of Praise viewers, a majority of whom are older people. Does this not suggest that older people are often willing to embrace the new?

- Have you noticed that many older people are ready to be liberated from oppressive religious ideas taught to them in the past?
- 5 Churches must recognise the wide range of abilities and potential to be found amongst their older members and appreciate their positive contribution.
- How often does a funeral address reveal an older person of talent, vision and energy who was simply not recognised as such by the vicar or congregation?
 - How many of your church leaders are over the age of 60?
- 6 Churches should however be aware of the effects of both physical and mental diminishment on their older members and help them to learn to cope with the associated feelings of loss.
- Does the constant emphasis in the church on 'doing' rather than 'being' devalue the importance of 'being'?
 - Could normal church activities such as house groups or women's meetings sometimes take place where older people already are, for example in their own homes or maybe in a care home?
- 7 Churches need to ensure that when older people become too frail to attend Sunday worship, their absence is noted and pastoral support offered.
- What systems do you have in place to notice when regular attenders suddenly disappear?
 - What procedures do you have for following up such absences, for example providing home communions or offering transport to church?
- 8 Churches should be conscious that many older people are themselves carers of spouses, parents, other elderly relatives and friends or of grandchildren and as such need both practical and emotional support.
- Is help ever offered to carers to enable them to attend church activities from time to time?
 - Have you considered setting up a support group for carers?
- 9 Churches should recognise that many older people feel challenged in their beliefs as they cope with losses and diminishment and their questioning needs a response.
- How often are older people's concerns about the after life brushed aside because it is easier to talk about something else?
 - How can older people be helped to come to terms with events in their past which need resolution?
- 10 Churches should act as beacons of intergenerational activity so that young may learn from old and vice versa and that neither is seen as more important than the other.
- Why do nearly all dioceses have posts concerned with youth and children's work but few have posts specifically related to older people's work?
 - What opportunities are there within the life of your church for young and old to talk or engage in activities together?

SONGS OF PRAISE TOP TEN HYMNS

How great thou art
Dear Lord and Father of mankind
The day thou gavest Lord is ended
Be thou my vision
Love Divine all loves excelling
Be still for the presence of the Lord
Make me a channel of thy peace
Guide me O thou great redeemer
In Christ alone
Shine Jesus shine