

Discussion questions on pastoral care of older generations



These discussion questions are intended to accompany the resource 'Guidelines for pastoral care of older generations'. They could be used with a pastoral care team and/or the kirk session and anyone else involved in pastoral care for older generations.

The questions are provided as ways to generate discussion and to equip those involved in pastoral care. Whoever is leading the discussion could use whatever questions are helpful or add other questions, where appropriate. The last section is specifically for those involved in organisation and leadership of pastoral care – the kirk session and pastoral care coordinators/team leaders.

Understanding Aging (from Chapter One)

Proverbs 20:29 says: 'The glory of young men is their strength, grey hair the splendour of the old.' (NIV)

- 1.** The book of Proverbs is about the godly wisdom of older people being passed on to the younger generation.
 - In light of this, why do you think grey hair is called the “splendour of the old”?
 - What does this mean in your experience of relating to older people who have had a close walk with the Lord for many years?
- 2.** Do you see older people as a blessing or a problem? Or to think about it more deeply – what is the difference between seeing pastoral care for older people simply as a way to help them with their problems, or as a way to help them take their full part in the life of the church, to bless them and be blessed by them?
- 3.** Pastoral care for older people is often about helping them through changes associated with aging. Thinking about change in your own life – what has helped you through change and why? (Try to include spiritual input, for example, a Bible passage that helped you or people praying for you).

Caring for older generations spiritually

(from Chapter Two)

Isaiah 46:4 says:

“Even to your old age and grey hairs

I am he, I am he who will sustain you.

I have made you and I will carry you;

I will sustain you and I will rescue you.” (NIV)

Isaiah 46:4 reminds us that ultimately it is God who is our helper, not human beings. When we bring pastoral care to older people or anyone of any age, it must always be with the intention of helping them draw closer to Christ.

- 1.** Why is it so important that we bring the spotlight onto Christ and all that He gives us when we trust in Him – salvation, the love of God, hope and a purpose in life to glorify Him?
- 2.** How comfortable do you feel having a conversation with someone who isn't a Christian about salvation – especially with a person who is older than you? What could make you more ready to have such a conversation?
- 3.** Consider some situations in which you might be able to move from the question 'why did God let this happen?' (which is often unanswerable) to 'what is God doing in this situation?'

4. How might you help an older saint share something of their experience of God so that both you and they are blessed – especially if they are reluctant to speak because they don't want to 'blow their own trumpet'?

Caring for older generations in failing health

(from Chapter Three)

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” (NIV)

When we care for people with health problems, unless we are a medical professional, we are not normally dealing directly with their physical needs – although we should be aware of any practicalities as mentioned in chapter three. What we can bring is the comfort of Christ.

- 1.** You may not yet be old enough to experience ill health due to aging but, if not, what have you learned through experiencing ill health that might help you empathise with the people for whom you give pastoral care and bring the comfort of Christ?
- 2.** What do you think about the advice offered in chapter three about prayer? Do you find yourself doubting God will heal even though you know, in theory at least, that He can, or do you think you might be over expectant that God will always heal?
- 3.** What practical steps could you take to better help the people you pastorally care for with their health problems?

Caring for older generations in changing personal circumstances (from Chapter Four)

Hebrews 13:8 says “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (NIV)

- 1.** How can the unchanging nature of God’s love revealed in Christ bring hope and peace in changing circumstances?
- 2.** Think about something familiar and important to you for a long period of time – how would it feel to lose it? Imagine magnifying that feeling to help you empathise with an older person who is undergoing a major change such as moving out of a house they lived in for decades into a nursing home.
- 3.** Have you had to care for an older person through any of the changes mentioned in chapter four? What did you learn from your experience that would be useful to share with others?
- 4.** In what ways can we encourage an older person going through one of these major changes to continue to be part of their caring fellowship, the church?
- 5.** How might we encourage a Christian who has just entered retirement, for example, to seek new opportunities for mission?

Caring for older generations in a changing world (from Chapter Five)

Leviticus 19:32 says “Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.” (NIV)

This verse closely connects respect for older people with proper reverence for God. In contrast, Lamentations 5:12, describing a totally broken society says “elders are shown no respect” (NIV). A proper deference to elders is a sign of honouring God who is our ultimate elder being eternal. No older person is perfect but generally they do have accumulated wisdom that should be respected.

- 1.** What do we lose when we forget to respect our elders – and what do we gain when we do?
- 2.** What have you noticed about the way older people are treated that is an indication that ageism is a problem?
- 3.** Did any of the differences in culture between the older and younger generations mentioned in chapter five relate to your experience? In what way?
- 4.** How might we see beyond differences between you and an older person to valuing each person in the same way God does, whether young or old – or in between?

Different ways to provide care for older generations and their carers and supporters

(from Chapter Six and Seven)

For kirk sessions and pastoral care coordinators and teams it is assumed that the kirk session already has a well-defined structure for providing pastoral care whether, through elders' districts or a different model using pastoral care teams and small groups. These questions should allow you to discuss how to enhance the care provided for older generations within that model.

- 1.** Have you a list of all older people in the congregation who are in particular need of care? How are their needs met by the congregation and how do you involve them in the life of the congregation?
- 2.** Take some time to think about ways in which you can provide pastoral care and help older people be part of a caring fellowship that is church. Perhaps you are doing this in a variety of ways already – what works well and why?

If your congregation has a pastoral care team, if you have not done so already, you may wish to think of having dedicated teams to visit in cases of bereavement or for visiting nursing or residential homes and the housebound. See the downloadable resource on the PCI website, 'Pastoral Care Teams' for more information.

3. Are there ways in which you can develop relationships between older and younger people in order for them to be a mutual blessing to each other, perhaps by passing on practical skills or simply through having fellowship with each other?

4. Consider also ways in which you could support and encourage full-time carers of older people and supporters (as described in chapter seven).



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