

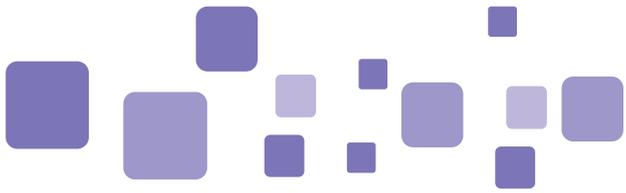
Uniting AgeWell

A New Conversation About Ageing



Melbourne | Bendigo | Geelong | Tasmania





Uniting AgeWell

A New Conversation About Ageing

This study resource aims to stimulate conversation across the church about ageing.

The prospect of living for many years beyond our working lives is a relatively new one. In 2007 there were 2.4 million Australians aged 65 years and over. That number is expected to rise to four million by 2022 ¹.

This increased longevity, the so-called 'third and fourth ages'², merits attention and preparation. For Christians, a key question must be 'what might Christ's call to abundant life mean in the later stages of life?' In this context, how might we prepare to age as well as possible as we grow older?

These four studies attempt to reflect on this changing situation within a theological framework, and to engage with current ideas about how to age well.

AgeWell is the name Uniting AgeWell has given its evolving positive approach to the growing needs of older Australians. It aims to provide a range of integrated services, from financial advice to end of life residential care. These services will be personal and driven by lifestyle choice. AgeWell operates on a wellness model rather than the conventional focus on sickness and decline.

AgeWell

- ▶ is about enhancing life experiences.
- ▶ demonstrates a different approach to the provision of services and care for older people within a restorative wellness model.
- ▶ provides a seamless service that enables choice and as much independence as possible.
- ▶ emphasises the ability of older people to continue contributing to community and provides opportunities for them to do so.
- ▶ assists in the development of government policy and future direction by demonstrating how services can be innovative and delivered according to need.
- ▶ is an expression of the Church as it responds to the needs of the vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities.

We commend these four studies which have been designed primarily for congregational use.

We would greatly appreciate any responses you may offer. These will be used to develop future publications and continue this new conversation on ageing.

Please direct any responses to the UA Director of Mission: directorofmission@unitingagewell.org

Rev Allan Thompson
Chair, UAC Board

Valerie Lyons
Executive Director and
Chief Executive,
Uniting AgeWell

¹ <http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/>

² The 'third age' generally refers to retirees from the paid workforce who are in relatively good health and socially engaged. People in the third age are sometimes called the 'youngold'. The 'fourth age' refers to individuals experiencing the final stage of high dependency.

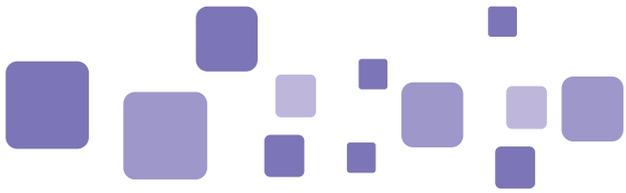


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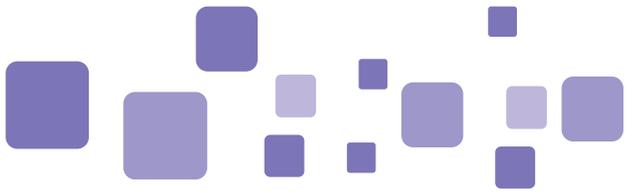
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Uniting Agewell

A New Conversation About Ageing

STUDY ONE

LIVING – fullness of life



STUDY ONE

LIVING – fullness of life

Jesus said: I came that you might have life and have it abundantly.

John 10:10



OPENING PRAYER

Divine Friend,

You never vary in your loving faithfulness and you never weary of making all things new.

Guide us through these changing times.

Do not permit our outlook to be ruled by anxiety or subverted by sentimental nostalgia.

Do not allow us to live in the museum of the past or to neglect its hard but enlightening lessons.

Do not let us live in daydreams about the future or neglect its exciting possibilities.

For your love's sake.

Amen.

'Past and Future' by Bruce Prewer, Jesus our Future, used with permission

INTRODUCTION

Using 'Mutual Invitation', share briefly with the group your response to the questions, following...



Why have you come to a discussion on growing older?

Do you – or did you – think about your life beyond the stage of full-time paid work?

Some lifestyle changes might include: on-going support for your children, the arrival of grandchildren, embracing volunteering opportunities, planning for changes in health and fitness, travel options, developing a health and fitness regime, changing social networks, questions of identity when no longer in paid employment.

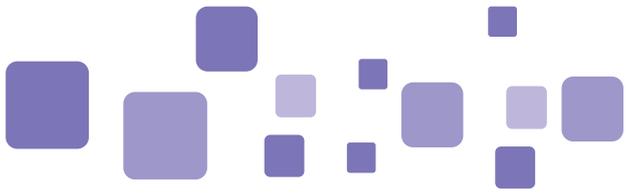
Mutual Invitation

The leader will share first. After that person has spoken, he or she then invites another to share. Whoever you invite does not need to be the person next to you. After the next person has spoken, that person is given the privilege to invite another to share.

If you have something to say but are not ready yet, say 'pass for now,' and then invite someone else to share. You will be invited again later. If you don't want to say anything, simply say 'pass' and proceed to invite another to share. We will do this until everyone has been invited.

You are invited to listen and not to respond to someone's sharing immediately. There may be time to respond and to ask clarification questions after everyone has had an opportunity to share.

Eric Law, The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb, Chalice Press, 1993



Section One

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION



Elizabeth MacKinlay and Corinne Trevitt outline three views of ageing in their study of ageing and spiritual care. They say 'elements of each of these views of ageing are true'.

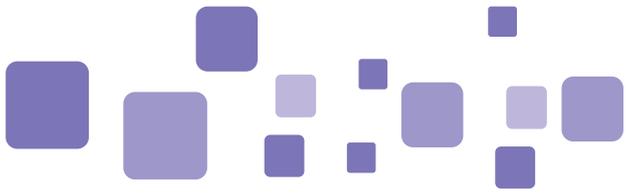
There are different views of ageing in our society. One view sees ageing as a period of physical decline that includes illness and disability, with an emphasis on the 'burden' of an ageing population ...

A second view is of 'successful ageing'. This promotes continued engagement with the wider community and pursuit of physical and psychosocial activities as a means of ageing successfully. However this view begs the question of what happens to people who are not 'successful' – older people who live with multiple chronic health problems, who are depressed or live with dementia.

The reality is that the later years of life may frequently be accompanied by chronic illness requiring special care.

Therefore an alternative view is needed. We propose a third view that sees ageing as a 'spiritual journey', with challenges that continue across the later years of life. This is a journey that searches to find meaning in one's life and therefore reason for continued life and hope. This view accepts the possibility of death while living life to the full.

Taking this third view allows people living with increasing disability to flourish, even in the face of uncertainty.¹



Through imagination, inspiration and creativity, we can discover ways to support each other in our shared spiritual journey ... Growing old is a time of transitions that can involve loss and letting go. It can also be a time of new possibilities and new connections.

Uniting AgeWell: A different approach to growing old

Adding years to your life and adding life to our years

Ageing concerns my generation more than it appears to have worried our forebears. They had other concerns – including the threat of disease and early and painful deaths. While we have succeeded in adding years to our lives, we remain uncertain of our ability, as a society and as individuals, to add life to the years we have gained. There is hope, however, not just because of scientific and cultural progress, but also because we as individuals are powerful personal and social creators of ageing as well.²



In what ways might we 'add life' to the increasing years we have gained?

What might 'ageing well' mean as our circumstances change?

How might the idea of ageing as a stage on life's spiritual journey change our approach to and understanding of ageing?



The United Church of Canada made a 'Statement on Ageing'³ which says:

We repent the ageism that infects our society, and ourselves as parrot of society. It affirms newness, wellness, youthfulness as 'the only good' and negates the value of the later stages of living.⁴

What kind of damage is done to people and to our community by affirming youth and newness as 'the only good'?

Have you noticed ways in which the Church reflects the view that an ageing church is a failing church? How might this ageism be challenged?



Read these words from Janet Wood, past President of COTA – Council on the Ageing Victoria – and a past Chair of the Uniting Aged Care (now Uniting AgeWell Board).

We are not yet used to the idea of ageing as a really positive thing ...

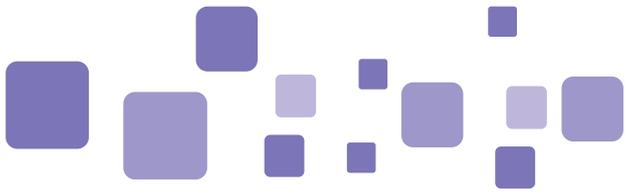
The 'old' have always been among us, but never in such numbers and never living, in numbers, for such a long time... For all except this tip end of human history, the majority of people who survived infancy died before the age of 60. The Greek ideal was the beautiful youth. The Romans did not organise senior citizens' clubs ...

Healthy ageing policies and programs are not the social equivalent of cosmetic surgery. There are aspects of accumulating birthdays which are faced daily by older people themselves and push us back from an unreal expectation that soon the wrinkles will all be smoothed over.



How do you think we can affirm the opportunities that the later season of life brings, while being realistic about the challenges that come with ageing?

How can we view the presence and experience of older people as a gift rather than a burden?



Section Two

BIBLICAL REFLECTION



Ask members of the group to read the following short Bible passages out loud.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female God, created them.

Genesis 1: 27

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4.16–18



How might this biblical perspective challenge or affirm how you currently think about growing older?

Jesus said: I came that you might have life, life in all its abundance.

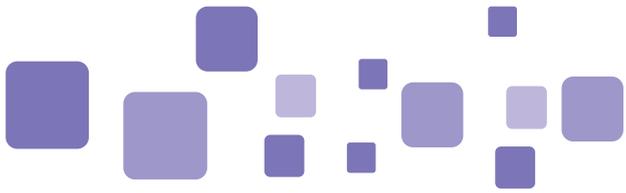
John 10:10

A core Christian conviction is that all people are made in the image and likeness of God regardless of age, race, appearance, ability and gender. That image does not diminish with the passage of time. Paul refers to the vitality of our 'inner nature' despite our ageing bodies. Jesus came offering 'abundant life' to all.

How might the Church contribute to a rethinking of ageing in Australian society?

In 2010 in Australia 6.1 million people had undertaken some kind of voluntary work in the previous 12 months. 'Volunteering is an effective way to help solve serious human, social and environmental problems ... to deliver services, provide individualized attention, to engage with those most in need of help ... to improve the quality of life in our communities, to enable people to live healthier, more productive and fulfilling lives.'

Allen, K 2000, 'Responding together to the challenge of the International Year of Volunteers', Australian Journal of Volunteering, 5(2), pp. 32-41.



Section Three

REFLECTION AND MAKING

for sharing or individual response

Allow 20 to 30 minutes for this: half for engaging the task, half for sharing.

Choose one activity, consider doing others during the week.

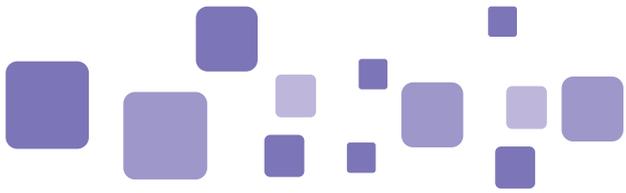
- ▶ Write a prayer of confession that acknowledges ageism.
- ▶ Create a thanksgiving prayer that celebrates the possibilities of 'ageing well' within the limits of compromised health or physical capability.
- ▶ Begin writing! Start with a personal journal entry that acknowledges your attitudes to ageing – your own and others'. Are there ambivalences? Concerns?
- ▶ The Simple List – what are some achievable actions you can begin immediately to address ageism in the life of our church?
- ▶ Thought provokers – look at some of the further quotes at the end of this study and make your own journal entry, prayers or notes in response.



CLOSING PRAYER

Use any prayers written in the previous section then close by singing or saying together the Aaronic Blessing.

*The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make His face to shine upon
you, and be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance
upon you,
And give you peace*



THINGS TO DO AT HOME

Collage – begin collecting images and articles that imply particular attitudes to youthfulness and ageing. Your group may want to establish a shared resource where people can add items they find. They can make their own responses and questions known via post-it notes, written messages or images. Instead, you may prefer to do this as an individual project.

Over these weeks, keep a Story Journal of stories and experiences in your own life. If you attend to your own stories, you may find you are more aware of listening to other people's stories, too.

What organisations are you aware of that represent older people? Find out the name of one or two such organisations. Who they are for, where are they located, what they do?

Read and reflect on the quotes, following.

FURTHER QUOTES

... we are entering a time of exploration of old-age-appropriate spirituality. We may grow old gracefully by entering fully into this exploration. Partnering with life as we age into late life means that we take life's directions seriously as our lives move towards wholeness.⁵

Ann Zubrick

The burden of these years is the danger that we might internalize the negative stereotypes of the aging process. We might become what we fear and so abdicate our new call in life.

A blessing of these years is that we are the ones whose responsibility it is to prove the stereotypes wrong, to give age its own fullness of life.⁶

Joan Chittister

There is a wicked inclination in most people to suppose an old man decayed in his intellect. If a young or middle-aged man does not recollect where he laid his hat, it is nothing but if the same inattention is discovered in an old man, people will shrug their shoulders and say "His memory is going".

Samuel Johnson

Whatever our culture tells us about life being an inevitably demoralizing business of falling apart, it is not what human life is about. Bodies do wear out and our minds do get slower, but human beings are made in the image of God who is love; and God's intention for us, if we choose to pursue it, is continual growth – growth in love both of God and neighbour.

Center for Christian Ethics, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

1 MacKinlay, E and Trevitt, C 2007 'Spiritual care and ageing in a secular society', *Spirituality and Health MJA*, vol. 186.

2 Zubrick, A 2009 (November) 'How might we grow old gracefully?' *Tjurunga: An Australian Benedictine Review*.

3 Note that 'ageing' is the Australian spelling; 'aging' is a North American spelling.

4 Seniors Ministries, Organization of United Church Homes 'Seniors, an ethical and theological statement on aging', www.united-church.ca

5 Zubrick, A 2009 (November) 'How might we grow old gracefully'

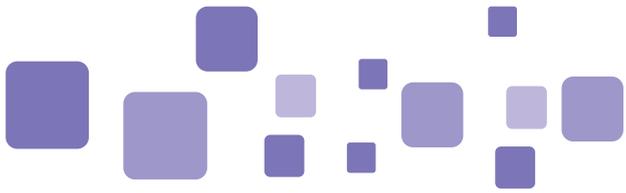
6 Chittister, J 2008 *The Gift of Years*, BlueBridge, New York.

Uniting Agewell

A New Conversation About Ageing

STUDY TWO

LOVING – when it's not easy



STUDY TWO

LOVING – when it's not easy

Jesus said: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength ... You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

Mark 12: 30 – 31



OPENING PRAYER

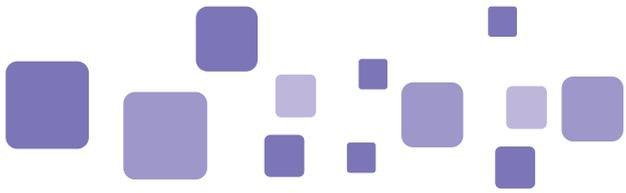
*Lord of flowing times and seasons,
of minutes, centuries and millennia,
a hundred years in your sight are less
than a blinking of an eye.*

*We realize that our fascination
with calendars and centuries
displays of human insecurity
and brief tenure in this world.
Have pity on our vulnerability.*

*Humour and guide us as we begin
to explore this new century
which to us seems momentous.*

*Let it not be a pathetic regurgitation
of our past follies and failures.
Reinvigorate the quality of our
loving and help us keep faith with
your kingdom.*

*'Our Times' by Bruce Prewer, Jesus our Future,
used with permission*



Section One

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION

Identity as a gift of community



INTRODUCTION

Using the 'Mutual Invitation' technique introduced in the first session, check how each participant went with the tasks done at home. Allow 15 minutes.

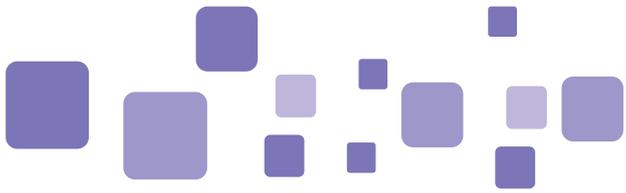


As long as we continue to divide the world into the strong and the weak, the helpers and the helped, the givers and the receivers, the independent and the dependent, real care will not be possible, because then we keep broadening the dividing lines that caused the suffering... in the first place.¹

Henri J.M. Nouwen and
Walter J. Gaffney



Discuss ways in which we divide the world into helpers and people in need of help. Have you experienced this division as a 'giver' or 'receiver' of care?



The Uniting Church affirms that God is a relational God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in a community of self-giving love. To be created in the image of God is to live in community with God and one another, in mutual love. In this reality is true identity and wholeness for all humankind, irrespective of age or circumstance.

Uniting Aged Care Theological Statement



Reverend Sani Vaeluaga



Reverend Sani Vaeluaga is a Uniting Church Minister. He observes the following contrasts between Samoan and Australian contexts.

In Samoa

Growing old is honoured; care is fundamentally the responsibility of the children and grandchildren.

Respect is a two-way street where both elderly and young ones offer and receive honour and love. The elders are served by the younger members of the family.

Family is the primary context for growing old. Here, basic needs of food and shelter are provided. Families also look for ways to connect the elders with others of their age and social grouping. They have their elders lead daily family devotions and go with them to church and other activities.

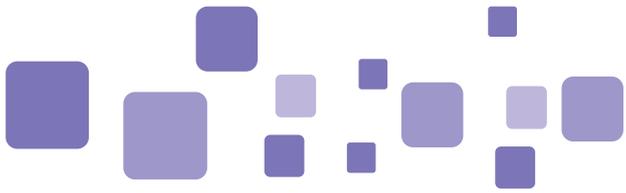
The advice of older people is sought on matters that affect the wellbeing of the family. The elders are the holders of family genealogy; they understand the history of the family's roots and its protocols. This knowledge is seen as a priceless gift by Samoan families.

In Australia

The value placed on individual needs and rights and the social ordering of Australian society sometimes places people in lonely and vulnerable situations. The context for ageing has shifted from the family environment to institutions of professional carers.

The relationship between the elders and their family members is altered and can bring unresolved grief and loss.

Older people in Australia are not routinely sought after for their advice.



Reverend Dr Ji Zhang



Read the comment by Uniting Church Minister Reverend Dr Ji Zhang about the expectations of Chinese culture regarding care for ageing parents.

As the elder son, I have the full responsibility to care for my mother. I need to pay for everything if required and offer unconditional care.

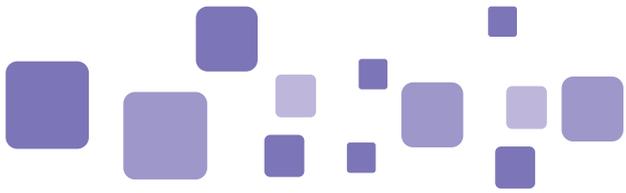
The traditional teaching is, 'the son ought to give his life to the father if it is required'. I have seen people who sacrifice their career to fulfil the duty of looking after the dying parents. But this can also mean parents will avoid seeking help from the children in order to protect their future.



What challenges might people from Samoan and Chinese cultures experience in Australia?

How might mainstream Australian culture appreciate and support people with different cultural approaches and backgrounds?

What wisdom is there that might challenge western attitudes and practices?



LOVING THE UNPRETTY AND THE APPARENTLY UNRESPONSIVE

Rosalie Hudson writes about person hood and the fear of dementia:

Bert has remained in his nursing home bed, mute and immobile for nine years. No longer able to recognize or to respond to his family in any meaningful way, unable to engage with friends, he is now almost totally deprived of visitors. An old photo, sitting askew on the wall beside his bed, points to a time when he served his country at war. Some faded artificial flowers are the only remnants of the last gift he received. Now, his past means little, as busy nurses clang the bed rails up and down, not infrequently tearing his frail skin in the process. Leaking urine and faeces, legs contracted tight together, Bert does not exemplify wholeness or dignity and many nurses question the value of his existence... Bert's family commented, 'I can't bear to visit him any more. He's no longer a person. It's just a living death.'²
Rosalie Hudson

People such as Bert are often viewed as unproductive burdens. Christian theology challenges this view.

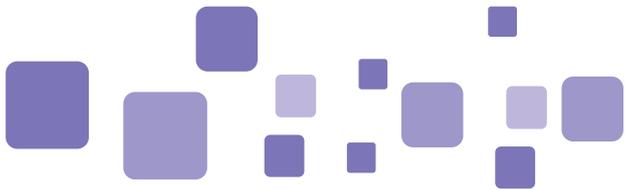
Stanley Hauerwas comments:

We especially fear, if not dislike, those whose suffering is the kind for which we can do nothing. They are not self-sufficient, they are not self-possessed, they are in need... We do not like to be reminded of the limits of our power, and we do not like those who remind us.³



How is it possible to express love and respect for people in situations like Bert's?

How do you respond to Stanley Hauerwas's comment?



In a series of articles in The Age about euthanasia, Father Geoffrey King wrote:

I was diagnosed almost two years ago with motor neurone disease ... At present my determination is to live as fully as possible within these already significant limitations. I am acting dean of the United Faculty of Theology. I am teaching one course within that faculty. As a Catholic priest I celebrate Mass several mornings a week in the church at Richmond where I live, and on Sundays at Werribee. I go to the MCG when Collingwood is playing. I go to concerts in the city, and to exhibitions at the NGV. I frequent cafés that serve good coffee. I do most of the shopping for my small community.

Why do I choose to press on into the more horrendous paths of this motor neurone journey? Ultimately for me this is not a matter of reason, but a matter of faith. For me, life is a gift from God. So far it has been an extraordinarily generous gift... I have had a wonderful life, and for this I am immensely grateful. I have now entered into much darker places, but even here I find new life ...

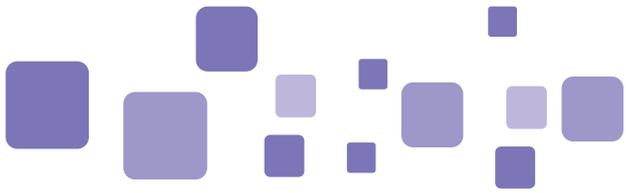
I have also discovered how much people love me. Prayers, good wishes, and material help have come from places expected and quite unexpected ... Having motor neurone disease, then, has enabled me to live life in new ways. I actually see it as a gift, a very challenging and mysterious gift, from a life-giving God.

My attitude is based on my Christian faith ... it is the statement of someone who wants to live life to the full, who has found some of that fullness of life in the unlikeliest of places, and who trusts the amazing grace that has brought me safe thus far to lead me on.

Geoffrey King



How do you respond to Father King's approach to his challenging circumstances?



Section Two

BIBLICAL REFLECTION



Don't be harsh or impatient with an older man. Talk to him as you would your own father, and to the younger men as your brothers. Reverently honour an older woman as you would your mother, and the younger women as sisters.

1 Timothy 5: 1–2 (The Message)

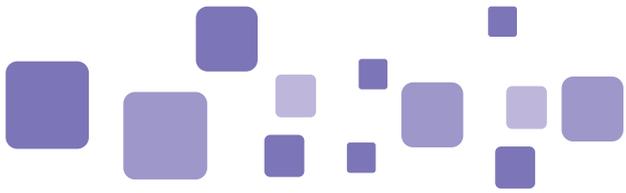
One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.'

Mark 12: 28–31



In what ways might growing older enhance our capacity to love?

As we grow older, what actions by others might remind us that we are loved?



Section Three

REFLECTION AND MAKING

for sharing or individual response

Allow 20 to 30 minutes of your study group gathering time for this.

Choose one or two activities.

- ▶ The 'three plagues' of old age are loneliness, helplessness and boredom. If you had to make a first-aid kit to combat these three plagues, what would be in it? What longer-term plans could you build into your life to address these plagues for yourself and for others? Design your first-aid kit.
- ▶ Make notes for your Story Journal. Have you been reminded of experiences that you want to recall and write about? Take some notes to come back to during the week.
- ▶ The Simple List: in your congregation and community, what are some practical ways you can invite and listen to the experience of older people?
- ▶ Caring for people with high needs often involves significant domestic hard work. How do you think your congregation and community could better acknowledge and support the work of carers?
- ▶ Is there a quote or phrase that has stood out to you in this study? Take a few minutes to write it out by hand and place it somewhere in your home where you can meet it through the week. Is there a quote you might frame to add to your first-aid kit?
- ▶ Before you leave, please read the 'Things to do at home' section. There is an invitation to bring a story from your own life next week. Ask for clarity if you do not understand the task.

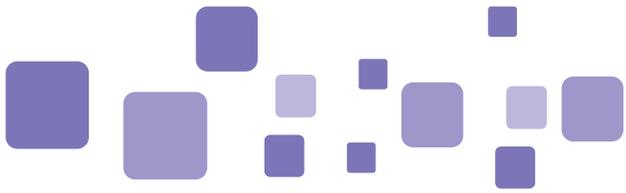


CLOSING PRAYER

Use the prayer by Terry Falla below, or one created by a member of your group.

*beside and before
Crucified and risen one,
you are behind us,
we do not have to turn around.
You are in front of us,
we are walking toward you.
You are beside us,
more than any abyss and any mountain.
We return to the road and know that you are there.
Amen.*

*By Terry Falla, Be our Freedom Lord, used
with permission*



THINGS TO DO AT HOME

Next week you will be invited to share a story about a person who, in the later stage of their life, has had a significant impact on you. These questions may assist you.

Who has had a positive influence on your life?

How has their life shaped yours?

What legacy have they left?

Start mulling now. Your story does not have to be impressive. You will need to have a sense of where the story begins and ends. You may want to make notes, but don't try to write the story out in full. Each person will have eight minutes to speak.

Your job is to prepare your story by thinking about it and holding it prayerfully.

- ▶ *Collage – search for images that you could use to represent community and relationships.*
- ▶ *First-aid kit – consider creating the first-aid kit you designed and sharing it with the group next week.*

FURTHER RESOURCES

But what is required of the person who believes in the crucified Jesus is something that frequently recurs and is therefore mostly more difficult than a single heroic act: it is the endurance of ordinary, normal, everyday suffering, which is then most likely to prove excessive. The cross to be borne is therefore the cross of everyday life. That this is far from being obvious or edifying is apparent to anyone who has seen how often a person tries to get away from his own cross, all his daily obligations, demands, claims, promises in his family or his calling; how he tries to shift his cross onto others or suppress it altogether.

Hans Kung

1 Nouwen, HJM and Gaffney, WJ 1976, *Aging: The Fulfillment of Life, Image*, New York.

2 Hudson, R 2004, 'Dementia and person hood: a living death or alive in God?' ANZATS conference, Queens College Melbourne, July 2004.

3 Hauerwas, S 1986 *Suffering Presence: Theological Reflections on Medicine, the Mentally Handicapped, and the Church*. University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana.

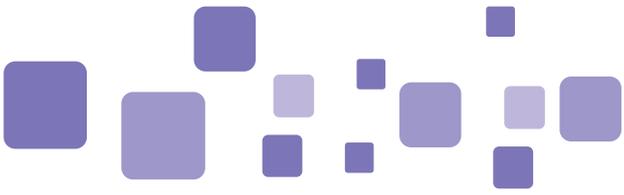
4 King, G 2013, 'Life or death decision inspired by faith in God', *The Age* 4 April 2013.

Uniting Agewell

A New Conversation About Ageing

STUDY THREE

LEGACY – living today with
tomorrow in mind



STUDY THREE

LEGACY – living today with tomorrow in mind

God comes to you disguised as your life.

Father Richard Rohr

Will you join in our crusade?

Who will be strong and stand with me?

Beyond the barricade, is there a world you long to see?

'Do you hear the people sing?' from Les Miserables

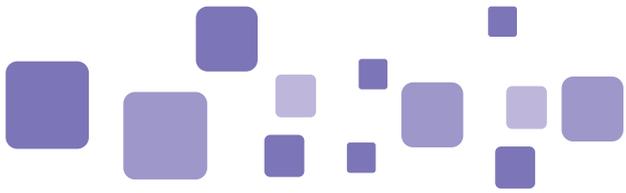
Seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things shall be yours as well.

Matthew 6: 33

INTRODUCTION

This session's focus on legacy reminds us that our actions, commitments and relationships will outlive us. Decisions we make today about how we use our time and resources will leave a legacy for those who come after us. This awareness of our mortality and of our legacy will hopefully add direction, purpose and satisfaction to our lives in the present.

The first part of this study is given over to storytelling. You will be in groups of three with each person having up to eight minutes of undivided attention. The purpose of this time is to listen to each other in the knowledge that how a story is listened to affects how it can be told. Re-read the instructions at the end of Study Two that assisted you in preparing for this task.



Section One

STORYTELLING

what are the stories we bring?



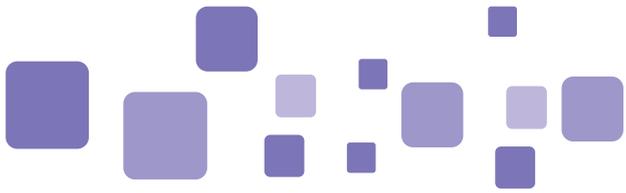
As a preparation for the storytelling, share the reading aloud, stanza by stanza, of the opening prayer, which explores the possibilities of and the impediments to our telling and listening together.

Ageing invites us to interrogate our lives more fully – to revisit our memories of events and experiences, through personal and collective myth and story and through such processes, to derive renewed meaning and understanding.¹

Ann Zubrick

Trusting in God often seems easier when our lives feel in tune with our ideas of how our lives should unfold. Scripture reminds us that we can trust that God's Spirit is with us in all of life's experiences.²

Seniors Ministries, The United Church of Canada



OPENING PRAYER

Lord God,
*Unless you take a lead with us,
Our lives will always be the same:
our view of self and world will never change; and
some of us want that.*

*But some of us are in brokenness;
we wear bruises,
carry heavy hurt,
shamed by events beyond our ability to
influence, or shamed by events we influenced
too much.*

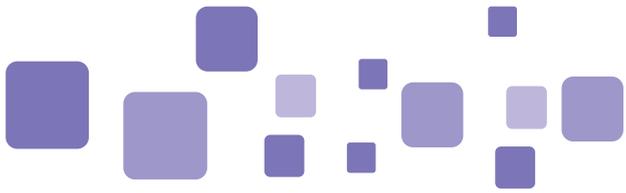
*We seek a refuge, a safe place to tell the truth of
our lives,
Truth which, when heard,
will meet graciousness not scorn,
meet trustful, kindly gentleness and
not contempt.*

Lord God,
*rescue us to be truth tellers and
truth hearers;
for unless you take a lead with us,
our lives will always be the same;
bruised, heavy hurted, shamed.*

*And rescue us from gossip truth-pryers,
or truth-pryers who possess instant answers,
or truth-pryers too keenly aware of
appropriate correction
for unless you take a lead with them,
their lives will always be the same.*

*For it is you, Lord, who are our hope,
And it is in you we trust –
Trust learnt from our years of trading in truth with you.*

*So our praise is in our hearts,
on our lips,
in our community,
because we tell truth to one who carefully listens,
taking a lead with us,
so our lives will not be the same.
In the name of the One who is the truth.
Amen³
(David Grant)*



STORYTELLING AND LISTENING

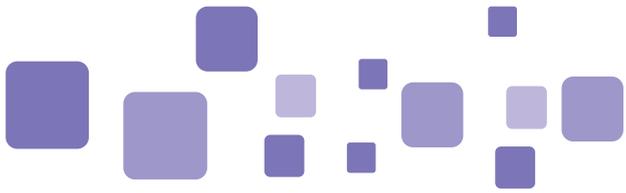
Allow 20 to 30 minutes

In this time, you are invited to tell a story, to a group of three or four, about someone who, in the later years of their life, has had an impact on you. Hopefully you have been thinking towards this during the week. Try to include tangible details of everyday living. Remember that the stories you will hear belong to other people; they are not yours to tell to others.

How you listen to each other is vital; please eliminate distractions. Appoint a timekeeper whose task is to gently signal when the teller reaches the seven-minute mark so they have time to finish off. Most stories will not take the full eight minutes. You may want to use a talking stick that the speaker holds or has in front of them for the duration of their turn. If your group finishes early, use the time to browse the readings in this study.

CIRCLE SPEAKING *Closing the ritual of storytelling and listening*

To end the time of storytelling, re-gather into one larger group again. Each person is invited to offer one word or phrase to describe the experience of story-listening and story-telling. You may want to pass the talking stick from one person to the next. Note that the task is not to comment on the meaning of other people's stories, but on the impact of listening and being listened to.



READING ALOUD

Following this circle activity, have one or more volunteers read these texts aloud. Begin with Joan Chittister's and Jurgen Moltmann's words and go on to the biblical texts.

The opening prayer was based on Psalm 71. Hear the psalm read from the NRSV (see page 31) or another version.



There will be a few minutes after the readings for personal note taking.

READINGS ON LEGACY

What we are inclined to forget is that each of us leaves a legacy, whether we mean to, whether we want to or not. Our legacies are the quality of the lives we leave behind. What we have been will be stamped on the hearts of those who survive us for years to come ...

We leave behind our attitude toward the world. We are remembered for whether or not we inspired in others a love for life and openness to all of those who lived it with us ...

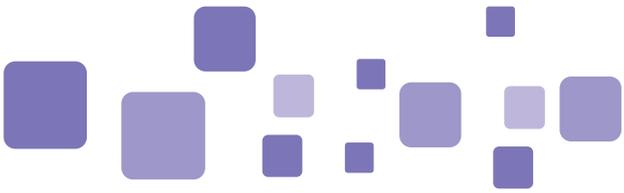
We leave behind the memory of the way we treated strangers, how we loved the individuals closest to us, how we spoke to them in hard times, how we gave ourselves away to satisfy their needs ...

Our legacy does not end the day we die. We have added to it every moment of our lives. It is the crowning moment of the aging process. It is the major task of these years...⁴

Joan Chittister

When we die, the book is finished, but it will not be destroyed ... the broken-off story of our lives will be taken up and completed.⁵

Jurgen Moltmann



Section Two

BIBLICAL REFLECTION



Grey hair is a crown of glory;
it is gained in a righteous life.

Proverbs 16:31

In you, O LORD, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.

In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.

Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.

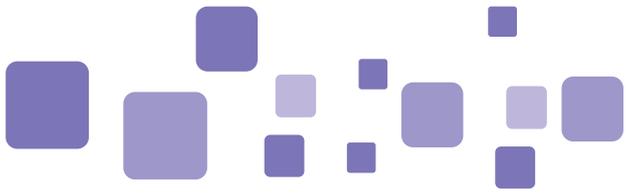
Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.

For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.

Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.

My praise is continually of you.

Psalm 71: 1-6 NRSV



Allow a short silence after the readings. Give participants several minutes to make notes on the readings or respond in writing to the stories that have been heard and told.



Read the following extracts:
... to live with respect in creation

In an age which bears the cries of a broken earth, older adults, whose own generation contributed to the pollution of the earth, have a fundamentally critical role to play as sentinels of healing and restoration. From recycling to petitioning, many older adults are now proactive participants, calling every generation to honour the integrity of creation and to repent of our human arrogance and destruction.⁶

Seniors Ministries, The United Church of Canada

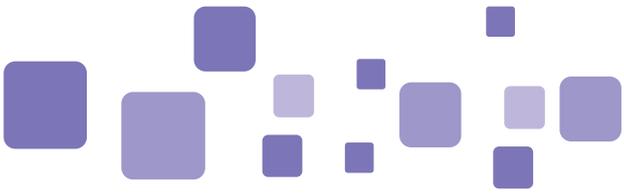
'A Grand Stand for the Environment Inc' is a group started by churches in Manningham in response to climate change. In an interview about this initiative, Gail and Alastair Pritchard said:

'A Grandstand for the Environment Inc seeks to address the urgent and vexing issue of human arrogance and destruction by emphasising a spiritual relationship between humans and the earth. We believe the environmental crisis stems from a loss of relationship with the sacredness of the earth. We are passionate about creating opportunities for people to make this connection and to explore the question of human identity in relation to the whole of creation... As grandparents and seniors we have a particular responsibility and privilege to listen to the wisdom and suffering of the earth on behalf of future generations...'



How do you think you could better listen to the stories of the older people in your life?

What practices or invitations would be needed to allow this opportunity?



'A Grand Stand for the Environment INC' is one local initiative that aims to leave a legacy. Consider whether you are part of any movement or organisation whose purpose is to make a difference, now and into the future – to leave a positive legacy. If you can't think of anything, what sort of group might appeal to you?

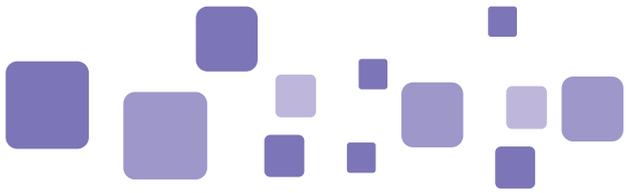
The potter

There is a Native American legend that when the old master potter can no longer make pots, when his life work is finished, he gives his finest piece of work to a new potter; the one he feels will be the new master, in a ceremony of initiation. The younger potter does not keep this beautiful vase, this master work, to admire or contemplate. He smashes it into shards, and grinds the pieces into his own clay.⁷

Kate Kennedy



How does this Native American tradition suggest that a legacy can be absorbed?



Section Three

REFLECTION AND MAKING

for sharing or individual response



Spend the first 15 minutes adding to your own Journal or notes by answering the following questions.

What will your legacy be? What aspect of forming your legacy calls for your attention today? Do you sense an energy that draws you to particular intentions? Are there impediments you need to address?



CLOSING PRAYER

*May God your Creator,
your Redeemer and Sustainer,
be the truth on which your life and death are built,
your hope that cannot be destroyed,
your freedom from which love and justice flow,
and the joy that has eternity within it.*

*Be our Freedom Lord, Lutheran Publishing, Adelaide, used
with permission*

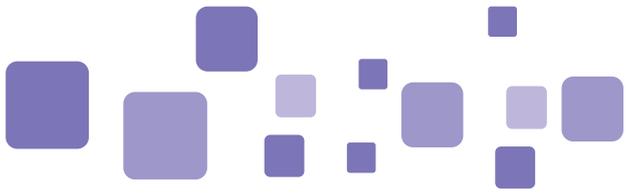


Now allow a further 15 minutes for sharing some of your gathering and making from the first two weeks ...

This is the time to show and share the collages you have been building at home since week one.

People may like to display or speak to the first-aid kit for the three plagues of old age that they designed in week two.

How you will respond to the task of growing older and to the people you know who are in the later stages of their lives?



THINGS TO DO AT HOME

Devise your own list of how you will follow the intentions you have formed and how you will attend to your own sense of legacy.

Think about ways in which you can pay attention to the legacy of others.

Reflect on the poem 'Where there's death there's hope'. Ponder how our awareness that life is finite can sharpen the importance of how we live today.

Where there's death there's hope

Where there's death there's hope:
that mothers and daughters, fathers and sons
will make their peace.

Hope that we will learn that what's of value
is not that distant pay rise, promotion,
resort holiday, getting the kids off our hands.
But this moment: this sunrise, this embrace,
this poem read, meal shared, love made.

This soft child's cheek, this spring's unfurling bud.

This daily grind, shot through with joy and moments of
epiphany: where there's death there's hope that one
day we may start to get it right.

Clare Boyd-Macrae, used with permission

- 1 Zubrick, A 2009 (November) 'How might we grow old gracefully?' Tjurunga: An Australian Benedictine Review.
- 2 Seniors Ministries, Organization of United Church Homes, The United Church of Canada 'Seniors, an ethical and theological statement on aging', www.united-church.ca
- 3 Grant, D 1998 Grant us your Peace, Prayers from the Lectionary Psalms, Chalice Press, Missouri.
- 4 Chittister, J 2008 The Gift of Years, BlueBridge, New York.
- 5 Moltmann, J 1998 Is There Life After Death? Marquette University Press, Milwaukee.
- 6 Seniors Ministries, Organization of United Church Homes, The United Church of Canada 'Seniors, an ethical and theological statement on aging', www.united-church.ca
- 7 Kennedy, C 2005 Sing and Don't Cry, a Mexican Journal, Transit Lounge, Melbourne.

Uniting Agewell

A New Conversation About Ageing

STUDY FOUR

LEAVING – companioning those
who are dying



STUDY FOUR

LEAVING – companioning those who are dying

I want to do this thing, this finishing, as well as I know how.

Margaret Hope Bacon, Year of Grace

I'm not afraid of death, I just don't want to be there when it happens.

Woody Allen

Eternal God, you are our dwelling place, and underneath are your everlasting arms.

Deuteronomy 33:27



OPENING PRAYER

*Most loving and ever-faithful God,
return us to the sanity of faith.*

*Help us to let go of our worrying habits
and stand empty in the presence of
your abundant grace.*

*Fill us with courage, a sense of humour
and a quiet mind.*

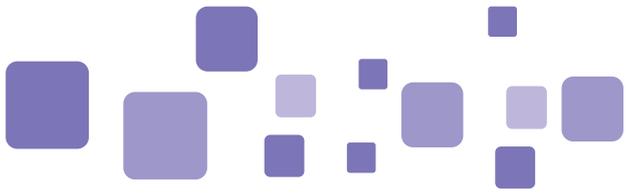
*For yours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory
of irrepressible love, today, tomorrow and forever.
Amen.*



INTRODUCTION

Preparing to die does not mean giving up on life – a good life includes awareness of the fact of death. The topic of death is frequently avoided in contemporary western culture. Following the medical model of prolonging life at all costs, death comes to be viewed as a form of failure.

While untimely death brings its own particular grief, this study will focus on dying after a long life. Any discussion of death will arouse memories – both good experiences and traumatic ones. It is important that there is no enforced sharing. You may like to begin and end with prayer and allow a moment of silence to acknowledge participants' untold stories. There is a further reading section that offers resources around grief.



Section One

INFORMATION AND DISCUSSION

for sharing or individual response



Read the prayer from the Carmina Gadelica. Scottish Highlanders would have prayed this prayer, which was collected orally in the late 1800s. Notice how both hope and anxiety are expressed here.

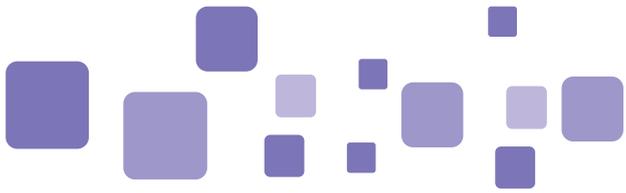


*Grant me grace throughout my life,
Grant me life at the hour of my death;
Be with me, o God, in casting of my breath,
O God, be with me in the deep currents.*

*O in the parting of the breath,
O be with my soul in the deep currents.
O God, be with my soul in sounding the
fords, in crossing the deep floods.*

Alexander Carmichael, Carmina Gadelica, 1900





If you have access to a recording of it, listen to the old hymn 'Abide with me'. If not, read the words in the Further Resources section.



Why might the notion of 'abiding' be important at this time of vulnerability?

Why do you think hymns, psalms and poetry around the experience of death are important? Do you have a favourite funeral hymn?

GLIMPSES OF DEATH IN OTHER CULTURES



In Further Resources, read the depiction of *The Day of the Dead* celebrations in Cate Kennedy's non-fiction account of her experience in Mexico. (P49)



Share any ways of responding to death you have encountered in other cultures that have surprised or confronted you.

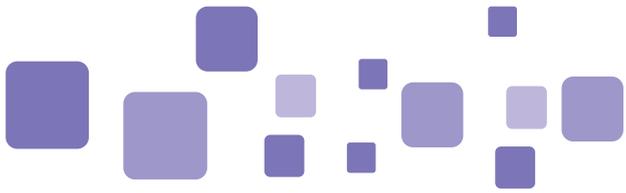
POETRY



Allow members of the group to choose one of the poems at the end of the study: 'Living in the body' (Joyce Sutphen) (P50) or 'Sonnet: preparing for my mother's death' (Clare Boyd-Macrae). (P51) Read it in a time of silence.



Identify a phrase, stanza or thought from the poem that you'd like to share with the group and the reason you chose it.



DEATH AS PART OF LIFE



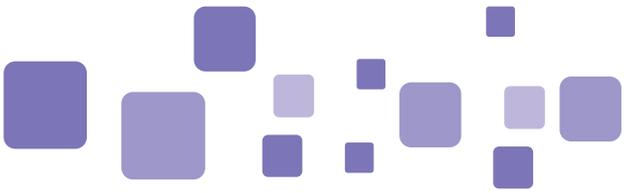
Look at the definition of 'wholeness', below, then consider the questions in groups of three.

Wholeness definition

Origin: Old English root word Haelen – health, healthy, healing, hale, wholeness, wholesome, holy.

Choose one or two of the following questions to reflect on and share your response with the others if you want to.

- ▶ As you continue to age, what will you willingly give up and what do you want to retain?
- ▶ What do wholeness and wellness mean as people age?
- ▶ If you knew you were going to live to 90, what plans would you put in place?
- ▶ How is it possible to remain whole or well while being dependent?
- ▶ What do you need from your community to support you as you age?



PREPARING FOR DYING

Rosalie Hudson and Helen Day write about the conversations that are needed when planning for people's end of life needs.

Decisions about end of life are not made in isolation, or by professional carers on behalf of others. Rather, decisions are made collaboratively within a context of trusting relationships. While we do all we can to ease suffering and to accompany each person on the final stages towards death, ultimately death cannot be 'managed' or controlled. While we may respect a person's right to refuse burdensome treatment, we also respect our limit as humans created to care for one another without domination.¹

Rosalie Hudson and Helen Day

Here are some questions they suggest for an end of life care plan:

What does dignity mean to you and your family at this time?

Are there any particular religious rituals that are important to you?

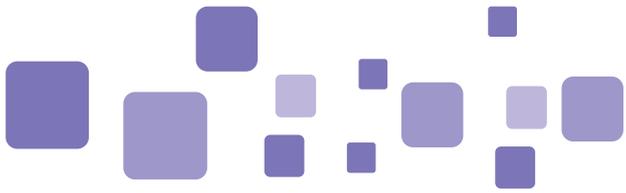
What has been the source of your spiritual strength in the past?

What or who provides you with the greatest comfort and support?



Are there questions you would like to add?

If you were caring for someone approaching death, what questions would you want to have thought about with them?



Section Two

BIBLICAL REFLECTION



Prepare to read these passages aloud in an atmosphere of stillness. The questions can come after you have had the opportunity to sit quietly with the readings.

Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn grey I will carry you.

I have made, and I will bear;
I will carry and will save.

Isaiah 46:4 NRSV

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

Romans 8:31-39 NRSV



In what ways might people of faith wear words of comfort as armour to protect them from experiencing grief?

Have you experienced the paradox of being deeply sad at the same time as knowing you are held and loved by God?

What difference, if any, does belief in life beyond death make for how you view your life and your death?



Section Three

REFLECTION AND MAKING

for sharing or individual response

Allow a full 30 minutes for this (15 minutes on task, 15 minutes sharing).

Choose one activity below – consider doing others during the week.

- ▶ Create your own end of life care plan – what questions would you like asked of you if you were dependent upon others?
- ▶ Consider things that matter for a funeral – if you were to die suddenly, are there particular songs, hymns, readings and poetry that you would like included?
- ▶ Make a 'Bucket List' of things to do before you die. What would be on your list of things to attend to if you only had 12 months to live?
- ▶ Journaling: Have you ever had others tell you to 'move on' from a grief? Have you found that elements of your Christian faith have given you permission to grieve at the same time as anticipating the return of hope?
- ▶ Write your own night watch prayer (see closing prayer) for accompanying someone in their final hours
- ▶ Make a list of books and films that address death and dying to discuss in further conversations.



CLOSING PRAYER

*Keep watch dear Lord
with those who work or watch or weep this night,
and give your angels charge over those who sleep.
Tend the sick, Lord Christ,
give rest to the weary,
bless the dying, soothe the suffering,
pity the afflicted, shield the joyous;
and all for your love's sake.
Amen.*

From Night Prayer, Presbyterian Church USA



THINGS TO DO AT HOME

- ▶ ***Psalms and prayers for leaving – consider making your own collection of prayers and poetry for comfort and companionship in death. Create a box or folder to collect prayers, songs, hymns and poems that might be useful when planning a funeral.***
- ▶ ***Is there a farewell letter you would like to have written or received?***
- ▶ ***Acts of forgiveness: are there big sorrows you need to acknowledge, things you need to ask or offer forgiveness for? Hold these prayerfully during the weeks to come and think about who, if anyone, you might speak to about them.***

FURTHER RESOURCES

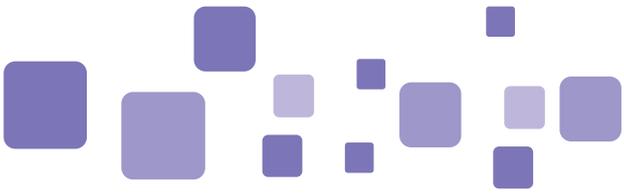
HYMN: ABIDE WITH ME

Abide with me, fast falls the eventide;
the darkness deepens: Lord with me abide!
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
change and decay in all around I see:
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
shine through the gloom and point me to the skies:
heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Henry F. Lyte, 1847



The Day of the Dead in Mexico

Death is close in Mexico, hovering, leaning over your shoulder, breathing down your neck. Close, feared, mocked, made light of, placated like the school bully. You can laugh nervously at Death, by presenting Him as a skeleton dancing, playing the guitar, driving a bus or going to the dentist, like anyone. You can eat Death, in a special sweet bun called Bread of the Dead, made with two crossed bones on top, or as a lolly skull, with raisin eyes and white peanuts for teeth. You can flatter Him, with wreaths of marigolds and candles and copal incense... Amass all the wealth you like in this world, that's where we're all ending up. So you don't talk in hushed euphemisms about 'passing away'; in the fatalistic irreverence of Mexico, you 'turn in your driver's license', 'move to Skeleton City', 'move to the Valley of the Bald', or 'elope with the Skinny One'.

...The Day of the Dead is one indigenous tradition the Church had enormous difficulty attempting to eradicate back in the 16th century... Westerners visiting the country, squeamish with their own mortality neuroses, usually recoil from the celebration, calling it morbid, grotesque, sick.

But Día de Los Muertos acknowledges death as a continuum of life, full of its own ritualized obligations and observances. Momentarily, the bonds between the living and the dead are broken and the spirits of the departed return to Earth to visit us. Never is the ongoing literal interpretation of this belief more apparent. Families make visits to the graveyard to trim the weeds and scrub the tombstones of their dead. They mass the graves with fresh flowers and repaint the boundaries with fresh whitewash, available in the big communal barrel. Generations of surviving kin set out picnics on the graves, and settle down overnight to await the spirits' return. They bring the new baby to show them, they bring framed photos of absent family members and explain where they are and how they're doing. They chat to the dead, remembering happier times, reminiscing, telling the children about the little quirks and idiosyncrasies of the departed, smiling at the stories, shedding tears, saying rosaries, toasting memories in nips of alcohol and cups of hot chocolate.

Cate Kennedy



Living in the body

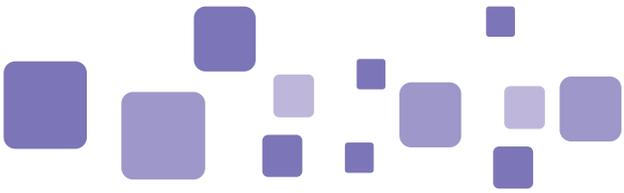
by Joyce Sutphen

Body is something you need in order to stay on this planet and you only get one. And no matter which one you get, it will not be satisfactory. It will not be beautiful enough, it will not be fast enough, it will not keep on for days at a time, but will pull you down into a sleepy swamp and demand apples and coffee and chocolate cake.

Body is a thing you have to carry from one day into the next. Always the same eyebrows over the same eyes in the same skin when you look in the mirror, and the same creaky knee when you get up from the floor and the same wrist under the watchband. The changes you can make are small and costly – better to leave it as it is.

Body is a thing that you have to leave eventually. You know that because you have seen others do it, others who were once like you living inside their pile of bones and flesh, smiling at you, loving you, leaning in the doorway talking to you for hours and then one day they are gone. No forwarding address.

In Good Poems, edited by Garrison Keillor



Sonnet: Preparing for my mother's death

by Clare Boyd-Macrae

A mother's death, whenever it should come
changes a daughter's world and shakes her soul:
love her or hate her, she's the only one
who's been there from the starting of it all.
And recently, as she prepares to die
we've gently talked the older hurts away,
garnered a peaceful kinship now, and I
have no unfinished business left to say.
And she is getting old, and, unafraid
she's calm in face of death and true and strong,
and I am grateful for the love we've had,
and I will be alright when she is gone.
But some long nights I cannot get to sleep,
and some days all I want to do is weep.

*In Some of my Friends are Poets, edited by Mac Nicol,
used with permission*

1 Hudson, R and Day, H 2002 'End of life decision making: Policy issues for UCA aged care facilities', Bioethics Committee Synod of Victoria.
2 Kennedy, C 2005 Sing and Don't Cry, a Mexican Journal, Transit Lounge, Melbourne. (pp. 230-232, used with permission)



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