

Golden Apples in Silver Baskets

Based on Proverbs 25:11

The contributions of seniors to care in our ecclesia



Seniors Bible Week

On beautiful Lake Macquarie

March 2016

Compiled by Laurence Lepherd

'Golden apples in silver baskets'

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Preface

This small booklet was compiled as the result of an evening activity during the Bible week. The presentation was given by Brother Laurence Lephherd and included contributions from Sisters Lesley Quill and Robyn Anderson, and Brothers Gary Steel and John Quill, the latter also being the Chairman for the evening. Everyone attending was invited to make a contribution through writing their ideas down and forwarding them to Laurence for collation during the weeks following the Study Week.

The presentation was divided into four main areas – Family care, Peer care, Elderly care and Self care. The notes that follow are a compilation of all contributions made by the presenters and those attending.

There is some overlap between various areas. One of the difficulties was that many of the attendees were elderly and thus had elderly peers. And, many of the observations in other sections could be relocated. It would be useful to view all of the observations in a very broad perspective and apply them in any way they might be relevant.

Introduction

The Proverbs verse tells us that golden apples in silver baskets are something of great beauty and value. The writer regarded appropriate words (and implied actions) to someone at a significant time as exceptional and worthy. We, as golden seniors, and many of us with silver hair, can provide appropriate words and actions that can be accepted appreciatively by those with whom we interact.

Three principles of spiritual caring are: stopping to listen, acting and praying. We could debate the best order for these. There are many Scriptural examples of compassionate caring:

In Matthew 20:30-34, Jesus demonstrated a clear principle of caring. He became aware of the blind man who was crying out for help. Jesus **stopped**, he asked the man what he wanted and **listened** to the man's answer, then Jesus **acted** by healing him. Jesus' life was always prayerful.

Caring is about sharing; we do not 'dispense' care. It is important that we have empathy with those for whom we are caring. There is a difference between empathy and sympathy. Empathy means 'the ability to understand and share the feelings of another' (Oxford dictionary), while sympathy is 'the formal expression of pity or sorrow for someone else's misfortune' (Oxford dictionary). We have empathy with our Lord Jesus in that we have the 'fellowship (sharing) of his sufferings', (Phil 3:10).

Our caring of everyone in our ecclesia (both local and wider afield) involves sharing their experiences with them, not just having pity on them.

Job 32:6-9. In these verses, Elihu indicates that while it is important for older people to ‘teach wisdom’ we should not forget that it is not only older people who are wise. Respect for younger people is important.

Another important principle: we should remember that spiritual growth can start with very practical helping activities. Spiritual development can follow from these. Jesus is the great example of offering spiritual care through practical care. Such practical activities as healing the blind and the sick, and feeding the five thousand showed his compassion and often led to greater spirituality in the recipients. In our ecclesial life, practical help can lead to a spiritual strengthening of all people – young and old – in our community.

Family care

Nuclear family – adults and their children

We should recognize that, should Jesus not return immediately, we need to assist in the spiritual growth of families. This can involve simple, practical activities. The following list is not exhaustive.

- Families, where we have them, can be a source of great fun and blessing.
- At the same time, we care about them and will often offer practical help.

Young children and youths:

- There is the story of the little boy who says he likes being with his Nana because she has time to sit and watch the ants with him. We should make time to spend with our littlies.
- Show interest and play games with them – puzzles, building blocks. We could learn games they may play that are new to us – even digital! We could show them games we may have played as children that are no longer played.
- Positive interaction in all activities is important.
- Help older ones with homework – where we can do the activities ourselves!
- Attend their school functions and sporting events.
- Show interest in what they are doing – at home and in the ecclesia.
- Read books popular with the children so we have a topic of conversation with them.
- Invite them to sit with us occasionally at ecclesial meetings.
- Communicate with them using their media – SMS and email are examples.

Parents

- Offer stability in a sometimes fragile family environment.

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- We can be experts in distraction to defuse a tense situation.
 - We can help young families who are struggling to encourage their youngsters to continue coming to Sunday School and meetings.
 - We might make ourselves available to offer a child free day for a busy parent.
 - Mothers with young families may appreciate some help in the home and/or care of young children while they do the shopping or attend appointments. Senior sisters may be able to help in this area.
 - Work with parents – Sunday School activities, family prayer – e.g. at the meal table.
 - Help with young grandchildren (practical tasks) e.g. driving to and from school, supervising homework, minding at home and showing interest in their activities as they grow older.

Extended family – the ecclesia

We should care for those families who are not in our nuclear family – both young and old. It is desirable for Seniors to make sure they make time on a Sunday to speak to young and older people to enquire of their welfare and take an interest in their activities and spiritual development.

- We care for those in the ecclesia without family connections and who need special care and hospitality so they can feel included in the ecclesial family.
- Newly baptised members need continued support and instruction; senior brethren and sisters can help in this area.
- Senior members can conduct a 'Bible Circle' Sunday mornings for parents who have come early to bring their children to Sunday School. Make it casual and maybe serve coffee/ tea/ biscuits.
- Open the Ecclesial Hall up say once a fortnight for anyone who is free to pop in for a chat/Bible reading/morning tea/scrabble etc.
- When caring for, or just having friendly contact with the seriously ill, both within and without the ecclesia, it is important to be very respectful of how others choose to deal with their diagnosis etc. (A personal comment from a contributor: I cared for my Aunt for approximately two years until her death, and at no time following her diagnosis and treatment were any specifics ever mentioned. This was how she chose to handle her situation. Although a little difficult at times, with no questions asked and therefore no feed-back, we enjoyed a very close, loving, respectful and trusting relationship with much chatter about everything beautiful.)
- Pray for the sick in ecclesial prayers, but only name them with their approval.
- Hold Bible Classes in day time so that elderly/sick people can get to them.
- There is the need to care for sisters with young families whose husbands are not in the Truth or have left them or have passed away. Sometimes they struggle to manage the children and paraphernalia that they have to get in and out of the ecclesial hall.

Other views

Our thoughts relate particularly to the great good that can come from the older ones in the ecclesia taking a genuine interest in those who are younger including the children and teenagers. In say a 10 year period from 60-70 we do not generally change too much, but a young person growing from 10-20 will undergo immense changes through that time.

Our interest in what they are doing or studying, and getting involved in their activities at outings/camps etc. can help form relationships that will assist them feel more a part of a very special family, and may impact their attitude to the Truth in those critical teenage years. Also the relationship can help us be more sensitive to them and not just automatically react in a negative way to their dress/hair/behaviour etc.

This may give us an opportunity to give some friendly advice when the opportunity arises, and for them to listen and not just write us off as being old fashioned. From this perspective one of us recently spoke to an older teenager because we noticed that she was using her phone throughout the meeting. She admitted it was not to look up her Bible and that it would be better to be involved in the meeting. She took it positively and thanked us for pointing it out to her. She also decided not to use her phone in the meeting any more.

Ecclesial activities

Some time ago at Castle Hill a couple of the younger brethren organised a very successful afternoon called "Old dogs, New tricks" A number of the older ones were asked to run a workshop for all the children. This included showing a collection of antique record players and how they worked, flower arranging, fruit tree pruning/propagation, patchwork and cooking.

It was so successful that a year or so later a reverse afternoon was organised called "New tricks for Old dogs". This time our young people were the teachers and included things like computer skills, surfing skills and a few others. In both cases we divided into groups and rotated from one workshop to the next followed by afternoon tea.

On a slightly different tack another initiative someone suggested was a *Get-to-know-you* lunch on a Sunday. A big list is put up of our ecclesial families. You are to invite one couple or family you have not had home before. It is organised so that everybody is either a host or a visitor! They too have been very successful.

At Shaftesbury Road Ecclesia recently a suggestion from the ABs was that ecclesial members (and children) move from their usual seats in the meeting to a seat somewhere else in the Hall, as this would provide an opportunity to speak to those we don't usually get the chance to communicate with.

Further ecclesial care

- Prepare meals for the sick/busy.
- Mind kids when parents have particular needs, e.g. sickness, moving house, new babies, etc.
- If a brother is down for a Bible Class topic, pass on articles or a suitable book that might assist in preparation.
- Play on-line scrabble with disabled members and elderly.
- Invite younger people over for a meal (an opportunity to ask what interests them, what are their favourite 'causes', what they find frustrating about the ecclesia, etc)
- Mentor new members particularly from non-Christadelphian backgrounds.
- Invite singles, and those without families in the area, to family events such as a Christmas lunch.
- Adopt a grand-child at your ecclesia particularly if grandparents are not around.
- Mind young children during the meeting to give parents a break. Collect some suitable activities so kids have different books/toys.
- Find a positive comment to make to the speaker, chairman, musician, and praying brothers.
- Ask a Sunday school teacher at the meeting what lesson they gave at Sunday School today.
- Ask a young person what they talked about at their last youth class.
- Ask if you can join the youth group email list so you know what events are coming up and can talk to the youth about them.
- We can 'adopt' one older single brother or sister and make them feel part of the family, perhaps inviting them to Sunday lunch, or any other time that may be suitable. (Our children volunteered to write Father's Day cards for one elderly single brother who visited us often!!)
- Keep Sunday morning exhortations to 15 minutes (total). Get to the point! Older (and younger) people have short attention spans.
- Offer to have a meeting at home for individuals having difficulty attending.
- Try to arrange for the video streaming of memorial meetings, supply printed exhortations or audio recordings of meetings to reach those who are house bound
- Have the bereaved visit your home on a regular basis for companionship for at least a year.
- Another example is married couples whose family lives on the other side of the city or interstate, who may need help with baby-sitting/child minding when difficult circumstances arise.

Presentation - Lesley Quill: On being older

"Now I have reached the age of seventy I find that my role in our family and the Ecclesia has changed. It gives me great joy to be a grandma. However, I am no longer a Sunday School teacher because I'm too slow and my hands are too shaky to help with the craft activities, I can no longer play the hymns for Bible Class, and I need to stand in the back row at choir. Yet I find I still have plenty of interaction with the children and young people, their parents and grandparents. I am thrilled to welcome a new baby with a small gift and lots of cuddles and enjoy conversation with our preschoolers, if they will

stay still long enough to talk. The primary and high school students grow up so quickly that I have to work hard to keep up with what they are doing. Last year at the Sunday School Prize Afternoon, the senior students gave such a spiritually mature presentation that I sensed some baptisms round the corner, and there have been. What a blessing it is to sit back and watch them all grow and develop. In our retirement I have the time to attend most ecclesial activities and share the young ones' experiences just by being there.

"In my later years I have tried to base my behaviour on older sisters who are my role models and I would like to share several with you tonight.

"The first is Naomi, the mother in law of Ruth and Orpah. To me she is an ideal mother in law. Bereft of her own husband and sons she considered the best line of action for Ruth and Orpah and made her suggestion. She must have been so happy with Ruth's decision, yet accepted Orpah's choice as well.

"In our ecclesia there is a sister who never married. She celebrates the joys of her nieces, nephews, great nieces and nephews and now a great, great niece and nephew. She lives a very simple existence. She has decluttered her life so she can serve God day in, day out, with joy and gladness. For me, she is a stable influence in the Ecclesia, always ready to talk through an issue or problem and provide common sense advice. Her approach is to look for guidance in the scriptures and trust in God. To me she seems ready to step into the Kingdom immediately.

"Another inspiration is Sister Olive Dawes, who some of you may know. I have known her for most of my life and she is a person who has always been prepared to find a practical solution to a problem. She and Brother Kevin have been instrumental in developing the marriage enrichment courses which have helped so many couples to strengthen their marriage relationship on a firm scriptural understanding. You may have been to those courses yourself. Despite the challenges she has faced and her many commitments, Olive has always had time to listen in a loving, sympathetic, non-judgmental way and offer a range of options for one to consider.

"The widow who gave what she had is another wonderful example for us. There is always something we can offer, no matter what our circumstances.

"As an older sister in the Ecclesia, as a mother, mother-in-law and grandma, I endeavour to emulate these role models. As Naomi did, I try to accept people's different points of view. As the second sister has done I am trying to organise and declutter my life to serve God more profitably and as Sister Olive has done, I try to always make time to listen with an open mind.

"Rather than moan over what I can no longer do, I try to rejoice in what I can still do. I am grateful to have the opportunity to be another mother to a number of younger sisters and brothers whose mothers are not easily accessible. I am grateful to have the opportunity to share other people's

grandchildren as well as my own. It is such a blessing to be an integral part of our ecclesial family and share the joy and the sorrow that is part of everyday life in Christ.”

Peer care

In this segment of the evening, we looked at the issues people of our age-group face, and activities in which we can become involved.

- This Bible Study week is an example of our peer mutual spiritual support. This assists in both our spiritual and social growth.
- Other examples are seniors’ outings with Bible readings.
- We often have more time to support Bible Class and other ecclesial activities.
- Our particular seniors’ age can be a time of stresses when we are trying to support our family, or when we have the beginning of our own ill-health.
- Many names on our appointments calendar can be prefixed by “Dr”!
- Emails and phone calls might be used to make contact with people of all age groups in our family and ecclesia.
- We should be aware of, and interact with those in our meeting who have no nuclear family.
- Watch for sign of stress in peers who may be coping with ill health, or who themselves are caring for elderly relatives. Offer assistance where possible by shopping for them, taking them to appointments or offering to sit with aged relatives while they have a break. Also, if there are widows or widowers in our peer group, make sure they are included in invitations to social events, and not made to feel “left out” because they are no longer part of a couple. Inviting them home for a meal can also be supportive, as can offering practical assistance around the home.
- In our discussions with those who are struggling with any aspect of their life, we should beware of excessive self-disclosure. We can mistakenly think at times that if we recount our own ‘similar’ experiences in considerable detail, we are demonstrating that we understand the other person and try to make them feel more at ease. We may, sometimes, find it helpful to illustrate, very briefly, that we can understand a little of the other person’s circumstances. However, we can never know *exactly* how another person feels, and excessive self-disclosure can minimise and be dismissive of the other person’s feelings that are very real and troublesome to themselves.
- Check in often with our peers to ensure they are well, especially if they are on their own.
- Be an ear for the difficulties they may be suffering.
- Provide skill-share with peers where it may be of mutual benefit.
- There is always a positive response if we ask a brother or sister living on their own to come around and do the readings one evening and have a good chat over a cup of tea. Of course if they don’t drive at night you can offer to come to them. They always enjoy the company and fellowship.

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- Coming to grips with changes in our ecclesia and knowing how to realise that our care in these circumstances can be difficult. How do we maintain our own spiritual integrity and develop the most appropriate approach to caring for the direction of our ecclesia in the face of often challenging changes proposed by younger people?

Lapsed brothers and sisters

Unfortunately, in our ecclesias there are those of a wide range of ages whose commitment and attendance lapses. As seniors, we can often have more time to try to encourage these brothers and sisters to rejuvenate their commitment.

There are a number of ways in which we can help. For example, we can send out monthly invitations to the lectures and other activities with Glad Tiding or similar magazines.

The experiences of one senior couple. Following the self-withdrawal of a brother and sister from our ecclesia, contact via card and newsletter was made by us every year for 15 years with little response. Contact was resumed with this sister following her advice to us of her husband 's sudden death, which had occurred six months earlier. She subsequently returned to the Ecclesia. She has since told us and many others, her reason for resuming contact with us initially was our persistent contact for 15 years, and later the personal invitation to meet for a coffee and a chat, which lasted three hours! The rest is history; she is a very dear sister, whom we love very much and who is devoted to the Truth.

Further reading

A relevant article is the one on "F" for Fellowship (in the series A-Z of discipleship) in the December 2015 issue of *The Christadelphian*.

Presentation - Gary Steel: Peer groups facing challenges

"What are you studying"? I was asked. I was 17 and just baptised, a quiet peripheral kind of young person at the time and certainly not given to study or talking to a brother 4 years older than me who was prominent in young people's activity and leadership. I belonged to a small ecclesia with only a few young people. The questioner was from a larger meeting and the question took place at a combined young people's class. I contemplated not going to any more classes to avoid further interrogation, but realised even I could not justify that. By study he meant, and I knew he meant, studying the scriptures and I have to say that his question over the years contributed significantly to the work I have since done in the ecclesia.

"Eventually I decided that I would have to start, so I picked the smallest book in the Bible, Obadiah; I got a copy of some Bible marking notes written by Brother H P Mansfield and began copying them into the margin of my Bible. I have been studying the scriptures ever since, with, I hope, a more mature technique! At the time I wouldn't have considered (we'll call him John) a peer because he seemed so much older than me. But as the years went by the age difference became non-existent.

Now 49 years later we still ask each other the same question, “What are you studying or what are you working on”? Many great discussions about the word of God have resulted. I don’t know how many others John encouraged in the same way but he certainly made a difference in my life.

“I read many years ago that there are two things we all look for in a relationship: the first is security and the second is significance. It is a very helpful diagnostic. Some people, a mother for example, might feel quite secure in her relationship with her family but not very significant. She may invest a huge amount of time and effort in caring for her family and yet find that her questions and comments in family discussions are often not given the consideration deserved. In like manner, our brothers and sisters can feel secure enough in the meeting, comfortable to come and go, but not particularly significant. On occasions they may even note to themselves how few people bother to talk to them. Over time they may even feel quite invisible. Some folk can even feel quite invisible in their own home; the ecclesia can make an important difference for them.

“John made me feel significant, although initially somewhat intimidated. It is what happens when we take an interest in someone else. If you have the ability to strike up a conversation with a peer who perhaps you don’t know so well, someone on the periphery of things, think about how taking an interest in that person could help him or her feel both significant and secure in their ecclesial home.

“Taking the time to pause to talk to an individual with whom you spend little time, particularly in large meetings, can make a significant difference to their day. The important thing to remember is we are all part of the ecclesia. “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1Cor.12:27). It is the variety of parts of the body that provide the riches of the character of Christ in the ecclesia. To work together effectively, we need to know the gifts that each person can bring to the meeting; if there are members whose gifts are unknown; we are the worse for our ignorance. The quietest brother or sister among our peers has gifts to offer the meeting – skills, perspectives or a helping hand (1Cor.12:15). However, without interaction the gift lies dormant.

“Each peer group in the ecclesia faces different challenges approaching our senior years; there are few who will escape without job or family hassles or both. In some cases, self-worth is plummeting, spiritual life is dissolving and brethren in particular are just going through the motions of life, just a shell of their former selves. Learning to identify the signs of withdrawal and developing the skills to make contact, can have a significant outcome for the good of us all. “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love”. (Eph.4:16)

“How do you do it if it is someone with whom we rarely speak or have little contact? It starts with a smile and a greeting, which over time progresses to a conversation about a neutral subject, then to a specific topic of personal interest to the individual. Finally, a relationship develops reflected in a

mutually satisfying ongoing dialogue. “Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart: so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel” (Prov. 27:9).”

Elderly care

The Wikipedia (often a dubious source of information) collection of synonyms for *elderly* is ‘aged, old, mature, older, senior, ancient, venerable’. Of these, we certainly would not like to be regarded as ancient, but perhaps we would not mind being venerable. This broad collection demonstrates how difficult it is to define elderly. Perhaps it is better not to try to define the term but to simply regard an elderly person as someone who is, in the broadest sense, older.

There are many ways in which we can assist our older brothers and sisters maintain their faith and help them in their daily lives.

General observations

- Many elderly people suffer from fear, insecurity and inferiority.
- The old, the disabled, and the feeble require the same warm, emotional relationship as any other person.
- We can encourage the elderly to recount past activities in God’s service to help them to feel more at peace with themselves.
- We can assist in arranging occasional special activities for just the elderly, including a Sunday lunch after our Memorial Meeting.
- Our senior ecclesial members should be contacted regularly. When they feel lonely or nostalgic it is our duty, and a wonderful privilege, to help them review the blessings that our merciful Father has given them.
- Some elderly people become anxious over unknown dangers. We can help alleviate the stress through quiet care and golden apples.
- The elderly may feel ecclesial ‘redundancy’. This can be the brother who, for example, is no longer considered useful for formal ecclesial appointments such as speaking, presiding, as an arranging brother, or the sister who is no longer able to teach Sunday School, participate in Dorcas or catering activities.

Integrating senior members in ecclesial activities

Spiritual growth and development can be realized best through active participation in ecclesial services. Factors to consider include their discomfort in sitting still on hard pews for two hours, steps, distance to the meeting ...

Personal interaction

- Pastoral interaction would normally include some spiritual interaction – bible reading: favourite passages, Psalms, comfort, current world events discussion, and mutually agreeable (short) prayer. This is “shepherding”.
- The elderly often like to talk about some of their past life.
- Visiting our elderly families is important but not all elderly members have families in the ecclesia.
- We can visit the elderly occasionally but we need to be aware that they may not want this. Requesting permission to visit is important. (“Would you like me to visit you?”)
- The elderly often think about their physical future – this may be depressing for them. They may welcome Scriptural interaction.
- Holding hands with an older person may be helpful. They must give permission.
- It is important to identify with elderly at their level.
- Our simple ‘presence’ can be reassuring to the elderly.
- Visit those in nursing homes etc. And, just as a diversion from their routine - have a coffee.
- Provide a service - letter writing, reading to them.
- Put them in touch with someone in the ecclesia to help them solve a problem e.g. an accountant.
- Take them for walks etc. where they can enjoy some nature.
- Support - spiritual. Ensure they are aware they are still needed. Seek their advice in areas where they may have special interests or skills.
- When visiting the elderly in aged care, one visit now and again is not very helpful. We need to get to know the brothers and sisters so they feel comfortable with us and look forward to a regular visit. They will communicate better with us the more we know them and we can encourage them in the Truth. And, they will encourage us.
- For the elderly still in their own homes, check on them with regard to food supplies, adequate warmth in winter, cooling in Summer, security
- Provide transport to and from doctors and hospitals.
- Mow lawns and do maintenance jobs for the elderly.
- One big help would be a reserved parking spot in the hall carpark. These are often supplied for the less mobile elderly but not for those who need to park in close proximity to the hall entrance.
- They may need/want contact through the week via a phone call or visit or practical help such as prepared meals. However, this would depend on whether this was welcome as help or regarded as an intrusion. This would require a sensitive approach to those we perceive may have a need.

Other ways of helping

On some occasions, such issues as wills, power of attorney and health directives might be raised with us by an elderly person in our ecclesia. Other possible issues for discussion are plans for high care with family, or record wishes, set up a funeral fund and related matters. It can also be useful to help the elderly to plan the final years of their life. It is imperative, however, that these matters are only discussed if they are raised by the cared for person him/her self. It is usually more appropriate, if the matter is raised with the carer, for the carer to offer to arrange for a qualified person to visit and discuss the issues in detail. In the first instance this should be a family member, or a suitable carer or administrator in a retirement village. These are very sensitive issues that can involve families and it would be appropriate for us to walk very carefully when discussing these matters.

Presentation - Robyn Anderson: Recognising the example, and the needs of the elderly

“In my youth I frequently felt out of step with my own generation, never quite feeling comfortable with the current trends of my peers and as I look back on my life, I attribute this in part to the many years I spent in the care of my grandparents.

“I adored my maternal grandmother and she has left me a legacy of Apples of Gold. Sage words such as:

“Without God in this life you have nothing”; “Remember whose you are and whom you serve.”; “In this house, we always use the phrase, ‘God willing.’”

“While I have remembered these gems, the real Apples of Gold were the examples of Godly living which I observed in my grandparents. In their homes I learnt the importance of daily Bible reading, attendance at the Memorial Meeting, hospitality and prayer. Add to this the examples of strong but simple faith and honest, Godly living and the principles for my life were laid down very early.

“The Apostle Paul tells Timothy in his first letter that contentment with Godliness is great gain. I rarely heard my Grandmother complain. As a farmer’s wife, she shared the frustrations of prolonged droughts, a life in isolation without many of the mod cons of city folk and yet she considered herself blessed.

“Over the years, so many older brothers and sisters have supplied me with cups of tea over delightful insights into their lives. We have shared stories, poetry and many discussions of scripture verses. Many times I have been sustained by the examples and advice of my older brothers and sisters. I recall an older sister in particular who took the time to phone after school had finished for the day, to encourage both our young son and myself when he was having difficulties settling into school. Her support at a time when I doubted my ability as a mother is something I have always treasured. For me, the treasure was not only the advice shared, but the love and thoughtfulness which were given so unstintingly.

“Whether the elderly in our lives are our parents, brothers and sisters in the Truth or folk in our community, the advice to Timothy holds true for us. Don’t speak harshly to the older brother, treat the elderly women as mothers and care for the widows. Patience is a wonderful virtue. Take the time to walk slower and listen to the repeated stories. Respect the elderly person’s right as much as possible to make their own decisions.

Recognizing the needs of our seniors can only be achieved by interacting with them. They have a wealth of knowledge and life experiences to share if we are willing to take the time to listen.

“Sharing a Bible reading is an obvious common interest and can lead to beautiful discussions. Using the technology and social services available to us may also be useful to provide assistance with the weekly grocery shop, doctor’s appointments, household chores, and transport to the Memorial Meeting. To enjoy the perfume of a garden, the taste of an ice-cream, when allowed by nursing staff, listening to the birds or watching the passing traffic may rekindle memories of past homes or special picnics. Recalling times past from photo albums can all relieve the monotony of a long day spent in the seclusion of your room. For the animal lover, a visit with your family pet can bring great joy.

“Patronization can be cruel. How often I said to Nan, “Nan you’re looking well today.” To which she would respond, “It’s not how I look, it’s how I feel.” I remind myself that thoughtless comments can be demeaning and rob people of their dignity. To be able to age with one’s dignity and self-esteem intact is a goal which I consider to be an enormous blessing.

“As I dust my china cabinet, I don’t have golden apples sitting there, but I do have a hand painted plate and a beautiful piece of crystal both given by dear sisters reminding me of their advice and love. To be invited into the lives of our seniors and to assist them in their declining years is a wonderful privilege and I am so thankful that I have been given that blessing. I hope I will be able to continue to do so until, should our Lord delay His coming, it’s is my turn to receive.

“I promise I’ll try not to be grumpy. **Please just make sure my hair is done!**”

Self-care

We need to be secure in our own faith to help others and ensure our own continuing spiritual nurture.

- We can sometimes feel that we are losing our ability to contribute to general ecclesial life, especially if we have difficulty in ‘letting go’ from contributing formally in the ecclesia. There are many activities we can be involved in.
- We can take a role of ‘consultant’ by showing our interest in those younger.
- Accept that we may need a ‘day off’ in our caring time.
- Keep a balanced perspective on all aspects of our life in Christ.

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- Do not neglect our personal spiritual and physical health, daily readings and prayer, healthy exercise and healthy eating.
 - Keep busy in the ecclesia.
 - If having difficulties, seek out a member for support.
 - Be careful not to take things said on a personal level.
 - Consider that our brethren and sisters probably have our best interest at heart.
 - If drowning, never be afraid to put up a hand in order to be rescued.
 - Ensure we have sufficient rest in order to be of some help in other activities.

Presentation and concluding remarks - John Quill: Relationships

“Tonight is our last evening together. We have been with people we saw just last week and with people we have not seen for decades. We have enjoyed wonderful studies, our consciences have been pricked and our understanding extended.

“But when all is said and done, and it will be said and done tomorrow at lunch, there remains a question: it's the big "so what." "So what" that we have been here and learned such wonderful things? What are we going to do with our extended understandings? Have our speakers had the same experience as Ezekiel who, to his listeners, had sung no more than a beautiful song with a delightful voice or will we take what we have heard and do something with it?

“Brothers and sisters, let us be sure we do not leave this place the same people we were when we came in. Rather, let's leave with the confidence that at this latish stage of our lives we can still make a significant contribution to the ecclesia of God. The role we can play in this should not be underestimated. Our example to others is a powerful force.

“When we think about looking after ourselves our thoughts can quickly turn to medication, exercise, visits to the doctor, looking out for lumps and bumps that can indicate something problematic. While doctors, exercise and medication can assist longer life and a better quality of life, they are, however, only the mundane and ordinary things of our existence, that which is common to all men.

“As we lay dying, as we all surely will in the not so distant future if the Lord does not return, it's not the house or the pills or the trips or the money or the antiques or the cars or the holiday house that will be important to us, rather it's the relationships we will remember: relationships with friends, with family, with brothers and sisters and, above all, our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

“The quality of just one of those earthly relationships affects the quality of our relationship with God. We cannot be right with our God if we are not right with our brothers and sisters. Peter tells us that a husband's prayers are hindered if he's not right with his wife. The Lord's Prayer says: Forgive us our trespasses but only to the extent we forgive others.

Looking after ourselves through relationships

Now my point is this: maintaining and extending loving, Christ-like relationships is one of the best ways we have of looking after ourselves; in fact, it is life eternal.

“Without a sense of being linked with each other and without actively cultivating these links we are more likely to be selfish and therefore unmoved by the plight of others. Let's not treat the ecclesia - and I mean the ecclesia in its broadest sense, not just that part of the ecclesia of God where we spend most of our time - like a hotel, where a group of strangers live for a time under one roof.

“To what extent are we strangers to one another living under the roof of the Australian Unity Agreement? Ecclesias should not be strangers to one another. We must be able to share that sense of being together – we should be a real community for we are all in the same condition - men and women in desperate need of salvation.

“We once lived in different wings of the ‘hotel’ categorised by labels we applied to each other. Remember the labels of the 70's - the Logos wing, the Shield wing, then, more recently, the conservative wing and the liberal wing? Our allegiance is not to magazines, committees or ecclesial groups. Our allegiance is to Our Heavenly Father and to His son and through them to one another.

“Labels can be so dangerous. There were psychological studies done after WW2 about the effects of labelling people. These studies showed that when people are identified by labels it is harder to be sympathetic to their plight as it lessens their humanity and can cause us to regard them as less valuable than they really are.

“In Matthew 5 our Lord tells us: “Blessed are the peace makers for they will be called the children of God”. Brother Harry Tennant once styled this as: “Blessed are the bridge builders, blessed are they that actively seek reconciliation with their brothers and sisters, who lead those in darkness to be reconciled with God and who actively seek themselves to be reconciled with our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ”.

“Brother Anthony reminded us of the words of Jesus on the cross: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do”. Here are words for us when despite our best efforts reconciliation with another person does not seem possible. We must forgive people anyway and treat them with love and kindness. That he benefited from his sacrifice is indisputable but this is not an academic thing. The very best way we can look after ourselves is by serving others. We have our very best example in all things before us in our Lord's sacrifice.

“In Philippians 2:3,4, Paul tells us: Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

“Let us then cultivate humility through loving service especially to those who, in natural terms, might not appear to deserve it; and cultivate humility not by focussing on our own pain, and suffering but rather through listening to others and seek ways to encourage them and to be reconciled with them.

“Hebrews 10:23-25: Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

Conclusion

In caring we try to relate to another person, no matter what age. We cannot do this in a detached way. One of our characteristics as carers is that we are human ourselves. We are all touched by life's hard experiences. Some people have tougher lives than we do, but we have all had some events in our lives that have caused us physical and emotional hurt and pain. As caring senior brothers and sisters, what we are trying to do is harness those experiences from which we've learnt and help others cope with their difficulties, but, at the same time, help in their spiritual development.

We care for all in our ecclesia, and the wider ecclesial world, in a compassionate and empathetic way. Our lives should be our own responsibility, we should organise our spiritual, social, financial, physical, mental activities and not blame others for our inabilities. We have a responsibility in our marriages, ecclesial, family and day to day lives to work together in love to show God's glorious plan for those who trust Him.

Our care should be based on compassion, empathy and prayer

