



*To add life to the years  
that have been added to life*



**International Year of Older Persons**  
**Social Justice Sunday 26 September 1999**

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# Introduction

## Dear Worship Leader,

The United Nations (UN) has presented many themes over the years, helping us to focus on our world in ways that will inspire a higher quality of life for all creation. This year the UN have presented us with five themes, reproduced on [page 3](#) of this resource, to enable us to explore the value of and our responsibility to the older people in our lives.

Many activities in our churches and communities are organised and enabled by the older people among us. Older people have a wealth of skills, experience and wisdom to share. In Western society we do not always acknowledge this or allow older people to fully participate in life. It is important that we empower people *to add life to the years that have been added to life*.

*Life* is social, mental, spiritual and physical. Our goal should be to allow all people to fully participate in society in whatever way each person is able. We need to accept the many gifts of each person, and look after those members of our families and communities who are no longer fully able to look after themselves. Our communities need to offer opportunities for the growth and participation of all members.

Representatives of Uniting Ministry with the Ageing (NSW Synod) and National Social Responsibility & Justice have prepared a liturgy, reflected on the needs and contributions of older people and collected resources to assist the Church in its reflections and activities during the International Year of Older Persons (IYOP). You are encouraged to copy whatever of this material is helpful, but please remember it is important to acknowledge the source.

The central element of our Social Justice Sunday resources is the liturgy. There are many types of liturgies that would be appropriate for IYOP. The liturgy on [pages 9-12](#) can be lifted out and photocopied as it is, or you may wish to adapt the resources for your congregation. You may want to celebrate the older people in your congregation, their families and their networks. You may want to have a service about ageing or the seasons of life. Older people might reflect on how they have adapted to ageing.

Social Justice Sunday is the last Sunday in September. We hope you will use these resources, adapted or as is, on that day or on another suitable occasion, and enable people to reflect on and actively participate in *adding life to the years that have been added to life*.

Debra A. Brown  
Acting National Director, Social Justice

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## Guidelines for Worship Leaders

- Give yourself plenty of time to arrange the service.
- Allow those taking part in the service plenty of time to become familiar with the resources in a way that enables the presentation to come alive.
- Arrange special music/hymns/songs.
- Take time to involve all generations, especially older people.
- Remember the centre pages are meant to be a lift our liturgy for the people's participation.
- An appropriate *worship space* recognises the different ways of receiving information that are experienced by people. Attention to the visual presentations, displays and banners add to the richness of the worship experience, as well as providing good visual cues. *Movement* and *action* throughout the worship should also be considered.

# Themes & principles for IYOP

## Independence

1. Older persons should have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing and health care through the provision of income, family and community support and self-help.
2. Older persons should have the opportunity to work or to have access to other income-generating opportunities.
3. Older persons should be able to participate in determining when and at what pace withdrawal from the labour force takes place.
4. Older persons should have access to appropriate educational and training programmes.
5. Older persons should be able to live in environments that are safe and adaptable to personal preferences and changing capacities.
6. Older persons should be able to reside at home for as long as possible.

## Participation

7. Older persons should remain integrated in society, participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies that directly affect their well-being and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations.
8. Older persons should be able to seek and develop opportunities for service to the community and to serve as volunteers in positions appropriate to their interests and capabilities.
9. Older persons should be able to form movements or associations of older persons.

## Care

10. Older persons should benefit from family and community care and protection in accordance with each society's system of cultural values.
11. Older persons should have access to health care to help them to maintain or regain the optimum level of physical, mental and emotional well-being and to prevent or delay the onset of illness.
12. Older persons should have access to social and legal services to enhance their autonomy, protection and care.
13. Older persons should be able to utilize appropriate levels of institutional care providing protection, rehabilitation and social and mental stimulation in a humane and secure environment.
14. Older persons should be able to enjoy human rights and fundamental freedoms when residing in any shelter, care or treatment facility, including full respect for their dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy and for the right to make decisions about their care and the quality of their lives.

## Self-fulfillment

15. Older persons should be able to pursue opportunities for the full development of their potential.
16. Older persons should have access to the educational, cultural, spiritual and recreational resources of society.

## Dignity

17. Older persons should be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse.
18. Older persons should be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability or other status, and be valued independently of their economic contribution.

*(These 18 principles and 5 themes are the official principles of the United Nations for IYOP)*

# Justice for Older People

Many older people see the opportunity that retirement brings as a chance to explore other dimensions of life which they might never have had the chance to explore in their earlier years. Access to meaningful opportunities to use the experience and gifts of a lifetime as well as to grow through further education are important in *adding life to the years that have been added to life*.

While life is good for many older Australians, there are also many who face barriers in achieving social justice. What are some of the barriers?

## Stereotyping

Older people are not a homogeneous group, but are often treated as if they were. Older people are just as diverse in respect of their aspirations, hopes, wants, interest, skills etc as any other sector of society. Diversity does not become less valuable or significant to each of us or to society at large simply because an individual passes a certain age.

One stereotype experienced in our society is that all older people require high levels of physical care, costing a lot of money. This simply isn't true. For instance, only about 7% of older people are in residential (hostel or nursing home) care at any one time. Most older people continue to live highly independent lives.

## Health Care

The proportion of the total health budget spent on people aged 65 and over has remained fairly constant over the years at around 35-40%. The vast majority of this is spent in the last two years of a person's life. It is interesting to note that a similar proportion is spent on children in the first two years of life.

Some people suggest that with a limited amount of money to spend on health care, we need to be making decisions about whether it is better to spend money on older people using high-cost technologies, or whether we should be re-directing those funds elsewhere to other target groups (e.g. children, men's or women's health etc). This can fuel a divisive argument pitting one sector of society against another.

Does our nation 'value' its older people? A nation that values the contribution of its older generations must provide the necessary and deserved support in these later years.

How does a nation that values the contribution of older people provide the necessary and deserved

support? There is a need to advocate for the maintenance of a strong public health system. We also need to place emphasis on enabling healthy ageing, which will have a positive impact on people and help reduce health care costs.



## Transport

One of the things that older people value most is mobility - being able to get around, going to where you want when you want. Many older people, of course, still have access to, and drive, cars. Many do not. If good public transport or community transport is not available and suitable, it restricts the ability of older people without cars to access services and to participate in many of the activities of life that others generally take for granted.

## Ageism

In our society, older people are sometimes seen as having nothing to contribute - just 'waiting out time'. This is in contrast to some other cultures where older people are venerated, and seen as the holders of great wisdom from their years of experience. Older people can play an extremely important role in passing on the enduring values in society, setting these into context and being a practical model of living those values.

Often it is made difficult for older people to find meaningful work, or to access educational opportunities.

### Psychiatric Disabilities

Statistics indicate that one in five Australians suffer from or have a family member who suffers from mental illness. People with a mental illness or psychiatric disability find many barriers to being accepted as part of the broader community. Older people with a psychiatric disability face a dual set of barriers and difficulties.

### Indigenous Australians

The life expectancy of Indigenous Australians is about 20 years less than that of other Australians. This indicates profound injustice in Australia. It is partly a problem of inadequate policies and funding. It is also a problem of attitude. Non-indigenous Australians must learn from Indigenous Australians. We must

work together to enable all Australians to live life fully, both in quality and in numbers of years. As a nation, we must provide the levels of funding necessary to address the iniquitous gaps in housing and basic services to Indigenous communities.

### Non-English Speaking Backgrounds

Many older people from non-English speaking backgrounds feel very isolated in society. Many can lose acquired English skills and revert to the language originally spoken when growing older. This can make it difficult to use the services and support needed. It is important that information about services for older people is available in appropriate languages and places. In order to be useful information and services must be appropriate.

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## The Church as Service Provider

The Uniting Church in Australia has for many years been at the forefront in the provision of residential care for older people. The UCA is the largest single provider of residential aged care in Australia. It provides over 6,000 nursing home beds and over 9,000 hostel places nationwide.

In addition, the UCA provides nearly 6,500 self-care or independent living units for older people.

While the Church generally cares for people of ordinary means who need help, it places special emphasis on assisting people who are financially disadvantaged. It is worth noting that the Church's aged care system is supported through government subsidies and resident and client contributions. This means that it doesn't rely on contributions through Church offerings.

In addition to all of this, there are an enormous number of local parish/congregation-based services which are run by older people to assist older people in the community.

In recent years, the Church has been at the forefront of the development of new models of care, such as Community Aged Care Packages, where care services such as assistance with showering, dressing, meal preparation and housework are delivered into a person's own home. The Church is also providing care to older people with psychiatric disabilities.

The key, really, is to provide choice so that older people who are in need of services and assistance can utilise the kind of service they most want i.e. what will make the 'most difference' for them.



# Voices for the Liturgy

*Our stories can be our most powerful teachers.*

*Include some of the following or your own stories in the liturgy.*

**One:** Growing older is a mixed experience. It can be a period of leisure and opportunity to pursue one's interests. It can be a time to enjoy having fulfilled many of life's tasks and to take on new and different tasks such as being a grandparent (or great grandparent) or being a volunteer in community organisations. It is also a time of coping with change in one's own life and in the world.

**Two:** I'm a member of a seniors' computer club. We meet every week, and I get to learn how the darn thing works. My next step is to learn how to surf the net. Won't that surprise everyone?



**Three:** It's so lonely now in this street...everyone works. The young people move so fast ...crossing the road is a nightmare. I want to die in my own home... I've lived here for 40 years. I was forced to retire long before I was ready. I feel so useless, yet I've got all this experience. I don't want to be a burden on my children, but I do want to stay at home.

**Four:** After the death of my grandfather four years ago, my grandmother began doing volunteer chaplaincy work in a hospital. Now she works two days as a volunteer and is paid for another two days each week. My grandmother is 86.

**Five:** I just can't get around properly any more. The buses aren't regular out our way. There is no shelter at the bus stop. I have to cross the road, of course, and the traffic just won't stop. It's just not worth getting out any more.

**Six:** Independence is very much about the opportunity to make choices. As we age, our choices can be limited and thus our independence. Independence is very personal: what makes one person feel independent is not necessarily the same for another.

**Seven:** An older lady who is physically frail may need assistance to shower and dress - one may say she is dependent - but what about other aspects of her life? She may need assistance with personal care, but she can still choose whether she reads or listens to music, and whether she would like to eat this or that. In a nursing home or hostel, it is important to offer choices to residents, to be sure that they can claim some level of independence. That is important to them. It is not up to us to determine who is independent and who is not, or what makes independence and what does not. We must give older people the opportunities to make choices.

**Eight:** A care worker visited a man who needed assistance to manage at home. He badly needed a shower and his house needed cleaning. The care worker discussed his needs with him and talked about the support that would make a difference to him. Although it was obvious that he could do with a shower, it was agreed that the care worker would sit and have a cup of tea and a chat, and then walk his much loved dog. This man was able to say what would make a difference to him - what would help him manage better at home. He was able to make a choice and have some independence.

## Home and Community Care services (HACC) & Community Aged Care Packages (CACP)

*funded by government and provided through many church and community agencies, help people remain in the community.  
Comments from HACC & CACP clients and their families include:*

**Nine:** Gratitude for the lovely outings and walks for mum. Especially when you can stave off “sherry time” a bit longer...

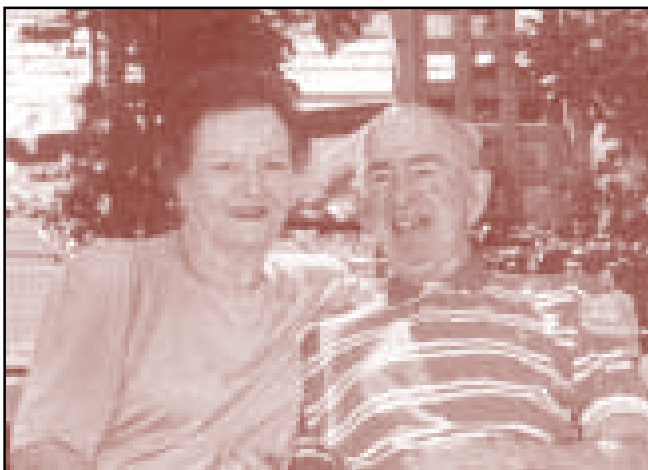
**Ten:** Couldn't manage without this wonderful assistance. Having the same carer attending is an advantage as they get to know one's needs and fit in with one's family.

**Eleven:** I want staff to stay longer. Their time is too short.

**Twelve:** Services would be great if only my parents would accept them. How do I persuade them to do so. My father is stubborn and he will not.

**Thirteen:** You have all shown great respect and love for a person who is not fully able to understand what is happening to her. The loss of her dignity and the fear of isolation and loneliness that usually accompanies such a condition was diminished to a degree whereby mum enjoyed a quality of life that would otherwise have remained beyond her.

**Fourteen:** After a party given by care workers one of the older people at the party wrote, “Not only children go to sleep after a party but I slept in my favourite chair until 6 PM... Perhaps we don't grow up, but only get older”.



### *From the ethnic community.*

**Fifteen:** My family should look after me. I do not want strangers coming in my home... Our community is very close. Other people will know I cannot care for myself. They will not respect me.

**Sixteen:** I can hear their voices, but I can't understand what they are saying. Why don't they speak my language? ...Oh...you speak my language. Where do you come from? I lived near there. Yes. You may come in to visit me.



### *Older people at a day centre.*

**Seventeen:** I couldn't afford to die on a Monday! (The day centre operated on Mondays and all her friends were there; it was a really special day.) This makes such a difference to me. This day is the highlight of my week. Everyday I look forward to it. It gives me a reason to get out of bed.

### *Comments by volunteer.*

**Eighteen:** I learn so much from older people. I enjoy my work.

# Intergenerational Activity

## During the Liturgy

### step 1: introduce the theme

*To add life to the years that have been added to life - International Year of Older Persons*

Ask the congregation to think of a person they know who is 30 to 40 years older or younger than themselves. Allow 30 seconds to a minute for each person to remember a time or times they have spent with the person. The congregation could be prompted by asking them to think about what they appreciate about this person; the good and bad times; how these times have been important for both persons.

### step 2: read a story

Read a story about sharing life with others. This could be a guided meditation or read as a story to be discussed afterwards in pairs or small groups. Keep in mind how the different characters in the story are important to each other. Following are some suggestions of appropriate stories. You may know others.\*

Wilfred Gordon Macdonald Partridge - Mem Fox/Julie Vivas PICTURE PUFFIN

The Very Best of Friends - Margaret Wild/Julie Vivas ASHTON SCHOLASTIC

A Bit of Company - Margaret Wild/Wayne Harris ASHTON SCHOLASTIC

\* If you need to purchase a story, be sure to check with bookshops well ahead.

## Activities for Children

Have pencils, coloured pencils or crayons available for the children, as well as blank sheets of paper, or include a special page in the Order of Service or Newsheet. Following are several possible activities for younger children.

### activity 1

Write the name of someone in your church who you know and who you think is 'old'. Leave some spaces between each letter. Next to each letter of their name, write something about them which begins with that letter. It can be something you like about them. It might be what you think they do in the church. It might be what they look like. There are lots of possibilities.

### activity 2

Think about growing old. What do you think you will look like - draw a picture. Under the picture write or draw some of the things you hope to be doing when you are old.

### activity 3

Some older people are very happy. Some are very sad. Make a list or draw a picture of the things you think make older people sad or happy.

### activity 4

Draw a picture of your favourite older person.

### activity 5

Write a letter to your favourite older person telling them why you think they are special.

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## Hymn & Song Suggestions

### Together in Song

(Australian Hymn Book II)

182 Bring many names

(also available in *As One Voice Vol. II* No. 10)

### New Century Hymnal

(UCC, The Pilgrim Press)

11 Bring many names

539 Won't you let me be your servant

### Australian Hymn Book (AHB)

39 When all your mercies, O my God

44 I'll praise my maker while I've breath

308 Come, holy Ghost, our souls inspire

455 Be thou my vision

512 Who fathoms the eternal thought?

557 Lord of creation, to you be all praise!

571 A new commandment I give unto you

Sing Allelujah

■ 66 Make me a channel of your peace

*To add life to the years*



*that have been added to life*

## International Year of Older Persons

### Call to Worship

Leader: Through our lives, we celebrate life.

**People: Let us praise God for the gift of life.**

### Prayer of Adoration

God our Creator,  
our thoughts cannot contain you;  
our words fall short of your vastness;  
yet you are our God,  
God of all ages.  
Your breath gives us life.  
Your hands shaped our being.  
Your artistry in creation  
leaves us gasping in wonder;  
longing to experience that which is of you.  
In each person, there you are,  
if we could but discern you.  
Accept us again, O ancient yet youthful God,  
as we gather to worship and adore you.

### Hymn/Song

**Voices** *(Use some or all of the voices provided on pages 6 & 7,  
or have members of your congregation tell their stories of joys and difficulties.)*

### Prayer of Confession

*(an alternative prayer of confession can be found on page 16)*

Leader: Gracious God, we know that there is  
a time to be born, a time to grow old and a time to die.  
We know that ageing is a part of life.  
Yet sometimes we forget.  
Sometimes we fail to embrace the life of our older people.  
  
We confess that we sometimes do not hear  
the voices of our older people; their needs and concerns.  
In our busy daily life, sometimes we just don't stop and listen.  
**People: Forgive us when we close our ears to our older people.**

Leader: We confess that sometimes we do not attend  
to the hearts of our older people; their pain and despair.  
We are often wrapped up in selfish worldly concerns  
and don't open our heart to feel.

**People: Forgive us when our hearts are hard and cold.**

Leader: We confess that we sometimes become reluctant  
to share precious resources of life with our older people.  
In this competitive world, too often our priorities  
go to where we readily see new life, youth and the promise of success.

**People: Forgive us when we participate in the unjust allocation of resources.**

Leader: We confess that we too often fail to allow the blessings  
of our older people to contribute to our life  
and to the life of our children; their wisdom and their faith.  
In the brokenness of family and community life,  
we live disconnected and poor.

**People: Forgive us when we lose the integrity and wholeness of our life.**

Leader: We confess that many Indigenous Australians never know old age,  
or become old before their time, through the struggle in their lives.

**People: Forgive us when we fail to notice and act.**

Leader: Loving God, the Lord of life,  
bring to us the awareness that our life depends on each other.  
We are called to uphold each other, especially those who are weak, frail and vulnerable.  
Fill us with your compassion, love and grace,  
the grace that walks with us embracing even our death.  
In the name of Christ,

**All: Amen.**

## Assurance of Pardon

Leader: God is Love.  
Through Christ, God reached out to us,  
embracing the young and the old,  
the strong and the weak, and the living and the dying.  
In Christ we are one.  
Hear then these words of grace, 'Our sins are forgiven.'

**People: Thanks be to God.**

## Intergenerational Activity *(see page 8)*

### Readings *(lectionary 26 September 1999)*

Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 78:1-4, 12-16; Philippians 2:1-13; Matthew 21:23-32.

*(alternative readings)*

Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:1 (or 11:7-12:8); Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (as Psalm); Philippians 2:1-11; Matthew 15:1-9.

## Hymn/Song

## Sermon/Reflection

## Affirmation of Faith

We believe in God the Creator.  
We believe in Jesus Christ, our companion.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the sustainer.  
Holy Trinity, three in one, our God of all ages.  
We believe in respect for all people, regardless of age,

and in the dignity of each individual.  
We believe in community that seeks to respond  
to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of older people,  
encouraging the sharing of their knowledge  
and their active participation in sustaining the fullness of community life.  
We believe in the opportunity for older people  
to participate in decisions which are life-changing.  
We believe that all people should have the chance  
to reach old age in peace and safety  
and to live to the fullness of their potential.

## Collect

Lord of all generations,  
whose love spans our years;  
keep us ever mindful of your gift of life;  
childhood to fulfillment of age,  
that we so rejoice in each other,  
that we live our days  
with respect, compassion and mutual responsibility;  
In the name of Jesus Christ,  
**Amen.**

## Hymn/Song - Offering

### Prayers of Thanksgiving

*(Two voices - one younger, one older)*

**Younger person:** We give thanks, O God,  
for a society where people can look forward to long lives,  
for the wisdom of older people,  
for their faith and experience,  
for the sense that older people give us  
of family, tradition and identity,  
for the leadership they offer,  
for the things they teach,  
and all the ways in which they contribute  
to our families, our community and our church.

**Older Person:** We give thanks O God  
for the blessings of life,  
and our experience of its different seasons,  
for family, children, grandchildren,  
for the experiences and opportunities of our lives,  
for our survival through struggles and griefs,  
for your presence throughout our lives  
and for the hope of the life to come.

**All:** **Amen.**

## Prayers of Intercession

Leader: God of the ages,  
from babe to youth,  
from adolescence to greatness of age,  
you are our God, creator, companion,  
our wisdom and our guide.  
Lord of all ages

**People: Hear our prayer.**

Leader: We hold before you the older people of the world:  
rich and poor;  
able and disabled;  
sick and well;  
at home or in care;  
with family or alone.  
And we give thanks  
for the treasure of their lives  
and the gifts that each one offers.  
Lord of all ages

**People: Hear our prayer.**

Leader: With sadness,  
we acknowledge that many older people are seen  
not as treasures to be delighted in,  
but as a burden to be carried,  
with indifference and resentment,  
with hostility and carelessness.

May Australia be a community  
of mutual respect and tolerance,  
compassion and patience.  
May we learn  
from the collective wisdom of older people,  
hear their voices,  
use their giftedness,  
learn from their faith,  
be strengthened by their endurance and determination,  
joy in their laughter,  
and seek to have excellence of care for all older people  
in their living and their dying.

May we see a return to the balance of community  
where youth and age work and live side by side  
with a mutuality which embraces life in its entirety.  
Lord of all ages

**People: Hear our prayer.**

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal

Benediction



# The Rhythm of Life

Readings: Ecclesiastes 11: 7 - 12: 1 (or 11:7 - 12:8); Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8 (as Psalm); and Matthew 15:1-9.

Most of us will grow old. The life expectancy of men in Australia is 76 years and of women is 81 years. This is something to celebrate.

The readings for today remind us of two sides of one coin. Older people are valuable members of our communities, entitled to respect. Those in our communities who are younger will one day be old. As we age we consider what we have done with our own lives. As we consider this will we find, like the speaker in Ecclesiastes, that we have lived our lives in vain? Will we find, like those whom Jesus condemned, that we have avoided our God-given responsibilities to our parents and other older people in our community? Or do we live according to an inclusive and loving vision of the Reign of God? How does our adherence to the Biblical tradition shape our understanding of what it means to be a responsible community and nation? What will our reflections reveal when we look back from old age?



The International Year of Older Persons is built on five foundations:

- *independence,*
- *participation,*
- *care,*
- *self-fulfilment and*
- *dignity.*

Altogether, there are 18 principles within these five themes. In summary, older people are human beings and have human rights that must be respected, as with people of any other age. Old age is no excuse for undermining people's dignity, neglecting them, or for limiting their autonomy.

As Ecclesiastes 3 reminds us, life has a rhythm and stages. Sometimes that rhythm is hard to

see. When is the correct time for doing what? Sometimes we cannot be sure what life requires of us. We need wisdom and experience, and even then, our personal resources will sometimes be inadequate for the situation. That is why human rights covenants and international years are important. They offer us the opportunity to share in some of the best wisdom of humankind. They remind us of basic principles that apply in all cultures, and encourage us to reflect on what they mean in our particular nation, culture and community. The major Christian traditions have all recognised the importance of human rights. Unlike the speaker in Ecclesiastes, we do not have to work it all out for ourselves.

The speaker in Ecclesiastes 11 appears to have lived a selfish life. Chapter 2 paints a picture of self-indulgent materialism. He finds that such a life is empty and pointless. Here is a warning for those of us who are so busy looking after our own wishes and ambitions that we fail in our responsibility for others. The issue is not obedience or punishment. The point is that we need to distinguish transient satisfactions from those that withstand the rigours of life and the test of time. As we look back from old age, what will we find in our life that has true value?

The speaker in Ecclesiastes struggles with the theological orthodoxy of his day, the doctrine of reward and retribution. He believes that the good are rewarded; the wicked are punished. He affirms that the good things in life come from God, but in chapter 6, he claims that those who gain such good things will not enjoy them - someone else will. He becomes disillusioned. Where is the reward for living a good life? Why are the wicked not punished? Where is justice?

The general attitude of the speaker is very common in our day - many people display a cynicism with life, because it does not work the way modern values and attitudes claim that it will. Material pleasures are transient.

Ambitions often seem empty when achieved. The sacrifices made for these aspirations really do not seem worth it. And the worst part about it is that often we sacrifice people, only to find that what we wanted is empty.

The point is that justice is the task of human beings. That is what Job found out when God answered him from the whirlwind. It is also the theme of the prophets. God calls us to “do justice” as Micah puts it (Micah 6:8).

Like the people Jesus criticised in Matthew 15, we too often make excuses for uncaring and irresponsible attitudes. We are tempted to avoid our responsibility for justice or we reduce it to abstractions. Some of us may neglect our parents for the sake of other worthwhile activities, such as our involvement in

church. We may be very good to our own parents, but we are part of a society that is looking for excuses to be uncaring and irresponsible towards older people. We may be willing to give a church offering, but not to pay adequate taxes to provide social security or nursing home capital. We may resent overseas aid to countries where people become ‘older’ much sooner than Australians, because of the widespread poverty. Through the International Year of Older Persons, God calls us to look after and respect our own parents and relatives. God calls us also to work for a society and an international order where all older people are respected, treated with dignity, cared for if they need care and not deprived of autonomy. God calls us to live in a way that allows *independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity* for older people.

## What does this mean in practical terms?

It will differ in some ways depending on our age and our family and local situation. The 18 principles of the IYOP offer some guidance. In some ways, Australia caters well for its older citizens. There are some current problems, and some troubling trends in discussions about policies that will affect future generations of older people. Following are some of the implications of the IYOP principles, and some of the ways in which we can honour the older people, in Australian society. Of course, many church and community programs and actions already reflect these principles. The question on Social Justice Sunday is who are the people in Australia who do not enjoy these principles, or who are at risk in the future. What do we need to do about it?

1. **Independence** has implications for pension levels, public transport, the kind of help provided through community care and in hostels and nursing homes.
2. **Participation** can take many forms - participation in democratic processes, participation in the life of the community, participation in the church, participation in the decisions that families and institutions make, participation in decisions about selves and needs.
3. **Care** has implications for taxation levels so there is adequate funding for health and personal care. Even when health and personal care are provided, these deal only with physical needs. Care is an empty thing if it does not cater for people’s need to socialise, to express an opinion, to say what they are feeling, or to die with dignity.
4. **Self-fulfilment** ties in with independence and participation. It means that people should be given opportunity to engage in learning and development even when it is not job related. One example of how churches fulfil this principle is “Schools for Seniors”. This is a challenge to market-based ideology, for the learning of older people is often learning that does not have a dollar value in the market place.
5. **Dignity** is about fundamental attitudes and relationships. It is about recognising the value of human beings as human beings. Dignity is about recognising the many gifts that older people offer to us, if we are open to their participation and experience. It is also about being respectful to people even when they have dementia or cannot do basic tasks like toileting themselves. It is about not stereotyping people - not making assumptions about what they can or cannot do, or what their opinions might be.

There can and should be debate about the limits of these concepts but the core of these concepts is clear. Part of the ministry of the Uniting Church in Australia is to promote such ideas, to advocate them to government and to ensure that our own ministry with older people is based on these ideas. Such care honours God and expresses our faithfulness to God.

# Living with Joy

*a reflection on Philippians 2*

What does the word *happiness* evoke? Perhaps time spent with the one you love, celebrating with friends, a dream holiday. Chasing these ideals can be a lifelong pursuit during which we can spend much money and accumulate many possessions. Perceived happiness can be seen to depend on our circumstances. What happens if the circumstances change?

Paul's purpose in life was not pursuing an earthly ideal of happiness or a comfortable trouble free existence. Paul sought to speak out boldly for what he believed, regardless of the consequences. As he wrote this letter from prison, Paul feared his execution was imminent. Rather than bewail his state of affairs imprisonment became an occasion to urge the Philippians to suffer for Christ's sake. Paul refers to a joy he has received from serving Christ. A joy he hopes will be made complete by the Philippian Church sharing his attitude, which reflected the attitude of Christ Jesus.

Paul would probably have agreed with the saying; "If you're not ready to die, then you're not ready to live." People can be accepting of the certainty of death, but want to add life to the years that have been added to life. Paul lived his life to the full imitating Christ's humility through service. Having the attitude of Christ resulted in joy, but as Paul acknowledged it also involved suffering - both physical and emotional.

Suffering is rarely sought, and is avoided sometimes at great medical cost. Yet suffering is part of our world and experienced by people of all ages. We long to maintain our energetic commitment but added years often bring added physical aches and pains. The spirit may be willing but the body seems defeated in the effort! Older people long for a close relationship and understanding with their children and grandchildren. The lives of the younger generation are busy and different to the older generation's. It may seem that jobs come first and families last. Children may be disinherited due to family break up. The grandparents grieve in solitude for precious time once spent with grandchildren.



Paul speaks of the joy experienced in the midst of suffering. Joy is different to happiness. Joy is the quiet, confident assurance of God's love, work and presence in our lives. Happiness depends on happenings but joy is anchored in Christ. Yes, life hurts and can be unjust, but these struggles lead us to grow in our dependence and knowledge of Christ who strengthens us.

Did the Church at Philippi share Paul's experience of joy, or were they chasing elusive happiness? The first generation of Christians were united in the conviction that in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself. However there was serious disagreement over admission to the church, standards of Christian behaviour, and attitudes towards Jewish law and Roman culture. Philippi was a cosmopolitan city. The composition of the church reflected this with its people from a variety of backgrounds and walks of life. Paul writes as a friend who longs for the Philippians to share his joy. Friendship for Paul was a kind of oneness, a sharing between individuals. There is a concept of people working together for common goals, where the project is central. The Philippians are so closely involved with Paul in his work that they share as partners both his trials and achievements. They rejoice together and share in his sufferings. As the body of Christ, do we share as partners in each other's joy and suffering? Aboriginal Australians have one of the lowest life expectancies of any group of people in the world. Do we ache with and pray for our indigenous brothers and sisters who have a life expectancy that is amongst the lowest in the world?



Paul's letter is written to a community. Our Western society is individually orientated rather than community aware. There is a reluctance and fear to 'get involved'. The emphasis on partnership in the Gospel is strong in Philippians. If people live only for themselves seeds of discord are sown. The United Nations has five areas of concern for older people:- Independence, Participation, Care, Self-fulfilment, and Dignity. How can we as the body of Christ, as *community*, deal with these in our own local area, in our family and in our world? Is there something we can do politically or in practical ways with our neighbours? Are older people encouraged in efforts to have a political voice, and be involved in our community?

Paul invokes a series of qualities which for him essentially characterises life 'in Christ' and so should regulate community relationships regardless of diversity of background. As Christ demonstrated selfless love so the community is to love. (This does not mean we ignore ourselves and our own needs. We are all of worth and to be respected.) As Christ was humble so the community is humble. How do we and the community use power? Do we assert ourselves over the more vulnerable? Are older people treated with dignity and respect regardless of physical and mental state? Paul believed Christian love flows from a practical concern for others. United in common focus the community is to follow Christ's example

as quoted in the hymn (2:6-11) Paul does not promise happiness but joy, and the hope that the ideal society rests in heaven.

For Paul, Christ is both the ideal superior and friend. Suffering can be expected, since friends struggle together in common purpose. May we also be humble in our service to apply the eighteen principles for the International Year of Older Persons adopted by the United Nations. May we all *add life to the years that have been added to life*.

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## A Prayer of Confession

*(an alternative for the prayer of confession on page 9)*

**Leader:** Loving and merciful God,  
our lives are like buds that open,  
then fall when we fail to embrace life,  
in all its seasons.

**People: Forgive us, Gracious God.**

Person 1: When our impatience spills over  
and we fail to listen to or hear each other.

**People: Forgive us, gracious God.**

Person 2: When life is cut short  
by disadvantage and oppression.

**People: Forgive us, gracious God.**

Person 1: For times when involvement seems  
too hard, or we ignore or scorn  
the contribution of others  
because of youth or age.

**People: Forgive us, gracious God.**

Person 2: When life loses hope,  
and we doubt  
that good is stronger than evil.

**People: Forgive us, gracious God.**

Person 1: Help us to uphold each other in love,  
respecting the Christ in each of us.

**All: Amen.**

# A Vision for Australia

The Uniting Church, through its national agency Uniting Community Services Australia (UCSA), has been alongside government and the community services sector to develop a national strategy for an ageing Australia. The aim of the strategy is to provide a comprehensive approach to delivering services to older Australians into the next century.

The strategy, according to UCSA, will build on work already undertaken by a number of institutions such as the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Bureau of Statistics, identifying where older people live and the needs of older people in different areas. The UCA, through its experience of providing services can make major contributions to the development of a national strategy.

## Healthy Ageing

Any national strategy should consider the principles of healthy ageing. The Health and Community Services Ministerial Council has already done some work in this area. The Council's draft Healthy Ageing Strategy (July 1997) underlines the importance of:

- recognising that growing older is a part of living;
- recognising the interdependence of generations;
- recognising that everyone has a responsibility to be fair in their demands on other generations;
- fostering a positive attitude throughout life to growing older;
- eliminating age as a reason to exclude any person from participating fully in community life;
- promoting a commitment to activities which enhance health, well-being, choice, independence and quality of life for all ages; and
- encouraging communities to value and listen to older people and to cater for the diverse preferences, motivations, characteristics and circumstances of older Australians in a variety of ways.

Health is a major factor in our ability to fully participate in life. 'Healthy ageing' is about total 'wellness', not illness. It is about quality of life, and a balance between contribution to society and reaping the rewards of that contribution.

## Other Considerations

Other fundamental considerations that UCSA have identified include reform based on informed research and policy advice rather than a quest for budget

savings. This research must include consideration of the needs and wishes of older people, and an analysis of international as well as Australian contexts.

It is also important that the government responsibility for funding aged care services is clearly stated, and situated within the wider social and economic context of government responsibility. Emphasis must be placed on improving the communication between all governments, departments, agencies and organisations involved in providing services and information relevant to the needs of older people. Individuals, families, communities, consumer groups and service providers must be identified, consulted and actively engaged in firstly the formulation and secondly the implementation of the strategy.

Bricks and mortar, supply and demand, economic and social policy, service quality and standards of care - all underline the key to a national strategy on ageing. The key to unlocking the process is the participation of older Australians in community life and decision-making. The value of any "ageing" strategy will be measured by the value placed on older people. That value will then be reflected in policy, legislation, care and support.

## Residential Care

Residential care is simply one alternative pathway for older people. Most people will not require intensive residential care in their older years. However, all Australians have a responsibility to ensure that those who do, receive it in a dignified, caring and holistic manner. Nationally, the UCA, through UCSA, is committed to working with government, consumer, and provider groups in the sector, to ensure that the government's proposed strategy establishes a foundation for future public policy that is both realistic and visionary.

## The Challenge

It is UCSA's hope that all parties will rise to the challenge of working in a partnership of openness and cooperation, resulting in a framework that creatively addresses the individual, community and institutional needs of Australia's ageing population.

*(Modified & updated  
from the UCSA newsletter, December 1997)*



## What can we do?

- Discuss the material in this booklet in your congregation. Listen to the stories of older people.
  - Base our relationships in our own families and our congregation on the principles of IYOP. Talk to and learn from each other. What do older people want to contribute? What help or care do they want? Do we ever exclude older people?
- 
- Different age groups have different experiences of the world. Create opportunities for different age groups in your locality or congregation to meet together to learn from each other and work together.
  - Support the advocacy of the Uniting Church and other church and community agencies for a National Strategy for an Ageing Australia, along the lines proposed by UCSA (Uniting Community Services Australia).
  - Join and participate in community groups tackling problems encountered by older Australians.
  - If you discern unmet needs in the community, take some action. Five essential steps are usually involved: talk to older people in the local community to see what they think and what they want to do; contact the agency in your synod that has oversight of ministry with the ageing; talk with local community service agencies and the local council; analyse what you have learned; plan and implement action where necessary.
  - Assist the older people in your community to know what support services are available for them.



The liturgy on pages 9-12 is available as an .html

<http://assembly.uca.org.au/NSRJWeb.html>



## W e b S i t e s

Uniting Community Services Australia <http://www.uca-uca.org/>

United Nations IYOP <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/iyop>

Commonwealth Government IYOP <http://www.iyop.health.gov.au/index.htm>  
Health and Aged Care <http://www.health.gov.au/acc/>

Australian Coalition '99 <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ac99/>

Council on the Ageing <http://www.cota.org.au> (includes links to state sites)

State sites

ACT [http://www.actcommunity.org/cota/special\\_events/iyop99/iyop99.htm](http://www.actcommunity.org/cota/special_events/iyop99/iyop99.htm)

Northern Territory [yscotant@downunder.net.au](mailto:yscotant@downunder.net.au)

NSW <http://add.nsw.gov.au/iyop.htm>

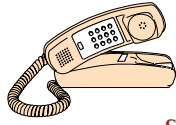
Queensland <http://www.families.qld.gov.au/iyop/index.html>

South Australia <http://www.seniors.asn.au/iyop.htm>

Tasmania <http://www.tased.edu.au/tasonline/cotatas/iyop.htm>

Victoria <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~ac99vic/>

West Australia <http://www.osi.wa.gov.au/iyop/>



## Other Resources



Some synods have an aged care policy.  
Some are organising special projects for IYOP.  
Check with your synod.

Northern Synod: Synod Office (08) 8981 8444

NSW Synod: Uniting Ministry with the Ageing (02) 8267 4372 <http://uma.nsw.uca.org.au>

Synod of Queensland: Department of Community Services (07) 3367 3840

Synod of South Australia: Neville Stewart, Commission for Church Agencies (08) 8346 4346

Synod of Tasmania: Synod Office (03) 6331 9784

Synod of Victoria: Ivy Goodwin, Ministry with Seniors (03) 9852 7433

Synod of Western Australia: Elaine Olley, Uniting In Care Services Board (08) 9220 3333

### Agencies

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Aged Care Info Line 1 800 500 853  
Aged and Community Care Division, GPO Box 9848, Canberra ACT 2601

The Council on the Ageing (COTA) is Australia's peak consumer organisation dedicated to protecting and promoting the well-being of older people. It has the members, skills, knowledge base, and resources to support this role. COTA, Level 2, 3 Bowen Crescent, MELBOURNE VIC 3004, Phone (03) 9820 2655, Fax (03) 9820 9886 [cota@cota.org.au](mailto:cota@cota.org.au)

The state Councils of Social Service, and state departments that deal with housing may have useful resources, as may your local government body.

### Printed Resources

*Aged Care: Old Policies, New Problems*, Diane Gibson, 1998, Cambridge - provides a comprehensive mapping and analysis of aged care policy and service provision in Australia.

*All Passion Spent*, V. Sackville-West, 1931 (since reprinted) - a novel about the last year of the life of an older woman.

*Education & the Aged: the challenges facing the aged & the educational response to these issues*, Ron Browne & Barry Russell, 1996, available from Uniting Education, PO Box 1245, Collingwood Vic 3066.

*In Search of Understanding: why do I sometimes feel out of step in today's world and what can I do about it?* produced by Ivy Goodwin, Ministry with Seniors Project, Synod of Victoria, CFM Kew Office, cnr. Cotham Road & Highbury Grove, Kew 3101.

*Memory Board*, Jane Rule, 1987, Naiad Press - a novel about two ageing women, one with increasing physical difficulties, one who is losing her memory.

*Old Age: Journey into Simplicity*, Helen Luke, Parabola Books, 1987 - using portions of *The Tempest*, *King Lear*, *The Odyssey* and T.S. Eliot's *Little Gidding*, this book examines the wisdom that growing old can offer.

*Prayers and Liturgies to Celebrate 1999 as the International year of Older Persons*, produced by Ivy Goodwin, Ministry with Seniors Project, Synod of Victoria, CFM Kew Office, cnr. Cotham Road & Highbury Grove, Kew 3101.

*The Names of the Mountains*, Reeve Lindbergh, Simon and Schuster, 1992 - a portrait of an older woman and her increasing memory loss and how her family responds to it.

*Two Year Review of Aged Care Reforms - A Submission to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care*, Uniting Community Services Australia, June 1999.

## Acknowledgment . . .

These resources were prepared by a task group of the Aged Care Chaplains committee, Uniting Ministry with the Ageing, NSW Synod of the UCA, in cooperation with the Board for Social Responsibility (NSW Synod) and the National Social Responsibility and Justice Agency. Frontier Services and Uniting Community Services were also consulted. Special thanks to Brian Smith, Lee Chin, Helen Edgerton, Steve England, Sue Goodwin, Jill Ison, Ruth Jones, Chris Ridings, Jungmin Sunwoo, Les Underwood, Ann Wansbrough and Deb Brown.



Published by:  
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