

RESPECT FOR SENIORS

Report from

Normanhurst Uniting Church 13 June, 2010

Invitation to Participate

Although we had prior consultation about the programme I experienced some problems in getting on board.

- The detail of what was involved came only one month ahead and I found it rather daunting as I saw what would need to be done to participate fully. A month is not really long enough to prepare a congregation for something new. In particular it is hard to organize lay folk in such a short period to undertake responsibilities, and certainly more difficult to invite the participation of anyone from outside, especially if they are asked to speak.
- Again, the two weekends suggested were an unfortunate choice. The first, 13 June, was a long weekend which meant that numbers would be reduced. The second, 20 June, co-incided with the anniversary of the formation of the Uniting Church for which I had already planned something special.
- Most importantly, I sensed I was not sufficiently prepared in myself suddenly to deal with what was a somewhat new concept. I was worried about doing it enthusiastically to make it an important focus in a worship service and to encourage ongoing participation by the congregation. Quite frankly, the need to engender more respect for seniors was not high on my agenda. I had not really considered that the issue was all that important in the community. Occasionally one might hear of some unfortunate experience by an elderly person, but then that is life. I needed to be made aware that here is an important issue to be addressed in society. Most elderly people would feel a right to be respected and younger people of all ages should be made aware of their need for respect.
- Somehow, I sensed the need for something more than written material and a phone call or two. I therefore suggest that there would be value in some face to face preparation for the minister and/or some members of a participating congregation to attend a preparatory meeting or meetings to get them properly on board. Alternatively, or in addition, a well informed person might meet with a small group from the congregation, preferably including the minister well in advance of any date set to observe Respect for Seniors.
- I do admit that once I set my mind to prepare for the service, I found the supplied material helpful. Moreover, discussing the matter with a key member of the congregation who is involved with ministry to the aged, and reflecting on the lot of the elderly in a variety of circumstances, I warmed to the whole concept and felt satisfied with the outcome. Nonetheless I feel strongly that, for this matter to take off, there needs to be preparation well in advance along the lines I suggest above.
- We made available copies of the brochure "Respect for Seniors" with the Church Notices a week before the service.
- I invited the congregation to wear purple at the service – a bit reluctantly because we had worn red for Pentecost a few weeks before. The response was excellent. I think the womenfolk enjoy the colour idea.

Service on 'Respect for Seniors' 13 June, 2010.

Although we did not invite anyone from outside to be involved, the service was relevant because our congregation has a preponderance of older people including some from "Bowden Brae" a Uniting Church Retirement Village within the parish and with which many of our people are actively involved.

Our involvement includes organists and other members assisting the Chaplain at each Sunday Evening's worship service at Bowden Brae. In addition groups of our ladies run a programme for aged people each Thursday including a light lunch. Again, once each month on another day an activity is arranged with entertainment for the aged and a hot meal. So, Normanhurst Church is already well involved in respecting and doing significant things for the aged.

The following four features of the service are noted.

1. **The reading of Psalm 71:17 – 21** which is a prayer of an elderly person.
2. **The "Conversation with the Young in Heart"** was not only designed to include the children but to have a dialogue with the Congregation on the subject of the aged. Thus the theme was introduced. Participation by both young and old was very good. Some headings for the conversation are included below.

CHILDREN AND SENIORS (Normanhurst U.C. 13.6.2010)

Do you know any old people?

Who are they?

What are they like? Do they play with you? Do they tell you things? What kinds of things?

Are they special? Why?

Do you do anything for them?

Do you know about any old people in the Bible? Who are they?

(Moses. Simeon. Anna. Enoch. Methuselah.)

Methuselah was a very old man. How old? (Look it up - Genesis 5: 27.) Lived 969 years – and do you know what the Bible tells us that he did? See if you can find out? (He died) He lived all those years – Not as long as our years, but a long time and all they said about him is that "He died". It does tell us that he had sons and daughters.

His father was Enoch. He did something very special with his life – see Gen 5.24' "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him."

What did Moses do?

What did Simeon do? We read in Luke that he lived and prayed. The Holy Spirit told him he would see God's special leader of his people. And he did. The baby Jesus was brought into the Temple and Simeon took him in his arms and said: "God you can let me go now in peace...I've seen your salvation." (Lk 2.25f)

I hope we can all grow old. I hope we can do something with our lives.

Especially like Enoch – walk with God. Or, like Simeon – keep looking for Jesus in our lives.

3. **The Conversation on Ageing and Respect for Seniors** was another focal point of the service and notes are below. I invited the person involved in Synod Aged Care to speak spontaneously. On reflection I consider this dialogue was the most significant aspect of the service. I include some notes.

RESPECT FOR SENIORS

Programme begun by St Ives Church last year.

R. for S. is a grassroots campaign with the vision of creating a safe, caring community where we can all age with dignity and respect.

A research Programme. You have had the brochure handed out last week.

What has your research uncovered?

At our Activity Centre I had a Conversation with People (Ladies) at Thursday Luncheon. I asked What Hurts? – Impatience. Rudeness. Ignored. Treated as if old.

How do you feel? – Failing physically. Insecure. Confused at times, eg Instruction books with new gadgets. Phone calls with no one there to help – Press #'s.

Independence? Hand over power of attorney.

St Ives' Research:

Identified ageism and lack of respect as major factors in mistreatment.

Respectful society creates a sense of safety and being valued.

Community engagement can help change attitudes and behaviour.

They Invited 20 Churches to have this focus. – Wear Purple - Have This Conversation.

1. What does respect mean?
2. How do we show respect for others?
3. I feel respected by others when they ...
4. Why do I respect seniors?
5. How do I show that respect?

A culture of Respect – Recognise Story. Identity. Honour values.

Value and Acknowledge

Competence and contribution of lived lives.

Diminishing number of intimate relationships

Shifts in power and autonomy

The vulnerable shifts from independence

What do we already do here at Normanhurst?

Bowden Brae. Thursday Activity Centre. Tuesday Lunch Club.

PSALM 71: 17 f. (See OOS)

Discovered in suggested readings when visiting the aged.

Tell us about an aged person in your life for whom you had respect.

4. The Sermon - "Love on Display"

This sermon was on the Gospel reading for the day – Luke 7: 36 – 8.3 concerning Jesus' visit to the home of Simon the Pharisee and the contrast between the way Jesus was treated by Simon and the way he was treated by the woman who anointed his feet with oil. The text was verse 44. "Do you see?"

Three points were made and reference to the aged was specifically brought out in two of them as follows:

a. SIMON. Do you see this woman?

To-day, the set reading is very apposite. For it asks us: DO YOU SEE THE ELDERLY AROUND YOU?

Do you notice their needs? Can you put yourself into their place? Are you aware of their insecurities? Their confusion? Their loneliness? Their physical frailties? Their need to be recognized?

There's a corner in our vestibule where some of our elderly seniors sit during morning tea. How delighted I am to see some folk occasionally sacrifice the joy of conversing with others and have a chat with some of them.

At the Service here in March we thanked God for the life of Ann Derrick. I cannot forget how her daughter Linda, told us that in the Eastwood Shopping Centre one day, Ann saw a forlorn, unkempt woman, not coping well at all. Her urine-stained petticoat, had slipped down around her legs and she obviously needed help. It's the sort of situation which most people would ignore and pass by on the other side. Poor things, they have poor love-sight. Not Ann. *"Do you see this woman?"* Jesus asks. *"Yes. I see her."* said Ann. And immediately went to her aid.

How's your eyesight? More importantly, How's your love-sight?

b. SIMON. Do you see yourself?

c. SIMON, *"Do you see me?"*

Again on this day when we are mindful of whether or not we really see the aged, it is all wrapped up with seeing Jesus. It's the essence of the parable of the sheep and the goats. Jesus says to some: *"I was hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick and in prison – and you totally ignored me."* They say, *"No, Lord, Not us. Never."* To which Jesus replies, *"Inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. You did not see me in them!"*

Conclusion

After the above experience at Normanhurst I support the "Respect for Seniors" concept. My early hesitation was a combination of pressure to honour my promise to be involved, then the short notice of one month to participate through the worship service and my on-going responsibilities in a supply situation. I commend the minister and the St Ives congregation together with Unitingcare for their initiative.

Bill Ives (Rev Dr)

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13 July, 2010.