

*A course of Five Sessions exploring the
strategic role of Seniors in the work of Evangelism*

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Calling All Seniors!

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The average age of regular worshippers in the Diocese of Chelmsford is 63 years. This Course takes the view that God has specially gifted his Church with active seniors for this time. In the UK today we can reasonably expect to live longer and stay fitter than our predecessors. Seniors bring a lifetime of experience as well as gifts of faith and compassion to the task of evangelism. But one of their biggest gifts is that they often have flexible programmes and can find time more easily than younger people.

Seniors are more aware of the significant changes that have taken place in society and the church than younger people. Often those changes have marginalised the older person and we certainly have an ageist dimension to our culture. How then are seniors to respond to this situation?

This Course seeks to encourage seniors to cross age barriers and engage with younger generations as well as their own peers, squaring up to the challenges and discovering the Grace of God in new and deeper ways.

Hugh Dibbens

The Five Sessions:

1. Evangelism in an age of Change
2. Christian Grand-parenting
3. Crossing the Generation Boundaries
4. Shaping-up and Living Well
5. Stepping out

Session One Evangelism in an Age of Change

Worship and Prayer

The group leader could lead the group in prayer and in subsequent weeks invite members of the group to do so.

Aim

The aim of this session is to gain a clearer understanding of the task of evangelism.

Introductory activity

Invite people, in twos and threes or as a whole group, to share what changes are affecting them.

Leader input

The Group Leader provides input on changes in our culture and changes in the church in the last 50 years, including these paradoxes:

- Increasing freedom, yet growing fear,
- Respect for individuals, yet loss of respect for authority, politicians, doctors, clergy, teachers etc.
- Increase of active longevity, yet discrimination against the older person,
- Advocacy of individual human rights, yet the development of a 'blame culture' where things that go wrong are always someone else's fault,
- Commitment to economic growth, yet tolerance of growing debt both national and individual,
- Total involvement in the consumer culture, yet knowing that the promises of advertisers are often false.

In the church there is awareness that the average age of regular worshippers is 63 years, as against 48 years for the population as a whole. We are also more aware that God has called us to be mission-minded and outward looking. In the Diocese of Chelmsford the 'Transformation Agenda' has been guiding the policy making – Distinctive Living – Effective Evangelism – Accountability – New forms of Ministry. In line with this, churches are moving from a primarily maintenance/pastoral model of church to a more evangelistic/missional model.

Group activity

Share examples of the advantages in having a long memory of many decades.

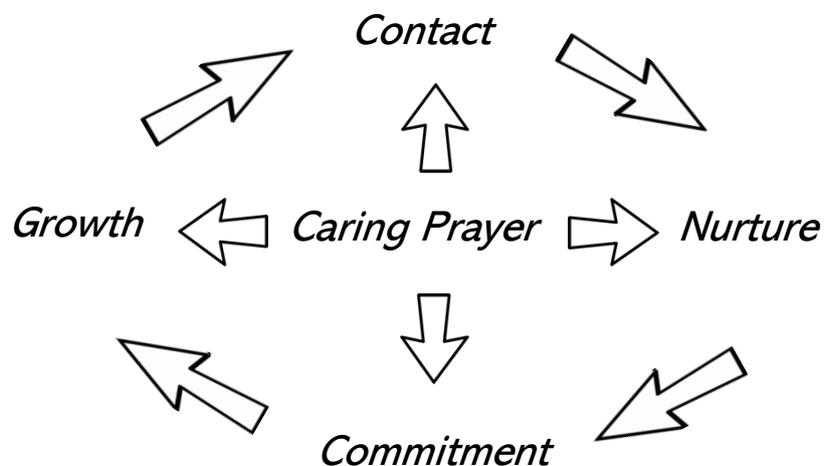
Leader input

The Group Leader provides input on the nature of evangelism.

Effective evangelism may well start with

- our hearts (how we relate to and care about someone else);
- it then moves to our hands (how we might be practically helpful or inclusively encouraging); then
- it comes to heads (sharing our understanding of the Love of God seen in Jesus and inviting that person to take a step towards Him).

What does Evangelism look like?



Contact refers to non-church people whom God has brought into your life.

Nurture is intentional activity, invitations to events and possibly to courses that seek to grow the relationships.

Commitment is the specific invitation to follow Jesus Christ.

Growth is the development of the faith that has begun, grafting people into the community of faith. They then help others to make the same journey.

Caring Prayer must surround every part of the process.

Group activity

In small groups - Looking at the 5 focus points in the diagram (contact, nurture, commitment, growth and loving prayer), how would you evaluate your own local church? Which are the strong points and which might need to be made stronger? Do you have any recommendations?

Refreshment Break

Leader input

The Group Leader leads discussion of the role that Seniors can play in each of the five areas of contact, nurture, commitment, growth and prayer.

Bible Study

Read: Isaiah 40:7-31.

'Why do you complain...? Why do you say "My way is hidden from the Lord?" ... Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary... He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even the youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not faint.'

Discussion

- In what ways might engagement in God's mission be good for our health?

Closing Prayers

Homework

Raise some of the issues of this session with friends and bring someone else with you next week.

Session Two Christian Grandparenting

Worship and Prayers led by members of the group. Psalm 78 1-8 may be included.

Aim

The aim of this session is to consider the opportunities presented to those who have 'grandparenting' responsibilities.

Introductory activity

Consider the statistics about grandparenting in the UK:

- In 2016 there were about 13 million grandparents with an average of 4.4 grandchildren.
- A third of these spend at least 3 days a week caring for their grandchildren.
- If the grand-parents attend church, 60% of their grandchildren will go too, if invited.

Many other seniors have caring responsibilities for young children, sometimes through school and church, whether related to them or not. They are often seen as 'honorary grandparents.'

Group activity

In full group consider: What grand-parenting role could members of the group have, even if they do not have grandchildren of their own or in addition to that? Perhaps at school or church? If so, what would that role involve? (or the purposes of this course, 'grandparenting is used to include all these relationships).

- In small groups: Consider what opportunities exist in each group members' area for 'honorary grand-parenting.'
- Consider what is different about Christian grand-parenting? Collect stories of good practice and effective Christian grand-parenting

Leader input

Invite group members to share some of those personal stories.

The Group Leader provides further input on 'The Challenge of Christian Grand-parenting:'

- What might be done to ensure that grandchildren receive a good experience and understanding of the Christian Faith?'
- In a context where the parents are not committed Christians, what might be done to share the Gospel with the whole family?'

Issues and Questions to be discussed in small groups (Take a refreshment break while you are talking about this):

- Do we need, as members of this group, to build a personal network of prayer support?
- Would it be helpful to seek on-going training by doing occasional courses in children's/teenage ministry?

- What about financial considerations? Providing child care obviously saves the parents significant money. But even so there are costs. Running the car, providing meals, taking the children on outings... etc. Who should bear the costs?
- What is people's experience of highly complex situations? Parents may be separated or unemployed, looking for work, paternal and maternal grandparents may be culturally different or of different religions. Has any of the group found some effective solutions?
- How do you work out how much time to give to grand parenting? Should boundaries be agreed with the parents? If so, what might they be?
- How might your local church support a grand-parenting ministry?

Plenary discussion and question time

Feedback significant ideas and suggestions.

Closing prayers

Including: Psalm 89:1, 2

*I will sing of the Lord's great love forever;
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.*

I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself.

Psalm 71:14-19

As for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more.

*My mouth will tell of your righteous deeds, of your saving acts all day long—
though I know not how to relate them all.*

I will come and proclaim your mighty acts, Sovereign Lord; I will proclaim your righteous deeds, yours alone.

*Since my youth, God, you have taught me,
and to this day I declare your marvellous deeds.*

*Even when I am old and grey, do not forsake me, my God,
till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come.*

*Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens, you who have done great things.
Who is like you, God?*

Homework

Reflect prayerfully on your own ministry in a Christian grandparent role. If convenient, share these reflections with other senior friends, perhaps other grandparents, especially if they are in your family. Consider whether you might be able to take on a Christian grand parenting role with some children outside your family... in the local community or in the local school.

Session Three

Crossing the Generation Boundaries

Worship and Prayers led by members of the group

Aim

The aim of this session is to consider the opportunities that inter-generational activity gives us

Leader input

The Group Leader provides input on 'Generation Theory' - Features of the last six generations...

- Silent Generation (born 1918-1945) - Hard-working, respectful of authority, debt a disgrace, against waste...
- Baby Boomers (1946-1965) - Big visions and hope for the future, generous-hearted, less respectful of authority...
- Generation X (1966-1984) - Greater informality, Focus on choice and immediate gratification, respect needs to be earned...
- Generation Y (1985-1997) - Awareness of the Global perspective, climate change etc. focus on being happy, hi tech begins to be a feature of life...
- Generation Z (born 1998-2012) – Are digital natives, brought up to live in a real and virtual world at the same time.

Later generations are safety conscious and risk averse, more protected by parents and family than previous generations, less likely to have under-age sex and drink alcohol, and less likely to rebel against their parents. They go on holiday with their parents to a later age, grow up more slowly and more safely, while facing intense social pressures resulting from competitive testing at school and an insecure workplace. They are non-religious yet have a strong inclusive attitude eg. on gender issues. They are more independent politically and more likely to be passionate about particular issues-e.g. the environment or gender identity, than the entire manifesto of one political party.

Over 70% of disciples today make their commitment to follow Jesus before the age of 18 years which makes this a key age group to engage with.

Group activity

In small groups discuss: 'Do any of the Generation theories find an echo in your own experience and relationships with those of other generations?'

Bible Discussion: Seniors were at the beginning and the end of the Nativity Story... and probably in the middle too! Read the following passages:

Zechariah and Elizabeth: Luke 1:5 - 25

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And

when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: "Do not be

afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20 And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

When his time of service was completed, he returned home. After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Simeon and Anna - Luke 2:22-38

When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord:

"a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the

temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

*“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

*For my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”*

The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

Questions:

1. Both Zechariah and Elizabeth and Ann and Simeon were seniors. What advantages did their age bring?
2. What was the impact on them when they realised that they were being called by God to take care of and engage with children?
3. If we cross the generational boundaries, what might this do to our spirits and perspective on the world?

Small group discussion:

What further skills do we need to engage with young people?

- Many young people simply want someone to listen to them. How can we improve our listening skills?
- How do we improve our skills? How, for example, can we invite younger people to help us with IT skills?
- Can we use our knowledge of traditional skills to engage with children and young people? -baking, feeding the ducks, sport, boats, games...

Record, perhaps on a flip chart all the opportunities which exist in the group members’ churches to build relationships with other generations: e.g. youth groups, messy church, volunteering at school, sport, social groups, alpha, confirmation, marriage and baptism preparation, environmental projects, issues with local government, street pastors, food banks...

Leader input

The Group Leader provides input on 'How do we express our distinctively Christian approach in these contexts? Using the 'heart', 'hands' and 'head' approach! (referred to in Session 1) might be appropriate. Do we need more training?

Homework

Ask the grand children or young people known to you about texting, skype, emails, etc.

Closing Prayers

Session Four

Shaping Up & Living Well

4: *Shaping
up and living
well*

Worship and Prayers led by members of the group.

Aim

To examine how physical, emotional and spiritual health aids our evangelism as Seniors.

Introductory Activity

Share some experiences when you have been able to do something with someone else that you could not have done on your own.

Leader input – Spiritual Health

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Colossians 4:2-6

The Group Leader provides input on spiritual disciplines and a godly life. These may be tough but are never boring!

- Discuss what patterns of prayer, as individuals and when gathered with other Christians, should become the habits of Senior evangelists.
- Consider the words: '*Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt.*' Can group members give examples of such talk?

In small groups: discuss

- What spiritual disciplines do we try to follow?
- What do we think might be our next steps in growing into a more godly life?'

Refreshment Break

Leader input

The Group Leader provides input on physical disciplines such as diet and exercise. More is known about what it means to live a healthy lifestyle than ever before and in the UK most of us have real choices about how we live. Spiritual health and physical health are interconnected: we are one person, body soul and mind which are intimately linked.

- In small groups share what patterns of exercise, eating and sleeping group members have already adopted?
- What might be the next steps towards an even more healthy life style?'

Leader input - Healthy teams

The Group Leader provides input on working as a team

Many Christian disciplines, such as corporate worship especially regular Holy Communion, accountability, willingness to engage and speak for God, generosity, life-long learning, care for the environment are part of our spiritual heritage, but often we sit light to their corporate dimension. God does not expect us, nor have we been made, to act on our own. Working as a team we both reflect God's intention that we should be in relationship with each other and find joy and support.

Our task as the church is effective evangelism at a time of radical change. We achieve this by prayer and relating to people, offering hospitality, connecting with people's needs, arranging events, offering invitations and so on.

If we engage in this task as part of a team built on personal trust and sharing, on prayer and encouragement, a spirit of forgiveness and a sense of humour then we have a good foundation for some effective work. Caring for each other we demonstrate God's love and care for all people.

Group activity

We may have different roles in the team. The group leader asks the group to consider the following diagram, devised by John Adair:



The diagram describes three aspects of team-work. Team members may be particularly focussed on one or two of them

- achieving the task. Some people are 'task-oriented' and their primary focus is to remind the team of what it has been formed to do and to seek out the resources to do that.
- Some people will focus on the well-being of the team, paying attention to the meeting space, refreshments and the resources needed for each person's comfort and good working.

- Some people will be particularly concerned for the needs of individuals in the group, listening to their hopes and fears.

Group activity

- In small groups suggest examples of the activities which fall into each of the categories described above – and some which fall into the overlapping spaces.
- Find out which category members of the group feel naturally drawn to.
- Based on these three aspects, what would an effective evangelism team look like?

Homework

Give prayerful thought to how you might take some steps towards developing healthier spiritual, physical or corporate habits. Discuss with those close to you what lifestyle options might be beneficial.

Prayers

Include a slow reading of the Beatitudes – Matthew 5:1-11

Session Five Stepping Out!

Worship and Prayers led by members of the group.

Aim

The aim of this session is to identify actions which can be taken to enhance our ministry as Senior Evangelists

Introductory Activity: Group members share ideas about what gives them courage to take a risk.

Group activity

Read the following passage - Joshua 14:6-14

Now the people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, "You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. So on that day Moses swore to me, 'The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.'

"Now then, just as the LORD promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. 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. Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as he said."

Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.

Caleb had spied out the land of Canaan in the time of Moses as the representative of the tribe of Judah. Twelve men went to explore the land but Caleb and Joshua brought back a minority report that it was the right time to invade the land. In those days Caleb aged 40 years was full of faith. (See Numbers 13:26 –14:10.) Now Caleb is 85 years old, - Joshua 14:10, 11. He is in good health and willing to fulfil his dream to enter and possess the land. A tough call but his faith was as strong as ever.

In small groups and then as a whole group:

- What can we learn from Caleb? Is there anything you wanted to do for God '40 years ago' which, as yet, you have not been able to do?

Leader input

The Group Leader provides input on common practice and experience of churches that are growing both spiritually and numerically:

- There is teaching and practice of prayer - In the end it is God who converts and brings renewal, so we must learn how to stay connected to be effective,
- There is a focus on small groups within the fellowship where people may enquire about the faith and new members are nurtured,
- There are active efforts at including people of all ages, whatever their age, ethnic origin or social background.

In May 2015 a report entitled 'From Anecdote to Evidence' was presented to the Church of England's General Synod. The researchers took a larger than usual sample of 4,137 respondents, all of whom were non-church. A surprising result was that one in five was open to exploring the significance of Jesus. In May 2016 the Roman Catholic Church ran a poll of regular church-goers. This included Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists, as well as Catholics. Another equally surprising result was that for every one hundred worshippers in all these denominations only two came from non-church backgrounds. Thus those who go to church are likely to have come from families that went to church and so it will be necessary to reach beyond our usual contacts.

- Discuss: Whose responsibility is it to make the connection between the spiritual seeker and the Church?

Bible discussion

Read Luke 10:1-9. Jesus sends out his Disciples...

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.

Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

"When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

"When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'

In small groups

- What did Jesus think this mission was going to be like for the disciples? How does this compare with our situation?

- In verse 9 Jesus gives us a summary of His message: 'The kingdom of God is within you.' What would group members say that expressed the essence of the Christian Gospel?
- Any other thoughts or responses to today's presentations?

What Next?

In small groups talk over the following ideas – and others – and each person identifies one to follow up.

- Finding and praying with the like-minded?
- Reporting back to the Incumbent and leading a discussion at the PCC?

Joining further training courses, such as:

- 'Parish Evangelist & Evangelism Enabling', a 12 session Diocesan Course leading to a Certificate in Evangelism or authorisation as an Evangelism Enabler. (Contact dhardy@chelmsford.anglican.org)
- 'Prayerful Evangelism,' a six week course combining growth in awareness of God with effective evangelism. (On Diocesan website)
- Researching other parishes where there is effective action?

Homework

Prayerfully consider what might be the priorities for you 'stepping out'. Take the first steps!

Final Prayers, including these passages from Job and John.

Job 14:7-9

At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail. Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant.

and John 7:37-39

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.