

# Loneliness in Older People

Guidance on how Christian faith organisations can support older people facing loneliness



## About the Authors

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Karen Grimshaw is a director of an independent nurse consultancy company – providing clinical supervision, clinical teaching and nurse consultant input to NHS and independent sector nursing teams and individual registered nurses. She retired from the NHS three years ago, from role of Nurse Consultant for Older People, where she worked in acute hospitals and community organisations, leading on frailty services and dementia care.

Karen is a Registered Nurse and Registered Nurse teacher, with over 30 years working in the speciality of older people. She has worked clinically across health and social care sectors, in community, hospitals and care home settings. She has held several senior nursing positions and has served at director level on NHS boards, in executive and non-executive nurse roles, for community, primary care and acute hospital organisations; she has been the Safeguarding adult and Mental Capacity Act lead for both NHS providers and commissioners.

Since retiring from full-time work with the NHS, Karen works part-time as director of a nurse consultancy company, clinically as a registered nurse in local hospitals, and also on a freelance basis as a clinical expert witness. She has worked with Professor Keith Brown, as a visiting Fellow of Bournemouth University with the National Centre for Post-qualifying Social Work and Professional Practice.

Karen worships at Plymouth Christian Centre, an Elim Pentecostal church, where she serves on the pastoral care support team and is developing the role of Anna Chaplain, as part of her ministry among older people across Plymouth.

### **Professor Keith Brown** | [kbrown@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:kbrown@bournemouth.ac.uk)

Professor Keith Brown was the founding Director of the National Centre for Post Qualifying Social Work and Professional Practice and he is an Emeritus Professor at Bournemouth University where the social work department was ranked number 1 in the UK in the 2020 Guardian League Table.

In 2005, he was awarded the Linda Ammon memorial prize sponsored by the then Department for Education and Skills awarded to the individual making the greatest contribution to education and training in the UK. He was awarded a Chartered Trading Standard Institute [CTSI] 'Institutional Hero' award in 2017, recognising the significance of his research into financial fraud and scams.

He sits on the DHSC safeguarding advisory board, the joint DHSC and MOJ National Mental Capacity Leadership forum and the Home Office Joint Financial task force. He has written over 35 text books in the fields of social work and leadership and is particularly known for his contributions in the areas of Mental Capacity and Leadership.

Since his retirement from a full time academic post, he has been the Independent Chair of the NHS Safeguarding Adults National Network, the Chair of the Worcestershire Safeguarding Adults Board and the Chair of Love Southampton, a body that represents 3 food banks and 4 debt advice centres in Southampton. He is also an Ambassador for Faith in Later Life and a member of Above Bar Church Southampton. He continues to write in the area of the interface between the welfare state and the church and is passionate about encouraging the church to minister to the marginalised and vulnerable.



**The Rt Hon Damian Green**  
*Chair of the APPG for Longevity*

As Chair of the APPG for Longevity, I'm delighted to have been asked to commend this new guidance from Professor Keith Brown, which I do most warmly.

Keith is an expert in his field when it comes to supporting older people and I'm grateful that his many years working in this area can produce a report which will enhance and equip the Christian community to engage with the wider subject of loneliness.

The pandemic has, as Carl Knightly reminds us, affected our older people and this report reminds us how much we need a change in society's attitude in this area. I was delighted to hear of the work that Faith in Later Life does, with a range of partners to evaluate the conversation.

There is a need for us to work together across the sectors to celebrate older people and longer life. The work of the APPG for Longevity seeks to do that and I look forward to sharing this contribution to the discussion with colleagues across Parliament. I am confident this advice for Christian organisations will provide a useful toolkit to aid and guide you in your work.

My thanks to Keith and Karen for their work and I look forward to seeing how this guidance changes the work done in many of our communities.

## Forewords



**Professor Keith Brown**

*Chair of the NHS Safeguarding*

*Adults National Network*

*Faith in Later Life Ambassador*

Loneliness and isolation can have a devastating impact on individuals of all ages, but older people, particularly those in the fourth age, are more likely to experience loneliness and isolation and the associated impacts on wellbeing. One of the reasons I am so committed to raising an awareness of these issues originated a few years ago whilst working with the National Trading Standards Scams team to evaluate the impact of telephone call blocking technology. We have all seen and witnessed the rise of financial scams and fraud over recent years, and I have been privileged to lead national research into this area. The government funded project involved fitting telephone call blocking devices into people's homes where they were deemed to be at risk of scams due to their vulnerability, and there was a previous history of being a victim of this type of crime. Many of the participants had been receiving 30, 40 or even 50 plus scam calls per week from criminals (I call them criminals because this is exactly what scammers are).

The project was designed to measure whether the call blockers had any impact on the person's wellbeing and clearly, we were hoping for a positive result. You will be pleased to hear that, overall, there was a positive correlation between the use of call blocking technology and mental wellbeing; however, these results were not straightforward to demonstrate. What happened for many people taking part in the project was that rather than receiving 30, 40 or 50 plus calls a week from criminals, they received no calls at all - from anybody. The call blocking technology was extremely effective in blocking calls from criminals, but nobody else was calling. It was a huge shock to discover that many participants had disconnected the call blocker as they preferred to have criminals call them rather than endure their phone falling silent. This was a real wake-up call to us. Loneliness and isolation are such terrible things to experience and it is so devastating to think that many people would rather speak to criminals attempting to defraud them out of their savings rather than to have no contact with the outside world. This experience left me determined to raise the issues and impact of loneliness and isolation within our society.

Churches and Christian faith-based organisations are often at the forefront of providing pastoral and practical support to older people in our society and we wanted to continue our support for this work by producing this latest guidance for those engaged in supporting older people. Karen Grimshaw and I have been lifetime friends since we first met at university in the early 1980s and we have both spent all of our professional lives working in this area, publishing national guidance for Health and Social Care professionals. More recently, we have teamed up with Faith in Later Life and other Christian organisations to produce guidance based on our national work, but tailored for churches and Christian faith-based organisations. We would not describe ourselves as Christian leaders, but rather leaders who are Christians. Our professional experiences and credibility are at the heart of what we do, and we want to promote professional excellence; but we unashamedly do this from our own personal Christian faith perspective.

To those of you who tirelessly provide support to the marginalised, the lonely and isolated older people, can we both thank you and encourage you to keep going. To those who are thinking about setting up support networks and systems in these areas can we encourage you to get going - your work will be so vital to many - and to those of you who are just thinking about this for the first time and you don't know where to start, please just do something as it really will make a difference. It is our hope and desire that this latest guidance will help and assist in promoting support systems for older people from churches and Christian faith-based organisations.

Finally, can I express my sincere gratitude to those organisations and individuals who have contributed to the writing of this guidance. Not only do you help demonstrate the scale and impact of churches' involvement in this area, but your advice and guidance to the reader is so valuable. Together we can make a significant impact on reducing the impact of loneliness and isolation, especially amongst older people. Hopefully, we will reach a point where vulnerable people with call blocking technology are comfortable because friendly voices are phoning them instead of criminals.

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**Carl Knightly**  
*Chief Executive*  
*Faith in Later Life*

During the coronavirus pandemic I have found it difficult at times to work from home, as I enjoy the company of others. And yet every afternoon my children return from school and, in the evening, my wife returns from the hospital she works at. So, whilst I have lonely points, this doesn't last. I wonder if you have pondered loneliness and its impact? I wonder what it must be like to be so lonely that you go to the doctor's surgery just to see someone. I wonder what it must be like being one of the over 5 million older people who say the television or their pet is their main form of company.

Loneliness and isolation can be debilitating, and indeed loneliness, social isolation, and living alone have all been associated with an increased risk of premature death.

Yet from my Christian perspective, society is not meant to be full of loneliness and isolation, and indeed when things are at their best, older and younger people are side by side enjoying themselves. The Bible paints a beautiful picture of a world restored when it says this: 'Old men and old women will again sit along the streets...each with a staff in hand because of great age. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing there'.

There are over 45,000 churches across the UK, often ideally placed in their communities, many doing great work with people of all ages, seeking to bind together a society often divided along age lines. In this guidance, you will read of some excellent organisations engaging with older people, together with guidance and processes to enable you to do so effectively.

The coronavirus pandemic has affected older people disproportionately in relation to death, illness, and removal of liberty. But it has also provided an opportunity for the Church. At times of crisis Christians (and other groups) have often sprung into action and provided love, care, and support for those at risk, and we can do so again. Whether as a church community by 'adopting' your local care home, or whether you just reflect on how to engage with older people in your street who may be profoundly lonely, there is so much we can, and indeed must do. The Bible tells us that 'God places the lonely in families' - I wonder what that verse means to us, as we take time to reflect on it.

I would contend that reducing the loneliness of one person in your community can be quite simple, perhaps as simple as starting with saying 'hello' when you see someone in your street, on their daily morning walk, and asking them how they are coping in these challenging times. Or starting up with small talk over the fence in the back garden. The key is to be intentional. You will find plenty of helpful ideas and more in-depth strategies in this guidance, which will help as you consider what you can do. Thank you for reading this, and for being interested. Together let's take a stand against loneliness and show older people they matter.

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## Executive Summary

It is well known that we have an ageing population, and that our churches too have ageing memberships; with the numbers of those living above 80 years of age having the fastest and greatest increases. These oldest of our elderly populations are now recognised as being in their Fourth Age. With many years of experience, a wealth of knowledge and having witnessed many changes to society and church over the years, those living in the Fourth Age have what is sometimes termed the “Gift of Years”. Yet for many, the ‘gift’ comes at a time when they may be living alone, isolated from family and friends, recently bereaved, struggling with physical or mental health and finding social situations, attending church or meeting with others difficult. For many, the Fourth Age can be a time when the greatest challenge of everyday life is combatting loneliness.

This publication has been written following an earlier document we produced “Guidance for Christian faith organisations in the support and value of older people’ (2020) and in response to the impact of lockdown measures for the Covid 19 pandemic, on those living in the Fourth Age. During the pandemic, many people struggled with the reduced social contacts, social distancing measures and enforced isolation; much has been written and featured in the media about the impact of loneliness. Yet, for many people living in the Fourth Age, such isolation and loneliness are the norm; they have been an everyday reality long before the pandemic. Our experiences of lockdown have raised awareness of the impact of isolation and loneliness to our health and wellbeing; we now have a better understanding of the lives of many older people in our communities and churches, who spend week after week living on their own, going for several days without seeing anyone, being unable to attend church or social events and struggling with loneliness and the challenges it brings every day.

By recognising the impact of social isolation and loneliness on the health and wellbeing of those in the Fourth Age, churches can work together and with local community organisations, to identify the lonely and reach out to provide support and help. Providing pastoral support to older people who may be struggling with loneliness can create opportunities for mission and ministry for Christian faith organisations – to share the good news of the Gospel and introduce people to the love of Jesus. By reaching out to those who are isolated and lonely, churches can promote the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health of older people – by enabling social interactions, developing meaningful relationships, offering support and prayer for spiritual development and combatting loneliness.

Some of the isolation and loneliness which people in the Fourth Age experience is due to the ageism in our society and in our churches. It is now time for churches to stand-up to the prejudices and discrimination of older people, to challenge the ageism we see in society and show that people in the Fourth Age are valued, celebrated, respected and included. Churches and Christian faith organisations should be leading the way to reach out to older people, to tackle ageist views and attitudes and demonstrate that older people matter.

Ministries amongst older people, to older people and with older people, should be as high profile in our churches as those to other sectors of society such as children, youth, students. There are a number of ministries and projects run by Christian faith organisations, which specifically support the spiritual and pastoral needs of older people and help churches set up schemes to support older folk in their memberships and communities – the work of Linking Lives UK, Anna Chaplaincy, Embracing Age and Faith in Later Life are featured in this publication, to act as resources, guides and encouragement to churches in establishing ministry and mission to support older people living in the Fourth Age with the impact of loneliness.

## Demographics leading to an isolated generation

The demographic changes over the last few decades, leading to our ageing population, have resulted in increasing numbers and a larger proportion of older people, many of whom will live on their own (Office of National Statistics 2018). It is estimated that 3.6 million older people are currently living alone in the UK, many struggling with health issues, reduced social activities, bereavement and loss. With a third of older people living alone reporting that they can go without speaking to a family member or friend for a month, there are many people who are feeling isolated and lonely (Age UK 2018).

### Factors leading to loneliness are well identified:

- Reduced health status – making it difficult for people to get out and about
- Disability and reduced functional ability – particularly those with reduced mobility, incontinence, cognitive impairment
- Being widowed – and recently bereaved
- Living alone – which can be isolating and reduce social contacts
- Living in poor or isolating housing

*(Age UK 2015)*

Although isolation itself may not result in an individual feeling lonely, it is a major factor in reported loneliness of older people. The Campaign to End Loneliness (2021) report that there are nine million lonely people in the UK, four million of them are older people. With older age, and in particular those living in the Fourth Age – in their 80s and above, there is an increasing likelihood of becoming socially isolated; there is a clear relationship between isolation, loneliness and frailty for those living in the Fourth Age. With the increases in numbers of people living to the Fourth Age, it is likely that over the next decade we will see an increase in the numbers of people reporting that they are feeling lonely. Age UK (2018) predicted that there will be 2 million older people in England who are lonely, if we fail as a society to tackle social isolation and the causes of loneliness.

In the recent Covid-19 pandemic, many people struggled with the enforced social isolation and the experience of loneliness. The British Red Cross (2020) reported on the specific issues people faced through the lockdowns and social distancing measures of 2020/21. There is now a wider understanding of the physical, mental and social impacts of being socially isolated – of spending hours, days and weeks alone, being limited to telephone and virtual contact with others and devoid of physical contact of others. For many older people, such social isolation and loneliness is an everyday norm. Whilst some develop a resilience and contentment which enables them to live alone without due distress, others struggle with an increasing despair of loneliness.





## Demographics leading to an isolated generation

Many church memberships have an ageing profile, with increasing proportions of older people. With the exception of the Orthodox and Pentecostal churches, the average age of those attending churches has increased over the last decade, with the proportions of those in the Fourth Age having double or trebled. Most fellowships now have greater proportions of people over eighty years than under twenty. With the increasing age of church populations, the focus on issues relating to loneliness have been increasing – the Church Survey undertaken in 2020, identified that for 70% of churches, supporting people with loneliness and isolation was the top priority for ministry and support within church memberships and local communities. (All Churches Trust 2020)

Across denominations, the increasing proportions of those living in the Fourth Age brings great opportunities for churches – to nurture, develop and value these members, to show the love of Jesus and to further God’s kingdom. The challenge these changes to church memberships bring is to view those in the Fourth Age as a ‘gift to enjoy, rather than a burden to bear’ (Jewell 2013).

“For **70%** of churches, supporting people with loneliness and isolation was the top priority for ministry and support within church memberships and local communities.”

Older members of a church may find it more difficult to maintain regular attendance at services or other meetings, due to physical or mental health decline. They may lose social contacts from long-term Christian friends through ill health, moving house or death. As their contemporaries die or become too frail, older people in churches are becoming increasingly lonely, with a sense of being abandoned and left behind. With the recent lockdown and social distances measures due to Covid-19, some older people have struggled to maintain contact with the church fellowship, access church services which have only been held online, or receive the pastoral and spiritual support they would normally receive from face-to-face contacts/visits.

Within our own families there are more grandparents and great-grandparents living into their Fourth Age. More families are experiencing life with and alongside older people who may be living with reduced mobility, sensory losses, dementia, other long-term health conditions and bereavement. Children and young people are now more exposed to those living in the Fourth Age and more willing to play a part in the support, inclusion and company of older people.

Churches have historically led the way in caring for older and frail people in society, often providing food, shelter, clothing and money to those living in the local neighbourhood. Centuries before the concept of state health or social services, churches would provide care, pastoral support, food and homes to those struggling in society, many of whom were older people. Nowadays, many churches support their local community and social causes, to a range of age groups, often focusing on the real needs of those who are lonely, living in poverty, struggling with substance misuse and homelessness. This has been particularly so during the Covid-19 crisis, during which churches worked alongside secular services to reach out to those in need of food, shelter, accommodation, healthcare and social support.

## Responding to the Epidemic of Loneliness

For many centuries now, the church in the UK has been at the forefront of addressing loneliness and social isolation whether through running lunch clubs, toddler groups, social events or one-to-one pastoral care of those in the community. These activities have formed part of the backbone of community life, without which many people would have slipped into significant emotional, psychological and spiritual ill health. It is a welcome step that in the past 10 years in particular, loneliness and social isolation have increasingly become recognised by the church as serious social concerns. These were quickly brought into sharper focus, during 2020, when Covid-19 forced many people across the world to face their own realities of dealing with varying levels and extremes of isolation and loneliness.

There have been a number of key developments in recent years which have led to the general public, government and other agencies recognising these concerns. In 2011, the Campaign to End Loneliness was established, against the background that 9 million people in the UK lacked the friendship and support that they needed. The campaign's role is to share research, evidence and knowledge relating to loneliness and social isolation and its initial work has become a catalyst to many subsequent developments in the field.

Following the tragic death of Jo Cox MP in June 2016, a commission was established (the Jo Cox Commission) which focused on addressing loneliness within communities. In 2017, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sports launched a £20 million fund to address loneliness and the world's first 'Loneliness Minister' – Tracey Crouch – was appointed. Publication of the Loneliness Strategy (2018) made a number of recommendations which have led to increasing cross-governmental working on the issue, raised awareness of the impact of loneliness and continued investment on social prescribing, as a way to offer a variety of services and activities to support people facing loneliness.

### **The key role of churches and faith groups**

During this time, churches and faith groups have continued to do what they do best: responding to priority needs and concerns in their communities.

A coalition of ten national Christian charities has been working together since 2017 through Christians Together Against Loneliness (CTAL). This coalition has collectively been engaging in the development of national strategies, including a multi-agency approach to consider effective responses to loneliness and involvement of the 'Loneliness Minister' to discuss the role of faith groups in addressing loneliness.

As we come to terms with the impact that Covid-19 has had on us all, the church will continue to have a crucial role to play in local communities. This will include ensuring that those on the margins of society are identified, and opportunities provided to engage with initiatives which lead to greater connectivity and inclusion.

There are, however, many challenges as we all seek to make our communities as welcoming as we can. On an individual level, as we engage with others in our day-to-day lives and at organisational level. There are many opportunities to bring people together – both virtually and in person, and this involves a commitment to long-term relationships, partnering with other organisations and prioritising resources and time. There are now a number of excellent models of good practice that churches can use to address loneliness locally (see page 35) which encourage joint working and avoids duplication of effort.



“As we come to terms with the impact that Covid-19 has had on us all, **the church will continue to have a crucial role to play in local communities.** This will include ensuring that those on the margins of society are identified, and opportunities provided to engage with initiatives which **lead to greater connectivity and inclusion.**”

## Loneliness of the Fourth Age

Old age itself does not increase loneliness – rather there is an increase in the risk factors and contributors to loneliness with increasing age eg. loss, living alone, isolation, poor health, reduced mobility, increased frailty.

### People living in the Fourth Age are more likely to:

- Live alone
- Be bereaved/widowed
- Have complex health issues
- Struggle with disabilities and reduced functional abilities
- Be socially isolated

Loneliness is often about loss – loss of contact, confidence, employment, relationships or purpose. Those in the Fourth Age are commonly facing numerous losses, which contribute to feelings of loneliness – loss of family, partner/spouse, health and physical ability, cognitive impairment, social contacts/activities, meaningful and regular relationships or purpose in community/life. For some people living in the Fourth Age, the opportunities for such meaningful conversations and interactions may be very few – due to social isolation and loneliness.

### Triggers which are likely to lead to loneliness for people in the Fourth Age include:

- Being widowed
- Living alone
- Having nobody to open up to or share concerns
- Poor health and/or deteriorating health
- Not feeling part of a social group or community
- Unable to do the things they want to – due to isolation, lack of money, poor health etc

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the social isolation and loneliness of many older people – as they have been completely isolated, due to the need to shield for their own health protection, comply with lockdown requirements of communities and follow isolation or social distancing measures. Those living in the Fourth Age who live alone found themselves completely cut-off from family, friends and society; only having contact with others by telephone, internet or at a distance from the doorstep.

But the pandemic has brought to light the plight of many older people in the Fourth Age who live alone and are lonely. People who had moved away for work or social reasons felt the impact of great geographical distances from their older family members, being unable to travel to visit; neighbourhoods sought to support older people in their communities with shopping and doorstep visits; the needs of those living in care homes were brought to the fore, as social care staff fought for access to supplies and medicines. Sadly, many older people, who were living alone or in a care home, have died without being able to sit with a family member, see friends or family in their last days of life, or say goodbye to their loved ones.

**“Loneliness occurs when people’s ability to have meaningful conversations and interactions is inhibited”**  
Age UK (2018)

## Valuing and Including Older People

**Tackling persistent loneliness requires a focus on individuals' experiences, needs and contributions, within a culture of inclusion and involvement:**

- Treating people as individuals – valuing their strengths and recognising their interests.
- Listening to people – making their voice heard.
- Developing confidence and self-esteem – enabling and empowering individuals.
- Supporting people to help themselves and/or be involved in care/support
- Building resilience in communities and individuals.

*(Age UK 2018)*

Reducing social isolation and loneliness are important aspects of a good quality of life. Valuing older people and supporting them to continue to contribute, get involved and engaged with activities and people which matter to them, is one way of promoting their health and wellbeing. Maintaining or establishing good relationships can reduce the impact of social isolation or living alone. Promoting social relationships in older people can promote their health and independence, their self-confidence and self-esteem.

But Christian faith organisations can do far more than simply offering coffee, cake and company– more than just meet the social needs of older people who may be struggling with loneliness. By reaching out to those who are socially isolated, church fellowships can promote the health and wellbeing of those living in the Fourth Age, by recognising and valuing their life achievements and contributions, encouraging and facilitating regular social interactions, enabling them to develop meaningful relationships and hold onto lifelong friendships. Churches can provide activities for group bible discussion and prayer support, individual spiritual and pastoral care and opportunities for biblical teaching and discipleship.



**Outreach to older people in the community and pastoral care within a church can help the fight against loneliness and isolation by:**

- Helping individuals to define personal identity, in the form of relationships
- Enabling individuals to hold onto their achievements and life-successes
- Creating a sense of belonging
- Promoting the sharing of knowledge and experiences to enable a mutual understanding and appreciation of others
- Informing and developing coping strategies and accessing help against loneliness,
- Improving social and functional abilities and increase positive thoughts
- Enabling social support, mental resilience and self-help to cope with the challenges of isolation

## Ageism in churches – Isolating and Excluding Older People

Ageism is a negative and destructive attitude to ageing and older people, and is the most commonly experienced form of prejudice (Age UK 2012). Unfortunately, ageism in society and in churches often goes unnoticed, unrecognised or unchallenged. Ageism reflects a lack of knowledge and understanding of ageing and a fear of older age, leading to negative attitudes and discriminations against older people. It affects how people view older people and their value in society; it also affects how older people see themselves, what they expect and how they view their place in society (Campaign to End Loneliness 2020).

Ageist views discriminate against those living in the Fourth Age, suggesting that ageing is something to avoid at all costs. Such views devalue and dismiss the contribution of elders and focus on the new, updated, modern and young. Ageism and age discrimination manifests in the lack of resources, services and policies to support older people within the community and in society. Despite the Equality Act (2010) making it illegal to discriminate on the basis of age, older people often experience prejudice from society, communities, churches and families, due to inherent ageist views and attitudes.

“Churches and Christian faith organisations can have policies, services and practices which **discriminate against older people**, without being explicitly ageist”

The impact of institutional ageism, seen in society today, is that the needs of older people can be overlooked. Ageism experienced by people living in the Fourth Age is often due to a lack of knowledge and understanding, rather than intentional discrimination – leading to some older people feeling excluded, abandoned and disregarded. Churches and Christian faith organisations can have policies, services and practices which unintentionally discriminate against older people, without being explicitly ageist – simply by excluding older people, not enabling them to access services or making them feel disregarded and ignored. Because it is so negative, excluding and discriminatory, ageism can itself lead to a predicted and inevitable loneliness in old age. Ageism which has been built-in to society's views leads to a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' of loneliness, as people view loneliness as an inevitable part of getting older and experience much higher levels of isolation and loneliness in the Fourth Age.

Despite most churches having declining numbers and ageing memberships, very few have specific ministries, leadership or missions involving or among older people. Rohr (2012) suggested that many churches have a 'first-half-of-life' culture, where the focus of ministry is on children and families, with the contributions and needs of elders being unintentionally ignored. In particular, there is little focus on those in the Fourth Age – the 'forgotten faithful', who may not be able to attend church services, events or groups; whose spiritual and pastoral needs may go unnoticed or unfulfilled in some churches; who may have enormous amounts of knowledge, experience and wisdom but few opportunities to share or use these in ministry or mission. It is interesting to note that churches who hold Family services often focus these on the needs of children and youth members, omitting to consider the older members of grandparents and great-grandparents – this is one example of the churches' unintentional ageism which over the years has excluded and ignored those living in the Fourth Age.



The ageism in society and in churches can result in older people feeling (and being) less valued, less included and less involved. This can lead to older people living in the Fourth Age becoming disengaged with church life, excluded from the mission and ministry of a church and overlooked when it comes to input to activities such as community outreach. There can be an assumption made that older people can or wish to step back from the work of the church. However, in kingdom service there is no such thing as retirement – no time to sit-back; every worker is needed and, in God’s eyes, everyone is valuable and worthwhile. There is no room for ageism in the service of God.

Many church leaders and those leading other Christian faith organisations have grown-up in their faith during an era when there were larger numbers of children, youth and young families in churches. Many ministers undertook their training in a period when the focus of outreach and ministry was on families and young people; few have had any training or knowledge in the specific needs of those living in the Fourth Age, and not many have a passion for exploring new opportunities for mission and ministry among older people. Many churches have youth workers or youth ministers, whose role focusses on the pastoral care, discipleship and outreach to children and young people; few churches have ministers for older people.

Ageism in churches often overlooks the pastoral and spiritual needs of older members, lacks sensitivity towards the changing circumstances and social needs of the Fourth age and ignores their contributions to church life and work. What churches need is to develop more pastoral ministries, which focus on the spiritual needs of people of all ages, to bring together age-groups and counter against the ageism of society today; to better recognise the rights of the very old to be heard and valued. Rather than marginalising, isolating and disempowering those in the Fourth age, the church needs to include these wise elders, recognise their contribution to life and to the fellowship and celebrate their wisdom and understanding.

## The Impact of Loneliness on Health

“Loneliness can often be associated with **poor mental health and reduced mental resilience**, leading to low mood, anxiety, depression and lack of confidence and inability to cope. “

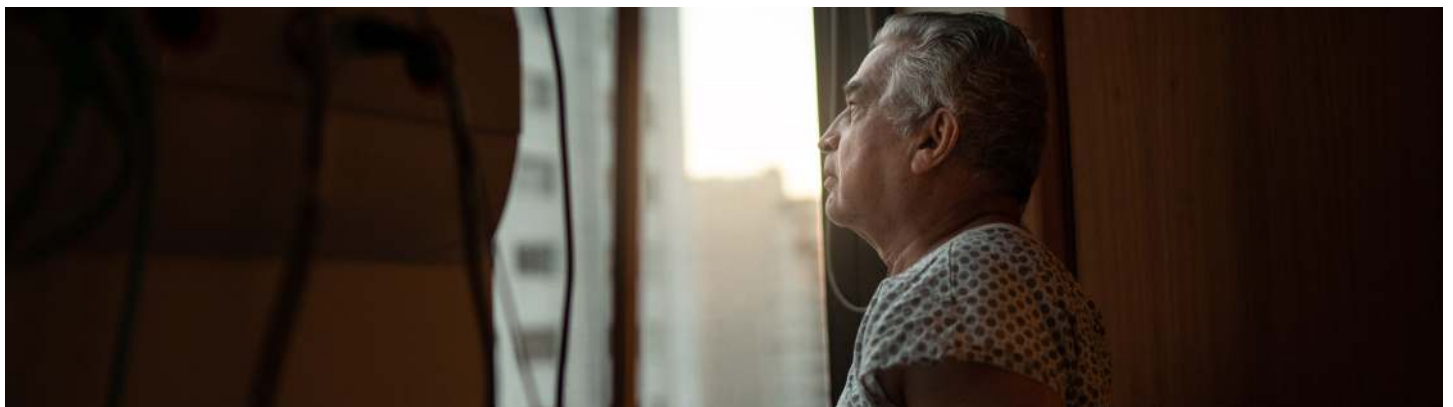
Public Health England (2015) identified clear links between loneliness and poor health, with an increase in cardiovascular disease due to loneliness, equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Social isolation and loneliness are linked with various aspects of health decline due to poor lifestyles, resulting from loneliness – such as reduced physical activity, poor diet, low mood and cognitive decline. Older people living alone are a specific “at risk” group for health decline, due to social isolation, often resulting in difficulties managing long-term conditions, anxiety and depression, declining vision and hearing, increased disability and risk of falls, risks of malnutrition and cognitive impairment.

Loneliness can contribute to poor health, but poor health in itself can cause loneliness – poor health can limit physical activity, functional abilities and social interactions; poor physical health can impact on mood and emotions and contribute to cognitive decline. An older person struggling with social isolation and loneliness can find themselves in a vicious circle, whereby their physical and mental health are affected by their isolation and loneliness, which in turn makes them more socially isolated and alone.

Loneliness can be associated with poor mental health and reduced mental resilience, leading to low mood, anxiety, depression, lack of confidence and inability to cope. The Campaign to End Loneliness (2020) described a “downward spiral” of mental decline caused by loneliness - where the associated low mood and a withdrawal from family and social settings results in making the person more isolated and lonelier, which in turn increases the risks of anxiety and depression.

**Every Mind Matters (NHS 2020) identified the need to maintain positive and strong mental health through activities such as:**

- planning practical support
- staying connected with others (friends, family, etc.) by phone, emails. etc.
- talking about worries and concerns (with a trusted person)
- keeping healthy through diet, exercise and regular sleep
- staying positive (don't stay glued to the news)
- doing enjoyable things and taking time to relax





The links with loneliness and declining mental health has been made more apparent through the Covid-19 pandemic. There is now a much better understanding and appreciation of the impact of loneliness on an individual's physical and mental health and their ability to manage and cope in a crisis (British Red Cross 2021).

### **The impact of loneliness on an older person's health and well-being are well evidenced:**

- Significantly increases the risk of premature death from all causes, similarly to the risks of smoking and obesity.
- Increases the risks of developing dementia by 50%.
- 29% increased risk of heart disease and a 32% increased risk of stroke.
- Higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicide.
- In heart failure patients there is a x4 times increased risk of death, 68% increased risk of hospitalization.

*(The National Academy of Sciences 2020)*

In the early 1970s, a New Zealand politician called Norman Kirk famously quoted what people want in life – “somewhere to live, something to do, someone to love and something to hope for” (BBC News 2015). Older people are no different; reducing loneliness and social isolation are important aspects of a good quality of life, promoting health and wellbeing through:

- Supporting older people to get involved and engaged with activities/ people which matter to them.
- Maintaining or establishing meaningful relationships, to reduce the impact of social isolation, increase positive thoughts and provide a sense of belonging.
- Promoting social relationships in older people, to promote their health and independence, develop coping strategies and share experiences and knowledge.
- Encouraging and facilitating regular social interactions in order to influence behaviours, promote functional abilities and increase social support and self-help to cope with challenges.

Churches have an important role to play in combatting loneliness and hence improving the health and wellbeing of those older people in their communities. Enabling and promoting positive relationships and contacts – whether these are face-to-face, by telephone or internet; improving access of older people to services and support – through transport schemes, disabled access to premises or improving technological access for older people.

Recognising the impact of social isolation and loneliness on the physical, mental and social health of older people, Christian faith organisations can offer opportunities for activities to reduce loneliness as part of their ministry and mission. At an individual level, this may include understanding what older members want, in terms of maintaining and fellowship, getting involved with church and community events and connecting them with local faith or community support groups. It may involve visiting, telephoning or meeting with older people who live alone in the neighbourhood – reaching out to offer friendship and reduce isolation. At a community level, it may involve identifying other church, voluntary organisation or public service groups/ activities/services in the neighbourhood – working with other organisations to provide activities, transport and volunteer support to enable older people to access and engage with a range of social interactions, activities and support, in order to reduce the impact of loneliness.

## Loneliness of Caring

Loneliness of caring is a common experience of those older people who are caring for someone at home. With a sense of love and duty, many older carers struggle with the relentless and increasing demands of providing care for someone at home. Whether the cared-for has a physical disability, Dementia or life-limiting condition, an older carer may struggle with the physical, mental and emotional demands of looking after a loved one on a constant basis – with limited opportunities for their own social interactions, rest and respite from their caring role. Carers UK (2021) describe how carers can live in the “shadow of isolation” – where loneliness is a result of the isolation created by the situation of caring for someone at home.

**For older people, living in the Fourth Age, the role of carer may not be recognised.** The man caring for his wife sees himself as her husband, not her carer; the woman caring for her husband sees this as part of her wedding vows and not a role which is separate from their marriage; the older couple who provide care for their disabled son do so out of love and protection, as they have done for the past decades and may not view themselves as carers.



Christian faith organisations can make themselves and their activities more accessible to older people who may have a caring role, inviting both the carer and cared-for to events and services. Pastoral care can be offered to meet the needs of both carer and cared-for – recognising that for the carer simply having time away to do other things, have time on their own or with someone else is a real luxury. Just as local councils and GP practices are required to identify those people who are carers, in order to assess and meet the health, social and financial impacts of being a carer, Churches should identify those people in their membership who may be carers, in order to identify and support the spiritual and pastoral needs of those providing on-going care – particularly where the carers are themselves living in the Fourth age and may have their own health and social needs (see also section on the Embracing Age scheme Carers Connected).

## Those who are Bereaved

Grief often opens the door to loneliness (Campaign to End Loneliness 2021), bringing physical, social and emotional isolation at a time which is already difficult to bear. For older people, bereavement can become a frequent event – bringing a feeling of being left behind, deserted or abandoned. Grief from bereavement is not made any easier simply through experience. Indeed, the loss associated with multiple bereavements can often be compounded, making the intensity of grief even greater and harder to bear.

For people living in the Fourth age, bereavement can be one of a series of losses experienced in recent years – loss of employment/profession, loss of health, loss of family, loss of roles. For some it may be a precursor to new losses – loss of soul mate and life partner, loss of friends and social circle, loss of independence and confidence, loss of home. Just because these losses may be predicted, or in some cases inevitable, does not make them any easier to accept.

Churches and other Christian faith organisations can provide great support to older people facing grief through bereavement. Helping people talk about their loss, celebrate life, have the opportunity to vent feelings, ask questions and be supported with some of the practicalities of life. For those with a Christian faith, the church may help them see the love of Jesus, feel the peace of the Holy Spirit and hold onto the hope of the resurrection.

Providing opportunities for the bereaved to talk and work through these natural and common feelings of bereavement, churches can support individuals through the difficult and sometimes overwhelming journey of grief; helping them work through these feelings, to deal with their loss and grief without being left feeling isolated and lonely.

### **Being widowed or recently bereaved is a major risk factor for loneliness (Age UK 2015). Common feelings following the death of a loved one are:**

- Fear and anxiety – worrying about the future, how to cope with the ‘now’.
- Anger and frustration – feeling abandoned, asking ‘why?’.
- Guilt – being self-critical, focusing on negative thoughts.
- Depression and despair – feelings of sadness and loss of hope.
- Loneliness – due to the isolation and loss.



## Isolated Communities

Older people may be isolated in the community in which they live. Rural villages may be geographically isolated, have limited transportation, with poor internet connections, and fewer social and health services/groups/networks. Inner city communities may have poor housing, poverty and deprivation, all of which are factors which may contribute to loneliness. Churches have often been part of the local community support for many years – for some areas, the church and church hall are the hub of a community and the only communal facility in the area.

Before the introduction of state health and social care services, churches fulfilled an important role in supporting and providing for the poor, disabled and housebound. As families and households have become more mobile, this role of the church within local communities may have dwindled; many church members travel from other neighbourhoods and some churches have less contacts and relevance for people living locally. However, it is important that churches remember the important roles of pastoring and providing for the local community – whether in providing physical resources or offering pastoral and spiritual care to those living in the neighbourhood.

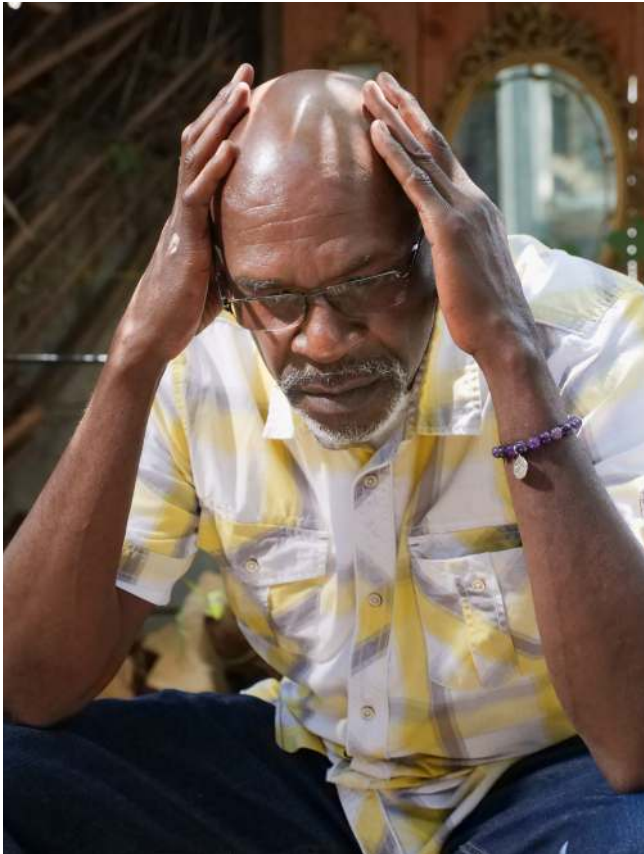
Within local communities, there may be individuals or smaller groups of people who themselves are isolated from the neighbourhood, e.g. those from ethnic minority groups, people with learning disabilities, immigrant families, asylum seekers. For such marginalised groups, isolation may be increased through lack of language, other difficulties with communication, lack of understanding or awareness of the local culture or cultural norms and social exclusion, barriers or prejudices.

Wherever older people are living and from wherever they have come, the local church can be a great resource and opportunity to reduce isolation and combat loneliness – helping to bring people together, reaching out to individuals in their own homes and offering a sense of community. Remembering to cater for potential reduced mobility, eye-sight, cognitive function and strength of individuals, churches can provide events and services which can create a sense of belonging, contribution and commitment amongst older people, who may otherwise spend every day on their own.

Working in partnership with other local and national organisations, churches can support existing schemes and develop new projects, relevant to the local community, which may support and meet the needs of local people, with support of organisations such as Redeeming Our Communities (ROC), Linking Lives UK, Friends of the Elderly and Re-engage.



## Loneliness of Dementia



Dementia currently affects around **850,000** people in the UK (Alzheimer's Society 2018)

Dementia currently affects around 850,000 people in the UK (Alzheimer's Society 2018) and for older people living in the Fourth Age, the risk of Dementia is 1 in 5. With an ageing population in society and in our churches, we are likely to see increasing numbers of people living with Dementia and caring for people with Dementia.

The effects of Dementia can themselves lead to isolation – of the person with Dementia and their carer. Social situations become difficult, everyday activities become a challenge and an individual's behaviour, communication and emotions can make attending events or mixing with others very hard. People with Dementia can experience social difficulties related to their memory loss, language difficulties, disorientation and mood changes. They or their carers can feel embarrassed and frustrated by their cognitive decline, which may or may not also impact on their physical abilities. Slowly, the person with Dementia begins to disengage, to withdraw and become isolated – and often their carers do too. Our society frequently demands high levels of cognitive functioning – when a person with Dementia can no longer participate in social interactions, cope with complex situations or manage unexpected events, they begin to become overlooked, forgotten or ignored; they are made to feel less important, not valued or even a nuisance.

Churches can help people with Dementia and their families by keeping them involved and informed; helping them feel part of the fellowship and community. Becoming a Dementia-friendly church will broaden the access and appeal of a church to anyone with mental health problems, cognitive impairment or learning difficulties. Making church activities and events Dementia-inclusive will help people with Dementia feel valued and engaged – providing support and help to remain involved and socially included – rather than becoming isolated and excluded.

Raising awareness of the needs of people with Dementia, within the church membership and local community, is one way of combatting loneliness and isolation for people with Dementia and their carers – as a great deal of exclusion of people with Dementia is due to ignorance, fear and a lack of understanding of the condition and how best to help the person living with Dementia to remain as active, involved and included as they wish.

## Loneliness in Care

Those living in the Fourth age represent over half the population of care home residents, with nearly 15% of those aged 85 years or over living in long-term care (Age UK 2019). Whilst there may be rural areas without any local care homes, most towns and cities will have a range of homes providing residential, nursing, dementia and other specialist care on a 24-hour basis. Most churches will have at least one care home in its neighbourhood and many will have church members now residing in a care home.

Links and relationships between churches and care homes are limited – with perhaps an annual carol service, monthly communion and the occasional call upon the minister at the death of a resident; few people living in a care home feel part of the local church. Few members of a church have set foot inside a care home. Yet, as neighbouring institutions, churches and care homes have a great potential to work together, to the benefit of those living in care homes and those worshipping in churches.

For some older people, living in a care home increases their isolation and loneliness. They may have had to move to a new area, be further away from their family and friends and not be able to get out and about to visit and maintain social contacts. Their health needs may be such that they may be limited to the care home, not able to join in with social or family events or have the means to attend church services or activities. Moving into a care home is a major life-changing decision and people often experience a period of loss and grief, as they adjust to living in an institutional setting, which adds to the feelings of isolation and loneliness.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, care home residents were unable to have visitors to the home for many months, they were not allowed to leave the home for social visits and were often limited in their interactions within the home. Where there were cases of the virus within the home, or if a resident had to attend a hospital or health clinic, residents would need to isolate further within the home, being confined to their room for many days. This resulted in long-term loneliness and in some cases depression and despair – as some people living in care homes felt abandoned and forgotten.



Church members who move into a care home, may feel a sense of loss from the fellowship – some feel abandoned and forgotten at a time when they have great need for spiritual support from the church membership or leaders. By encouraging and facilitating the attendance of those living in care homes, to church services, church meetings and events, the church can help the person still feel part of the church, supported through prayer

and worship and valued as a church member. Visiting the church member who is not able to leave the care home, to bring them news of the church, share prayer news, bible study, etc. can help them to still feel part of the fellowship and not forgotten or abandoned by the church.

Care homes are required by regulators and commissioners to provide care which meets the personalised and holistic needs of residents; this includes social, spiritual and pastoral care. Care homes are also required to demonstrate engagement with their local community and

provide opportunities for residents to be involved in community activities outside of the care home. Through regular contact and engagement, the development of personal relationships and involvement with local churches, care homes can make meaningful, significant and lasting links with the local community and help residents to feel included and part of the local neighbourhood.

Some care homes struggle to understand the concept of spiritual care and find it hard to deliver care which meets the spiritual and pastoral needs of their residents. Through regular pastoral visiting, the delivery of bespoke services or worship, provision of communion, small group bible study or prayers, churches can support a care home to meet the spiritual and pastoral needs of residents and form meaningful relationships with people within the local community.

### **The sorts of things churches and Christian faith organisations can do to support the local care home include:**

- Develop good relationships with the care home manager, activities co-ordinator and other staff.
- Offer to provide bespoke and relevant services of worship to those residents interested in church.
- Offer short carol services and nativity plays to care home residents.
- Invite care home residents and staff to social events run by the church.
- Facilitate church attendance (transport help and personal support) of those residents wishing and able to attend worship, church meetings or events.
- Set up regular (weekly) pastoral visiting by appropriate pastoral care volunteers.
- Encourage church members to join in with care home open events such as garden parties, Christmas parties.
- Identify from care home staff any resident who needs individual visiting, communion, prayer.
- Give small gifts, flowers, cards to individual residents – in collaboration with care home staff.

### **There are several national schemes to promote the pastoral & spiritual support of people living in Care homes:**

- Care Home Friends is a scheme run by Embracing Age, which supports churches to make links with local care homes and recruits and trains volunteers to offer visiting and befriending to residents (see page 31).
- Anna Chaplaincy promotes support of local churches with regular visiting of residents in care homes and the provision of small religious services to offer spiritual and pastoral support to those living in care homes (see page 25).
- The Methodist Homes Association employ Care Home Chaplains who regularly visit residents in care homes, building up relationships and getting to know the life experiences and interests of residents, in order to help meet the spiritual and pastoral needs of those living in care homes ([www.mha.org.uk](http://www.mha.org.uk)).
- PARCHE (Pastoral Action in Residential Care Homes for the Elderly) is a church-based ministry of Christian teams who visit care homes to offer fellowship, comfort, bible-teaching, communion and friendship to the elderly people living in care homes ([www.parche.org.uk](http://www.parche.org.uk)).

## Mission and ministry to combat loneliness - a spiritual and pastoral approach

Providing pastoral support to older people who may be struggling with loneliness in later life creates opportunities for mission and ministry for Christian faith organisations. There is a huge potential for mission amongst older people – reaching out to spread the good news of the Gospel to older people who have no faith, but for whom there may be less time to respond to the Gospel message. Many older people who have had little or no contact with churches during their younger years may be in a position to listen, reflect, believe and accept the love of Jesus in their Fourth age. At a time in their life with fewer pressures, demands and expectations than their youth, middle age and even early retirement, those living in their Fourth age may be able to re-evaluate their own life; they may be in a position re-set their priorities and commitments, be less materialistic and self-centred and more appreciative of spiritual guidance, acceptance of pastoral ministry and open to the message of the gospel.

Churches play an important role in supporting older people with the spirituality of ageing. Enabling and encouraging those in the Fourth age to reflect and rejoice; to let go of issues, relationships or difficulties which may have caused pain in the past. Prayer and pastoral care to those in later life are important aspects of the spiritual support older people need. So too is fellowship, with praise and thanksgiving - to celebrate life in the Fourth age and be thankful. Churches can also encourage and enable older people to focus on the positive gifts of later life and provide opportunities for spiritual healing from anything in life which may have caused hurt or damage.

Meeting the spiritual and pastoral needs of older people is a good way to offer the love of Jesus and share the messages of the Gospel. Many people living in the Fourth age may have been to Sunday school as a child, attended church for festivals and ceremonies and have a basic knowledge of the Bible and psalms. However, some may never had had the opportunity to really hear the Gospel or consider a personal relationship with God. Being invited to a church activity, service or group may be the only invitation an older person receives to a social engagement – learning about and being introduced to Jesus may be the greatest opportunity an older person receives to make the greatest of friends.

A study by Rote et al. (2013) found that “religious attendance was associated with higher levels of social integration and social support ....results suggest that involvement in religious institutions may protect against loneliness in later life by integrating older adults into larger and more supportive social networks”. The National Academies of Sciences (2020) also found that those with involvement in religious activities held strong religious beliefs, and active members of religious groups felt less lonely than those without any involvement in faith organisations.

The Covid-19 pandemic also brought opportunities for churches and other Christian faith organisations to step-up, to recognise the need for those in their communities – including older people. The lockdown measures helped people appreciate what it is like to go for many days without seeing another person, to manage without the convenience of a car or access to a large supermarket and only be able to make contact with family through the phone or internet. The lockdown measures also enabled churches and other Christian faith organisations to think differently about how they work, consider their priorities and recognise the importance of personal pastoral work.



For older people living alone or struggling with loneliness, Christian faith organisations have an important role to play in the development of local communities to support older people living alone, those in poor housing or living in care homes, in order to reduce the impact of loneliness - to enable community support and involvement to reduce the impact of social isolation and loneliness in older people. Churches are often involved in outreach visiting, social clubs and activities and are important in the creation of a sense of belonging and purpose. In addition to providing support, social contact and purposeful activity to those living in the Fourth Age, churches have huge opportunities for mission and ministry; for evangelism and kingdom-building to the lonely and isolated older people in the community.

**Through reaching out to contact and help in the battle against loneliness for lonely older people, Christian faith organisations can show the love of Jesus to those with little or no faith by:**

- Encouraging and enabling volunteers to help lonely older people
- Joining with other organisations to combat loneliness among older people
- Sharing resources (e.g volunteers, buildings, facilities), with community organisations and local businesses to help support lonely older people
- Being 'eyes on the ground' to spot possible loneliness amongst older people amongst church members and know where they could get help.

(Age UK 2016)

Churches can be part of the infrastructure which helps to create communities which are welcoming, social, safe and supporting; they can be important providers of social events, food distribution, informal gatherings and social support. But tackling loneliness requires more than simply providing social activities and somewhere to go. The Campaign to End Loneliness (2020) stated that tackling loneliness involves

".... more than simply promoting opportunities for people to come together...it needs to move towards understanding and addressing how loneliness affects how people think and feel".

**They recommend a psychological approach, which focuses as much on the wider community as it does individuals who maybe facing loneliness. This includes:**

- Raising awareness of negative thoughts and feelings associated with loneliness
- Understanding how behaviours and attitudes may increase loneliness
- Knowing how to challenge and change negative attitudes and behaviours
- Developing positive feelings and attitudes
- Changing behaviours of individuals, families, neighbourhoods
- Recognising that social activity and engagement can reduce loneliness

(Campaign to End Loneliness 2020)

## Anna Chaplaincy for Older People - 'Offering spiritual care in later life'



Anna Chaplaincy is a timely response to our rapidly ageing population and the complex pastoral needs of older people, many of whom describe themselves as lonely.

Anna Chaplains are named after the widow Anna, who appears with Simeon in Luke's Gospel. Both are good role models of faithful, expectant, hopeful, older people. They are skilled listeners who help accompany people finding life hard in their later years, as well as being a voice for some who might feel they are becoming invisible as they age. Anna Chaplains are companions on the journey, with advice to offer on the art of ageing well.

### Counter cultural

An Anna Chaplain is someone who celebrates old age, in a society which often tends to overlook and denigrate people of advanced years. This is counter-cultural work, in a society which prizes autonomy, youth, beauty and productivity so highly.

The Anna Chaplain can be a friend to someone who is lonely; a key link for the bereaved, someone who is isolated, and those feeling alone. They can signpost what help is on offer in any given context, for example for a husband or wife caring for their spouse living with Dementia.

### How did it start?

Former broadcaster, Debbie Thrower, became the first Anna chaplain in Alton, Hampshire, in 2010. Anglicans and Methodists in Alton had created the post seeking someone who would, as she says, 'spot the gaps in existing provision and raise the whole standard of good practice of ministry among older people' in their area. Four years of developing a suitable model and the Anna Chaplaincy was ready to be replicated elsewhere.

To that end, Anna Chaplaincy became part of Bible Reading Fellowship, BRF, in 2014. It was hoped it could emulate some of the success of Messy Church, another BRF initiative, which had spread nationally and internationally in the previous decade.

Work began on developing Anna Chaplaincy across the UK and in September 2021 there were 172 Anna Chaplains for Older People and others in equivalent roles - such as Older People's Pastor, or Director of Older People's Ministry - in the network nationally. Anna Chaplains are in cities, towns and villages as far afield as Devon and Kent, the Midlands, Northumbria and Cumbria, as well as in the very north of Scotland and even in Orkney! The tally of Anna Chaplains is rising fast.

### More churches are recruiting Anna Chaplains

As the implications of an ageing population hit home, churches are increasingly wanting to 'up their game' pastorally among this age group. They are realising the benefits of valuing older congregation members as well as reaching out to others in their later years beyond church, out in the wider community. The name 'Anna' means gift or grace, and Anna Chaplaincy is a gracious gift from the church.

There are men as well as women in the network; some are paid, though the majority are volunteers. Each Anna Chaplain is sent out from a church that prays for them. Whichever church the chaplain is based in signs a 'Head Licence Agreement' with Bible Reading Fellowship, BRF, to use the trademarked name. Each Anna Chaplain is thus appointed and authorised by and accountable to their local church (or group of 'Churches Together').

## How does it look in practice?

Anna Chaplains work ecumenically and are community-based. They soon find themselves becoming an advocate and champion of issues relevant to older people in the wider community. They may collaborate with local authorities, liaise with social workers, be invited to contribute to Care Quality Commission (CQC) reports on care facilities etc. They are always reaching out to people of strong, little or no faith at all. A recent survey showed 47 per cent of network members' encounters were with people who were not churchgoers (Anna Chaplaincy 2021). Anna Chaplaincy is never about proselytising, converting people. Anna Chaplains are motivated by their own Christian faith and proudly bear the name of the biblical figure Anna, but they meet people where they are and try to help in whatever ways they can.

Anna Chaplaincy training draws the distinction between religious care and spiritual care: 'Religious care is given in the context of the shared religious beliefs, values, liturgies and lifestyle of a faith community; Spiritual care is a one-to-one relationship, person-centred and makes no assumptions about personal conviction or life orientation. Spiritual care is not necessarily religious; religious care, at its best, should always be spiritual.' (The Scottish Executive, Health Department Directorate of Nursing)

'In retrospect', says Debbie Thrower, 'I'm grateful that the Anglican and Methodist Churches in Alton had the foresight to conceive such an enlightened way of supporting, not just their own congregations, but the ever-growing cohort of people over the age of 65 in their community.'

'It's worth stressing that Anna Chaplains are also there to draw alongside carers (whether relatives or paid professional carers). It is not just work with people in older age groups, far from it. Every person in need of support is someone's Mum, Dad or grandmother, grandfather, or



other relative or friend. Anna Chaplains often foster good relations with local primary schools too and generate visits and projects that tie in with care homes and sheltered accommodation.'

Anna Chaplain Sue Yeo, from St Martin's Church in Maidstone, offers spiritual care to residents in care homes in the parish. When the pandemic prevented her from visiting in person, she began recording services and delivering them on DVD. For Mothering Sunday 2021, she invited local primary school children to produce artwork and poems on the theme of Spring, a time of hope. The children's work was delivered with the DVD and displayed in the care homes for residents to enjoy, bringing the outside world in. She commented, 'Some of the children have a grandparent in a nursing or residential home, and I am sure being able to express their emotions in their poetry was important to them.'

'From the outset,' states Debbie Thrower, 'I was convinced Anna Chaplains could be just as effective in rural, or inner-city settings, as in a small market town. That has proved to be the case, with Anna Chaplains now in the countryside, seaside resorts and urban environments.'

## **Combatting loneliness**

Anna Chaplaincy is part of the coalition, Christians Together Against Loneliness, CTAL.

Anna Friends Sarah Griffiths and Shirley Hayes live in the village of Weald, in Kent. In normal times, Sarah organises regular 'golden oldie' film screenings at St George's Church, aimed at people with Dementia and their carers. Shirley is involved with a CAMEO (Come and Meet Each Other) group for older people in the village. During the pandemic, Sarah and Shirley made weekly phone calls to many older people who lived alone and risked being isolated during lockdown. Sarah became friendly with an older woman who had only recently moved to Weald when Covid-19 struck. It was a joy when they were finally able to meet in person on the village green, as restrictions eased. With a team from St George's, Shirley arranged for goodie bags to be delivered to the homes of older people, with cream teas and other delights!

## **Getting the network together**

As well as regular online get-togethers and specialist sessions on key aspects of Anna ministry such as prayer, care home worship and the variation on Messy Church that is specially for older people – Messy Vintage - the Anna Chaplaincy network meets as a whole each autumn. Meeting in this way is of great support to the network members who may be in far-flung parts of the UK, some distance from each other. 'It's good fun for colleagues to meet in this way and the decibel level can be very high at times!' added Debbie.

Anna Chaplain Beverley Moore began her ministry at Kendal Parish Church as a dementia enabler, one of a team spanning the county which was created through Churches Together in Cumbria. The regular Kendal Tea Service, hosted by the parish church and aimed at people living with dementia, became a firm favourite with people living in their own homes as well as care home residents in the town. During the pandemic, Beverley has created online services with accompanying service sheets. She has often filmed outdoors in the beautiful Lake District scenery, to bring something of the stunning countryside to older people stuck inside their homes during lockdown.

One of the most exciting aspects of Anna Chaplaincy is the way in which so many newly-retired people (and older) have found a renewed sense of purpose themselves by discerning a vocation to this ministry – even as lay people who have had very varied working and home-making backgrounds. While some Anna Chaplains are in their 20s and 30s, one of the most admirable features of this ministry is that so many recruits are people in their 60s and 70s (80s even) who are energised to discover a fresh purpose to life through this work in their own later years.

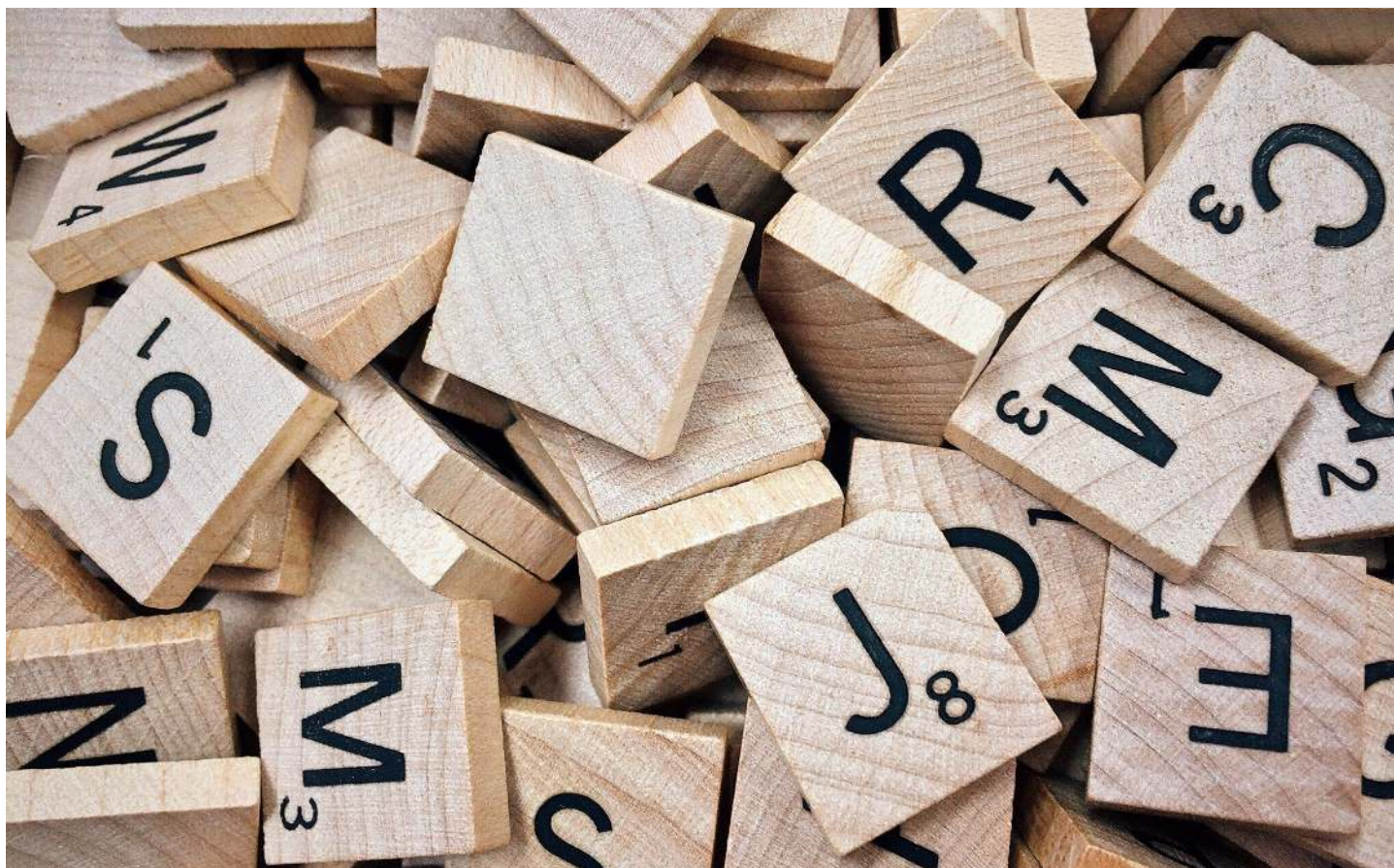
## How does a church get an Anna Chaplain?

Churches recruit and manage their own Anna Chaplains, whether paid or voluntary. As a first step, a church, or group of churches, might join an online 'Introduction to Anna Chaplaincy' session where the BRF team sets out exactly what is involved. A church may then set up a small steering group, preferably together with representatives from several denominations across the community. Some churches recruit a paid coordinator to map out what is already happening in terms of ministry among older people. This work never begins in a vacuum. A team of fundraisers is a welcome addition to any local effort to ensure a steady income stream and also to foster a sense of wider ownership of whoever is then appointed as the local Anna Chaplain.

Every Anna Chaplain, paid or voluntary, is line-managed and should be supervised. Typically, an Anna Chaplain offers a minimum of one day a week to the task. The chaplain has a strategic role spotting gaps in provision, leading worship in care homes where none existed before, for example, and in managing volunteers. Some of these volunteers may become known as Anna Friends. A recent survey showed Anna Chaplains have an average of eight such volunteers working alongside them.

Anna Chaplains often act as catalysts for all sorts of new ideas; intergenerational projects with local schools; pioneering Memory Cafes; or founding Carers' and Bereavement Support Groups.

To find out more visit <https://www.annachaplaincy.org.uk>  
Contact Anna Chaplaincy at [annachaplaincy@brf.org.uk](mailto:annachaplaincy@brf.org.uk)



## Linking Lives UK - Values of Befriending



**LINKING LIVES UK**

Befriending is widely recognised as ‘a relationship between two or more individuals which is initiated, supported, and monitored. Ideally the relationship is non-judgemental, mutual, purposeful, and there is a commitment over time.’ Relationship is at the heart of befriending and creating an environment of trust and mutual respect where the relationship can blossom is key. Making a commitment of time each week, and over the months, is an intrinsic value of befriending and, in this way, differs to casual contact with acquaintances. It is this commitment that helps to build the fabric of the friendship and, over time, makes such an incredible difference to one, if not both, of the people involved.

**“I love having my befriender call me; we chat for ages and put the World to rights.”**

*Link Friend (Client)*

Linking Lives UK is a Christian befriending charity which has equipped and enabled over 70 churches across the UK so far to set up befriending schemes as part of their engagement in their local communities. This is done through providing a ready-to-use framework for setting up, preparing and running a befriending scheme.

Before the 2020 lockdown, Linking Lives befriending always took the form of home visiting – where a volunteer would make regular visits to a client’s (Link Friend) home, with the aim of purely building friendship through conversation and shared activities in the home. In response to the pandemic, Linking Lives recognised that demand for befriending would continue, if not increase, over the following months, and so created a new model called ‘Two’s Company’ – a telephone befriending tool for churches wanting to respond to the desperate issue of loneliness in their communities.



Linking Lives work with churches, by firstly raising the issue of loneliness among church members and leaders alike. This is done in various ways such as through webinars, information on the Linking Lives website and short films or presentations. Linking Lives offers their befriending model as one way to address loneliness among local communities, and this is realised in a partnership between the local church and Linking Lives.

In this partnership, Linking Lives provides the framework, training and guidance needed for a local church to set up their own Two’s Company befriending project, along with templates for working, opportunities for networking, IT services and telephone support. In response to this, the local church agrees to initiate and run their own Two’s Company befriending project. They agree to do this in a professional way (including ensuring the safe recruitment of volunteers) and to uphold the values of Linking Lives in their dealings with volunteers, Link Friends and the wider community.

Using the Linking Lives framework, the coordinator of a local project is trained in all aspects of the process, including how to recruit volunteers safely, where to go to find referrals, how to

match volunteers and those referred, and how to provide ongoing support and monitoring once befriending relationships are established.

Referrals are encouraged from local agencies who are provided with clear guidelines of who the scheme is for and who may not be suitable. These may include 'social prescribers' who are in contact with many people who would benefit from non-medicinal treatment, taking a holistic approach to people's health and wellbeing. They connect people to community groups and statutory services for practical and emotional support.

**"I was shocked at how few services there were for isolated and lonely people here 7 years ago. Having a befriending service, which has adapted so quickly to the changing times, has meant so much to those of us who agonise about getting our clients the support/ caring environment/listening ear - just everything that your service is now able to offer."**

*Social Prescriber*

Perhaps the value of befriending is most clearly seen up close, through the lens of an individual. One such individual is Alec\*: Before Covid-19 arrived in the UK, Alec had been able to get out and about. However, when the pandemic hit, he had to start shielding due to medical reasons.

This left him feeling isolated and cut off from the outside world. He was referred into the Linking Lives scheme through the local social prescriber. After an initial phone assessment, the Linking Lives Coordinator paired him with one of the volunteer befrienders and he started receiving regular calls. Alec says - "It's so nice to have someone to talk to and listen to me. If I didn't have my befriender and the befriending scheme I would be stranded without any hope".

Elizabeth\* was also very active before Covid-19. However, because of lockdown her world closed in on her. She is an articulate and well-educated lady. She is happy to be alone but not being lonely. "The chats have helped her in ways that are not easily spoken about. Phone conversations ignite her look on life and allow her acquired knowledge be passed on." (Befriender).

As one project Coordinator states, "Volunteers have said they feel that the telephone ministry is a God-send to support the lonely. Link Friends have said they are grateful for this service and appreciate the fact that someone is reaching out to them through this meaningful connection."

*For more information visit: <https://linkinglives.uk/>*

*(\* Names changed)*

## Embracing Age – working to value, support and involve older people



Embracing Age is a Christian charity working towards a world where older people are valued, connected and full of hope; by combatting loneliness, mobilising volunteers, equipping churches and speaking out. They help churches reach out to people who are often overlooked, particularly care home residents and family carers through Care Home Friends and Carers Connected projects.

### Care Home Friends

It is known that older people in care homes are twice as likely to experience loneliness as those living in the community. Staff at Embracing Age are sometimes asked why this is, when care home residents are surrounded by others. But it is easy to feel alone in a crowd; which can be the worst sort of loneliness. Care home residents may not have anything in common with each other; it's not easy to start making new friends and building new relationships; some residents may have communication challenges, with poor hearing, sight, speech or memory problems. Many churches already run services in care homes, but often see so much need which they feel inadequate to address. Embracing Age helps churches to recruit and train volunteers from across the ages, to befriend care home residents. This might involve simply chatting or playing a board game, going for a walk, gardening, reading aloud or anything that a resident enjoys; it enables the building of meaningful connection. It's amazing how such simple acts can have such a huge impact in the lives of care home residents, and volunteers are often surprised by how much they receive from the experience too.

*Further information can be found through [www.carehomefriends.org.uk](http://www.carehomefriends.org.uk), or by contacting Embracing Age by email - [info@embracingage.org.uk](mailto:info@embracingage.org.uk)*

### Carers Connected

One in eight adults in the UK has a caring role, and an estimated one in three people will have a caring role for a person living with dementia. Thus, most churches are likely to have carers in their congregation. Caring for a loved one is a privilege, but it can also be isolating and exhausting. Carers may struggle with guilt, anxiety over difficult decisions, anger, stress, financial difficulty or loneliness, with few places to turn for support, and prayer. Nationally, 80% of carers say they feel lonely or isolated, and 61% have suffered physical ill health as a result of caring. Christian carers can find themselves isolated from their church community, unable to attend, due to the needs & disabilities of the cared-for person.

With these things in mind, and with the advances in video-calling technology, Embracing Age set up Carers Connected – with a weekly zoom meeting to carers from across the country, providing an opportunity to chat and pray together. Each zoom meeting is hosted by a facilitator, creating a relaxed and friendly environment for carers to get to know one another. It's been described as a gentle welcoming oasis in their week. Carers feel they can talk and pray with other carers more comfortably than with Christians in their churches, as there's an unspoken, shared understanding of the pressures and experiences involved in caring. One carer explained "It's a unique forum to share vulnerably our feelings and stresses, and to encourage and pray for each other in our caring roles. It's great to chat, unwind and even laugh together."

*New carers are welcome to join Carers Connected. Simply email [info@embracingage.org.uk](mailto:info@embracingage.org.uk)*



## Love Southampton: An example of using your Talents



Love Southampton is a collaboration of Christian Churches and charitable organisations within the Southampton area, working together to support those most in need, with a strap line of 'Through the Church for the City'. It operates to encourage coordination between groups working on the same issues to maximise the use of resources and to ensure as many people are reached as possible.

An example of the success of the collaboration of churches is Charlotte's story. During the middle of the Covid 19 lockdown in 2020, Charlotte approached Love Southampton as she wanted to help, but she did not know how; she thought she did not have any skills that could be of any value or use. She was a professional florist by trade and she wanted to help, but simply did not know what she could offer. Whilst talking about the various things which Love Southampton had been organising and co-ordinating, she came up with the idea of making gifts of floral bouquets. She thought she would be able to persuade the wholesale florists to give her some flowers for free and she could use her time and skills to make the bouquets if they could be used. It was agreed that if she could make 10 to 20 bouquets per week, these could be offered to local churches; they could be personally delivered as gifts to lonely older people in the community. The responses were simply astounding. It was decided to initially visit older residents living in sheltered or warden assisted flats. Residents were stunned. Many were in floods of tears as they received the bouquet on their doorstep. Many had not had a visitor for months - some had not received a gift for years.

The simple act of offering bouquets of flowers made by Charlotte, who initially felt she did not have any skills to offer Love Southampton, broke down barriers, built relationships and saw churches working together; four different churches took part, one church every week on a monthly rota to take the flowers out to lonely isolated older people in the community. But it did not stop there; the church visitors were so bowled over by the impact of their actions of delivering flowers, that they decided to connect-up with the foodbanks within the city - so that in between the monthly visits with flowers, they could visit with other small gifts of food and other supplies. At the time of writing this section, the pandemic lock-down measures are shortly to move into the next phase, allowing up to 6 people to meet in somebody's house. Southampton has many older people who cannot wait to invite their new friends, the "flower visitors", into their homes for a cup of tea.



Churches often spend a great deal of time thinking of their 'Mission Strategy' and how they can find new members. Charlotte's story reminds us that simply offering your talents and skills is a way to start change. Whatever you think of your own skills and abilities, putting them to use will often see amazing results. Loneliness and isolation have such a devastating impact, particularly on older people, yet such small acts of kindness can and do bring a massive response. Churches and church members can work together to identify practical ways to help relieve loneliness and isolation in the local community, even in the middle of

a pandemic. Please use this guidance and advice found within it to think and plan for a way to reach out even more effectively to the marginalised in your communities and may you too be as surprised and delighted as those serving through Love Southampton.

For more information visit: <https://www.lovesouthampton.org.uk>

## Faith in Later Life



Faith in Later Life started out in 2017 and is on a mission to inspire and equip Christians to reach, serve and empower older people in every community through the local church.

### Why

Faith in Later Life exists to shine a light on older Christians, to encourage and affirm them, and to encourage Christians in sharing the love of Jesus with older people in the wider community, many of whom are lonely and isolated. God didn't create older age by accident, quite the opposite, and the Bible is full of older heroes of the faith (Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Daniel, Anna, Simeon - the list is endless). And the Bible also tells us in Psalm 92 that older believers will flourish and still bear fruit in old age. The Church is intergenerational by design, we need our older saints in our midst, they have much they can teach us, and a unique perspective only age can bring.

### How

The Faith in Later Life website provides links to 100s of resources relating to older age, which are useful for church communities and individuals alike. We bring all these resources into one place on our website, making it easier than spending time searching online. And 60% are free to download. We also provide advice and guidance, as well as a database of UK churches that hold community-focused activities for older people.

Lastly, we host a community of 'Church Champions' at more than 450 churches across the UK (and a few beyond), a growing network of Christians who are passionate about older people or involved in ministries with older people. We encourage and equip them with resources, support, and a monthly Zoom training seminar. It is all free- maybe you want to join us? Do visit our website for more.

**"Your resources are of a very high standard and have encouraged me to work within the third and fourth age members of my congregation"**

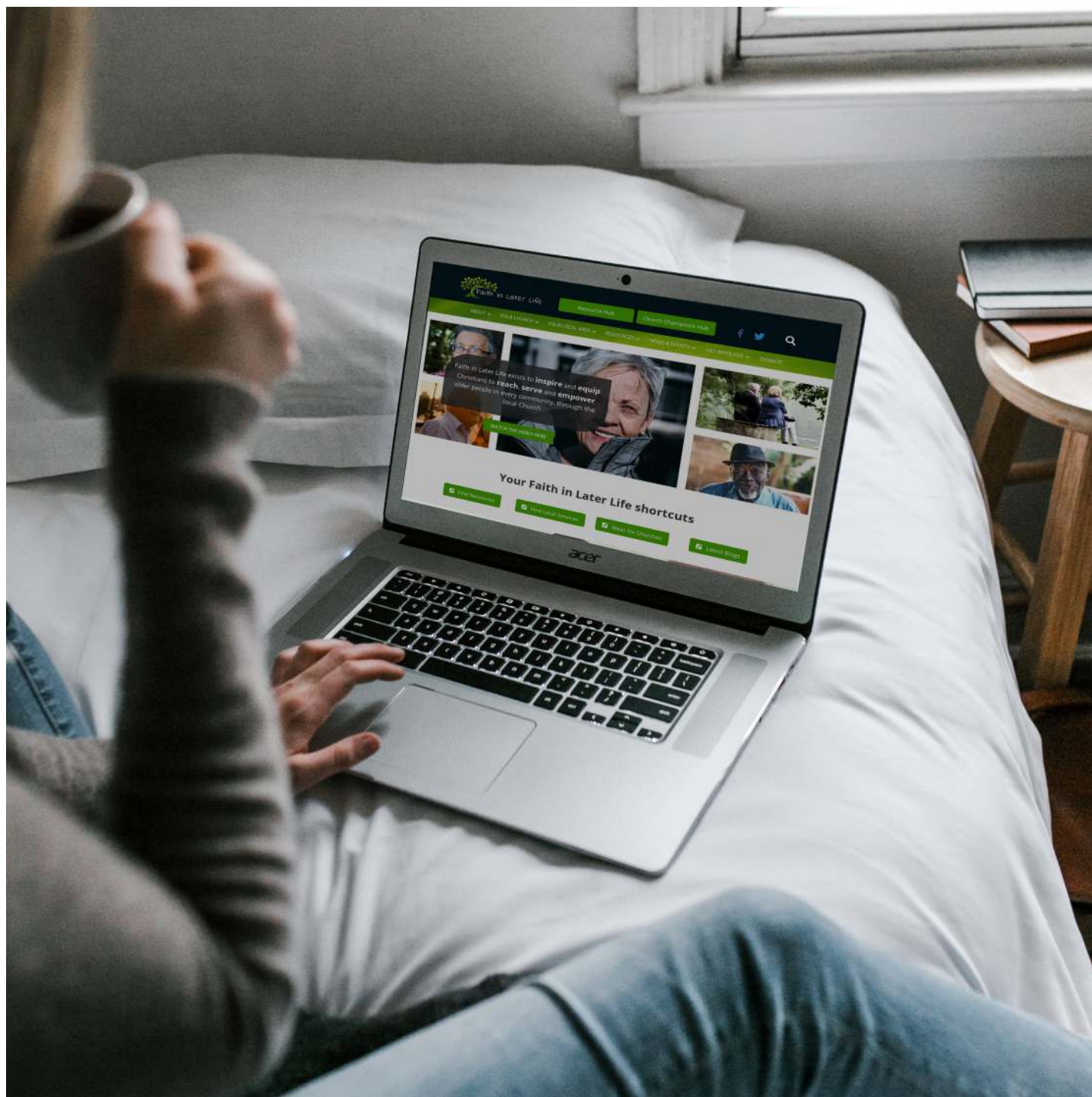
*Faith in Later Life supporter*



## Against Loneliness

Faith in Later Life works collaboratively with other Christian organisations and is part of a coalition of such organisations that sit under the banner of 'Christians Together Against Loneliness', journeying together, aware that we can do more in partnership than we can alone. Another effective partnership Faith in Later Life is involved in is the 'Daily Hope' telephone line. Founded by Faith in Later Life, the Church of England, and a group from Holy Trinity Church in Claygate, the Daily Hope line was set up towards the beginning of the pandemic to provide spiritual support to older people who couldn't participate in online church. With prayers, hymns, reflections and even chair exercises on the phone and help with sleep, the Daily Hope line has provided a lifeline to many, and has seen over 500,000 calls made, totalling over 6 million minutes call time. The phone number is available free to all UK landlines and mobiles and is available 24/7 on 0800 804 8044.

*To find out more visit: [www.faithinlaterlife.org](http://www.faithinlaterlife.org) and to get in touch email [info@faithinlaterlife.org](mailto:info@faithinlaterlife.org)*



## National Organisations/campaigns to Address Loneliness in Older People

### **Anna Chaplaincy**

<https://www.annachaplaincy.org.uk/>

### **Campaign to end loneliness**

<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/the-facts-on-loneliness/>

### **Embracing Age**

<https://www.embracingage.org.uk>

### **Care Home Friends**

<https://www.carehomefriends.org.uk>

### **Christians together against loneliness**

*A coalition of Christian organisations working together to alleviate loneliness in society.*

<https://www.ctal.uk>

### **Faith Action**

*Supporting faith-based groups to reach out to their communities. Offering training, advice, and campaign support to bring faith groups together with statutory agencies to support local neighbourhoods.*

<https://www.faithaction.net>

### **Faith in Later Life**

<https://www.faithinlaterlife.org>

### **Friends of the Elderly**

*Befriending service for those over 60 who live alone, have little contact with family or friends.*

<https://www.fote.org.uk/our-charity-work/befriending/>

### **Keychange**

*A Christian charity, creating caring communities.*

[www.keychange.org.uk](http://www.keychange.org.uk)

### **Linking Lives UK**

<https://linkinglives.uk>

### **Pilgrims' Friend Society**

*Support older people to live fulfilled lives in residential care settings or independent living housing schemes.*

<https://www.pilgrimsfriend.org.uk>

### **Redeeming Our Communities (ROC)**

*Creates strategic partnerships between statutory agencies, voluntary organisations and churches, to develop volunteer-led schemes which meet the needs of local communities.*

<https://roc.uk.com>

### **Re-engage (formerly Contact the Elderly)**

*Arrange weekly tea parties for small groups of older people in host homes. Now developed telephone befriending service with volunteer Call Companions.*

<http://reengage.org.uk/>

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**All Churches Trust (2020) – Hope Beyond: helping communities build resilience and a brighter future**

<https://www.allchurches.co.uk>

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*– where we are a decade on'* by Julia Burton Jones and Jenny Kartupelis, The Bible Reading Fellowship, BRF.

**British Red Cross (2020) – Lonely and Left behind: Tackling loneliness at a time of crisis**

**British Red Cross (2021) – The Longest Year; Life under local restrictions**

<https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/the-longest-year-life-under-lockdown>

**Bournemouth University (2020) – Guidance for Christian Faith organisations in the support and value of older people**

<https://faithinlaterlife.org/>

**Campaign to end loneliness (2020) – The psychology of loneliness: why it matters and what we can do.**

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## Further Reading

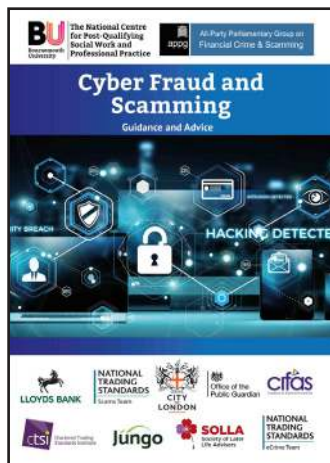
Individuals who have experienced fraud and scams are victims of financial abuse. In many cases, the financial losses may lead to real poverty. The financial abuse may also cause long-term damage to the older person's health – some victims are left with emotional and psychological effects of stress, anxiety, fear, depression and shame.

The National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work and Professional Practice leads the national research into financial fraud and scamming. It has produced a number of helpful resources to help prevent scams.

Examples are shown on this page and can be downloaded for free at [www.ncpqsw.com](http://www.ncpqsw.com)



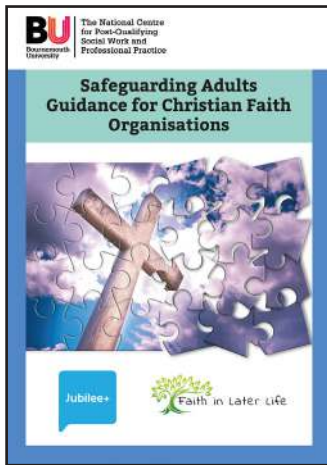
### Scams: The Power of Persuasive Language [www.ncpqsw.com](http://www.ncpqsw.com)



### Cyber Fraud and Scamming: Guidance and Advice [www.ncpqsw.com](http://www.ncpqsw.com)



### Financial Scamming and Fraud [www.ncpqsw.com](http://www.ncpqsw.com)

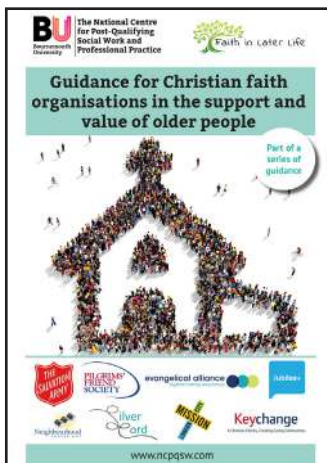


## Safeguarding Adults Guidance for Christian Faith Organisations

This guidance provides a comprehensive set of advice regarding how to ensure that any Christian Faith based organisation has appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place to safeguard adults. It is written by experts in this field with many years of experience and understanding and will help Faith based organisations and churches ensure that their polices, systems and operations are all conducted in safe and effective ways.

**Available to download for free from:**

<https://faithinlaterlife.org/fill-resource/safeguarding-adults-guidance-for-christian-faith-organisations/>



## Guidance for Christian Faith organisations in the support and value of older people

This guidance considers a range of issues facing older people and challenges churches and Christian faith organisations to do the same. Those living in the fourth age are not a homogenous group; to start with they represent people from different generations, with different life experiences, a range of health issues and different social situations. They are also at different stages of a faith journey, many will have been to Sunday school as children, many will have been married in church. Some will have been life-time Christians and be regular church attenders, some will now only go to church for ceremonies, others will not want to step foot into a church again.

The diversity of the fourth age provides great opportunity for churches and Christian faith organisations; this guidance gives some ideas to churches for different ministries, outreach and mission among older people.

**Available to download for free from:**

<https://faithinlaterlife.org/fill-resource/guidance-for-christian-faith-organisations-in-the-support-and-value-of-older-people/>



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