

## **Parishes and Older People**

**Here are some of the issues and challenges that older people have told GOG that they are concerned about:**

- Knowing more about keeping healthy
- Disability and how to cope with it
- Dementia and how to manage
- Isolation and loneliness
- Benefits and how to fund long-term care if it is needed
- The lack of care for older people and lack of recognition of their value
- Wanting support for their religious practice, including when they have special needs
- Maintaining contact at home and at Church
- Support for each person's response to ageing
- Adapting and learning as we get older
- How do ageing/spirituality/wisdom interact?
- End of life issues: 'why have we been?' – the search for meaning; 'tidying up' – coming to terms with past difficulties; planning for our end of life care and for our funeral.

**As individual parishes, and as a Diocese, how are we responding to these issues?**

At a GOG conference in 2014, participants (nearly all older people) shared the ways in which they believe our Church could respond better to older people. Their ideas and suggestions follow.

### **1. How can we better building community and our parish ethos?**

- Creating a culture of 'warmth' in the parish – greeting people, introducing ourselves, offering a kind word, engaging with people
- Visiting / befriending another parishioner – to bridge gaps
- Noticing when regular people are missing from Sunday Mass and checking that they are OK
- Having tea and coffee available after services – to encourage people to socialise
- Offering lifts so that people can get to services
- Making sure that there is clear information available for people about what is going on in the parish and how to find out more
- Organising social and spiritual events that bring different generations and families together – parish BBQs, fish and chip suppers were suggested

- Organising parish seminars to share information, raise awareness and bring people together
- Creating opportunities for inter-generational involvement between younger and older people e.g. with the parish primary school and involving confirmation candidates, with older people encouraging (sometimes allowing!!) others to pick up the reins!

## **2. What ways can we support people in times of need?**

- SVP provides practical help - Encourage people to join including younger people
- Organise a rota to drive people to church. Speak at Mass about it and make sure there are contact details in the parish newsletter so that people can request help.
- Invite older people (including retired priests) to our homes
- If it is not possible to visit people, check if they are happy to be telephoned
- Have named contacts to whom people can go, in confidence, for information about support available through the parish e.g. for referral to the SVP. Ensure that their names and contact details are in the bulletin and on notice boards in the church
- Parishes are best placed to support people if they are aware of what is going on in the wider community. Make sure that the parish contact people have upto date information about local services: e.g. Citizens Advice, Adult Social Care, local organisations for older people, support for carers, groups providing support to asylum seekers. A noticeboard dedicated to local information could bring it all together, maybe with a pen and slips of paper attached so that people can note what they need.
- Is there a need for particular support for people at times of crisis, e.g. bereavement or serious illness? Can the parish develop creative and sensitive ways of responding?

## **3. How can we work with and for others?**

- Can we look beyond our own worshipping community and organize or join in activities and events which benefit people in the wider community? We could work with other local churches through Churches Together or with other faith communities. A weekly/monthly afternoon tea/friendship club open to all local older people would enlarge everyone's social networks
- Many parishes have halls which could be more fully used for social events such as games sessions, talks, exercise classes, singing groups (whatever people say they would like) for older people
- Occasional group outings to cinema, theatre, for coffee in a café, to places of interest, provide highlights for people who may find it difficult to get out with friends. Minibuses, coaches and/or cars for transport.
- Volunteering – doing something for others – is excellent for people's own wellbeing. Many 'younger' older people volunteer – is there anything in the parish

or locality that is looking for support or help from people? Advertise volunteer opportunities on the parish local information noticeboard.

- Support with IT – some older people use iphones, tablets and computers very effectively to keep in touch with family and friends and for leisure; others might like to try. Can the parish match people who are good with IT with people who would like to try it out?

#### **4. What ways can we respond to the spiritual concerns of older parishioners?**

- Midday/afternoon liturgy with food to follow – this might be Mass or a community-led service (see liturgy page for suggestions for resources). Make sure that there is help for people who need support to get there.
- Community celebrations of the Sacrament of the Sick (more than once a year), followed by a meal
- A regular weekday ‘dementia-friendly’ Mass as part of the parish programme, followed by food. To make it dementia-friendly, the Mass should be short, with hymns which are familiar to older people and an acceptance that some people may wander about. This makes it possible for carers to relax and not worry about their loved one disturbing others.
- Make sure that there is an efficient system for people to receive Holy Communion at home and that people understand how to request home visits
- Create opportunities for those older people who wish to, to come together to talk, pray and reflect together on the challenges and gifts of later life
- Ensure that older people can play a full part in parish life – from being part of parish groups and ministries, to being able to get to Mass, and being asked to pray for people and to telephone people who are housebound
- Consider the needs of older carers who may be worn out by the demands of looking after others. An occasional get-together may be possible for carers and those cared for, with separate spaces so that carers are able to share their worries and difficulties with prayer and mutual support while those cared for have an activity, followed by refreshments for all.
- Recognize and celebrate the contribution of carers, perhaps during National Carers’ Week, an annual campaign in early June each year to raise awareness of the contributions of carers to families and communities.
- Remember to include carers, as well as those who are sick, in the prayers of the faithful.
- Residents in care homes may have come from outside the area and are probably not in a position themselves to request visits from the priest or parish. Make sure that staff in care homes in the parish have clear, up to date information about how to contact the parish and what support is available for residents. A laminated information sheet, updated and re-distributed regularly can be sent or delivered to care homes. Personal relationships with care home staff will also be helpful.
- Some care homes welcome religious services.