

Respecting Elders – St Ives UC
20th June, 2010

From our Bible Readings, let me repeat two verses:

- “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them (Genesis 1:27)
- The Golden Rule: “Do to others as you would have others do to you.” (Matt 7:12)

When I was Chaplain at Kari Court and Northaven I was constantly quoting these verses to myself and to colleagues in care. They helped me to hold high the value and dignity of each person (whatever their age or wellbeing). Each is God’s creation and made in His likeness...valued and treasured by Him.

Our attitudes and actions are positively influenced when we see others as God sees them.

Again, as a Chaplain I would often reflect on how I would respond to an elderly person if he or she was my Mother or my Father or if I was the Chaplain caring for me in my older years.

As today we focus on “Respecting Elders” we are all encouraged to reflect on what shapes our attitude to ageing people and what those attitudes are.

It’s helpful in such reflection to focus for a moment on the colour PURPLE.

The colour PURPLE in liturgical use within the Christian church has two purposes: During the Season of Lent as a period of confession and repentance; during Advent as anticipation of the Coming of Christ the King - In other words, the colour for royalty.

Today, as Wear Purple Day, there’s a similar dual meaning. Purple reminds us to confess inappropriate attitudes and actions towards elders, but, also, **a symbol of our**

honouring them as we would royalty for who they are in their older years.

It is a day of recognition and celebration and, similar to other special days, it is meant as a day to motivate us towards EACH DAY having such recognition and celebration of our elders.

WHAT ARE SOME MOTIVATIONAL REMINDERS to honour and respect our elders?

1 We have a faith and discipleship responsibility to do so:

Such responsibility is based on our earlier Scripture texts, and we would add:

- From Leviticus 19:32 “Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God.”
- From Exodus 20:12 “Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.”

- From 1 Timothy 5:1-2 “Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters – with absolute purity.”
- Jesus’ example of always honouring people of all ages and having a particular bias towards the vulnerable.

2. We have a love and inspiration response to their impact upon our lives:

Let me share a few images which are clear in my heart and mind. They will prompt others in yours:

- It would have been my father’s 99th birthday yesterday. Although he died 7 years ago, he still lives strongly within me for who he was to me and to those whose lives he influenced.
- Two weeks ago I attended the funeral service for a past resident of

Northaven who died aged 103 years. I attended because of the inspiration she was to me of such devotion to God and family. Her grandchildren talked of her “spine of steel”. Her legacy will also live on in her family and friends.

- Three weeks ago I attended the 90th birthday party of a “retired” UCA Minister who still provides supply ministry for congregations. A real example of how age doesn't necessarily limit the contribution we can make to the community. *Age is not necessarily about receiving, but still a willingness and capacity to give.*
- The world's focus is currently on South Africa for the Football World Cup, a dream come true by Nelson Mandela. Midst all the array of colours worn for these games, today we wear purple for Nelson Mandela for his commitment throughout his

long life to bringing justice and wellbeing for all.

These are some examples of the many elders whom we love and whose lives and example inspire us. We love them for WHO THEY ARE; for THEIR UNIQUE LIFE STORIES, their INSPIRATION TO US; their WISDOM and the TREASURED RELATIONSHIPS we have or have had with them; for THEIR LEGACY which lives on within us and through us. WE ARE WHO WE ARE BECAUSE OF THOSE ELDERS WITH WHOM WE HAVE SHARED OUR LIVES.

3. We have a social responsibility.

I cannot let this morning's service pass without acknowledging the research work which is being undertaken by Julie Matthews in partnership with this congregation and Presbytery and Northern Sydney Region Of UnitingCare Ageing. Congratulations on your passion and commitment to Respecting Elders and to

Wear Purple Day. It has been a privilege to share in your enthusiasm this year.

In one of the review articles you shared with me I was particularly struck by these statements:

- “All members of the Australian community would benefit from a greater understanding of how best to achieve **respect** for the older community... In the development of programmes and initiatives for older people in Australia one important theme has been missing...**RESPECT**.”
(From Benetas and Deakin University)

- “..Offering older people a **voice** was considered mutual respect. Many families speak for older people and don't give them the opportunity to have input into their **choices**...”

As I read this I gave thanks for UnitingCare's policy and practice of person-centred care. It is our

aspiration that people within
UnitingCare communities are
encouraged to have a **voice**, to have
choice and to be empowered for who
they are. We seek to bring them
honour and respect.

Today, then, we wear purple to celebrate all
elders and to advocate for their
empowerment and protection, remembering
“They are made in the image of God” and
***“We would seek to do to them as we would
have them do to us.”*** Amen.